

**SIR EYRE CROWE AND FOREIGN
OFFICE PERCEPTIONS OF GERMANY,
1918-1925.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that from the end of the First World War in November 1918 to the signing of the Locarno Pact in December 1925, Eyre Crowe's perception of Germany, as articulated in the 1907 Memorandum and held consistently afterwards, was that of British governments and the Foreign Office during those years. It also asserts that between the end of the First World War and the signing of the Locarno Treaty, the Crowe Memorandum was not used by the Foreign Office as an inflexible dogma, but rather as a framework within which policies towards Germany could be formulated and business conducted. Moreover, it will be emphasised that the treatment of Germany in the period 1918 to 1925 cannot be fully understood without regular reference to the work of Foreign Office diplomats, especially, Crowe. The thesis will reveal that during key diplomatic events of the period, most notably, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the London Conference of 1924, at which the Dawes Report on German reparations was accepted by the wartime allies and Germany, Crowe's ideas on Germany were deeply influential on his political superiors, especially, the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (1916-1922), and three Foreign Secretaries, Lord Curzon(1919-1924), Ramsay MacDonald (both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in 1924) and Austen Chamberlain (1924-1929). In particular, it will emphasise that although Lloyd George did not like the 'experts' of the Foreign Office and tried to conduct foreign policy towards the German government almost without them, his attitudes to Germany mirrored those of Crowe. Both wanted Germany to be treated firmly, but fairly after the war, but were opposed to Germany being crushed. The thesis will also argue that, after the fall of Lloyd George in October 1922, Crowe was indispensable to the brilliant, but indecisive Curzon, and that it was Crowe's work that moved British policy forwards in the direction of an end to the Ruhr crisis. In 1924, when MacDonald formed the first Labour administration and assumed the onerous dual role, he was content to allow Crowe and Foreign Office officials to formulate policies, enabling him to make decisions rapidly. It was Crowe's work that was behind the great success of the London Conference of 1924, although, as in Paris before the Treaty of Versailles, Crowe himself was pushed to the background and MacDonald, a true politician, took

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Chapter 1

The Foreign Office and Review of Literature

There has been an exhaustive literature on almost every aspect of the causes and consequences of the First World War. A great deal of this writing has concentrated on the failings of the Paris Peace settlement and the international crisis of the 1930s, which culminated in the outbreak of the Second World War. What has been far more neglected is the period following the peace conference, leading up to the signing of Locarno Treaty of 1925, which is the main focus of this thesis. Even within the extant literature, one figure (Eyre Crowe), who, it will be argued here, was deeply influential on British foreign policy in this period has been neglected: Indeed, very little is known about Crowe's important contribution to the course of British foreign policy, and especially his views towards Germany following the end of the First World War. To rectify this omission, this thesis will examine the influence of Sir Eyre Crowe (1864-1925) on the perceptions of Germany held within the Foreign Office between the end of the First World War and the signing of the Locarno Pact. He was generally considered to be the Foreign Office's foremost expert on Germany and he was the Permanent Under-Secretary of State from November 1920, until his death in April 1925. The thesis will provide evidence that such perceptions were, to a great extent, those of Crowe himself. The thesis will, therefore, require an analysis of Crowe's celebrated 'Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany,' submitted on 1 January 1907¹. Although this document has particular

¹ 'Memorandum on the Present State of Relations with France and Germany,' 1 January 1907, reproduced as 'German Foreign Policy Before The War: The 1907

relevance to the period before and during the First World War, this thesis will demonstrate that with regard to Foreign Office attitudes to Germany, it continued to have great resonance after 1918. The argument presented in this thesis, which will be fully elaborated in the chapters that follow can be summarised thus: This thesis argues that from the end of the First World War to the signing of the Locarno Pact in December 1925, Eyre Crowe's perception of Germany, as articulated in the 1907 Memorandum, and held to consistently afterwards, was that of British governments and the Foreign Office during those years. It also asserts that the Crowe Memorandum was not used by the Foreign Office as an inflexible dogma, but rather as a framework within which policies towards Germany could be formulated and business conducted. Moreover, it will be emphasised that the treatment of Germany in the period 1918 to 1925 cannot be fully understood without regular reference to the work of Foreign Office diplomats, especially, Crowe. The thesis will reveal that during key diplomatic events of the period, most notably, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the London Conference of 1924, at which the Dawes Report on German reparations was agreed, Crowe's ideas on Germany were deeply influential on his political superiors, especially, the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (1916-1922), and three Foreign Secretaries, Lord Curzon (1919-1924), Ramsay MacDonald (both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in 1924) and Austen Chamberlain (1924-1929). In particular, it will be emphasised that although Lloyd George did not like the 'experts' of the Foreign Office and tried to conduct foreign policy towards the German government almost without reference to them at important times, his attitudes to Germany mirrored those of Crowe. Both wanted Germany to be treated firmly, but fairly after the war, but were opposed to Germany being crushed. The thesis will also argue that,

Memorandum of Sir Eyre Crowe, with a foreword by Hilaire Belloc in *A Friends of Europe Publications*, London, 1934, pp. 1-30. See also Chapter 2, pp. 58-59.

after the fall of Lloyd George in October 1922, Crowe was indispensable to the brilliant, but indecisive Curzon, and that it was Crowe's work that moved British policy forwards in the direction of an end to the Ruhr crisis. In 1924, when MacDonald formed the first Labour administration and assumed the onerous dual role, he was content to allow Crowe and Foreign Office officials to formulate policies, enabling himself to make decisions rapidly. It was Crowe's work that was behind the great success of the London Conference of 1924, although, as in Paris before the Treaty of Versailles, Crowe himself was pushed to the background and MacDonald took the credit. When the new Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin came to power, the new Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, was overwhelmed by the question of European security, including how to improve relations with France and Germany. It was Crowe and the Foreign Office that provided a solution that ultimately ended in the signing of the Locarno Treaty in December 1925. In fact, Crowe, had always hoped for a peaceful Germany and it is probable that, had Crowe lived, he would have advocated an 'eastern Locarno' that dealt with Germany's eastern frontiers, but the Foreign Office was, for a few years, a ship without a rudder.

The thesis is structured in the following way. The opening chapter outlines the nature of the research, the sources consulted, and provides a wide-ranging analysis of the historiography relevant to the study of this period. Chapter 2 examines the life and career of Sir Eyre Crowe up to the end of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, but will pay special attention to the role of himself and other Foreign Office delegates prior to the signing of the 'German Treaty,' - the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. The third chapter will analyse the three years of so-called 'Conference Diplomacy' from January 1920 to January 1923. Until October 1922, Lloyd George conducted the British government's foreign policy towards Germany largely without

utilising the expertise of Foreign Office officials such as Crowe. Yet, it will show that whilst Lloyd George and the Foreign Office differed greatly over policies towards France and Russia, their views on Germany were very similar, despite holding widely divergent opinions about diplomatic styles and methods. It will be also be demonstrated that the views of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, and the Foreign Office on Germany also had much in common with those of Crowe, as well as how much Curzon depended on Crowe's advice and support. The fourth chapter analyses the Ruhr crisis of 1923, an event of great significance in inter-war diplomatic history. Evidence will be provided that elucidates the considerable role of Sir Eyre Crowe and his influence on British government policies in the year from January 1923 to January 1924. The part played by Crowe and the Foreign Office in the fall of Ramsay MacDonald's first Labour government of 1924 has sometimes been misrepresented and the fifth chapter will show that, in fact, MacDonald (who acted as his own Foreign Secretary) and the leading Foreign Office officials had a very positive relationship and there was much mutual respect between himself and his Permanent Under-Secretary. There were differences over the Geneva Protocol and Bolshevik Russia, but it will be shown that Crowe and his fellow mandarins were influential in the successful acceptance by the major powers, including Germany, of the Dawes Report on German reparations, despite Crowe's complaints about his own inactivity at the London Conference of August 1924. The penultimate chapter will examine the crucial role that Crowe played in the early discussions about a western European security pact that resulted, six months after his death, in the signing of the Locarno Pact. The conclusion will re-emphasise the influence of Crowe on British foreign policy and on attitudes within the Foreign Office towards Germany.

The thesis made extensive use of a number of private papers, including, Hardinge, Vansittart, Lloyd George, Curzon, Bonar Law, Austen Chamberlain, MacDonald, Tyrell and John Strachey. Also consulted extensively were Foreign Office archives, private papers, letters, Parliamentary debates, newspaper extracts and articles from journals and books. The availability to historians of the collected editions entitled *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*,² has been extremely valuable and the first of the series covers the period of the study almost exactly. The first volume of the next series covers the year 1925, including the Locarno Treaty.

But, the most important collection proved to be the Crowe papers, which, as the thesis will demonstrate, have been neglected in many previous studies. Crowe did not live long enough to write his memoirs and so it is through the Documents on British Foreign Policy that historians can discover the depth of his insight and directness of his views in his daily work from 1920 to 1925. But the private papers and letters not only reveal the private family man and that his marriage was an intellectual partnership (he did not show any sign of condescension in his reports of diplomatic affairs to his wife Clema), but also Crowe's very strong opinions on his political masters and the great events in which he participated. This is particularly true of the events of 1919 and 1924. It is astonishing that many large-scale works of the period have apparently not used the Crowe Papers, for example, Margaret MacMillan's *The Peacemakers*, or indeed the private papers of other senior diplomats. Even Sibyl Eyre Crowe and Edward Corp did not use them fully, for example, neglecting to discover what Crowe and the Foreign Office actually did in

² Sir L. Woodward et al (eds.) *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (hereafter *DBFP*), Series 1, Volumes I-XXVII, 1919-1925, London, 1947-1985, and Series 1A, Volume 1, London, 1986.

Paris in May and June of 1919.³ They seemed to be so determined to assert the importance of Crowe and to counter Alan Sharp's view that the Foreign Office was 'in eclipse'⁴ that they failed to confront the considerable evidence that ran contrary to their opinion and to persuade historians that they were still right.

There is one large single volume biography of Sir Eyre Crowe⁵ written in English, and co-written by his daughter, Sibyl Eyre Crowe and Edward Corp. It is invaluable for this study, was well researched and is particularly useful up to the final five years of Crowe's life when he was the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. It does have a number of weaknesses, in particular its hagiographic nature and a tendency to criticise all whose ideas and actions conflicted with Crowe, especially his predecessor as Permanent Under-Secretary, Lord Hardinge. It is also critical of Lloyd George and Curzon. Yet the book contains a chapter on the work of Crowe and the Foreign Office in Paris in 1919, and focuses on his highly important work as Ambassador Plenipotentiary after Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George had gone home. It contains very little about the largely secretarial role of Crowe and his fellow delegates in the first six months of 1919, prior to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles - the 'German Treaty.' It will be one of the purposes of this thesis, to some extent, to fill in this gap, using the private papers of Crowe himself. The biography also does not give sufficient space to the four and a half years when Crowe was the Permanent Under-Secretary. From the standpoint of this study, too much attention was given to Crowe's early life.

³ See Chapter 2, pp. 72-76.

⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 15.

⁵ S. E. Crowe and E. Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant- Sir Eyre Crowe, 1864-1925*, Branton, Devon, 1993.

Crowe and Corp aimed to raise the profile of their subject, claiming that his place in the history of the period had been undervalued and, more often than not, ignored. Yet, Eyre Crowe was not unknown to scholars. Harold Nicolson, one of his juniors in the Foreign Office, describes his chief almost in terms of hero-worship.⁶ Nicolson said that, in Paris in 1919, Crowe had stood up so successfully to the bullying tactics of the French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau and that even 'The Tiger' was forced to admire him. Gordon Craig, who knew many of the diplomats who served in the Foreign Office in the 1930s, praised Crowe in his work.⁷ Three of Crowe's successors as Permanent Under-Secretary, Robert Vansittart, William Strang and Ivone Kirkpatrick all lauded Crowe in their memoirs.⁸ John Connell believed that Crowe's views influenced the Foreign Office until the 1950s, with the disastrous exception of the two peacetime years of Neville Chamberlain as prime minister and the years of World War Two.⁹ This view was supported by a more recent historian who stated that "it has been argued correctly that the 'Crowe doctrine' became the litmus by which all policy discussed within the Foreign Office was measured until the early 1950's..."¹⁰ According to Erik Goldstein, Crowe was

⁶ H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, London, 1933, p. 211. In a recent biography of Nicolson, his 'hero-worship' of Crowe is repeatedly extolled. Rose contrasts Crowe with his successor, Sir William Tyrrell: "As one high official put it plainly: 'Where Crowe would fearlessly confront a situation, Tyrrell would take avoiding action and let the thing blow itself out.' " N. Rose, *Harold Nicolson*, London, 2005, p. 33.

⁷ G.A. Craig, 'The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain' in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds), *The Diplomats*, Princeton, 1953, pp.26-29.

⁸ Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, London, 1958, pp. 62-63; Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad*, London, 1956, pp. 271-273. *The Inner Circle: The Memoirs of Ivone Kirkpatrick*, London, 1959, p. 12. Strang said that "I would place him first amongst all those who have occupied this seat in his time and ours." Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 403.

⁹ J. Connell, *The 'Office': A Study of British Foreign Policy and its Makers, 1919-1951*, London, 1958.

¹⁰ B. McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new: the Foreign Office and foreign policy, 1919-1939,' in M. Dockrill and B. McKercher (eds.), *Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 85.

“one of the outstanding diplomatists in British history...” who made a very positive contribution to post-war Europe.¹¹

Perhaps the greatest praise of all came from John Gregory, in a book written after his premature departure from the Foreign Office in 1928.¹²

How rarely it must happen to any institution to have been led by a man who is so wedded to it, so identified with it, that you might almost say that he was that institution, that he was of its very substance, as it was of his! Crowe and the Foreign Office were one and indivisible. He was its life; and his life was the Foreign Office and nothing but the Foreign Office.¹³

Historians, though, have not always been complimentary about Crowe. In her seminal work on the Foreign Office before the First World War, Zara Steiner was less enthusiastic about the Crowe Memorandum, believing it to be a negative account of recent German history.¹⁴ After becoming Prime Minister in December 1916, Lloyd George frequently expressed an unfavourable attitude to the diplomats of the Foreign Office.¹⁵ It is perhaps inevitable that supporters of Lloyd George, such as his compatriot, Kenneth Morgan, were also critical of the Foreign Office and tended to view its personnel in the same light as he did.¹⁶ In Germany between the wars, one historian called him “der böse Geist” (the evil spirit) of the Foreign Office.¹⁷

¹¹ E. Goldstein, *Winning The Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920*, Oxford, 1991, p. 118.

¹² J. D. Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy: Rambles and Reflections, 1902-1928*, London, 1928. Gregory, an Assistant Under-Secretary, was dismissed following the ‘Francs Case’ in 1928. See R. S. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924-1929*, London, 1997, pp. 22-23.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 255.

¹⁴ Z.S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, Cambridge, 1969. See also Chapter 2, p. 63. This book greatly increased the awareness of scholars of modern diplomatic history of the personalities and work of men such as Crowe, Hardinge and Tyrrell.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Diversity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922*, London, 1979, p. 139. Morgan repeats Lloyd George’s criticism of the inadequacy of Crowe and Foreign Office experts in dealing with political matters,

Steiner's book stimulated the production of a number of articles that discussed Crowe's career. Keith Wilson showed that Crowe's opinions on Germany were not, at first, accepted by some of his superiors before the 1907 Memorandum was submitted.¹⁸ Richard Cosgrove refuted what he believed was the traditional portrayal of Crowe as the British equivalent of the devious, poisonous and disloyal Holstein of the German Foreign Office, prior to the war. He described Crowe's family background and said that he did not have the advantages of aristocratic lineage or connections. Furthermore, he was born and educated in Germany (not an English public school and Oxbridge), and had married into a minor German aristocratic family. "Crowe achieved success by virtue of his superior gifts, but he was never fully integrated into the Foreign Office hierarchy. His German origins set him apart at once." Yet, Cosgrove named eighteen former Foreign Office officials, including Sir Edward Grey, who paid special tributes to Crowe in their memoirs. Cosgrove concluded that Crowe's criticisms of Germany "were indistinguishable from those of Hardinge, Nicolson and Bertie," but it was his ability to verbalize those fears and formulate policy clearly and logically that made him remarkable. By stating policy choices in unequivocal language, Crowe fostered the impression that he led opinion within the Foreign Office. He declared plainly, however, only what other colleagues believed but expressed in muted form. Crowe crystallized ideas which had already gained currency among other diplomats; his logic did not convert them but they assented to conclusions already accepted." It is a highly plausible argument, but it

particularly over the affair in December 1919 (see Chapter 2, pp. 81-82). Crowe and Corp accused Lloyd George of lying. See *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 369.

¹⁷ H. Lutz, *Eyre Crowe Der Böse Geist des Foreign Office*, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1931.

¹⁸ K. M. Wilson, 'Sir Eyre Crowe on the Origin of the Crowe Memorandum of 1 January 1907,' *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Volume 56, Number 134 (1987), pp. 240-242.

only tells part of the story. What set Crowe above his contemporaries, as Cosgrove elsewhere explains, were his industry, superior subject knowledge and directness.¹⁹ In an article written shortly after Crowe and Corp's biography, Sir Alan Campbell attempted a more balanced assessment.²⁰ In Campbell's view,

Crowe was the arch professional and despised what he called 'meddlesome busy bodies' such as journalists or members of parliament. He does not seem to have been aware of the dangers to his own profession of being thought to be isolated from public and parliamentary opinion. His insistence on high professional standards even led to his opposition to several overdue reforms in the recruitment and structure of the Foreign Service.²¹

It would not be correct to infer that Crowe was simply expressing the foreign policy of the Conservative Party, before, during and after the war. Inbal Rose, though, was right to identify some areas of mutual agreement between it and Foreign Office mandarins such as Crowe after 1918, for example, regarding Germany's ambitions towards Russia²² and the threat posed by Bolshevism to the British Empire.²³ "An acquaintance with present and, perhaps more significantly, past opinions of some of the members of the Foreign Office encouraged the belief that they shared a similar, traditional conservative view of policy."²⁴ In a work that is essential for diplomatic historians of the period before the First World War, Paul Kennedy supported the notion that there was a Foreign Office mind on Germany.²⁵

¹⁹ R.A. Cosgrove, 'The Career of Sir Eyre Crowe: A Reassessment,' *Albion*, Volume 4, Number 4 (1972), pp. 193-205.

²⁰ Sir A. Campbell, 'Sir Eyre Crowe, 1864-1925', *FCO Historical Branch, Occasional Papers*, Number 8, August 1994, pp. 31-45.

²¹ Campbell, 'Sir Eyre Crowe', p. 43.

²² I. Rose, *Conservatism and Foreign Policy during the Lloyd George Coalition, 1918-1922*, London, 1999, pp. 213-215.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 206.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

²⁵ P. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1880-1914*, London, 1980.

The Foreign Office is still an institution with an air of mystery to many British people. Yet, there are a number of accounts of its history, some of which come from the Foreign Office History Department.²⁶ There are a number of articles relevant to this study in a collection edited by Roger Bullen.²⁷ Nor is it true to say that the Foreign Office mandarins kept their work secret forever, judging from the autobiographies of some of the mandarins. They provide fascinating and very readable accounts of their careers, although they are not always completely reliable, as they are as prone to selective memory and self-justification as any other autobiographies.²⁸ However, they did not usually provide historians with the amount of detail that they required in order to cross-reference evidence. It would not be until the availability of substantial, hitherto unseen archive material in the 1960s that a greater academic awareness of the role of Foreign Office mandarins before, during and immediately after the First World War was facilitated.

Zara Steiner's book on the Foreign Office is vitally important.²⁹ Using the newly available archives, she analysed the organisation of the 'Office' and showed that it was not living in the past, but had undergone considerable reform in 1905 and 1906, of which Crowe himself was the prime mover.³⁰ Her work altered many perceptions of the 'old' Foreign Office. "The nineteenth century Foreign Office (had)

²⁶ Library of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO Historical Branch, Occasional Papers. See Bibliography.

²⁷ R. Bullen (ed), *The Foreign Office, 1782-1982*, Frederick, Maryland, 1984. For example, A. Sharp, 'Lord Curzon and the Foreign Office', pp. 66-84.

²⁸ The memoirs of Lord Hardinge are a good example. See Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy*, London, 1947.

²⁹ Steiner, *Foreign Office*.

³⁰ "The decisive role played by Crowe in the introduction of the reforms increased his reputation for brilliance ...". E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926*, Brighton, 1994, p. 46.

long been regarded as the epitome of 'old diplomacy'.³¹ It was criticised for being old-fashioned in its methods,³² but actually had been repeatedly reformed and in 1914 was in "modern sociological parlance... a knowledge-based organisation with efficient information management procedures geared towards informed policy-making."³³ In 1920, it was reformed again when the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service were amalgamated, although Christina Larner argued that this was "less complete and less effective than has hitherto been thought..."³⁴

Steiner also supplied invaluable biographical detail about men such as Hardinge, Tyrrell and Crowe (including her critical view of his 1907 memorandum), elucidated the confused days before Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August 1914 and discussed the declining influence of the Foreign Office. In July 1914, Crowe quarrelled with the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Crowe wanted a clear government statement to Germany that Britain would support Belgium if it were to be invaded, but Grey prevaricated.³⁵

Historians have since developed some of the themes outlined in her study. Roberta Warman analysed the question of the erosion of Foreign Office power during the war. Beginning with Hardinge's return to the Foreign Office as Permanent Under-

³¹ A.J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939*, London, 1957, pp. 167-200 cited in T. G. Otte, 'Old Diplomacy : Reflections on the Foreign Office before 1914,' *Contemporary British History*, Volume 18, Number 3 (2004), p. 31.

³² Steiner, *Foreign Office*, pp. 10-15.

³³ Otte, 'Old Diplomacy', p. 31.

³⁴ C. Larner, 'The Amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service with the Foreign Office,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, (1972), p. 107.

³⁵ In his memoirs, Lloyd George also blamed Grey who, he said, could have united the Cabinet over Belgian neutrality, but had merely demanded an international conference. See G.W. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George War Memoirs: a study in the Politics of Memory,' *Journal of Modern History*, Volume 60, 1-2 (1988), pp. 74-75. Another view is that during the crisis of July 1914, Crowe "pushed too hard for an early British commitment to go to war with Germany... Grey admonished him and [in 1916] blocked his certain promotion to succeed Nicolson as Permanent Under-Secretary." See McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', p. 88.

Secretary in 1916 (he had been Permanent Under-Secretary from 1910 to 1913 and then Viceroy of India from 1913 to 1916), she showed how the war, and consequent internal events, had greatly weakened the status of the institution.³⁶ After the outbreak of war, the relationships between the Cabinet, the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office altered because the Foreign Secretary, previously largely independent, now had decisions taken at Cabinet level. The Foreign Office was relegated in importance below the War Office and the Admiralty. Warman believed that the decision to move Eyre Crowe (then Assistant Under-Secretary and Head of the War Department) to the Contraband Department (in 1915) deprived the political departments of his abilities until the end of the war.³⁷

Warman discussed the role of the War Cabinet of Lloyd George and, in particular, the position of A.J. Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, who she argues was excluded from the inner circle of five men, but was “not isolated” because he was often required to attend meetings.³⁸ The performance of Balfour has come in for much criticism. Gaynor Johnson stated that he had an “excessively compliant attitude to Lloyd George.”³⁹ For Warman (and many contemporaries), the main obstacle that the Foreign Office faced between 1916 and 1918 was the Prime Minister, who, she said, “had little respect for traditional institutions (and) was prepared to ignore the Foreign Office when it suited him to do so.”⁴⁰ “Diplomats,” said Lloyd George, “were

³⁶ R. W. Warman, ‘The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence In The Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918,’ *Historical Journal*, Volume 15, Number 1, (1972), pp. 133-159.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 134.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 135.

³⁹ G. Johnson, ‘Preparing for Office: Lord Curzon as Acting Foreign Secretary, January – October 1919,’ *Contemporary British History*, 18, 3 (2004), p. 55.

⁴⁰ Warman, ‘Erosion of Foreign Office Influence’, p. 136.

invented simply to waste time.’’⁴¹ He even questioned their right to represent the government. ‘‘It is simply a waste of time to let (important issues) be discussed by men who are not authorised to speak for their countries.’’⁴² The massive increase in the size of the parliamentary electorate in 1918, including the vote for women over thirty, made Britain arguably a truly democratic country for perhaps the first time. After December 1918, it begged questions as to how Britain should be governed, how best should Britain be represented abroad and who should decide policy, especially the matter of taking the country or not taking the country to war. Warman’s article showed that Lloyd George believed that Britain needed a ‘new diplomacy’ even before it became a ‘new democracy.’ Supporting his view, Arno J. Mayer argued that the allied leaders in Paris in 1919 ‘‘were not as ignorant of international politics as legend would have it...’’ and that a political rather than a diplomatic background was really an advantage to them in their peacemaking task. ‘‘Party politics and power politics are not antithetical. Quite the contrary, experience in the domestic politics of modernized societies... is an excellent school for aspiring practitioners of international politics.’’ It was not a prerequisite for their appointment to have detailed knowledge. What really mattered was for the leaders of major powers to have ‘‘an overall view of and an insight into the processes of international politics rather than a thorough knowledge of a few select geographical areas.’’⁴³

⁴¹ A. Sharp, ‘The Foreign Office in Eclipse, 1919-1922,’ *History*, Volume 61 (1976), p. 198.

⁴² Warman, ‘Erosion of Foreign Office Influence’ p. 142.

⁴³ A. J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterreaction at Versailles, 1918-1919*, New York, 1967, p. 358. This book is otherwise of little value to this thesis as it does not mention Eyre Crowe at all and Lord Hardinge only once. Too many other books on post-war diplomacy do not analyse the work of the diplomats sufficiently. For example, Margaret MacMillan, *The Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference and its Attempt To End War*, London, 2001.

Roberta Warman was particularly useful on the creation of the Cabinet Secretariat and on the 'Garden Suburb' (Lloyd George's coterie of assistants who replaced the Foreign Office experts as advisers, policy-makers and even, on occasion, diplomatic envoys). This included Maurice Hankey (the Cabinet secretary from 1917 to 1941), Philip Kerr, Lloyd George's private secretary and Leopold Amery, the latter two being disciples of the arch-imperialist Lord Milner. Kerr said that the Foreign Office had "no conception of policy in its wider sense."⁴⁴ The Cabinet Secretariat was to act, Hankey believed, as "a kind of informal 'brains trust,' to be 'Ideas Men.' Men such as Eric Drummond were sent on special missions abroad and then had to report back to the Cabinet Secretariat, not the Foreign Office."⁴⁵ In 1917, there were a number of 'extra-diplomatic' missions such as that – Kerr to Switzerland, Milner to Petrograd, Northcliffe to the U.S.A. and Arthur Henderson to Russia. The Foreign Office was furious.⁴⁶ It was also upset by Amery's 'Appreciations,' a weekly summary of world events sent to the Cabinet and the prime ministers of all the Dominions, the setting up of Beaverbrook's Ministry of Information in February 1918 (a possible rival to the Foreign Office) and particularly the interference in the appointment and dismissal of ambassadors without consulting the Permanent Under-Secretary of State.⁴⁷

Alan Sharp took Warman's research further and argued that the Foreign Office, for most of Lloyd George's premiership, was in a state of 'eclipse.'⁴⁸ This

⁴⁴ Warman, 'Erosion of Foreign Office Influence,' p. 138.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 144.

⁴⁷ In 1918, two outstanding ambassadors were removed from their posts to make way for political appointments of Lloyd George. Lord Derby and Auckland Geddes replaced Francis, Lord Bertie and Sir Cecil Spring-Rice in Paris and Washington respectively.

⁴⁸ Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse.' Sharp's view was supported by, among others, Maisel, *The Foreign Office*, Brighton, 1994. It is an interpretation that does not

position was, unsurprisingly, vehemently opposed by Crowe and Corp,⁴⁹ but has more recently been questioned by historians of Lord Curzon's period in office as Foreign Secretary (1919-1924), such as Harry Bennett⁵⁰ and Gaynor Johnson.⁵¹ Their argument is only partially convincing as they focus on the questions that interested Curzon most, particularly the Near East. Indeed, after discussing Curzon and the Foreign Office and then Western European security in the first two chapters, Bennett's book is mainly about Curzon, Russia and the East. On German matters, especially reparations, Curzon was largely redundant, as were the Foreign Office mandarins, judging by the figures supplied by Sharp of the attendance records of Curzon and his experts at the post-war reparations conferences.⁵² This thesis reinforces Sharp's argument and adds that, despite the 'eclipse,' the perceptions of Eyre Crowe on Germany still remained extremely influential within both the Foreign Office and the government itself.

This was true even during the Paris Peace Conference and the framing of the Treaty of Versailles. Michael Dockrill and Zara Steiner⁵³ were highly critical of the Foreign Office in Paris, especially the performance of Lord Hardinge. They explained how Lloyd George chose Maurice Hankey, rather than Hardinge, to be the head of the British secretariat, despite the latter's greater experience of foreign affairs,

conflict with the memories of former senior Foreign Office officials such as Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking-1919*, London, 1933; Victor Wellesley, *Diplomacy in Fetters*, London, 1944; Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, or Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, London, 1958.

⁴⁹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 402.

⁵⁰ G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy During The Curzon Period*, Basingstoke, 1995, pp. 1-11. See also G. H. Bennett, 'Lloyd George, Curzon and the Control of British Foreign Policy, 1919-1922,' *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 45, Number 4 (1999), pp. 467-482.

⁵¹ G. Johnson, 'Curzon, Lloyd George and the Control of British Foreign Policy, 1919-1922: A Reassessment,' *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 11, 3 (2000), pp. 49-71.

⁵² Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse', pp. 202-203, 212.

⁵³ M. Dockrill and Z.S. Steiner, 'The Foreign Office at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919,' *International History Review*, Volume II (1980), pp. 55-86.

and how Crowe emerged as the leading Foreign Office personality in Paris. Dockrill and Steiner defended Crowe over his clash with the Prime Minister in December 1919 in connection with the French note.⁵⁴ The article is also very useful to historians on the role of the Political Intelligence Department⁵⁵ in playing “a crucial role” in shaping post-war policies towards the Central Powers⁵⁶ and on Curzon’s negative opinions of his Foreign Secretary as well as his Prime Minister, his methods and the ‘Garden Suburb.’⁵⁷ To Curzon, Lloyd George, “Hankey and Kerr were a little Camarilla who ruled the country and managed or sought to manage the Foreign Affairs of the Continent.”⁵⁸ He regarded Balfour “as the worst and most dangerous of Foreign Ministers with whom I have been brought into contact in my public life.”⁵⁹ Dockrill and Steiner were far more sympathetic, believing that Balfour, despite his failings, “when given the opportunity... proved to be an able co-ordinator and his many minutes suggest that he was not lacking in astuteness or awareness.”⁶⁰ They question the extent of his alleged marginalisation by Lloyd George in Paris, pointing out that he had a flat above the prime minister at 23 *rue Nitot* and met him daily to discuss the business of the peace conference. Balfour himself did say though that, both in peace and wartime, the Cabinet continued to give “a free hand for the

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 81-82. See Chapter 2, p. 81-82.

⁵⁵ One of the members of the P.I.D. was James Headlam-Morley, who had been appointed as the first historian of the Foreign Office. See Alan Sharp, ‘James Headlam-Morley: Creating International History,’ *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 9, Number 3 (1998), pp. 266-283.

⁵⁶ Dockrill and Steiner, ‘Foreign Office at Paris’, pp. 55-56. On this subject see also Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, p. 118 and in Chapter 2, p. 80.

⁵⁷ See also A. Sharp, ‘Holding up the flag of Britain...with Sustained Vigour or “Sowing the seeds of European disaster”? Lloyd George and Balfour at the Paris Peace Conference’ in M. Dockrill and J. Fisher (eds.), *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919: Peace Without Victory*, Basingstoke, 2001, pp. 35-50.

⁵⁸ Dockrill and Steiner, ‘Foreign Office at Paris’, p. 84.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

little man.”⁶¹ In response to accusations that, in Paris, Balfour was lethargic, Egremont said that this was unfair and stated that he was still capable of “constructive, if intermittent activity.”⁶²

The descriptions of the work done by Foreign Office experts in Paris by those of them who were there are of great interest and are essential sources, but must be used with varying degrees of scepticism. As is often the case, they also reveal as much about the author’s character flaws as they do about events and other people. For many years, Harold Nicolson’s views were quoted by critics of the Treaty of Versailles as evidence of the failures of the political leaders in Paris. He was particularly critical of the choice of the venue – “that shell-shocked capital...”⁶³ and of President Woodrow Wilson. “Why did he come?” he asked.⁶⁴ He believed that Wilson was an idealist who was incapable of coping with the wily British and French leaders.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Nicolson praised Lloyd George and eulogised the work and character of his hero, Eyre Crowe. Lord Hardinge’s autobiography presents a different, highly subjective perspective on Lloyd George. Writing some years later than Nicolson, Hardinge plunged his literary knife into the former prime minister. “Lloyd George was quite the most dangerous representative it was possible to have” and that “... responsibility for the Treaty rests principally” with him.⁶⁶ Lloyd George

⁶¹ A. Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, Basingstoke, 2001, p.7.

⁶² M. Egremont, *Balfour: A Life of Arthur James Balfour*, London, 1980, p. 305.

⁶³ H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking-1919*, London, 1964 edition, p. 76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69. Wilson’s Secretary of State, Robert Lansing agreed (*ibid*, p. 69), as did Lord Derby (Liverpool Record Office, Derby Papers, 920 DER (17) 28/1/1, diary entry, 16 December 1918) among others.

⁶⁵ Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 69.

⁶⁶ Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, p. 242.

even told Hardinge, allegedly, that “if I had to go to Paris again I would conclude a different treaty.”⁶⁷

The memoirs of Lord Vansittart unfortunately ended before he could give his version of his period of service under Neville Chamberlain,⁶⁸ but it did include his opinions on the period of this thesis. Vansittart, like Nicolson, was a promising junior official in 1919, and his book is a highly readable, but often flawed account, of his life and career, written in an idiosyncratic style, full of epigrammatic wit about the great figures that he had known.⁶⁹ Even so, it does contain some important insights concerning British policy towards Germany in the immediate post-war years. Vansittart was certainly negative towards German policy and cynical about the peace process in Paris. “Our contingent was eighteen strong – ‘picked men’ Hardinge called us to make us look better, but without avail.”⁷⁰ However, Vansittart, like Crowe, and unlike Hardinge, defended the Treaty of Versailles⁷¹ and, in particular, criticised the work of Maynard Keynes and blamed him personally for the decision of the U.S. Congress to vote against the Treaty.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 238. Hardinge recalled that these words were spoken to him when he was sat next to Lloyd George at a dinner in 1923 and after the recently retired diplomat had, according to his account, launched a scathing attack on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and his dinner companion.

⁶⁸ Vansittart was Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1930 to 1938, when he was ‘promoted’ by Neville Chamberlain to the newly created post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser. He retired in 1941.

⁶⁹ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 201.

⁷¹ Vansittart was though prone to self-revisionism, in the opinion of one biographer. “His views on Versailles were never as clear-cut and uncompromising as in later life he would have us believe. Although in public he championed the treaty in all its clauses, in private he was much more critical.” N. Rose, *Vansittart – Study of a Diplomat*, London, 1978, p. 47.

⁷² Keynes was “... a tyro in a tantrum.” Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 180. See pp. 23-24 on the arguments of Keynes and Mantoux. For Crowe’s opinion of Keynes, see Chapter 2, p. 79.

There is undoubtedly need for more research to be produced on the role of the Foreign Office in Paris in 1919, and it is to be hoped that this thesis might make a small contribution, but there is certainly already a substantial amount of excellent source material on the role of Lloyd George, the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles in general. Books by Michael Dockrill and Douglas Gould⁷³, Alan Sharp⁷⁴, Ruth Henig⁷⁵, Anthony Lentin⁷⁶ and Erik Goldstein⁷⁷ have all contributed to academic debates on 1919. Among their many criticisms of the ‘peace without promise,’ Dockrill and Gould felt that perhaps given the sympathies of some Foreign Office officials, including Crowe, it might have been a good thing that the Foreign Office had so little influence in Paris.⁷⁸ This thesis rejects the view that the attitude to Germany of Crowe was unhelpful to the British delegation. Elspeth O’Riordan held a different point of view to Dockrill and Gould, as, in her opinion, Versailles “‘was a treaty of promise. Had the victor powers worked together, it had the potential to be either implemented or revised to lead to a peaceful, secure Europe.’”⁷⁹ This happened, she said, during the Locarno honeymoon. “‘The tragedy... was that it took the Ruhr crisis ... before the policies of the major powers ... were co-ordinated and in particular the dichotomy between the American and French positions removed.’”⁸⁰ Sharp⁸¹ analysed the peace conference and the Treaty of Versailles and emphasised the immensity of the tasks facing the peacemakers and concluded that

⁷³ M. Dockrill and J.D. Gould, *Peace Without Promise: Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-23*, London, 1981.

⁷⁴ A. Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919*, Basingstoke, 1991.

⁷⁵ R. Henig, *Versailles and After, 1919-1933*, London, 1995.

⁷⁶ A. Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles - Lloyd George and the Pre-History of Appeasement*, London, 1984. See also Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*.

⁷⁷ Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*.

⁷⁸ Dockrill and Gould, *Peace Without Promise*, p. 350.

⁷⁹ E. O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, Basingstoke, 2001, p. 182.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Sharp, *Versailles Settlement*, p. 196.

there was still a 'German problem' after 1919. Ruth Henig believed that the treaty itself could not be blamed for the failure to secure a lasting European peace. The First World War produced serious, deep-seated economic and political problems, including severe economic dislocation. The peacemakers had to grapple with the forces of nationalism and militarism also unleashed by the war.⁸² Vansittart wrote that the Second World War happened because the treaty was broken, not because it was too severe. Sharp stated that this view was now more acceptable to historians,⁸³ but as Anthony Lentin said, "the legend of Versailles as a doomed settlement dies hard."⁸⁴ Lentin, a barrister, believed that, as a lawyer, the Prime Minister of Great Britain should have known that imposing an indemnity was against international law.⁸⁵ Then, in his later book, he quotes Lord Riddell's recollections of the speed with which key decisions were made in Paris.⁸⁶ Lentin is therefore very incisive when discussing Lloyd George and German war-guilt. In 1919, Lloyd George believed that the war was a crime against humanity, that the Kaiser was primarily responsible for it, that he should be put on trial and executed.⁸⁷ Agreeing with Harold Nicolson, Lentin believed that the war-guilt clause was for British public opinion and that "Lloyd George of all men should have been the first to grasp the unwisdom of article 231."⁸⁸ Then, for the next seven years Lloyd George argued that the Treaty as a whole was based on German war-guilt and would collapse if it were abandoned. As Lentin rightly pointed

⁸² Henig, *Versailles and After*, p. 48.

⁸³ Sharp, 'Holding up the flag of Britain', p. 48. Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 220.

⁸⁴ A. Lentin, 'Appeasement at the Paris Peace Conference' in Dockrill and Fisher, *Paris Peace Conference*, p. 51.

⁸⁵ Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁶ Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, p. 3. According to Riddell, at the end of 31 March 1919, a day when a number of huge decisions were made, including the war-guilt clause, the remarkably energetic Lloyd George was "full of fun." See Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923*, London, 1933, p.263.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

out, Lloyd George therefore played, unwittingly into the hands of the German treaty revisionists as this was exactly their position.⁸⁹ Yet even Keynes accepted that Germany bore “a special and peculiar responsibility for the war itself, for its universal and devastating character, and for its final development into a combat without quarter for mastery or defeat.”⁹⁰

In an introduction to a recent series of articles, Alan Sharp and Conan Fischer argued that the studies challenged the ‘new consensus’ that the major problem with the peace settlement was its enforcement.⁹¹ The studies indicated “that the practicalities of compliance and execution were far more problematic than has hitherto been realised.”⁹²

The literature on the performances of the various political leaders in Paris is vast.⁹³ The versions of history written by some of them, notably Lloyd George⁹⁴ and André Tardieu,⁹⁵ should not be ignored, even though their accounts must be read with caution. The indefatigable former Prime Minister, in the twilight of his career, was determined to correct many of the falsehoods and misunderstandings about the post-war peace conferences and treaties. He called the Versailles Treaty, “this much

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ J.M. Keynes, ‘The Economic Consequences of the Peace – A British View,’ in Ivo J. Lederer (ed), *The Versailles Settlement – Was it Foredoomed to Failure?* Boston, 1960, pp. 40-41.

⁹¹ A. Sharp and C. Fischer, ‘Introduction’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 16, Number 3 (2005), p. 420.

⁹² *Ibid*.

⁹³ David Newhall and J. A. Thompson provide very helpful bibliographies of Clemenceau and Wilson respectively. See D.S. Newhall, *Clemenceau: A Life at War*, Lampeter, 1991, pp. 569-631 and J. A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson*, London, 2002, pp. 253-260. As ‘Wilsonianism’ challenged Crowe’s belief in the ‘Balance of Power,’ the most useful books are those that focus on diplomacy.

⁹⁴ D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Volume 1, London, 1938; Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, Volume 1, New Haven, 1939. Also of particular relevance to this study are *The Truth About Reparations and War Debts*, London, 1932 and *The Truth About The Peace Treaties*, London, 1938.

⁹⁵ Andre Tardieu, *The Truth about the Treaty*, Preface by Georges Clemenceau, Paris, 1921.

abused and little perused document...’’⁹⁶ Egerton⁹⁷ explained how and when the books came to be written and the valuable assistance that he was given by his secretaries.⁹⁸ Maurice Hankey checked the memoirs with the government and Basil Liddell Hart checked military facts.⁹⁹ Lloyd George was still Hankey’s hero.¹⁰⁰ In his article, Egerton focused on two things – ‘‘the coming of war and the failure of Grey’s diplomacy and then the struggle with Haig and the generals for the control of war strategy...’’¹⁰¹

Probably the most famous book to have been written following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles was by John Maynard Keynes, who had been a member of the Treasury team in Paris. Jan Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, had urged Keynes ‘‘as soon as possible to set about writing a clear, connected account of what the financial and reparation clauses of the Treaty actually are and mean.’’¹⁰² In December 1919, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, was first published.¹⁰³ In it, Keynes made a strong personal attack on the ‘Big Three’ – Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George – and said that the treaty was unjust. Germany was unable to pay more than £2bn. in reparations at the outside.¹⁰⁴ It was a ‘Carthaginian Peace’ that would lead to the economic and political collapse of Europe.¹⁰⁵ Its impact was enormous in Britain, but was utterly devastating in the United States (sections of it were read aloud in Congress) where it destroyed the post-war diplomatic aims of

⁹⁶ Lloyd George, *Truth About Reparations and War Debts*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Egerton, ‘Lloyd George War Memoirs’, pp. 55-94.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 86.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 73. Grey had died in 1930 and Haig in 1928.

¹⁰² Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles*, p. 137.

¹⁰³ J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London, 1920.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd George, *Truth About Reparations and War Debts*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles*, p. 137.

President Wilson.¹⁰⁶ The Congress rejected the Versailles Treaty and American participation in the League of Nations. The U.S.A. returned to international isolation with disastrous consequences for the post-war peace settlement. Lentin said that “whatever may have been the economic consequences of the peace, the political consequences of Maynard Keynes were wholly monstrous.”¹⁰⁷

However, the Second World War made many people question the inter-war sympathy shown towards Germany and the views of Keynes in particular. A critique of Keynes’s book by a brilliant young French economist, Etienne Mantoux, was published posthumously.¹⁰⁸ Keynes had stated that Germany would never be able to pay the reparations that the allies demanded and, for some, the collapse of the German economy into hyperinflation in 1923 verified Keynes’s argument. But, Mantoux said that

reparations were not paid because Germany, as was quite natural, did not want to pay them, and – which was perhaps not quite so natural – the Allies showed themselves incapable or unwilling to take jointly the necessary measures which could have made Germany pay. The whole question, therefore, boiled down to political expediency.¹⁰⁹

Zara Steiner believed that the treaty “was not a ‘Carthaginian peace.’ Germany was not destroyed.” Keynes’s pamphlet was “pernicious but brilliant... and still the argument found underpinning too many current textbooks.”¹¹⁰ Margaret MacMillan said that Jan Smuts was “the most eloquent critic of all.”¹¹¹ But, she pointed out that it was Smuts who wanted to add pensions for widows and orphans of

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 137-140.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁸ E. Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace or The Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes*, New York, 1952.

¹⁰⁹ Lederer, *Versailles Settlement*, p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Z. S. Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, Oxford, 2005, p. 67.

¹¹¹ MacMillan, *Peacemakers*, p. 479.

Allied soldiers, thus inflating the reparation figures.¹¹² More research needs to be done on the attitude of the Foreign Office to the treaty, especially as it was the ministry that had to work for its fulfilment by Germany. This thesis will attempt to add to knowledge about the Foreign Office, its work at the Paris Peace Conference and the attitudes of leading officials to Germany up to the Locarno Treaty of 1925.

The Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles was the subject of great controversy in 1919 and have remained so ever since. The approach of the 75th and 80th anniversaries of the Paris Peace Conference and the Versailles Treaty saw a surfeit of articles on aspects of the events of 1919. A number of historians discussed the post-war German economy. Sally Marks insisted that reparations were a political question, which explained “‘why Britain’s best efforts at treaty revision never satisfied Germany’”¹¹³ and why the reparations question blighted relations between France and Germany until 1932. Marks also pointed out that the war and the ensuing peace treaty did not economically cripple Germany. “Despite the loss of Saar coal and Lorraine iron ore, Germany remained Europe’s ‘industrial power-house,’ able, in a remarkably short time, to dominate the trade of the central and eastern European states.”¹¹⁴ Gerald Feldman in his articles and book has consistently rejected this view. “‘Apparently, the only people who really believed that the Germans could fulfil their reparations obligations... are some historians.’”¹¹⁵ Elisabeth Glaser pointed out that others, for example, Hoover, Lansing and Headlam-Morley shared Keynes’s views, but his views “‘appeared more excessive than the others only in that he opted to make

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ S. Marks, ‘Smoke and Mirrors: In Smoke-Filled Rooms and the Galerie des Glaces’ in M. Boemeke, G. Feldman and E. Glaser (eds), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 370.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 360.

¹¹⁵ Feldman, ‘A Comment’ in *ibid*, pp. 441-450.

them public.”¹¹⁶ Niall Ferguson’s chapter is particularly interesting for its analysis of the ‘German Offer’ to pay a reparations figure of 100 billion gold marks (£5 billion) in May 1919.¹¹⁷ William R. Keylor implied that Keynes post-war polemic “reflected his sense of guilt at having worked in the Treasury during the war while his pacifist chums in Bloomsbury, such as Lytton Strachey and his former lover, Duncan Grant, chose conscientious objection and let him know of their disapproval.”¹¹⁸

The atmosphere in Paris and the haste of the statesmen to complete their task and leave for home gave rise to a decision that had considerable repercussions. It was decided that the total German liability would not be fixed in Paris, but it, and the execution of the collection of German reparations, would be the work of the Reparation Commission, the body established by the treaty.¹¹⁹ The Treaty of Versailles did insist though that Germany paid a first instalment of one billion gold marks (50 million pounds) by 1 May 1921. Lentin has argued that the Foreign Office should have pressed Lloyd George to settle the entire question there and then at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and that this delay worsened the situation.¹²⁰

In April 1921, the Reparation Commission decided that Germany must pay a total of 132,000,000,000 GM (£6,600,000,000) over forty-two years and a schedule of payments was formulated at the London Conference in May. Following the collapse of the German currency in 1923 and prior to the beginning of the Great

¹¹⁶ E. Glaser, ‘The Making of the Economic Peace’ in *ibid*, p. 381.

¹¹⁷ N. Ferguson, ‘The Balance of Payments Question: Versailles and After’ in *ibid*, pp. 407-409.

¹¹⁸ W.R. Keylor, ‘Versailles and International Diplomacy’ in *ibid*, pp. 469-506.

¹¹⁹ This decision has proven to be highly controversial. Harold Nicolson supported the delay, but Henry Kissinger disagreed. See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, London, 1994, p. 257. Anthony Lentin said that “Lloyd George’s refusal to consider a German counter-offer of £5 billion (May 1919) and his abandonment of a time limit for payment of reparations were demonstrably among the worst legacies of the Conference.” See Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, p.17.

¹²⁰ Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, p. 17.

Depression in 1929, committees of international financial experts produced the Dawes and Young Plans that revised the earlier decisions on German reparations. In an article published in December 1969, Sally Marks reconsidered the reparation question and concluded that its impact on the German economy and society had been frequently exaggerated.¹²¹ David Felix, another American historian, attacked her views and suggested that the opposite was true. The effects of reparations had been under-estimated. Her arguments were “not so much unacceptable as nonexistent. She has managed to investigate an economic question with almost no economic data.”¹²² Alan Sharp though has been highly critical of German governments after 1918. Germany received far more loans from the U.S.A. than it paid in reparations to the allies.¹²³ Stephen Schuker put it bluntly: “Not only did the Reich entirely avoid paying net reparations to its wartime opponents, it actually extracted the equivalent of reparations from the Allied powers, and principally the U.S. ... The gross capital inflow amounted to an astounding 5.3 per cent of German national income during the entire period from 1919 to 1931. The net capital inflow, after subtracting all reparations transferred and making generous allowance for the disguised return of German funds, still came to a maximum of 2.1 per cent of national income over the next thirteen years.”¹²⁴

Schuker denounced Keynes as a “defunct economist”¹²⁵ and criticised those such as George Kennan, a highly influential member of the United States State

¹²¹ S. Marks, ‘Reparations Reconsidered,’ *Journal of Central European History*, Volume 2 (1969), pp. 356-365.

¹²² D. Felix, ‘Reparations Reconsidered – With A Vengeance,’ *Journal of Central European History*, Volume 2 (1971), pp. 171-179.

¹²³ Sharp, ‘Holding up the flag of Britain’, p. 44.

¹²⁴ S. A. Schuker, ‘American Reparations to Germany, 1919-1933: Implications For The Third World Debt Crisis,’ *Princeton Studies in International Finance*, Volume 61 (July 1988), pp. 10-11; see also Sharp, ‘Holding up the flag of Britain’.

¹²⁵ Schuker, ‘American Reparations to Germany’, p. 14.

Department after 1945, for linking German reparations to the economic problems of the 1920s, the rise of Hitler and World War Two. However, the past generation has seen a great change in the historiography of the period, provoking a very important debate. “While these propositions continue to form part of the international catechism and thus to command substantial assent among the wider educated public, specialized historians no longer view them as credible.”¹²⁶ Professional historians now speak of a “new international history of the 1920s,”¹²⁷ Schuker said. According to him, the total sum imposed by the Reparation Commission in May 1921 “demanded less than met the eye.”¹²⁸ The burden laid down by the London Schedule of Payments totalled only 50 milliard gold marks. “Significantly, the sum exceeded by just one-quarter what Keynes (1919, p. 261) had described as a feasible maximum.”¹²⁹

Schuker has generally supported Marks’s stance that Germany had the actual capacity to pay reparations, had it had the political will to do so, a line opposed vigorously by Gerald Feldman¹³⁰ and Barry Eichengreen.¹³¹ The Australian historian, Bruce Kent, argued that the allied reparations policy was based on a financial illusion and that Great Britain and the United States were mainly to blame. He said that Lloyd George should have accepted the Treasury proposal that Britain solve the reparations question by writing off the debts of her former allies.¹³² Marc Trachtenberg also

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* See also J. Jacobson, ‘Is there a new international history of the 1920s?’ *American Historical Review*, 88, 3 (1983), pp. 617-645.

¹²⁸ Schuker, ‘American Reparations to Germany’, p. 16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ G. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924*, Oxford, 1993.

¹³¹ B. Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919-1939*, Oxford, 1992.

¹³² B. Kent, *The Spoils of War: The Politics, Economics and Diplomacy of Reparations, 1918-1932*, Oxford, 1989, p. 9.

rejected the view that France's desire was to extract excessive reparations from Germany and thus destroy its old enemy economically and financially.¹³³

Nor are German points of view unanimous. "Historians and economists have fought over reparations almost as fiercely as did the politicians of the 1920's. After World War Two some historians blamed reparations for the collapse of the Weimar Republic (for example Ludwig Zimmermann, 'Deutsche Aussenpolitik in der Äre der Weimarer Republik,' Göttingen, 1958), but recently some have said that during this period, Germany generally successfully obstructed their payment."¹³⁴ Detlev Peukert's conclusion was realistic:

All told, reparations were far less of a burden on the German post-war economy than had been feared. Between 1919 and the introduction of the Dawes Plan in 1924 Germany remitted approximately 10 billion RM in reparations. Simultaneously, the inflation led to a devaluation of foreign capital investment in Germany amounting to about 15 billion RM. Under the Dawes and Young Plans annual reparations payments ranged from 0.6 to 2.1 billion RM, giving a total of 11.3 billion RM between 1924 and 1932. During the same period, however, imported capital to the value of about 28 billion RM flowed into Germany, of which the Americans alone lost roughly 8 billion RM as a result of the world economic crisis. Reparations did not, in fact, bleed the German economy. Indeed, their net effect was to leave the economy in rather better shape. But the psychological effects of reparations were extremely serious, as was the strain that the vicious circle of credits and reparations placed on the international financial system.¹³⁵

A number of other books deal with the cost of the war and the question of inter-allied war debts.¹³⁶ Robert Bunselmeyer's book is particularly useful on the 1918 'Coupon Election' and the atmosphere in Britain in the months following the end of the war and the popular attitudes to Germany. It is of considerable relevance to

¹³³ M. Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics, 1916-1923*, New York, 1980.

¹³⁴ M. Berg, 'Germany and the United States: The Concept of World Economic Interdependence,' in C. Fink, Axel Frohn and Jurgen Heideking (eds), *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 77.

¹³⁵ D. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, London, 1993, p.197.

¹³⁶ For example, R. E. Bunselmeyer, *The Cost of the War, 1914-1919: British Economic War Aims and the Origins of Reparations*, Hamden, CONN, 1975.

this study. The Foreign Office's attitude to Germany was based upon Crowe's memorandum of 1907. Bunselmeyer believed that "the Election of 1918 formed a link between the mentality of the war, especially economic war, and the making of peace."¹³⁷ He said that

fear of Germany's economic and military strength, and hatred of her arrogance ... were the origins of Reparation and war-guilt in Britain. Both emotions... were given a final impetus by the General Election and by the fiscal worries of Britain at the end of the war. They survived into the months of (sic) Peace Conference and saddled the Treaty of Versailles with its fatal mixture of economic penalty and moral censure.

Arthur Turner pointed out that analyses of Anglo-French relations after the war had tended to neglect the war-debt issue.¹³⁸ Turner argued that "it made its own special contribution to the prevailing mistrust that hampered co-operation between London and Paris during the 1920s."¹³⁹ He believed that British governments thought that war debt claims on the French would "provide a valuable bargaining counter" and also, mistakenly, "as a useful means of exercising control over French policy towards Germany."¹⁴⁰

In Britain, much of the credit for the allied victory in November 1918 was given to David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister from December 1916 to October 1922. There is a vast amount of literature on him, much of which is not directly relevant to this thesis, but the opposite is certainly true as well. A truly remarkable

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹³⁸ A. Turner, *The Cost of War: British Policy on French War Debts, 1918-1932*, Brighton, 1998. Turner did acknowledge recent scholarship, such as of Bruce Kent, that had not ignored the question. He made special mention of Denise Artaud's two-volume history of interallied debts. D. Artaud, *La question des dettes interalliées et la reconstruction de l'Europe, 1917-1929*, 2 volumes, Lille and Paris, 1977.

¹³⁹ Turner, *Cost of War*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 271.

politician, Lloyd George polarised opinions about him throughout his career¹⁴¹ and he continues to fascinate historians. His friends, unsurprisingly, tended to be positive, even hagiographic in their judgements.¹⁴² Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary from 1917 to 1941, was aware of “his master’s idiosyncratic methods... (and) often experienced his deviousness at first-hand... (but) he was sometimes perhaps dazzled, by the sheer brilliance of intellect and imagination, which almost daily flashed and scintillated before him like an Aurora Borealis.”¹⁴³

Modern historians have recognised Lloyd George’s remarkable talents, but have been highly critical of the ways in which he used them. In an important article, George W. Egerton¹⁴⁴ discussed the former Prime Minister’s war memoirs, written and published in the years following his resignation as Prime Minister. Egerton focused on two things – the coming of war and the failure of Grey’s diplomacy, and then his struggle with Haig and the generals for the control of war strategy.¹⁴⁵ Of relevance to this thesis was Lloyd George’s criticism of Sir Edward Grey in the summer of 1914. Grey’s hand, he said, “trembled in the policy of apprehension, unable to grip the levers and manipulate them with a firm and clear purpose.”¹⁴⁶ In an article on Lloyd George’s foreign policy, Alan Sharp listed the Prime Minister’s immense range of talents. “And yet... the balance of contemporary

¹⁴¹ Keynes said that he was beyond good and evil. Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, p. xvii. Stanley Baldwin believed that he was that “... very dangerous thing, a dynamic force”. *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁴² For example, Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace* and the biography by his private secretary, Tom Jones, *Lloyd George*, Cambridge, MASS, 1951. Also useful are the writings of his mistress and later wife, F. Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary* by Frances Stevenson, edited by A.J. P. Taylor, London, 1971.

¹⁴³ S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, Volume II, London, 1972, p. 302.

¹⁴⁴ Egerton, ‘Lloyd George War Memoirs’, pp. 55-94.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

and historical opinion lies against Lloyd George.”¹⁴⁷ Zara Steiner believed that Lloyd George “‘had no doubts about German guilt.’” He favoured a peace that would teach Germany “‘an unforgettable lesson.’”¹⁴⁸ Anthony Lentin was highly critical of the Prime Minister’s role in the 1919 treaty that guaranteed French security, but which was never implemented.¹⁴⁹ In another article, Alan Sharp discussed Curzon’s criticisms of Lloyd George and Balfour and believed that a more serious charge against Lloyd George was not that he sowed the seeds of future discord in Paris, but that he “‘should have done more to preserve the wartime coalition and particularly the Anglo-French partnership which might have contributed to a happier outcome.’”¹⁵⁰

Margaret MacMillan did not mention Eyre Crowe or Lord Hardinge at all in her substantial book on the peace conference, but she describes Lloyd George’s foreign policy towards Germany as follows: “Germany, he told a friend in the middle of the war, must be beaten, but not destroyed. That would not do either Europe or the British empire any good, and would leave the field clear for a strong Russia. He understood where Britain’s interests lay: its trade and its empire, with naval dominance to protect them and a balance of power in Europe to prevent any power from challenging those interests.”¹⁵¹

Curzon, his acting Foreign Secretary in London, was highly critical and perhaps prescient. He said that in Paris “Lloyd George was supposed to be holding up the flag of Britain... with sustained vigour and brilliance... In reality (he) was sowing

¹⁴⁷ A. Sharp, ‘Lloyd George’s Foreign Policy, 1918-1922: The “And Yet” Factor,’ in J. Joades (ed.), *The Life and Times of Lloyd George*, Bangor, 1991, p. 129.

¹⁴⁸ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ A. Lentin, ‘Lloyd George, Clemenceau and the elusive Anglo-French guarantee treaty, 1919: A disastrous episode?’ in Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and cooperation*, London and New York, 2000, pp. 104-119.

¹⁵⁰ Sharp, ‘Holding up the flag of Britain’, p. 48.

¹⁵¹ MacMillan, *Peacemakers*, p. 49.

the seed of European disaster.”¹⁵² This study will show that, in diplomatic terms during this period, one characteristic that Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald (two Prime Ministers) and Crowe all shared and that three Foreign Secretaries, Balfour, Curzon and Austen Chamberlain all did not possess, was their readiness to take decisions and decisive action rather than produce a brilliant analysis of a situation.

The period immediately after the end of the Paris Peace Conference has perhaps not attracted the same amount of attention from historians. In a seminal article in 1976, Alan Sharp suggested that the Foreign Office, at this time, was “in eclipse.”¹⁵³ Lloyd George continued to keep control of foreign policy, particularly in matters pertaining to Germany. In doing this, he marginalised the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon and the officials of the Foreign Office, including Eyre Crowe. David Gilmour,¹⁵⁴ As previously stated,¹⁵⁵ Harry Bennett¹⁵⁶ and Gaynor Johnson¹⁵⁷ have challenged Sharp’s view that the Foreign Office was ‘in eclipse’ from 1919 to 1922, roughly coinciding with the first three years of Curzon’s period in office as Foreign Secretary, but the criticism is only partly valid as it only relates to Curzon’s favoured area – the Near East – and not relating to Germany and Western Europe.

Lord Curzon was the Foreign Secretary from October 1919 (having been Acting Foreign Secretary from January 1919 whilst Balfour was in Paris) to January 1924. Earlier in his career, from 1898 to 1905, he had been the Viceroy of India¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Sharp, ‘Lloyd George and Foreign Policy, 1918-1922’, p. 130.

¹⁵³ Sharp, ‘Foreign Office in Eclipse’, p. 198.

¹⁵⁴ D. Gilmour, *Curzon*, London, 1994.

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter 1, p. 16.

¹⁵⁶ G.H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period*, London, 1995.

¹⁵⁷ G. Johnson, ‘Preparing for Office: Lord Curzon as Acting Foreign Secretary, January-October 1919,’ *Contemporary British History*, 18, 3 (2004), pp. 53-73.

¹⁵⁸ Lord Hardinge also held this ‘semi-divine’ position from 1913 to 1916. The relationship between the two former Viceroyes at the Foreign Office was sometimes difficult. See Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, pp. 232-233.

and much of the literature focuses on that period, including his private papers.¹⁵⁹ After his sudden death in March 1925, Harold Nicolson wrote an unauthorised and, at times, highly critical biography that has special relevance to this study.¹⁶⁰ Curzon's widow did authorise Lord Ronaldsay to produce a more favourable work in an attempt to save her husband's reputation.¹⁶¹ Interest in Curzon's life was later revived by the publication of Grace, Marchioness Curzon's own memoirs that were notable for furthering awareness of the relationship between Curzon and Crowe during the Ruhr crisis in 1923.¹⁶² The large biography by David Gilmour, the son of the former Conservative Cabinet minister, Sir Ian Gilmour, written in the 1990s, did little to restore Curzon's reputation to that of the 'great man' that the subject believed that he was. His colleague, the Earl of Crawford, the brother of the future Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Ronald Lindsay, concluded that Curzon did not 'cut ice.'¹⁶³ John Gregory, who worked for Curzon at the Foreign Office, wrote a chapter about the experience and gave evidence of both his gifts and his indecisiveness.¹⁶⁴

Historians have tended to be critical of Lloyd George's preference for 'Conference Diplomacy' between January 1920 and January 1923 (Lloyd George was succeeded by Andrew Bonar Law in October 1922). Harold Nicolson was the son of a former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office who became a senior official in the Central Department. After resigning from the Foreign Office in the late 1920s, he wrote about his experiences at the Paris Peace Conference. Apart from his extremely valuable descriptions of Eyre Crowe and the events in Paris, Nicolson

¹⁵⁹ British Library, India Library, St. Pancras, London, Curzon Papers.

¹⁶⁰ H. Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919-1925*, New York, 1925.

¹⁶¹ Ronaldsay, Earl of, *The Life of Lord Curzon*, volumes 1,2 and 3, London, 1928.

¹⁶² The Marchioness Curzon of Kedleston, *Reminiscences*, London, 1955.

¹⁶³ A. Sharp, 'Adapting to a New World? British Foreign Policy in the 1920s,' *Contemporary British History*, 18, 3 (2004), p. 76.

¹⁶⁴ Gregory, *Edge of Diplomacy*, p. 250.

wrote critically of the 'new diplomacy' of Lloyd George.¹⁶⁵ Gordon Craig was certainly a supporter of the Foreign Office line:

It can scarcely be argued ...that the twelve international conferences which were held on the reparations question made any progress toward achieving a reasonable solution of that troublesome problem. It would be more accurate to say that their principal result was a series of public clashes between British and French policy, awkwardly smoothed over by compromises which satisfied no one and which finally produced, in England, an unreasoning suspicion of France and, in France, a degree of co-operation which found its ultimate expression in the fateful occupation of the Ruhr in 1923."¹⁶⁶

The Foreign Office mandarins believed that they had specific expertise and greater knowledge of diplomatic affairs than politicians and that their ministry must have a controlling role in policy formulation. Curzon agreed with them.¹⁶⁷ Arno J. Mayer gave an alternative point of view.¹⁶⁸ The politicians "were ill-informed not because they owed their jobs to petty graft or political patronage but because detailed knowledge about Teschen and Transylvania quite rightly is not a perquisite for their appointment."¹⁶⁹ In a very large work, though, there is no mention of Eyre Crowe and only one reference to Lord Hardinge, thus emphasising the importance of Zara Steiner's pioneering work.

Although this thesis focuses on Foreign Office perceptions of Germany, this matter is impossible to separate from Anglo-French relations, partly because it is a dimension of the Crowe Memorandum. Two articles are invaluable. Thomas Otte¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, pp. 207-209.

¹⁶⁶ G.A. Craig, 'The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain' in Craig and Gilbert, *Diplomats*, p. 29. See also Sharp, 'The 'And Yet' Factor', pp. 140-142.

¹⁶⁷ Sharp, 'Adapting to a New World?' p. 76.

¹⁶⁸ Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 358.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas G. Otte, 'The elusive balance: British foreign policy and the French entente before the First World War' in Sharp and Stone (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations*, pp. 11-35.

analysed the period before the war and Alan Sharp¹⁷¹ the period from 1919 to 1925. Together they connect attitudes of the two powers before and after the war. In February 1911, Eyre Crowe remarked that the entente was nothing but a “frame of mind” and warned that “for the purposes of ultimate emergencies it may be found to have no substance at all.”¹⁷² Otte believed that the Agadir crisis of July 1911 “played a catalytic role in Anglo-French relations.” Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech on 21 July had an electrifying effect as until then he had been regarded as a ‘pro-German.’ British public opinion was pro-French and Grey believed that it would force any British government to back France.¹⁷³ Otte concluded by saying that in July 1914, “France was still too weak in Europe and too dangerous overseas. Once again blundering German diplomacy had helped to cement the entente and transformed it into a formidable alliance.”¹⁷⁴ It will be shown that at times this was also true from 1919 to 1925.

Sharp argued that despite the fact that “British decision-makers did not feel a strong compulsion to assist France ... there was also an awareness that almost every important issue in post-war British diplomacy had a French aspect to it and that each state had the potential to frustrate the aims and objectives of the other unless they cooperated.” It was particularly important to secure French cooperation “over the execution of the Treaty of Versailles where each had very different perceptions of the future role and ambitions of Germany.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ A. Sharp, ‘Anglo-French relations from Versailles to Locarno, 1919-1925: The quest for security’ in Sharp and Stone (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations*, pp. 120-138. See also Sharp and K. Jeffrey, ‘Après la Guerre finit, Soldat anglais partit...’: Anglo-French Relations, 1918-1925,’ in Goldstein and McKercher, *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, London, 2003.

¹⁷² Otte, ‘The elusive balance’, p. 23.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁵ Sharp, ‘Anglo-French relations 1919-1925’, pp. 122-123.

Therefore, part of the study must compare not just the perceptions of Germany of the Foreign Office with those of British political leaders, but also with those of France as well. In an article that analyses the Foreign Office perceptions of its relations in the 1920s with major nations such as France, Germany, the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union, Alan Sharp stated that “British policy towards Germany in the early post-war years veered between exasperation at its failure to execute the terms of the treaty and suspicions that some of the treaty clauses were impractical, if not actually wrong, and worse still, that Britain might be at fault...”¹⁷⁶ Sharp cited the opinions of Sydney Waterlow, a senior official, in a very significant memorandum of 28 April 1922, regarding reparations and security, and those of Lord D’Abernon, the British Ambassador in Berlin.¹⁷⁷ Anne Orde also pointed out that Waterlow admitted that Britain bore much responsibility for the reparations problem as it had wanted pensions included in the total bill “and her record over the lapse of the 1919 guarantee was not good.”¹⁷⁸ Waterlow soon modified his stance,¹⁷⁹ but D’Abernon remained generally a sympathiser with Germany,¹⁸⁰ but this thesis will show that his views were not held by the leading mandarins of the Foreign Office, who instead followed the principles of Sir Eyre Crowe.

The attitudes of the key British participants to a treaty with France (of whatever kind) can reveal much about their attitudes to Germany. Those within the Foreign Office who favoured a treaty with France, including Crowe, Tyrrell and Lampson, tended to believe that a firm stance should be taken with Germany. Anne

¹⁷⁶ Sharp, ‘Adapting to a New World?’ p. 80.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ A. Orde, *Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926*, London, 1978, p. 31.

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 3, p.121-122.

¹⁸⁰ See p.125.

Orde was a particularly useful source on Lloyd George's promise to France over security and particularly the Anglo-French 'Guarantee'¹⁸¹

In April and May 1922, the Genoa Conference took place. Lloyd George, the 'spiritual father' of Genoa,¹⁸² wanted to consider the economic reconstruction of Europe, although the French Prime Minister, Poincaré, did not want to discuss reparations. During the conference Germany and Soviet Russia signed the Treaty of Rapallo and Genoa ended in failure. Its consequences were considerable, including, in January 1923, the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr. The book by Carole Fink on the Genoa Conference, as well as the collection of articles on Genoa edited by herself and two colleagues¹⁸³ are essential sources on these subjects. Fink said that Crowe and Curzon did not like Lloyd George's Genoa plans, but were furious at Poincaré¹⁸⁴ for wrecking it.¹⁸⁵ In one of the chapters, Sally Marks again argued that Germany had the capacity to pay reparations, but was not showing the will to do so.¹⁸⁶ Two German historians analysed the foreign policies of politicians and diplomats of the Weimar Republic. Manfred Berg was particularly interested in Germany's economic relations with the United States. On 29 March 1922, Walter Rathenau told the Reichstag that "never before has a nation held the fate of a continent so inescapably in its hand as does America at this moment."¹⁸⁷ Throughout the 1920s, Gustav Stresemann sought world economic interdependence. Reparations were a secondary issue, but the

¹⁸¹ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, p. 24

¹⁸² C. Fink, 'Introduction,' in C. Fink, A. Frohn and J. Heideking (eds.), *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 13.

¹⁸³ C. Fink. *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921-1922*, Chapel Hill, 1984 and Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*.

¹⁸⁴ C. Fink, *Genoa Conference*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ S. Marks, 'Reparations in 1922' in Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*, pp. 65-76.

¹⁸⁷ M. Berg, 'Germany and the US: The Concept of World Economic Interdependence,' in Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*, pp. 77-93.

preservation of the Reich's territorial integrity was vital, a stance that Stresemann advanced strongly during the Ruhr crisis.¹⁸⁸ Peter Krüger argued that von Maltzan, Head of the Eastern Department of the German Foreign Ministry (the Auswärtiges Amt or 'Wilhelmstrasse') was the moving spirit behind Rapallo and that Rathenau was against it.¹⁸⁹

Stephen Schuker argued that "the U.S. government considered the Genoa Conference a sideshow – a misconceived British conjuring trick to deal with the superficial features of trade depression on the Continent before agreement was reached on the political prerequisites for European economic reconstruction along sound lines."¹⁹⁰ It was "a conference designed primarily to meet the exigencies of British domestic politics, and that failed to consider American political requirements at all, stood no chance of clearing away the obstacles to world economic revival."¹⁹¹ The period following the Genoa Conference has been analysed in books by Anne Orde¹⁹² and Stephanie Salzmann.¹⁹³

In August 1922, the British government attempted to solve the reparations problem by proposing a cancellation of all inter-allied war debts. The 'Balfour Note' was received coldly by Poincaré and with utter disdain by the United States.¹⁹⁴ It seems extraordinary that British governments continued to have faith in 'The Balfour Note' almost until the end of reparations in 1932. Winston Churchill thought that the

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 93.

¹⁸⁹ P. Krüger, 'A Rainy Day, April 16 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and the Cloudy Perspective for German Foreign Policy,' in Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*, pp. 49-64.

¹⁹⁰ S.A. Schuker, 'American Policy towards Debts and Reconstruction at Genoa, 1922,' in Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*, p. 95.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 122.

¹⁹² Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*; A. Orde, *British Policy and European Construction After the First World War*, Cambridge, 1990.

¹⁹³ S. Salzmann, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union, 1922-1934: Rapallo and After*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2003.

¹⁹⁴ Preface by Douglas Dakin, *DBFP*, 1, XX, p. v.

'Note' forced the Americans "to search their consciences."¹⁹⁵ Modern historians have though generally and understandably castigated the 'Balfour Note.'¹⁹⁶ Anne Orde believed that it showed that the policies and motives of Lloyd George and his ministers to be utterly confused."¹⁹⁷ Stephen Schuker said that in 1922 the United States still wanted its debtors to pay up before they became officially involved in Europe.¹⁹⁸ President Calvin Coolidge famously said about America's former wartime allies: that "they hired the money, didn't they?"¹⁹⁹

After the war ended, there was much discussion about who would be the first post-war ambassador in Berlin. From January 1920, Lord Kilmarnock acted as Chargé d'Affaires in Germany. In July 1920, a banker, Edgar Vincent, Viscount D'Abernon, took up the post. He served until 1926. Three volumes of his diary were later published under the title, 'Ambassador of Peace.'²⁰⁰ Lord D'Abernon's diaries were not lacking self-praise and particularly self-justification. D'Abernon did not share the general Foreign Office perception of Germany and he was greatly criticised in the memoirs of Foreign Office mandarins. Vansittart was Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon. Curzon asked him what he thought of the appointment. "I ...condemned it – wrongly in one respect, for D'Abernon was equipped with greater knowledge of currency and economics than anyone in the Foreign Service. I questioned the intrusion because the French had lost money when he was President of the Ottoman Bank..."²⁰¹ Vansittart retained his animosity for the former ambassador for the rest of his life, describing him as the "heir in credulity to

¹⁹⁵ Turner, *Cost of War*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 68-70.

¹⁹⁷ Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁹⁸ Schuker, 'American Policy', p. 108.

¹⁹⁹ P. Neville, *France: The Three Republics*, London, 1995, p. 32.

²⁰⁰ Lord D'Abernon, *Ambassador of Peace*, Volumes I-III, London, 1929-1930.

²⁰¹ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 253.

Haldane and Keynes’’ who called ‘an armed attack by Germany on France within the next twenty-five years admittedly improbable’ and laughed when ‘in France the old cries were repeated that no German agreement would be adhered to.’’²⁰²

However, Alan Sharp believes that historians have generally regarded Lord D’Abernon’s career as Ambassador in Berlin sympathetically,²⁰³ but, as he pointed out, recent analyses by, for example, Gaynor Johnson²⁰⁴ and Stephanie Salzmänn²⁰⁵ have been more critical. It is difficult to agree though with Johnson’s comment that scholars have depicted D’Abernon ‘‘as one of the heroes of interwar diplomacy – the man who, almost single-handedly, helped to prevent war for a decade by persuading Stresemann to meet Briand and Chamberlain to conclude the Treaty of Locarno.’’²⁰⁶ Salzmänn was critical, for example, of D’Abernon’s failure to see the danger posed by the German Right.²⁰⁷ D’Abernon received a more sympathetic tribute from a German historian who said that it was ‘‘difficult to see how the German government could have managed the reparations question without the active mediation of the British ambassador, Lord D’Abernon, sometimes referred to as the lord-protector of Germany.’’²⁰⁸

²⁰² *Ibid*, p. 340.

²⁰³ One exception was F.S. Northedge, who conceded that D’Abernon may have given German governments sound financial advice, but condemned his diplomatic advice as demonstrating ‘‘a far weaker grasp on reality.’’ See *The Troubled Giant - Britain Among The Great Powers, 1916-1939*, London, 1966, p. 254.

²⁰⁴ G. Johnson, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D’Abernon, 1920-1926*, Basingstoke, 2002.

²⁰⁵ Salzmänn, *Rapallo and After*, p. 60.

²⁰⁶ Johnson, *Berlin Embassy*, p. ix.

²⁰⁷ Salzmänn, *Rapallo and After*, pp. 59- 60. See also F. L. Carsten, *Britain and the Weimar Republic: The British Documents*, London, 1984, p. 196.

²⁰⁸ H. Holborn, ‘Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Early Weimar Republic,’ in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds), *The Diplomats*, Princeton, 1953, p. 158.

In a recent article, Robert Gerwarth examined “Weimar Germany’s public controversy about the Republic’s place in German history.”²⁰⁹ The Versailles Treaty had left Germany as a unified state able to remain one the great nations of Europe, but Sharp believed that “the Allies did little to foster the new democratic Germany which they hoped would ensure peace.”²¹⁰ Great Britain’s relations with post-war Germany were analysed in a very provocative book by Douglas Newton.²¹¹ A selection of mainly Foreign Office documents relating to the Weimar Republic were summarised by Carsten.²¹² There are many books and articles on the Weimar Republic and its economic problems. Hermann Rupieper wrote about the government of Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno before and during the occupation of the Ruhr and emphasised the role of the leading German bankers in 1922 and 1923. He argued that German economic interest groups and the government itself prolonged the post-war inflation and prevented the fulfilment of the Treaty of Versailles and the introduction of much-needed social reforms.²¹³ In Detlev Peukert’s excellent book on the Weimar Republic, his section on reparations and the economic crisis is particularly useful.²¹⁴

The collapse of the German economy and the infamous hyperinflation of 1923 have been explained frequently as having been the product of the allied reparation policies. In 1945, Allan Taylor though questioned the link between the war, the imposition of reparations and the hyperinflation that ruined the mark.²¹⁵ Maisel pointed out that some leading Foreign Office officials believed that “Germany

²⁰⁹ R. Gerwarth, ‘The Past in Weimar History,’ *Central European History*, Volume 15, Number 1 (2006), p. 1.

²¹⁰ Sharp, *Versailles Settlement*, p. 196.

²¹¹ D. J. Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918-1919*, Oxford, 1997.

²¹² Carsten, *Britain and the Weimar Republic: The British Documents*, London, 1984.

²¹³ H.-J. Rupieper, *The Cuno Government and Reparations, 1922-1923: Politics and Economics*, The Hague, 1979.

²¹⁴ Peukert, *Weimar Republic*.

²¹⁵ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History*, London, 1996 edition, pp. 227-228.

deliberately created the economic crisis in order to escape reparation payments.”²¹⁶ More recently, the German historian Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich supported this view.²¹⁷ Niall Ferguson attached some of the blame for Germany’s hyperinflation to the involvement of Keynes with German governments between 1919 and 1923. Keynes advised them on how best to achieve revision of the Versailles Treaty and Ferguson believed that his advice was harmful. The policies employed by German governments in 1923, including the excessive printing of paper notes, led to the deliberate destruction of the currency, thus enabling Germany to pay a sizeable proportion of its external debts, while still complaining of the burden of reparations.²¹⁸ Charles S. Maier showed Poincaré’s restraint and hesitation during the Ruhr crisis and that the foreign policies of France and Germany were, in part, reflections of the domestic conflict within each country.²¹⁹ In a huge book on the German inflation, Gerald Feldman criticised the British government for making a difficult situation worse by its confusing policy in 1923.²²⁰

For half a century, British and American historians have been critical of French foreign policy after the First World War, especially over the decision to invade the Ruhr.²²¹ Recently, a revisionist school of interwar history began to reassess the

²¹⁶ Maisel, *Foreign Office*, p. 122.

²¹⁷ C.L. Holtfrerich, *The German Inflation, 1914-1923*, Berlin and New York, 1986.

²¹⁸ N. Ferguson, ‘Keynes and the German Inflation,’ *English Historical Review*, Volume 110, Number 436 (April 1995), pp. 368-369.

²¹⁹ C. S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilisation in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade after World War I*, Princeton, 1975.

²²⁰ Feldman, *Great Disorder*.

²²¹ For example, J. Joll, *Europe Since 1870 – International History*, London, 1990 edition, p. 284. James Joll said that Poincaré’s policy “totally misfired. Not only did it make French relations with Britain even worse, it also completely failed in its purpose, leading to an inflation in France caused by the financial burden of maintaining troops in the Ruhr, and to a severe weakening of France’s international credit. The consequences for Germany were even worse.”

early 1920s. Stephen Schuker,²²² Walter McDougall,²²³ Marc Trachtenberg,²²⁴ Jon Jacobson,²²⁵ P. Guinn,²²⁶ John Keiger,²²⁷ Bruce Kent,²²⁸ Elspeth O’Riordan²²⁹ and Zara Steiner²³⁰ all concluded that Poincaré’s Ruhr policy was affected by the role played by Great Britain. An outstanding account of the subject, in French only, by Jacques Bariéty,²³¹ contained a similar line of argument.

Paul Guinn explained how this ‘new history’ had transpired. In the 1970s, the French archives of the post-Great War period were opened up and were therefore available to historians. This led to the publication of research, mainly by French and American historians, the effect of which has been

to transform almost out of recognition the older Anglo-American images of France the wrecker, insistent on the letter of the Versailles treaty even though the result was European ruin. The French now no longer appear so intractable, while their erstwhile suspicions of German policy seem to have some viability.²³²

Walter McDougall reassessed the post-war period and observed that there was no analysis of French policy towards Germany that covered the whole period of peacemaking up to the end of the Ruhr occupation, also that integrated politics,

²²² S.A. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe: The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan*, Chapel Hill, 1976.

²²³ W. A. McDougall, *France’s Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914-1924: the Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe*, Princeton, 1978.

²²⁴ M. Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy*, New York, 1980.

²²⁵ Jacobson, ‘New International History?’, pp. 617-645.

²²⁶ P. Guinn, ‘On Throwing Ballast in Foreign Policy: Poincaré, the Entente and the Ruhr Occupation,’ *European History Quarterly*, 18, 4 (1988), pp. 427-438.

²²⁷ J. F. V. Keiger, ‘Raymond Poincaré and the Ruhr crisis,’ in R. Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy, 1918-1940: The Decline of a Great Power*, London, 1998, pp. 49-70. Also Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré*, Cambridge, 1997.

²²⁸ Kent, *Spoils of War*.

²²⁹ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*.

²³⁰ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*.

²³¹ J. Bariéty, *Les relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale, 10 novembre 1918-10 janvier 1925, de l’exécution à la négociation*, Paris, 1977.

²³² Guinn, ‘On Throwing Ballast’, p. 427.

economics and finance and that analysed policy from a French perspective.²³³ Marc Trachtenberg, contradicting the view of many Anglo-American historians, argued that French reparation policy at the Paris Peace Conference was extremely moderate.²³⁴

However, in 1971, before all of these books were published, *Frankreichs Ruhrpolitik* by Ludwig Zimmerman was published posthumously. It had little impact at the time.²³⁵ Anglo-Saxon historians though, have tended to remain hostile to Poincaré. In Kieger's opinion, their view was that Poincaré was "a bigoted, nationalist Germanophobe."²³⁶ Kieger hoped "that his policies might now be regarded as a continuum of firm but open negotiation."²³⁷

An excellent chapter by Denise Artaud considered French financial policy at the time,²³⁸ as did a book by the American economic historian, Barry Eichengreen.²³⁹ Artaud believed that the weakness of France's financial condition "was certainly the decisive factor undermining French foreign policy."²⁴⁰ Eichengreen was helpful on the financial figures of the British and French governments. The Foreign Office was as much aware of the financial problems of the French government as it was of France's need for security. This was particularly true in 1923 during the Ruhr crisis and the apparent attempt by the French government to create an independent Rhineland state.

The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that the Rhineland was to be occupied by allied troops for fifteen years. Much has been written on France's attempts to

²³³ McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy*, p. 12.

²³⁴ Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*.

²³⁵ Guinn, 'On Throwing Ballast', p. 427.

²³⁶ Kieger, *Poincaré*, p. 342.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ D. Artaud, 'Reparations and War Debts: The restoration of French financial power, 1919-1929' in R. Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence policy, 1918-1940: The Decline and Fall of a Great Power*, London, 1998, pp. 89-106.

²³⁹ Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*.

²⁴⁰ D. Artaud, 'Reparations and War Debts', p. 89.

create a separate Rhenish state during the Ruhr crisis. Walter MacDougall's book was, as has been stated already, one of the 'revisionist school' that was more sympathetic to France's post-war position.²⁴¹ Keiger said that Poincaré did not want the dismemberment of Germany, only the fulfilment of the treaty.²⁴² Detlev Peukert wrote of "the unstated aim" of the foreign policy of the French government.²⁴³ Schuker was also critical of Poincaré.²⁴⁴ In a recent article, Jeannesson believed that France "had an active policy"²⁴⁵ in the Rhineland territories that it had occupied in accordance with the Versailles treaty and the Rhineland Agreement. He said that the final halting of France's Rhineland policy, a consequence of the Ruhr invasion, "marked clearly the limits of French power in the post-war era, though it is not certain if all of France's rulers grasped this."²⁴⁶

Anthony Adamthwaite's book is an excellent work on the French foreign policy of the period.²⁴⁷ He was highly critical of the French decision-making process (between the president, prime minister and the foreign secretary) and the lack of coordination of strategy and diplomacy.²⁴⁸ Adamthwaite said that the French economy recovered so rapidly that, in the early 1920s, the government "had the resources to pursue an independent foreign policy – even perhaps to the extent of improving her own reparations and debt settlement."²⁴⁹ In his book on Poincaré, Stanislas Jeannesson stated that France's participation in the invasion of the Ruhr was

²⁴¹ MacDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy*.

²⁴² Keiger, *Poincaré*, p. 294.

²⁴³ Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, p. 59.

²⁴⁴ S. A. Schuker, 'The Rhineland Question' in Boemeke et al, *The Treaty of Versailles After 75 Years – A Reassessment*, Washington, 1998.

²⁴⁵ S. Jeannesson, 'French Policy in the Rhineland', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 16, Number 3 (September 2005), p. 475.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ A. Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid For Power In Europe, 1914-1940*, London, 1995.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 10-15.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

primarily due to Poincaré himself. He took a long time to make the decision, but it was his decision and he made it “de toute connaissance de cause” - in full knowledge of the facts.²⁵⁰ Jeannesson concluded that the legacy of the Ruhr crisis took longer to fade than that of Versailles. Despite the Dawes Plan and the Locarno Pact, “... the Republic was fatally wounded, a weakened body that would be overwhelmed by the Nazi virus.”²⁵¹ Conan Fischer agreed, but said that “had Poincaré responded positively to Germany’s overtures during the late summer of 1923, Franco-German relations might have assumed dimensions comparable in important respects to those of the post-Hitler era.”²⁵²

Until the advent of the ‘new history,’ the role of the British government in the Ruhr crisis, according to most British historians, was that of something akin to an innocent bystander. The French government was the guilty party. Older works have not been helpful to this study. A book by Royal J. Schmidt on Versailles and the Ruhr included very little on the role of the Foreign Office during the crisis, again emphasising the importance of the publication of the original archives in the 1960s.²⁵³

In a book and article focusing on the British role during the Ruhr crisis, Elspeth O’Riordan²⁵⁴ was particularly interested in the influences of France, Germany and the U.S.A. on Britain, as well as foreign policy-making processes within Britain’s bureaucratic system, the relationship between the Foreign Office and the Treasury and its impact on European policy. O’Riordan argued that “on the eve of the crisis British policy lacked purpose and direction, but rather vacillated between procrastination

²⁵⁰ S. Jeannesson, *Poincaré et la Ruhr, 1922-1924*, Strasbourg, 1997, p. 411.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² C. Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924*, Oxford, 2003, p. 292.

²⁵³ R. J. Schmidt, *Versailles and the Ruhr: Seedbed of World War II*, The Hague, 1968.

²⁵⁴ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, Basingstoke, 2001. E. O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis, 1922-24,’ *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 15 (2004), p. 221-251.

(regarding the proposed inter-allied conference at Brussels) and misjudgement epitomised by the provocative Paris plan.’’²⁵⁵ During the crisis, she believed that British policy was far more complex, but also far more limited and constrained than has previously been thought.²⁵⁶ O’Riordan rightly emphasised Crowe’s “‘crucial role” in the summer of 1923.²⁵⁷ Frank McDonough, though, concluded that “‘the whole sorry episode showed that France, acting without British support, could not hope to force Germany to pay reparations.’’²⁵⁸ In a recent article, O’Riordan examined Britain’s occupation of the Rhineland zone after the war and concluded that it had a notable impact on its policy-making process. The Foreign Office involved ‘the periphery’ “‘much more proactively in decision-making, using officials in the Rhineland to help find solutions to problems both in the spring and autumn. All in all the policymaking relationship had become much more ... symbiotic.’’²⁵⁹ Christopher Andrew’s book²⁶⁰ is very informative on the intrigue against Curzon in the summer and autumn of 1923, in which the editor of the *Morning Post*, H.A. Gwynne, was a leading actor.

The French Foreign Office, the Quai d’Orsay, is a subject requiring far more research from British historians, especially on the post-First World War period. Georges Bonnet’s reputation has been tainted with the epithet ‘appeaser,’ as a result of his participation in foreign affairs for French governments in the 1930s, but it would be wrong to ignore completely his book on the Quai d’Orsay, partly because it

²⁵⁵ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 173.

²⁵⁶ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 221.

²⁵⁷ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 244

²⁵⁸ F. McDonough, *Conflict, Communism and Fascism – Europe, 1890-1945*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 87.

²⁵⁹ E. O’Riordan, ‘The British Zone of Occupation in the Rhineland,’ *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 16, Number 3 (2005), pp. 439-454.

²⁶⁰ C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, London, 1985.

is the only one currently available in English. However, as with the books of the former mandarins of the Foreign Office, it contains many interesting anecdotes, but lacks a modern perspective and scholastic rigour. It therefore needs to be cross-checked with other sources. Bonnet, though, rightly asserted that French politicians and diplomats were occasionally frustrated with the “abrupt, confusing changes” in Britain’s policy.²⁶¹

The first Labour government of 1924 has been the subject of considerable scrutiny from historians.²⁶² Most of the literature has concentrated on its domestic policies, the intrigue within the Labour Party,²⁶³ but particularly on the character of the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald acted as his own Foreign Secretary and it is surprising that foreign affairs, in which he was intensely interested, has often received such little attention even from biographers. The most comprehensive biography of Ramsay MacDonald was that of David Marquand.²⁶⁴ He did not accept that MacDonald was a political pygmy, as Mowat had complained.²⁶⁵ For example, Marquand cited MacDonald’s interest in and great knowledge of foreign affairs, especially the politics of the United States.²⁶⁶ Austen Morgan’s biography²⁶⁷ was part of a series entitled ‘Lives of the Left’ and devoted little space to Labour’s

²⁶¹ G. Bonnet, *Quai d’Orsay*, Isle of Man, 1965, p. 62.

²⁶² For example, C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars*, London, 1955; A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, Oxford, 1992 edition; R. Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Politics, 1918-1939*, London, 1992;

²⁶³ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Troublemakers*, London, 1957, is a dated account of the infighting within the Labour Party. However, on MacDonald’s decision to assume the dual role of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, it is highly useful.

²⁶⁴ D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, London, 1977.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Mowat believed that between Lloyd George and Churchill, Britain was led by a succession of political ‘pygmies,’ namely Bonar Law, Baldwin, MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain. Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars*, p. 142.

²⁶⁶ His visit to the U.S.A. in 1897 “laid the foundations for a lifelong interest politics which was to be an important diplomatic asset thirty years later.” Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, p. 57. He also wrote two books on India that even impressed Indian readers. See Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Politics*, p. 46.

²⁶⁷ A. Morgan, *James Ramsay MacDonald*, Manchester, 1987.

foreign policy. Eyre Crowe was not mentioned at all. Yet, when foreign policy was briefly examined, Morgan's work is of great value to this thesis. He showed that in his 'Foreign Policy of the Labour Party' of 1923, MacDonald was extremely interested in coming to an agreement with America when Labour gained power.²⁶⁸ In discussing the Zinoviev Letter, Morgan mentions John Gregory's speedy action in releasing the letter and protest note (Gregory's name was below the note)²⁶⁹ and MacDonald's rejection in 1925 of a Labour plan to reform the Foreign Office and replace its leadership with American-style political appointments.²⁷⁰

Philip Bell's book on Franco-British relations between the wars is very useful on Ramsay MacDonald and France,²⁷¹ but Patrick Cohrs article on Anglo-American relations between 1923 and 1925 is essential for any analysis of MacDonald's foreign policy.²⁷² Cohrs argued that the Locarno Pact would not have occurred, but for the renewal of co-operation between Britain and the United States and in which MacDonald was a major player²⁷³ and asked whether the London Protocol of 1924 and the Locarno Pact of 1925 were the first real peace agreements after the war.²⁷⁴ He said that MacDonald's greatest achievement, the London Conference, "altered overall relations between the Western powers and Germany",²⁷⁵ and that the peace of the 1920s "stemmed from a formative, yet after 1925, unsustained, transformation of Euro-Atlantic politics."²⁷⁶ What is important for this

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 110.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 142.

²⁷¹ P. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940*, London, 1996.

²⁷² P.O. Cohrs, 'The First "Real" Peace Settlement after the First World War: Britain, the United States and the Accords of London and Locarno, 1923-1925,' *Contemporary European History*, 12, 1 (2003), pp. 1-31.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 31.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

thesis is that the role of Sir Eyre Crowe, MacDonald's main adviser on foreign affairs, should be emphasised, especially on matters relating to Germany. The most important event concerning Germany during MacDonald's first Ministry was the acceptance of the Dawes Plan on reparations.

In April 1924, the expert committees produced their report. The conference held in London in July and August aimed to gain the acceptance of the major powers, especially France, Britain, Germany and the United States, for the Dawes Plan, as it came to be known. Germany was to be assisted by receiving substantial foreign loans, mainly from America. It would then be able to pay the readjusted reparation instalments. Historians have generally praised the Dawes Plan for ameliorating what have been perceived to be the worst effects of the imposition of reparations and for stimulating the economic recovery of Germany, albeit for only a few years.²⁷⁷ However, Schuker pointed out that "... the net capital flow ran toward Germany during both the inflation and stabilization phases of the Weimar Republic."²⁷⁸ As a result, Germany's economy developed considerably in the next few years, to the great benefit of the German people. "The 'reparations' to Germany allowed the maintenance of living standards in the Weimar Republic at a level appreciably higher than domestic productivity would have justified."²⁷⁹ Furthermore, in his earlier book, Schuker had argued that Anglo-American financiers and politicians "in forcing the Dawes settlement on France, destroyed Europe's best hope for stability: France's bid to found security on a contained and fragmented Germany."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ For example, Maisel, *Foreign Office*, p. 144.

²⁷⁸ Schuker, *American Reparations to Germany*, p. 10.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²⁸⁰ Cohrs, 'The first "Real" Peace Settlements', 12, 1 (2003), p. 2.

There is a great deal of literature on the Locarno Treaty or Locarno Pact of 1925. The treaty claimed to have brought peace and security to Western Europe. Since the Second World War, the Locarno Treaty has been fiercely criticised. “Locarno had not so much pacified Europe as it defined the next battlefield.”²⁸¹ But, Philip Bell argued that the policy might have succeeded, but for the economic disaster of 1929.²⁸² Some of the literature has concentrated upon the parts played by the Foreign Secretaries of the major powers. Yet, so often the part played by Crowe and his colleagues has been ignored.

Crowe’s daughter, Sibyl, wrote an article²⁸³ that demonstrated her father’s “key guiding role in the success of the Locarno Pact.”²⁸⁴ She felt that to ensure this was his “last great personal achievement.”²⁸⁵ Yet, Sibyl Crowe showed that for many years the contribution of Crowe and the Foreign Office to the formation of the diplomatic strategy was largely ignored. Ms. Crowe argued that, perhaps inadvertently, Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary was partly responsible for this situation. A letter of 28 November 1925 to his sister Ivy “was by no means an entirely accurate account of what happened,”²⁸⁶ as Middlemas and Barnes pointed out in their biography of Stanley Baldwin. Chamberlain’s omission of any credit to Crowe was not due to any personal animosity. They suggested that it was simply “a clear case of faulty memory.”²⁸⁷ Crowe thought that whatever the reason, her father’s role had been only partly documented, but the accessibility of the official archives of

²⁸¹ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York, 1994, p. 274.

²⁸² P. Bell, *France and Britain*, pp. 152-153.

²⁸³ S. Crowe, ‘Sir Eyre Crowe and the Locarno Pact,’ *English Historical Review*, Volume 87, Number 342 (1972), pp. 49-74.

²⁸⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant*, p. 502.

²⁸⁵ Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno’, p. 74.

²⁸⁶ K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography*, London, 1965, footnote, p.

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²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

1924 and 1925 since 1967 had made it possible to fill many gaps.²⁸⁸ They have helped to “throw much light on the way in which Chamberlain’s policy was formed in consultation with expert opinion in the foreign office...”²⁸⁹

Ms. Crowe’s argument that her father’s role has been undervalued is beyond doubt. Alan Campbell, a diplomat, not a historian, as he admitted, wrote an overview of Crowe’s career,²⁹⁰ but with very little original insight and, on Locarno, mentioned only that Crowe and Chamberlain quickly established a close friendship and mutual affection in the short time that they worked together.²⁹¹ In a large biography of Austen Chamberlain, David Dutton²⁹² made one reference to Crowe. Richard Grayson seemed to emphasise the original vision of Chamberlain, not that of the diplomats.²⁹³ In the past decade though, one excellent article has supported Sibyl Crowe’s argument about the valuable role played by her father in the history of the Locarno Pact.

Erik Goldstein analysed the early months of the new Conservative government and argued that Crowe, working closely with the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, played a highly significant role in the evolution of the diplomatic strategy for the Locarno Pact. Furthermore, he believed that the vital role of the Foreign Office in this success served to restore much of the influence lost by the ministry in recent years.²⁹⁴ In his article on Anglo-American relations between 1923 and 1925, Patrick Cohrs failed to discuss the contribution of Crowe or any

²⁸⁸ Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno’, p. 50.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

²⁹⁰ Campbell, ‘Sir Eyre Crowe’, pp. 31-45.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 40.

²⁹² D. Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain: a Gentleman in Politics*, Bolton, 1985.

²⁹³ R. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924-1929*, London, 1997.

²⁹⁴ E. Goldstein, ‘The evolution of British diplomatic strategy for the Locarno Pact, 1924-1925’, in Dockrill and McKercher, *Diplomacy and World Power*, p. 115.

Foreign Office official, other than the Foreign Secretary, in the development of the Locarno strategy.²⁹⁵ Austen Chamberlain saw himself and England as Europe's 'honest broker,'²⁹⁶ reprising Bismarck's role at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

There has been no independent study of the attitudes and perceptions of Foreign Office officials about Germany during the period after the war, although various historians have drawn their own conclusions. Stephanie Salzmann suggested that there was a division of opinion inside the Foreign Office about Germany. She believed that the 'old' high-ranking officials such as Crowe and Tyrrell had been prejudiced against Germany since before the war, whereas the younger ones (supported incidentally by Curzon), such as Wellesley and Gregory (assistant secretaries) and clerks such as Lampson and Harold Nicolson believed that the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty had inflamed Germany and made it likely to ally with Moscow.²⁹⁷ In fact, the officials that Salzmann named were all great admirers of Sir Eyre Crowe and sympathised with his views on Germany, as will be shown in Chapter 2, Salzmann even conceded that

despite the diverging views on German policy within the Foreign Office there never was an open confrontation between the two groups. The prevailing view was that, for the moment, the treaty of Versailles was the basis of European relations. Moreover, until 1922 no long-term strategy for a policy towards Germany had been formulated.²⁹⁸

In a biography of her grandfather, Robert Hadow, Lindsay Michie said that when Sir Eyre Crowe died, with him died "the strong tradition of a policy of collective security in Europe. The death of Crowe seemed to represent the release of

²⁹⁵ Cohrs, 'The First "Real" Settlements'.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

²⁹⁷ Salzmann, *Rapallo and After*, p. 22.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

the Foreign Office from a tighter control over policy and a clarity of direction ...²⁹⁹

Michie wrote of her grandfather's strongest critic, Sir Orme Sargent, then head of the Central Department (responsible for Germany), that he 'advocated a 'classical' policy for Britain in which she could not allow any one power to dominate Europe. Germany was therefore to be contained by alliances; preferably Franco-British...'³⁰⁰

Very recently, a series of books on British foreign and colonial policy has begun to be published. Of some relevance to this thesis is one by Michael Hughes,³⁰¹ but of even greater interest is one by Thomas Otte that will include a chapter on Eyre Crowe. It is expected to be published in August 2007.³⁰²

It is beyond question that the works published on the seven years following the end of the First World War is only a fraction of those published on the ten years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. This is understandable as causes of wars are often of greater interest to historians and the public than the wars themselves or their aftermath. Yet this thesis argues that the seven years after 1918 are also of great importance in understanding the evolution of the international crisis of the inter-war years and the role of Germany within that crisis. The thesis is an attempt to follow in the tradition of historians such as Zara Steiner, Alan Sharp, F. L. Carsten, Sibyl Eyre Crowe, Ephraim Maisel and Elspeth O'Riordan, all of whom have asserted that in order to understand British diplomatic history one needs to be aware of the work of the diplomats 'behind the scenes.' What did the Foreign Office contribute to the Paris Peace Conference, the Treaty of Versailles, the London

²⁹⁹ L.W. Michie, *Portrait of an Appeaser: Robert Hadow, First Secretary in the British Foreign Office, 1931-1939*, Westport, CONN and London, 1996, p. 6.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 57.

³⁰¹ M. Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World, 1919-1939*, London, 2006.

³⁰² T. G. Otte. *The Office of the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, 1854-1945*, London, expected date of publication - 2007.

Conference of 1924 and the Locarno Treaty? How did it act during the Ruhr crisis of 1923, the German hyper-inflation and the Munich Putsch?

Throughout this thesis, it will be continually reinforced that the 'Foreign Office mind' on Germany, including most of the junior staff, was that of Sir Eyre Crowe. His perceptions not only influenced the thinking of the Foreign Office itself, but also some of the leading ministers of the Crown. Even during periods of apparent 'eclipse,' Crowe himself, or aspects of the spirit of the 1907 Memorandum, influenced British government policy on Germany. Obviously, it is not possible to discover the views of every official employed by the Foreign Office on Britain's relations with Germany after the First World War, but through an examination of public and private documents it is possible to discover the perceptions of almost all the leading mandarins as well as some of the junior officials who later in their careers attained high rank, especially those who worked in the Central Department (the section that dealt with German affairs). It is also accepted that there was much negative feeling within the Foreign Office, and Britain as a whole, towards the defeated former enemy in the period following the end of the war. But, emotions can change, as indeed, for many people, they did. It is also accepted that, at times, Crowe himself, and his Foreign Office colleagues, seemed to have been pushed to the background, as happened during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the London Conference of 1924. Yet, the principles for which Crowe stood remained potent. The study will demonstrate that Crowe's perceptions of Germany, as articulated in the 1907 Memorandum, were not a dogma that Foreign Office officials of this period carried around with them to wave at opponents like a 'Little Red Book,'³⁰³ Yet, they did provide a framework within which the foreign policy of the British government

³⁰³ See Conclusion, p.275. This seems to have happened, though, after the publication of the Memorandum following Crowe's death.

towards Germany between 1919 and 1925 could be formulated and business could be conducted.

In the course of the research, all sources were critically evaluated for their usefulness to a historian of the period. None were completely disregarded, despite the questionable reliability of some of the authors. Errors were due, perhaps, to the time lag between events and their being committed to paper, but more probably to the needs of the authors for a positive verdict upon them by the judgement of history. This was certainly true of the memoirs of Lords Hardinge and Vansittart of the Foreign Office, and, of course, Lloyd George. It was a major constraint on the thesis that some of the secondary material was approximately fifty to eighty years old. Their inclusion was justified because it was not possible to interview anyone who had served in the Foreign Office during this period (or authors such as Connell and Craig who knew some of them) and therefore memoirs of senior officials could not be ignored. Very few references to Foreign Office officials were discovered in either *Hansard* or *The Times* and therefore the importance of the Documents on British Foreign Policy series to the conducting of this study was considerable.

Chapter 2

Sir Eyre Crowe, the Foreign Office at Versailles and the Post-War World

This chapter will examine the work of the Foreign Office delegates at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, concentrating on the events leading to the signing by the German delegation of the Treaty of Versailles. Evidence presented here will argue that on 28 June 1919, Lloyd George signed a treaty that was very similar in spirit to the Crowe Memorandum. The chapter will analyse the apparent failure to impose their views in Paris of the Foreign Secretary, A.J. Balfour, and Lord Hardinge, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. It will also discuss the ambitions of Balfour's successor, Lord Curzon. The reaction of Crowe and the Foreign Office to the famous work of John Maynard Keynes and its effects upon the policies of the United States must also be discussed. Above all, the chapter will highlight the hitherto neglected career and views of Sir Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1920 to 1925, when, sadly, he died at the early age of sixty. It aims to show that for more than a decade before, during and after the war, Crowe's perceptions of Germany dominated the 'official mind'¹ of the Foreign Office. To this end, the chapter will analyse his famous 'Memorandum' of 1 January 1907² which

¹ Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, pp. 432-437. 'The Foreign Office mind' essentially consisted of the views of the Foreign Office élite according to T.G. Otte, 'Old Diplomacy: Reflections on the Foreign Office before 1914,' *Contemporary British History* 18, 3 (2004), pp. 31-52.

² British Library, *Memorandum on the Present State of Relations with France and Germany*, 1 January 1907, partly published under the different title of 'German Foreign Policy Before The War: The 1907 Memorandum of Sir Eyre Crowe', Preface by Hilaire Belloc, reproduced in *A Friends of Europe Publication*, London, 1934, pp. 1-30. For the whole memorandum, see *British Documents on the Origins of the War*,

argued that, following two decades of making concessions, Britain needed to take a firmer line towards Germany.³ It will then examine, as briefly as possible, his life and career until the end of 1918,⁴ including the question of his 'German roots.'⁵ It will demonstrate that his views even influenced politicians such as Lloyd George and Curzon who held widely differing opinions to Crowe on a number of key issues. As well as concentrating on Crowe's attitudes to Germany, it will discuss his vision of the post-war world and consider to what extent the 'Edwardian' view of Europe⁶ persisted during the Paris Peace Conference. It will show that despite the 'eclipse' of the Foreign Office⁷ in terms of Lloyd George's desire to do without its participation in formulating policies towards Germany, the policies of the 'Garden Suburb' (the small coterie of advisers and assistants favoured by the Prime Minister) shared many of the views outlined in the famous 'Crowe Memorandum.'

The chapter will attempt to discover Sir Eyre Crowe's view of the international situation in 1918-1919, largely through his work at the Paris Peace Conference,⁸ but, firstly, his earlier career must be analysed. In the aftermath of the 1906 Algeciras Conference, when the Kaiser had tested the new 'Entente Cordiale' over the question of Morocco, Eyre Crowe sent a forty-three-page document to his

1898-1914, Volume 3, London, 1928, pp. 397-420. Originally the document in manuscript was forty-three pages long.

³ This document, "perhaps for the first time, laid bare the true nature of the German threat to British interests." See G. Craig, 'The British Foreign Office from Grey to Chamberlain' in Craig and Gilbert (eds), *The Diplomats*, p. 26.

⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 1-302.

⁵ G. A. Craig, *The Germans*, London, 1982.

⁶ Mc Kercher, 'Old diplomacy and new'.

⁷ Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse'.

⁸ Bodleian Library, Oxford. *Crowe Papers and Letters*. *MS Eng, e. 3022*, and *MS Eng, e. 3025* (hereafter *Crowe Papers*); Dockrill and Goold, *Peace Without Promise*; Sharp, 'Lord Curzon and the Foreign Office'.

Foreign Office superiors on 1 January 1907.⁹ Only year earlier, Crowe had achieved senior status in Whitehall, after being promoted to the rank of Senior Clerk. He was soon promoted to Head of the Western Department. He had spent the previous twenty years acquiring a breadth of knowledge on a variety of subjects, but particularly modern European history. In fact, Crowe had lived in Germany until he was seventeen and remained in regular correspondence with relatives and family friends who happened to include high-ranking members of the German establishment. One decade later, during the war, these connections placed his career, home and family at great risk. In 1906 and 1907, they helped give Crowe a remarkable insight into the 'German character,' Germany's increasing desire for imperial expansion and the future of Anglo-German relations.

Following the initial section on France, the 'Crowe Memorandum' analysed the history of how Britain's position as a great power had developed over the previous centuries whilst being a small island state adjacent to the continental mainland with a vast overseas empire. Crowe emphasised the primacy of Britain's national interests, the significance of its naval supremacy and the need to ensure that no single power dominated the mainland of continental Europe through the

⁹ *Friends of Europe*, pp. 1-31. The Memorandum, a secret state document, was considered so remarkable that it was published three years after Crowe's death in *Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, London, 1928. Praise for it has come from many diplomats. In his autobiography, Sir Robert Vansittart, Crowe's successor as Permanent Under-Secretary (1930-1938) said that it was with "Canning's rhymed despatch, one of the few diplomatic documents that achieved fame in the world of technicians" and was a "reasonably explicit warning against Germany... written in the stilted style of the period." Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, pp. 63-64. To a more modern diplomat, it was "a classic document ... (that) was at a level of analysis never reached by any document of post-Bismarck Germany." Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 192. It was in the summer of 1924 that Ramsay MacDonald took the decision to publish selected documents on the origins of the war and, in November 1924, Austen Chamberlain confirmed this decision. See *Documents on Origins of War*, Volume 6, p. vii.

maintenance of a balance of power. As an analysis of Britain's diplomatic and military history the memorandum was brilliant in its description and logic, but it was in its observations and conclusions about the ambitions of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the German military élite that it had the most extraordinary and lasting impact.

A central aspect of the memorandum was Crowe's detailed review of the diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany in the previous twenty years. Ever since Bismarck's shift towards expansionist policies in the 1880s, there had been many quarrels between the two nations. Every disagreement had begun with direct German government hostility and disregard for the rules of diplomatic etiquette. Yet, despite being resented by successive Secretaries of State, Britain had nevertheless constantly shown a conciliatory attitude.

According to Crowe, the antagonism between Britain and Germany was not of an ephemeral nature, but it had "existed in ample measure for a long period."¹⁰ The cause was "an entirely one-sided aggressiveness on the part of Germany" whilst "on the part of England the most conciliatory disposition had been coupled with never-failing readiness to purchase the resumption of friendly relations by concession after concession."¹¹

Given this, how were British policy-makers to interpret the aims of current German policy? To Crowe, there were two possible alternatives. Firstly, Germany was "definitely aiming at general political hegemony and maritime ascendancy, threatening British vital interests, the independence of her neighbours, and ultimately the very existence of England."¹² Eventually, the only ways to avoid conflict would be for Britain to sacrifice her vital interests, thus losing her position as an independent

¹⁰ Crowe Memorandum, *Friends of Europe*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid*, p. 25.

great power, or by making herself too strong to give Germany a chance of winning any war against her. The second possibility was that “Germany had no clear ambition and that the great German design was really no more than the expression of vague, confused and impractical statesmanship, not fully realizing where she was going, “and all her excursions and alarms, all her underhand intrigues do not contribute to the steady working-out of a well-conceived and relentlessly followed system of policy because they do not form part of any such system.”¹³ In the view of Crowe, Bismarck would never have had such a confused and aimless policy, but he realised that part of the responsibility for “the erratic, domineering and often frankly aggressive spirit of German policy... so manifest in every branch of German life” were “the well-known qualities of mind and temperament of the present ruler of Germany (Kaiser Wilhelm II)...”¹⁴

Even so, Crowe accepted that both interpretations should be regarded cautiously, but whichever was correct, Britain’s response should be firmly based upon the maintenance of a balance of power. Within this system, Crowe believed that Germany had a significant role to play, but he claimed that policy makers later ignored this advice. He asserted that Germany must retain its position as a major power because a Franco-Russian domination of the continent would possibly be a greater threat to Britain. Therefore, a strong and vigorous Germany must become part of a viable European balance of power and it was even reasonable for Germany to possess a large fleet if it was necessary for the defence of its national interests.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 26-27; Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 118-119.

Even Paul Kennedy, who described Crowe as being part of a group of people in the Foreign Office and diplomatic corps who held “the most persistent dislike for Germany,”¹⁶ accepted that “Crowe’s 1907 memorandum postulated a policy of general, non-violent growth for Germany as an alternative to “aiming at general hegemony and maritime ascendancy.”¹⁷

Crowe had hoped that Germany would ask for a “close understanding with England ”¹⁸ and he believed that this should always be encouraged. To achieve this, he believed Britain should maintain an attitude of “unvarying courtesy and consideration in all matters of common concern, but also with a prompt and firm refusal to enter into any one-sided bargains or arrangements, and the most unbending determination to uphold British rights and interests in every part of the globe.”¹⁹

Crowe concluded that the policy of continually granting concessions to Germany had not worked.²⁰ He likened German policy to the methods of a blackmailer,²¹ who demanded more after each submission. Britain’s response should be “a firmer though still friendly policy ” towards Germany.²² Yet, Henry Kissinger said that it also left “no reasonable doubt that Great Britain joined the Triple Entente in order to thwart what it feared was a German desire for world domination...” and therefore “explained why, in his view, an accommodation with Germany was impossible and entente with France was the only option.”²³

¹⁶ Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, p. 253. and also p. 431 for Cecil Spring-Rice’s question about Germany. On the other hand, Leo Maxse complained that the Foreign Office was rife with subservience to Kaiser Wilhelm II - ‘Potsdamism,’ p. 317.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Friends of Europe*, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.19.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.24.

²² Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 124.

²³ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 192.

Whatever its true aims, there is no doubt the memorandum had an immediate and remarkable effect. Copies were circulated to the Foreign Secretary, Grey, the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman and the Chancellor, Asquith, with among others, King Edward VII receiving a copy.²⁴ It was not, however, universally admired and approved. The retired Permanent Under-Secretary, Sanderson, who was far less critical towards Germany, informed Lord Hardinge, his successor, that Crowe's summary of the recent history of Anglo-German relations was an "unchequered record of black deeds."²⁵ Zara Steiner agreed with Sanderson's stance.²⁶ Crowe and Corp accused Steiner of being "apparently advised and supported"²⁷ by Professor J. S. Grenville, who was an authority on Lord Salisbury's foreign policy. Connell said though that, in the years after 1907, Crowe's Memorandum "acquired the strength and stability of a revealed doctrine."²⁸

Germany also had many other influential supporters within the British Establishment. To begin with, the Royal Family had many links with Germany. As Kennedy put it: "Perhaps the most persistent lobby for good Anglo-German relations were the financial circles in the City of London and their equivalent in Frankfurt, Berlin and Hamburg."²⁹ Perhaps surprisingly, Crowe was very critical of the 'German' influences inside the City of London.³⁰

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 119-120. The memorandum was originally asked for by the King who was concerned at the prevailing current against Germany and favour shown towards France... This was "most ironic," wrote Kennedy in *Anglo-German Antagonism*, pp. 402-403.

²⁵ G. P. Gooch, *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft*, London, 1942, p. 55.

²⁶ Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 69.

²⁷ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 120.

²⁸ Connell, *The 'Office'*, p. 11.

²⁹ Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, p. 302.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 419.

This begs the question of whether or not Eyre Crowe was an anti-German.³¹ His daughter and her fellow biographer reject the accusation and claim that although often been portrayed as a bigoted Germanophobe, it would have been out of character for him to make such a partial and sentimental political judgement.³² In fact, Crowe was not opposed to Germany becoming a Great Power and it is very doubtful that a 'Germanophobe' could have written the following:

It cannot for a moment be questioned that the mere existence and healthy activity of a powerful Germany is an undoubted blessing in the world. Germany represents to a pre-eminent degree those highest qualities and virtues of good citizenship in the largest sense of the word, which constitute the glory and the triumph of modern civilisation. The world would be immensely poorer if anything which is specifically associated with the German character, with German ideas and with German methods were to cease having power and influence.³³

Crowe was positive about "German competition for an intellectual and moral leadership of the world in reliance on her own natural advantages and energies."³⁴ What he would object to was if Germany threatened the British Empire and British naval supremacy, and sought the expansion of its own territories before seeking these ambitions. This would result in conflict.³⁵ Nor did he see this as a purely Anglo-German matter. "Even if the (British) Empire disappeared, the union of the greatest military with the greatest naval power in one state would compel the world to combine for the riddance of such an incubus."³⁶

³¹ Kennedy referred to both Crowe and Sir Arthur Nicolson (Permanent Under-Secretary, 1910-1913, as "anti-Germans." *Ibid*, p. 451.

³² Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. xii. They do not say by whom. This was certainly not the view of colleagues such as Harold Nicolson in *Peacemaking 1919*.

³³ *Friends of Europe*, p. 16. Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 116.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

The evidence of his family background and education is enough to cast doubt on the opinion that Crowe was an 'anti-German.' Yet, Hardinge may have not been wholly off the mark when he said that Crowe was "palpably German,"³⁷ because he did possess some of the mainly positive characteristics that have been identified as alleged national traits.³⁸ He was dedicated to the 'work ethic,' to his family, respected the military (he was a member of the Territorial Army and had volunteered unsuccessfully – he failed a medical - to serve in South Africa) and was a lover of serious music who played the piano, being especially fond of playing the works of the great German composer, Johann Sebastian Bach. It might also have been said that Crowe was not wholly sympathetic to democracy, certainly in matters pertaining to foreign policy-making.³⁹

Appearances were deceiving. "People meeting Crowe for the first time were sometimes repelled by his rigidity and the punctilio of his official manner, but there were few, on closer acquaintance, who did not admire his industry and his breadth of view."⁴⁰ Nor was Crowe blindly obedient or deferential towards authority. From his early days in the Foreign Office, he would stand his ground against his

³⁷ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 47.

³⁸ See G.A. Craig, *The Germans*, London, 1982, pp. 5-7, 9-10, 17, 20, 112 and 293-294. Unlike Crowe, Craig lived through the Third Reich and the Second World War. Gordon Craig discussed such traits as being anti-modern, anti-political, deferential to authority, parochial, preoccupied with 'Germanness,' and xenophobic. He did not discuss the German sense of humour.

³⁹ This was also true of one of Crowe's admirers, a future Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, who admitted that, as regards democracy, "no one could have a more unshakeable faith in its being the highest form of civilized form of society yet evolved, despite its shortcomings... it is mere folly to blind ourselves to the defects of democracy. Its chief weakness lies in the domain of foreign affairs..." See Wellesley, *Diplomacy in Fetters*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Craig, 'The British Foreign Office' in Craig and Gilbert (eds), *The Diplomats*, p. 26.

superiors.⁴¹ It was not just his biographers who recounted stories of his kindness towards his juniors and the genuine sadness at his early death.⁴²

Eyre Crowe was born in Leipzig in 1864, the son of Sir Joseph Crowe, an English baronet, and a German mother, Asta von Barby, whose brother, Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff, would later become chief of the German naval staff during the Great War. Crowe's father was British Commercial Secretary in Germany, but a lack of funds prevented him from sending his gifted third son to an English public school and possibly on to Oxford or Cambridge, the usual breeding-ground for Foreign Office officials. After being educated in Germany until the age of eighteen, Eyre Crowe then went to England to cram for the Foreign Office entrance examination, at which he was to be successful. He therefore did not share many of the advantages of his contemporaries.⁴³

Crowe began work as a junior clerk at the Foreign Office in 1885, gradually building up a vast reservoir of knowledge of a variety of subjects that would help to develop his career and serve his country diplomatically. In 1905 and 1906, he was the main architect of a number of administrative reforms that "transformed a writing office to a policy-making bureaucracy."⁴⁴ In 1912 he was promoted to the rank of Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. During the war he did highly important work at the Ministry of Blockade. Crowe's move probably contributed to the apparent 'eclipse' of the Foreign Office that may have accelerated after 1916.⁴⁵ As Assistant Under-Secretary, he was Head of the War Department, but after he had quarrelled with Grey he was moved to the Contraband Department.

⁴¹ For example, Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 34.

⁴² For example, Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, pp. 210-211. Also Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 176.

⁴³ Steiner, *Foreign Office*, pp. 109-111.

⁴⁴ Sharp, 'Lord Curzon at the Foreign Office', p. 66.

⁴⁵ Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse', pp. 198-218.

Crowe's abilities were therefore lost to the political sections of the Foreign Office until the war was over.⁴⁶

Throughout Crowe's career he faced obstacles to his progress up the career ladder. A useful comparison could be made with his predecessor as Permanent Under-Secretary, Lord Hardinge, who was Viceroy of India between two periods in the highest post in Whitehall (1906-1910 and 1916-1920). Hardinge was a very able administrator, but it has been said that his career was helped by his wife's membership of, and influence in, the Court of King Edward VII.⁴⁷ Hardinge shared many of Crowe's attitudes towards Germany, but he held many prejudices against him and attempted to block the path to Crowe becoming his successor.⁴⁸

It was extraordinary that during the war, because of his German connections, Crowe and his family were subjected to a scurrilous hate campaign led by, among others, the *Daily Mail*, Horatio Bottomley, Sylvia Pankhurst and Annie Kenney. Between the summer of 1915 and September 1918, he was denounced in various allegedly 'patriotic' publications as a German traitor,⁴⁹ the 'evil genius' behind Grey and personally responsible for the deaths of British soldiers. On several occasions, Crowe's honour had to be defended publicly in the House of Commons, for example, by Simon, Grey and Cecil. The extreme anti-German, Leo Maxse, defended him in the *National Review*. In appreciation of his outstanding service, Crowe was given a substantial pay increase and was knighted in June 1918. Yet, in September 1918, a

⁴⁶ Warman, 'Erosion of Foreign Office Influence', p. 134.

⁴⁷ Dockrill and Steiner, 'Foreign Office at Paris', pp. 59-60.

⁴⁸ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 290-292.

⁴⁹ In *Britannia* on 12 November 1915, on account of his German family connections, Crowe was viciously attacked by several 'patriotic' Suffragette leaders and others. UK National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter UKNA), *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, p. 33. In *John Bull* on 7 April 1917, there was a shameful open letter to Crowe, *ibid*, p. 48. For other unpleasant letters and cards sent to Crowe's home, see *ibid*, pp. 42-50.

crowd of 3,000, led by another militant suffragette, Mrs Dacre Fox, gathered to march on his house in Chelsea. The police intervened, but Crowe had a loaded pistol ready to defend his family, if necessary.⁵⁰ Although his career was not destroyed by these events, they left scars on Crowe⁵¹ that lasted perhaps for the rest of his life.

In December 1918, Sir Eyre Crowe and a Foreign Office delegation left for the Paris Peace Conference. His work there can be divided into two parts. In the first six months of 1919, during discussions on the German treaty, he and his colleagues experienced long periods of idleness and frustration as a result of their marginalisation by Lloyd George, followed by a few weeks intense activity, particularly translating major documents.⁵² Then, after Lloyd George and the rest of Big Four left the conference, Crowe did remarkable work on some of the other treaties. He was given the rank of Ambassador Plenipotentiary of the British delegation, serving on the Supreme Council until January 1920.⁵³

The activities of the British delegation in Paris must be placed in a historical context. In December 1918, Lloyd George, a Liberal, and his mainly Conservative Coalition government, won a massive, but 'pyrrhic' victory at the polls.⁵⁴ In 1918, Lloyd George personally took much of the credit for the final victory. Hardinge, a great critic, later had to remind Lloyd George's French enemies that he had transformed the production of munitions in Britain and had popularised the war.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 286-290. Crowe was threatened because of his German origins and family connections, not because of his attitude to the female suffrage.

⁵¹ Interview with Curzon, 14 October 1919, UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, pp. 92-93.

⁵² See Chapter 2, pp. 74-75.

⁵³ See Chapter 2, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁴ Bunselmeyer, *The Cost of the War*.

⁵⁵ Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, p. 256.

Lloyd George was going to enjoy himself in Paris and enjoy himself he did, according to his friend, Lord Riddell.⁵⁶

The British delegation comprised 207 people in total. The Foreign Office delegation numbered eighteen, including twelve diplomats and six secretaries. They included Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Robert Cecil, his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Hardinge, Permanent Under-Secretary of State and Sir Eyre Crowe, then head of the Central Section (which included Germany). Robert Vansittart and Harold Nicolson were among the junior officials. While Balfour was in Paris, Lord Curzon served as Acting Foreign Secretary in London.⁵⁷

Harold Nicolson, having observed him at close quarters, had discovered that the Foreign Secretary only occasionally displayed his great ability.⁵⁸ However, Arthur Balfour seemed content to play a minor role at Versailles and allow Lloyd George to be 'centre stage.' At this time Balfour believed that as a reward for his wartime leadership there should be "a free hand ... (given) to the little man."⁵⁹ It was not a view shared by many of Balfour's class, including the mandarins of the Foreign Office. Nor can it explain his indolence at Versailles. Such was his anonymity that a group of French journalists in Paris decided to follow him one day to discover where he went while other statesmen were deciding Europe's destiny. His destination was a tennis tournament.⁶⁰

Michael Dockrill and Zara Steiner gave a more sympathetic view of the Foreign Secretary. They believed that Balfour, despite his failings, "when given the opportunity... proved to be an able co-ordinator and his many minutes suggest that he

⁵⁶ Lentin, *Lost Peace*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ See Johnson, 'Lord Curzon as Acting Foreign Secretary'.

⁵⁸ Egremont, *Arthur Balfour*, p. 305.

⁵⁹ Lentin, *The Lost Peace*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles*, p. 125.

was not lacking either in astuteness or awareness.”⁶¹ He was sometimes faced with the difficulty of communicating with the Prime Minister via the members of the ‘Garden Suburb.’ In Paris, Crowe wrote a minute regarding France’s behaviour towards Luxembourg and its pro-German dynasty. Balfour and Crowe suspected that Philip Kerr was preventing Lloyd George from reading it. When Balfour asked Kerr whether the Prime Minister had read the minute, Kerr replied, “I don’t think so, but I have.” “Not quite the same thing Philip, is it? - yet,”⁶² was the Foreign Secretary’s caustic observation.⁶³

The conference intended to redraw the map of Europe, using the principle of self-determination of smaller nations as had been outlined in President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, and to make peace treaties with the defeated nations - Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria and Germany. Opinions may differ about the significance of the Paris Peace Conference in inter-war history. What cannot be disputed is that it was an organisational shambles. Harold Nicolson observed, unlike, he claimed, contemporary historians, an “element of confusion.”⁶⁴ Modern business managers would criticise it on almost every criterion. In brief, everything seems to have been done ad hoc – ‘on the hoof,’ in current jargon. Nicolson recalled that the diplomats in Paris possessed a handbook on ‘International Congresses’ by Sir Ernest Satow in which the author “insisted upon the necessity of (a) some previous agreements as to the ends in view and (b) a definite and rigid programme.”⁶⁵ The first priority should

⁶¹ Dockrill and Steiner, ‘Foreign Office at Paris’, p. 85.

⁶² Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 338.

⁶³ Lloyd George was personally very attached to Balfour who had defended him against his many enemies within his own government. He told Riddell on 7 September 1919 that “B has always been kind to me. I like him and I am glad to see him looking so well.” Riddell, *Intimate Diary*, p. 124.

⁶⁴ Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 80-81.

indeed have been the German treaty⁶⁶ however important it was to promote the claims of the smaller nations and to negotiate treaties with the other defeated nations. The conference lacked an agenda and the British, critically for future historians, did not take minutes. As a result, far too much time was wasted.

Much work needed to be done, but Lloyd George kept the diplomats idle. To an industrious man like Crowe, this meant that he might as well not be there. He soon complained to his wife:

Meanwhile the conference has formally met. None of us was present. At the last moment, Hardinge alone was asked to attend. Lloyd George has decided to cut out the F.O. altogether and let the British delegation be represented by Hankey, who doesn't know a word of French. I don't know where it will all end. But you may imagine the state of feeling here. I have told Hardinge that our best plan would be all to go back to London at once, but he is no doubt right in advising patience.⁶⁷

His frustration continued though: "Since yesterday there is some more orderly progress, since it has been decided to appoint various committees. We are going to have a talk with Balfour at 6 today: perhaps something more definite will emerge." However, Crowe later added a postscript: "Not much resulted from the talk with Balfour. We live in a realm of argument, with no decision."⁶⁸

Almost two weeks later, he wrote that "we are still treated with an amusing degree of mistrust by our great plenipotentiaries."⁶⁹ Two days after that, he reported that "... Hardinge came over with a request from Lloyd George for a paper to be ready by this morning at 7. 30." Crowe accomplished the task, but then wrote: "At least I hear, Lloyd George was appreciative. I lunched with Balfour today. He

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, M S Eng., e. 3022, letter to his wife, Clema, 18 January 1919, pp. 61-62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 24 January 1919, p. 84.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 4 February 1919, p. 127.

was more talkative and human than usual, and full of the intolerable difficulties of his own position.”⁷⁰

Crowe’s personal position began to improve slowly, but the conference, he believed, was in disarray. He told his wife that:

it is true that I am having more and more to do, but I do not feel that what I do is going to have any useful results... You cannot imagine the atmosphere of general depression in which the whole of our delegation does its work. Nothing ever goes right or progresses. How long this chaotic state of things can continue, nobody knows. The confusion at the top is complete and reacts on everything and everybody below.⁷¹

Crowe did become more active. Foreign Office delegates were sent on various inter-allied committees. On 27 February 1919, a Central Territorial Committee was created, with Crowe the British representative, to coordinate their different work. Headlam-Morley was personally asked by Lloyd George to produce a compromise on the Danzig and Saar questions. But, the Foreign Office was ignored on all other issues such as Russia, reparations and the League of Nations.⁷² McKercher believed that Crowe and his colleagues made a positive contribution to the conference throughout its duration. He said that in Paris, the Foreign Office counsel “was felt on a range of issues touching Britain’s position in the post-war world. The most important came from Crowe. In the first phase of the Conference, he found himself immersed in a range of questions concerning the German settlement.”⁷³

By May 1919, Crowe had the opposite complaint to his earlier one. After being idle for so long, the Foreign Office delegation was now being overworked, but the knowledge and skills of Crowe, the foremost expert on Germany within the

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 6 February 1919, pp. 135-136.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 12 February 1919, p. 163.

⁷² Dockrill and Goold, *Peace Without Promise*, pp. 26-27.

⁷³ McKercher, ‘Old diplomacy and new’, p. 90.

administrative sphere, were still being misused (on clerical work rather than policy formulation). It was a ludicrous situation. In a hurry he wrote to Lady Crowe:

This must be a short letter we are all busy translating the German reply to our peace terms. We got the German text at noon. It consists of about 150 pages of close typing. The Council of Five demands a translation by this evening, and the command is 'all hands to the pumps.' I act as a kind of referee for all the twenty-odd translators and translatresses who are all busy on the document. There is one dictionary between the lot! The work shall not be perfect, but we shall do it all right.⁷⁴

In the following days, Crowe complained again of the overload of himself and his colleagues: "We produced our English translation of the German peace note by midnight, a rapid piece of work [185 pages of type] but I shudder to think of the quality of some of the translations. There was of course no time for revision."⁷⁵

The talents of Foreign Office staff were not being exploited:

Another avalanche of German notes received from Versailles ties our whole establishment down to the work of translation and copying."⁷⁶ Critical tasks were being completed at breakneck speed: "I had hardly finished writing to you ...when a message came up from the P.M. that the note from the Germans and the revised peace conditions must be got off today, Monday, at all costs..."⁷⁷

At dinner during the evening of June 16, Malkin, Hurst's Assistant at the Legal Division of the Foreign Office, "turned up with a hand almost entirely stained with red ink. He had been writing the alterations in the treaty in red ink for the one copy which was given to the Germans." It transpired that Malkin and two others had been up until 7 a.m. the previous morning reading and correcting proofs. Crowe was appalled. "This kind of thing is really indecent."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, M S Eng, e 3025, letter to his wife, 29 May 1919, p. 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 30 May 1919, p. 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 1 June 1919, p. 33.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 16 June 1919, p. 74.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 17 June 1919. p. 76.

Crowe had expressed doubts previously about the quality of the final treaty. He told his wife that “work in the translated document continues. I am afraid the result is likely to be a patchwork not nearly as perfect as your darns, nor as serviceable.”⁷⁹

Crowe revealed his frustrations at the performance of his political masters: The German negotiations are being badly bungled and things go wrong at all corners.”⁸⁰ They were disunited, and, on the British side, characteristically inconsistent and unskilled in diplomacy and Crowe said that, as a result of these flaws,

the political atmosphere is getting decidedly unpleasant. Discontent and irritation everywhere. Serious friction between the allies on vital points. Blame evenly distributable all round. Naturally I feel most what we ourselves are to blame for, and it is a good deal. I cannot easily explain all this complicated situation. I envy you being able to shut your eyes and ears to all this unedifying performance of the politicians.⁸¹

Crowe highlighted a frequent French criticism of the British – inconsistency. He said that the general situation in Paris:

is not satisfactory. Our insistence on making material concessions to Germany is creating very bitter feeling among the French, justifiably, I think, after we had deliberately declared a few weeks ago that we would stand on the terms we offered without any modification except as regards minor details. Our position is consequently not a pleasant one.⁸²

Crowe complained about the “flamboyant language” and “outspoken tone” of the letter also sent supposedly with the object of “offering changes to the treaty ...to make it easier for the Germans to sign...”⁸³ The covering note of Britain’s big reply to the Germans was “the work chiefly of Philip Kerr, the editor of the

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 4 June 1919, p. 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 4 June 1919, p. 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 5 June 1919, pp. 46–47.

⁸² *Ibid*, 8 June 1919, p. 61.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 17 June 1919, p. 77.

Round Table'' and a member of the 'Garden Suburb.' Crowe was utterly condescending, saying that if the note "had been an article in the *National Review* it would have read all right. As a formal state- paper it lacks dignity and courtesy."⁸⁴

On the following day, Crowe received news that the Weimar Republic had voted for signature of the treaty. "So here is the end, as far as the German peace is concerned."⁸⁵ He noted the recent Scapa Flow incident when the German North Sea Fleet was scuppered. To Crowe, "the Germans deliberately broke their word..." and he believed that one of the main results would be still more deep-seated mistrust of any undertaking."⁸⁶ At 5.50 p.m. on Monday 23 June a telephone message was received from the *Quai d'Orsay* stating that Germany was ready to sign unconditionally. "All said and done, this is a great moment. The war is definitely over."⁸⁷ However, Crowe rightly predicted that there would be fighting in Poland, as "no one believes that the Germans will make any attempt to carry out their undertakings there."⁸⁸

What was Crowe's view of the Versailles Treaty in June 1919? His initial comment is another typical understatement: "The signature of the peace on Saturday will I am sure mean much more than some people as yet think. Though Germany may have mental reservations as to carrying out their obligations, I think they will in all material respects be enforced in due course. I do not see any injustice in any of the important stipulations though some may not be very wise – like the trial of the emperor."⁸⁹ Whether the 'Hang the Kaiser' question was more important to Crowe

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 21 June 1919, p. 86.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 22 June 1919, p. 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 23 June 1919, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.100.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 25 June 1919, p. 106

than the war-guilt clause is a moot point, but for the rest of his life, Crowe believed that the treaty was not unjust and should be strictly enforced by the allies.

Nor did Crowe have a difference of opinion with Lloyd George on one vital issue. Crowe did not want Germany crushed by excessive reparation payments and he was effusive in his praise for his Prime Minister in Paris. Referring later to the 'Discussion of the British Delegation on 15 March 1919,' Crowe wrote that the Prime Minister was:

constantly pressing the financial experts to tell him what would be a reasonable sum. He did not care a scrap about what the effect would be on the House of Commons or on British public opinion provided he could find out what was the right sum... The last thing he wanted to do was to let Germany off paying ... before the Germans came to Versailles he wanted to know what was a reasonable figure... He wanted such a figure that a business man inside Germany would be able to go his government and say: 'Well, I think you can pay that.'⁹⁰

Crowe's analysis of the true intentions of Lloyd George were later supported by Harold Nicolson, who described him telling an audience in Newcastle that German reparation payments must be limited to its capacity to pay.⁹¹ In opening a Commons debate on 2 April 1919, Lt. Col. Claude Lowther referred to Lloyd George's speech in Bristol two days before the General Election and stated that "in every speech that he made he never pretended that he was certain that Germany could pay in full. He always said that Germany could and should pay to the fullest extent of her capacity to pay."⁹²

⁹⁰ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, p. 140. This is part of a long letter (pp. 125-156), headed 'Introduction,' undated, but written by Crowe soon after the publication of Keynes' *Economic Consequences of the Peace* in December 1919 and sent privately to Curzon.

⁹¹ Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, pp. 22-23. Nicolson said that he was appalled by the revelation that President Wilson had told his staff that Lloyd George's endeavours to make the Treaty "more just and reasonable" had "left him tired." *Ibid*, p. 210.

⁹² *Hansard*, Volume 114, H C Debates, columns 1306-1307, speech by Lowther, 2 April 1919.

Exacting reparations from Germany though “was an area in which the Foreign Office was to play no role either during the armistice negotiations or during the peace conference.”⁹³ Crowe was obviously interested in the matter, for in an interview with Curzon, then acting Foreign Secretary, Crowe expressed the desire to work on the Reparations Commission.⁹⁴ But this key responsibility was offered to a Treasury mandarin, Sir John Bradbury, much to the chagrin of the Foreign Office.

Like Vansittart, Crowe was not convinced by Keynes’ famous polemic⁹⁵ against the Versailles Treaty. He did though read it with mixed feelings. In a private letter to Curzon, he accepted that there were serious flaws in the treaty, as did some of the signatories. Yet Crowe supported much of Keynes’ general criticisms, but said that at the confidential meetings at which he was present there was “no trace of the sophistries, the legerdemain of which he speaks.”⁹⁶ Crowe defended the treaty mainly on the grounds that there were provisions within it for revision, saying that, “...the real answer to Mr Keynes’ book is to be found ... in the policy which ... is being pursued by the British Government, of using the opportunity afforded by the Treaty itself for modifying some of its provisions.”⁹⁷

As Crowe explained to Curzon: “At any time within four months of the signature of the Treaty, Germany... may suggest any practicable plan, category by category or for the reparations as a whole, which will tend to shorten the period of

⁹³ Dockrill and Steiner, ‘The Foreign Office,’ p. 55.

⁹⁴ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, 14 October 1919, pp. 92-93.

⁹⁵ J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London, 1920.

⁹⁶ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, p. 132.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Citing Article 234, Lloyd George made the same defence of the treaty in his memoirs. See Lloyd George, *Truth About Reparations*, p. 25.

enquiry and to bring about a prompt and effectual conclusion...’’⁹⁸ Crowe rejected

Keynes’s more extreme criticisms of the treaty and of France in particular:

What would be the result for France of a peace of generosity? France would have been left upon the continent of Europe isolated and dependent upon herself entirely for her own protection.... France would continue to be in a weak position vis-à vis Germany, despite the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine, because of her lesser wealth, population and the vulnerability of her frontiers. Furthermore, the war crippled France more than Germany... of all this Mr Keynes in his book shows not the slightest comprehension.⁹⁹

Once the Versailles Treaty had been signed in June 1919, the politicians returned home. But much remained to be done. It was then that Crowe’s true worth began to be appreciated. On 12 September 1919 he replaced Balfour as the British representative on the Supreme Council and was given the highest possible rank – Ambassador Plenipotentiary.¹⁰⁰ Lord Derby, the new British Ambassador in Paris, was angry at the award of this title to Crowe, deeming it to be “a personal slight to himself and to the Office of Ambassador in Paris’’¹⁰¹ and threatened to resign. Dockrill and Steiner believed that Crowe won Derby over within a fortnight.¹⁰²

Erik Goldstein has been effusive in his praise for Crowe in Paris. He “was deeply concerned about the altered nature of the Great War and how the British Empire would secure itself in this new world.’’¹⁰³ Crowe also “recognized the significance of the emergence of the new states based on roughly national lines for the future European balance of power, and he knew that Britain would have to find a way

⁹⁸ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, p. 133. In early November 1919, Crowe had persuaded Clemenceau to send a demand to the German government that it promise to fulfil all its obligations after the treaty came into operation. Crowe and Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant*, p. 366 and note 278, pp. 386-387.

⁹⁹ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, p. 133.

¹⁰⁰ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, Lloyd George to Crowe, 15 September 1919, M S Eng, d. 2904, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, 26 September 1919.

¹⁰² Dockrill and Steiner, ‘The Foreign Office,’ p. 80.

¹⁰³ Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, pp. 118-119.

to utilize this situation.”¹⁰⁴ Goldstein argued that the links between Crowe and the members of the Political Intelligence Department who belonged to Seton-Watson’s ‘New Europe’ group “did much to determine the face of modern Europe.”¹⁰⁵

His biographers have also praised his decisive influence in the second half of 1919. Crowe wanted an ultimatum threatening military action if German soldiers did not leave the three Baltic provinces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. By 14 December 1919, they had almost all left. The last to go, the ‘Iron Division’, left on 8 January 1920, two days before the Versailles treaty came into force.¹⁰⁶ They claimed that Crowe was opposed, as was “the Foreign Office as a whole,” to a ban on the future *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria.¹⁰⁷ He “had never believed that it should be British policy to reduce Germany to the status of a second-class power in Europe. It was only as a world Power, with dangerous intentions, that he wished to see her weakened.”¹⁰⁸ Gaynor Johnson pointed out that it was Crowe, acting as Ambassador Plenipotentiary in the Supreme Council in Paris, who suggested that the Allies should agree the conditions under which diplomatic relations with Germany would be resumed.¹⁰⁹ This would ultimately lead to the appointment of a British ambassador in Berlin in less than one year.

Crowe’s work earned him great accolades from colleagues and foreign politicians and diplomats in Paris, but perhaps not from those in London:

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 118. See also Sharp, ‘James Headlam-Morley’.

¹⁰⁶ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 354-355.

¹⁰⁷ This is a view supported by others in the Foreign Office. Lord Hardinge minuted, undated, his agreement with Lewis Namier of the Political Intelligence Department that no clause in any treaty could ultimately prevent the ‘Austrian Germans’ from joining Germany. See Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁸ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 345.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *Lord D’Abernon*, p. 18.

I sometimes doubt whether the people at the Foreign Office, however closely they follow the negotiations here, fully realise what Crowe has done and the position he has created for himself on the Council. It is no exaggeration to say that he dominates the Assembly and there is hardly any limit to his power of making his colleagues accept his proposals. This is partly owing to the fact that he is the only person who has ever sat on the Council who really knows the questions with which he has to deal in all their hearings but it is also the result of the respect and affection which he has been able to inspire in the other representatives by the combination of firmness with conciliation which he is able to achieve.¹¹⁰

Goldstein believed that some of Crowe's masterstrokes in Paris (for example the Memelland question or the Belgian claims on Dutch Flanders) involved "the more classical opinion" of saying nothing until necessary.¹¹¹ Yet, not everybody was happy with Crowe's work in Paris. The Foreign Office supplied "the chief British negotiator in Paris and, justifiably or not, Lloyd George was not happy with the results, especially when he believed that Crowe had committed Britain to a policy which might entail the renewal of hostilities with Germany in December 1919."¹¹² Dockrill and Steiner¹¹³ defended Crowe. Following the scuppering of its fleet at Scapa Flow, Germany was required to pay compensation to the allies. In response to their failure to do so, Clemenceau wished to send a note threatening a military response. Crowe supported him, but Crowe, rightly, told Clemenceau that he required the approval of the British government before any action should take place. On 7 December, Lloyd George then sent Kerr out to Paris to tone down the note.

Clemenceau was furious, but Crowe had appeared to lose face because of the Cabinet action. Curzon sent a letter to Lloyd George praising Crowe's efforts in Paris, but, in a reply to it, Lloyd George made an extraordinary attack on Crowe, saying that he had "blundered" and that he did not have "the necessary political

¹¹⁰ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, 794/2, Mr H. Norman to Mr Campbell, 18 December 1919.

¹¹¹ Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, p. 127.

¹¹² Sharp, 'Holding up the flag of Britain', p. 37.

¹¹³ Dockrill and Steiner, 'The Foreign Office', pp. 81-82.

equipment to handle a grave situation of this kind.”¹¹⁴ Even Hankey privately stated that he felt that Lloyd George was being unfair to Crowe, who, he believed “has represented us with great dignity and ability”.¹¹⁵

His compatriot, Kenneth Morgan, has supported Lloyd George. “Eyre Crowe’s blunder in presenting what turned out to be something very similar to an ultimatum for Germany illustrated for Lloyd George the inadequacy of the Foreign Office in supplying the flexibility and sensitivity required.” It was further justification that the time for the ‘Old Diplomacy’ had passed. “Lloyd George’s method was clear – summit diplomacy on the model of wartime.”¹¹⁶

The incident does demonstrate an element of consistency in Crowe’s philosophy. Although, as will be shown in Chapter 4, he was often angered by French policies and behaviour, he never lost his faith in close ties with France, an important strand of the 1907 Memorandum. Zara Steiner described Eyre Crowe as “traditionally Francophile,”¹¹⁷ but this is an exaggeration. He did not love the French. Crowe was ‘against a break with Britain’s wartime ally’¹¹⁸ because it was the best policy for Britain, for the same reason that he did not favour a Carthaginian peace with Germany. He would have agreed entirely with a minute written by Vansittart to Eric Phipps in Paris in 1927, a memorandum that he could have written himself: “You are right in thinking I am pro-British. It is a question of our policy, the one that suits us

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ Morgan, *Consensus and Diversity*, p. 139. Crowe and Corp had a very different response to this incident. See *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 369, as did Lord Derby, who told Lloyd George “that the fool was not at the Paris end of the wire but at the English end. We got quite hot over it...” Derby Papers, Liverpool Record Office, 920 DER (17), 28/1/4, diary entry, 15 December 1919.

¹¹⁷ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, p. 226.

¹¹⁸ J.F.V. Keiger, ‘Poincaré and the Ruhr’, p. 50.

best, not of any pro-this or anti-that.’’¹¹⁹ All the more understandable that Alan Sharp should have observed that it was extraordinary that British statesmen and officials, based upon the evidence of their minutes and letters, constantly assumed that British policies were altruistic and they could not understand how, especially the French, did not assume likewise.¹²⁰

As has been evidenced from Crowe’s own papers,¹²¹ he agreed with almost all the major specific aspects of the Treaty of Versailles,¹²² but historians have not agreed on either his or the Foreign Office’s attitude to Germany and the international situation after the end of the war. Dockrill and Goold believed that while Headlam-Morley ‘‘was convinced that Germany was now a liberal and constitutional republic, and that the powers should take this into account when drafting the treaty, others like Crowe and Hardinge had little faith in the possibility of German redemption.’’¹²³

His biographers have rejected this opinion. Crowe

felt very strongly that she (Germany) should not be permanently weakened and crippled by excessive reparations but continue as in 1907 to be regarded as a great European power; and at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 he took the view that only a minimum of territorial concessions should be demanded of her. In the west he favoured only the cession to France of Alsace-Lorraine; and in the east he thought that Danzig should remain German and objected strongly to the division of East from West Russia (sic) by the establishment of a Polish corridor between them.¹²⁴

In analysing Eyre Crowe’s attitude to Germany, the historian must consider whether the Great War had effected a drastic review of his pre-war stance

¹¹⁹ Quoted by McKercher, ‘Old diplomacy and new’, p. 87.

¹²⁰ Sharp, ‘Lord Curzon and the Foreign Office’, p. 77.

¹²¹ Chapter 2, pp. 76-77.

¹²² This meant that Crowe accepted the war-guilt clause and reparation chapter, the return of Alsace-Lorraine and the gift of the Saar coal mines to France, as well as the demilitarisation of the Rhineland and the reduction of Germany’s military capacity to make war.

¹²³ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace Without Promise*, p. 32.

¹²⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. xiii.

and also attempt to discover what Crowe's response was to the situation in Germany in 1918 and 1919. Zara Steiner believed that "Crowe was consistent; his views did not change between 1907 and 1914. Nor, in fact, did they alter in the post-war period."¹²⁵ Unlike some of his Foreign Office colleagues, he does not appear to have become embittered by the war. Hardinge and Tyrrell lost sons and Vansittart a brother and these tragedies reinforced their beliefs and perhaps prejudices. Crowe's outlook remained consistent, logical and with little apparent emotion, other than anger at the marginalisation of Foreign Office experts. There is evidence that Crowe was unsympathetic to intelligence reports coming from Germany early in 1919, from both soldiers and business experts, describing food shortages, although this was primarily because Crowe questioned the competence of the writers and their close contacts with Lloyd George.¹²⁶

Douglas Newton rightly admonished contemporary politicians and historians of the post-war period for ignoring or misrepresenting the turmoil that Germany was enduring and for holding prejudiced viewpoints about German democracy itself. On the very day of the armistice, Lloyd George had emphasised to his War Cabinet colleagues how important it was to conduct wise policies in the future.¹²⁷ But Newton believed that his government "showed virtually no concern with nourishing the new German democracy in 1918-19."¹²⁸ As with the fledgling democracy in Russia in 1917, the British government's policy towards the Weimar Republic was "disastrous."¹²⁹ For one conservative British historian though, the members of the new Weimar government were the great weakness. They were "a

¹²⁵ Steiner, *Foreign Office*, p. 115.

¹²⁶ Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic*, pp. 388-389.

¹²⁷ "The future peace of the world depends more on the way in which we behaved after victory than upon victory itself." Quoted in *ibid*, p. 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

flimsy republican régime of dingy, well-meaning but inexperienced working-class and middle-class politicians.”¹³⁰

German politicians and citizens of every class though were in a state of denial. After the end of the war, a commission was set up to inquire into the origins and conduct of the war. Field-Marshal Hindenburg made a statement and used the word *Dolchstoss*, or ‘stab in the back,’ for the first time in public.¹³¹ The attitude of Germany to its defeat was perhaps the most important root cause of its post-war diplomacy. It refused to accept the reality of defeat in 1918 and this made it “even more difficult to establish the treaty’s legitimacy. This was a very different world from that in 1815, or of 1944-5.”¹³² The *Auswärtiges Amt*, or *Wilhelmstrasse*, was in full accord with these sentiments and acted upon them during these years. German diplomats “were not willing to accept Germany’s military defeat as a basis for the peace” and shared and promoted the illusions of the Right.¹³³ The reaction inside Germany to the war-guilt clause and the reparation chapter was one of fury, the nation angrily protesting its innocence (with the notable exception of the German Communist Party). Henry Kissinger, a strong critic of the Versailles Treaty, believed that because of its pre-war ambitions, it is unlikely that Germany could have accepted any peace terms.¹³⁴

The opinion of the Prime Minister of the Versailles Treaty could almost have been said by Crowe himself. “The official British point of view is that the German nation were not responsible for the war, that the Junkers have been ejected,

¹³⁰ C. Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, London, 1972, pp. 249-250.

¹³¹ H. James, *A German Identity, 1870-1990*, London, 1989, p. 117.

¹³² Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, pp. 68-69.

¹³³ K. Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking. Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1985, p. 404.

¹³⁴ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 242.

that the German government should be supported, that German industries should be revived and that, generally, the Germans should not be treated with suspicion.”¹³⁵

Crowe’s views on the new government in Germany are open to debate, but evidence has been given to prove that he did want Germany revived as a peaceful major power in Europe, not destroyed. It was a view with which most of his Foreign Office colleagues concurred for at least the next five years.

In January 1919, Sir Horace Rumbold,¹³⁶ Ambassador in Switzerland, sent a telegram to Curzon, based on a confidential memorandum from M. de Modzelewski, the Berne representative of the Polish National Committee, who had informed him that secret meetings continued to be held in Germany at which “important personalities from all parties...exchanged views.” Summarising one secret memorandum distributed at one of those meetings, de Modzelewski explained that

everything in Germany, politics, economics, philosophy, social sciences, justice, even theology and art had contributed to foster the instinct of domination in the German people: the Germans have felt and still feel themselves the chosen race to whom God has given the earth to govern. German intellectualism goes on the assumption that humanity cannot be governed either by love and charity or by justice: only force can win a place in the sun. But, as the efforts of the Germans to assert themselves by means of force have been crowned with such manifest success, it is clear that God must be on the side of this theory and of the people which acts on it. Hence the triumphant confidence which animates Germany. Centuries would be needed to eradicate this belief from the German mind.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Lloyd George’s view, described in Riddell, *Intimate Diary*, p. 188.

¹³⁶ In 1909, Rumbold had written to his father, saying that “Crowe is quite cracked about Germany.” M. Gilbert, *Sir Horace Rumbold: Portrait of a Diplomat, 1869-1941*, London, 1973. Rumbold later became an outstanding British Ambassador in Berlin from 1928 to 1934, showing consistent scepticism towards Germany’s military élite and Right-wing politicians.

¹³⁷ UKNA, FO 371/3776, C 15098, Rumbold to Curzon, 22 January 1919, p.171.

Rumbold described this as “an astonishing passage, literally translated...”¹³⁸ and explained de Modzelewski’s views. Meetings like this occurred in other countries, but elsewhere were generated by public opinion, he said. In Germany such meetings decided public opinion. The decisions taken by these important men were then broadcast across Germany via Parliament and the press that would have been only of secondary importance. Thus German thought was organised and the population was utterly compliant. The Germans, Rumbold believed, were governed by this “occult parliamentarianism, which formed plans, propagated ideas and guided the education of the nation.”¹³⁹ In de Modzelewski’s opinion, according to Rumbold, “the only possible way of forcing Germany to abandon her ideas of revenge is to limit her territory by surrounding her with states non-German in race and anti-German in sentiment. This policy alone would present guarantees for the future...”¹⁴⁰ Rumbold was so pleased by these views and so much in a hurry to convey them to London that he gave Curzon more of them later that day. Modzelewski had stated that “it is clear from these secret meetings that ever since the entry of America into the war the question for Germany has not been whether she would win or lose the present war but whether she would not preserve her vital forces in order to take her revenge in the future.”¹⁴¹

German pacifists and militarists had similar aims, but favoured different methods. The pacifists believed that “as the Entente would dissolve after the war, nothing could prevent a Germany, who had preserved all her vital forces, from carrying out pacific penetration in neighbouring countries and even overseas. Such was their conception of Germany’s revenge on their rivals.” On the other hand, the

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 182.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 184.

militarists believed that if Germany had husbanded her vital forces, then after “ten years of rest and preparation Germany would let loose a new and this time decisive war.”¹⁴²

In yet another despatch on the same day, Rumbold conveyed de Modzelewski’s belief that, in comparison to her devastated neighbours, “Germany has an immense start... both in the west and in the east.” The German professors knew that “the Allies were on the horns of a dilemma. “Either they must not take harsh financial measures against Germany or if they did it would not be in their interests to make Germany pay amounts beyond their capacity. The professors suggested that if the Allies did force it to pay large indemnities, Germany “would take care to ruin herself and so frustrate the designs of her enemies.”¹⁴³

Curzon’s responses to Rumbold’s despatches are not recorded. Perhaps he did not even read them. What was probably true is that some leading experts in the Foreign Office would have accepted these theories and the evidence upon which they were based as being based highly plausible. Men such as Crowe, Tyrrell and Vansittart, all future Permanent Under-Secretaries of State, were very sceptical about the intentions of some of those people who wielded the greatest influence inside Germany. Germany had replaced the government of the Kaiser with that of the Weimar Republic, but the affinity of many German people for the military élite remained considerable because of the widespread refusal to accept the stark truth of the defeat of the German Army in 1918. However, it will be shown that Crowe’s influence on his colleagues perceptions of Germany were not the result of the understandable antipathy towards Germany in the aftermath of the war, but were the product of a flexible policy that had been formulated over a decade earlier and would

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 186.

be seen by many diplomats as having resonance for over a decade after the author's death in 1925.

The British Ambassador in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, wrote that he preferred the new democratic Germans to the "Teutonic obstinacy and dourness" of the old officials "who were soon again to set the style of the foreign service."¹⁴⁴ Yet, these were the German diplomats with whom Crowe and his colleagues were familiar. However, as in Britain, their influence was limited. "The direction of German foreign policy fell into the hands of the German bourgeois parties after 1920, and among them the German People's Party assumed a crucial position..." partly because of the increase in its popular vote and also because it represented most of the most important German industrialists. They included most of the Ruhr coal and iron magnates and their chief political spokesman was Hugo Stinnes.

Crowe underwent a very difficult period at the end of 1919 and beginning of 1920. Despite his very important wartime and peace conference work, he was very dissatisfied with past events at the Foreign Office. He told Lord Curzon in October 1919 that he had been considering resignation for five years and that he was willing to resign now if a suitable post such as on the Reparation Commission could not be found for him. Crowe, allegedly an 'anti-German,' had tolerated the prejudice against himself within the Foreign Office for too long. "In the service I had always been made to feel that I had come in as an outsider, yet I was prepared to take a generous view of that prejudice." He was very bitter about his wartime treatment and hoped that "my resignation would then be made the occasion for righting me as far as the general public was concerned." Even his knighthood, he felt, "was wholly

¹⁴⁴ Lord D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace*, London, 1929, quoted by Holborn, 'Diplomacy in Early Weimar,' p. 153.

misleading.”¹⁴⁵ He was clearly under enormous strain. In January 1920, Crowe went on sick leave with a kidney infection similar to the one that would cause his early death in April 1925.

¹⁴⁵ UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, Crowe to Curzon, 15 October 1919, p. 93.

Chapter 3

The Foreign Office and Conference Diplomacy, 1920 – 1923

This chapter examines the period from the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in January 1920 to the decision in January 1923 by the French and Belgian governments to send troops into the Ruhr industrial region. The research will largely use Foreign Office archives, private papers and the considerable number of secondary sources, particularly on Anglo-German and Anglo-French relations during these three years. The chapter will be divided into a number of parts. Firstly, it will be demonstrated that from January to October 1920, even before Crowe was installed as Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, his perceptions of Germany were held by most of the leading mandarins as well as by most of the Lloyd George government.¹ In the following six months, up to the imposition of the final sum by the Reparation Commission and the London Schedule of Payments in May 1921, Crowe himself may have been marginalised, but it was still his view of Germany that prevailed in the Foreign Office (in London, if not in Berlin) and the government as a whole. The year 1921 though did witness sharp differences between Crowe and his political masters, Lloyd George and Lord Curzon, over a possible British military alliance with France should either be attacked by Germany. It will be shown that the

¹ One of the most notable exceptions to Crowe's attitudes came from the new British Ambassador to Germany from July 1920, Lord D'Abernon. D'Abernon was a former banker, not a professional diplomat. His alternative views will be discussed in this and later chapters.

deteriorating relationship with France did not meet with Crowe's approval, but neither did it lead to a better relationship with Germany and the section that analyses the months prior to and during the Genoa Conference (April-May 1922) will reinforce the view that the scepticism of Crowe and his Foreign Office colleagues to the conference was primarily because of their differences with Lloyd George over Soviet Russia and not Germany. Finally, the examination of the nine months prior to the Ruhr invasion, beginning with Poincaré's speech at Bar-le Duc in April 1922 will provide further evidence of the influence of Sir Eyre Crowe on Foreign Office perceptions of Germany. It will be emphasised that until the fall of the Lloyd George coalition government in October 1922, the major foreign policy decisions vis-à-vis both Germany and France remained in the hands of the 'Garden Suburb.' In October 1922, a new Conservative administration led by Andrew Bonar Law came to power. Yet, the chapter will show that the policies followed by both British governments towards Germany were, in almost every case, made in the spirit of Eyre Crowe's 1907 memorandum, with his full support and with that of the great majority of the Foreign Office experts. These officials may have been vehement in their opposition to Lloyd George's diplomatic style and methods, but not his policies. During the span of approximately ten weeks from the accession to power of Bonar Law to the critical Franco-Belgian decision, the attitude of Crowe and the Foreign Office staff to Germany remained deeply unsympathetic. Foreign Office perceptions of Germany in these three years were very much those of Sir Eyre Crowe.

At the beginning of 1920, Lord Hardinge was still the Permanent Under-Secretary of State. His two Assistant Under-Secretaries were Crowe and Sir William (known as 'Willie') Tyrrell. Since October 1919, Lord Curzon had been the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Curzon's private secretary was Robert Vansittart. All of

these men held sceptical attitudes towards Germany. For three of them there were personal factors behind their stances. Tyrrell and Hardinge had lost sons during the war and Vansittart had lost a much-loved brother. They all believed that Germany wanted a war of revenge.² Curzon did not like the Germans either. He claimed that the German mentality was “at once the most formidable and the stupidest in Europe.”³ But, he had little sympathy with the French: “what treacherous dogs they are,”⁴ Even Lloyd George was not immune from criticising Britain’s former enemy, talking of “this miserable thing called Germany.”⁵

The Foreign Office had played a minor part in the events leading to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. Yet the leaders of the victorious allies had decided at the Paris Peace Conference that they would meet regularly to discuss the implementation of the treaty. It seemed ‘Open Diplomacy’ had replaced the ‘Old Diplomacy.’ Lloyd George relegated the ‘experts’ to the background role of translators of diplomatic ‘notes’ and reserved the aspect of decision-making to an inner circle of like-minded individuals. For the next three years, British foreign policy towards Germany was conducted in this manner. But even though Crowe was either not present at a post-war reparations conference, or a silent witness at another one, in terms of British policy, Eyre Crowe’s views on Germany remained deeply influential. Crowe realised that British governments must not give in to Germany, but he also believed Germany must not be treated too harshly and it had to be possible to extract reparations from it that were not excessive.

² Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 38. Tyrrell subsequently believed that Germany was deliberately weakening its own economy in order to avoid paying reparations, *ibid*, p. 56.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 90-91.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁵ K. Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary*, Volume 4, London, 1969, p. 117.

In 1920, feelings of antipathy towards Germany ran high in Britain, but far more so in France and Belgium. The main aim of the inter-allied conferences of 1921 and 1922 was to ensure that the Treaty of Versailles, and in particular the Reparation chapter, was implemented. Within the British government and the Foreign Office between January 1920 and January 1923, perceptions of Germany were still generally uncompromising, but any signs of 'appeasement' infuriated French policy-makers, especially President Millerand and his occasional Prime Minister, Poincaré. As a result, the conferences witnessed increasing enmity between the Entente powers about how Germany should be treated.

Differences between the French and British leaders at Versailles in 1919 had been considerable. When Clemenceau told Lloyd George that the British would turn against France as soon as the war was over, he replied casually, "well, was it not always our traditional policy."⁶ Crowe did not believe that the war had destroyed German militarism and nationalism and he had correctly predicted that Germany would not comply with the requirements of the treaty.⁷ But he opposed what he believed to be the illegal coercion of Germany. Lloyd George wanted Germany to accept its liability and to pay up and then disarm. Within weeks of the ratification of Versailles, the German government was deliberately failing to fulfil its reparation quotas and the disarmament clauses. Lloyd George "was convinced that only when Germany's liability was definitely fixed and accepted would it be able to raise the necessary international loan to cover its unfavourable balance of payments, regain its economic stability, and pay the reparations that he was unwilling to forego."⁸

⁶ Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace*, p. 19.

⁷ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, pp. 50-51.

⁸ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 193.

But at a meeting of the Supreme Council in Paris in February and March 1920, President Millerand of France demanded an allied occupation of the Ruhr to ensure compliance. Yet he backed down on this demand when British support for it did not materialise. Then, on 6 April 1920, Millerand unilaterally sent French troops into Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Hannau, Dieburg and Homburg. Following the Kapp putsch, German soldiers were sent into the demilitarised zone and Millerand claimed that he was simply ensuring their prompt withdrawal, as the treaty demanded. The British government and the Foreign Office were united in their opposition to what they perceived as Napoleonic ‘sabre rattling’ on the part of the French government.⁹ Millerand had also, in the process, broken the post-war agreement on united action. At the San Remo conference (19-26 April 1920), Lloyd George “forced the French into withdrawing their troops”¹⁰ from the five German towns. Crowe and Corp emphasised that the strong opposition of the Foreign Office, particularly from Eyre Crowe, to what was considered, under the treaty, an illegal invasion by the French had helped to take the heat out of the situation.¹¹

Throughout 1920, Lloyd George, the Foreign Office and the Treasury became equally concerned that a restoration of Anglo-German trade was vital to fixing German liability and helping ensure payment of reparations. Holborn believed that this was preferable to an interim plan over a number of years because, until a final sum was fixed, Germany was not likely to receive the foreign credits it needed to restore its economy and to enable it to pay reparations.¹² Discussions at Boulogne in June 1920 about Germany’s total liability failed to arrive at a final figure. The matter was then referred to another conference at Spa in July, but, for the first time since the

⁹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp 430-431.

¹⁰ Morgan, *Consensus and Diversity*, p. 141.

¹¹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 431.

¹² Holborn, ‘Diplomacy in Early Weimar’, p. 158.

peace conference, Germany sent delegates. In Parliament, after the conference, Lloyd George said that it was “the first occasion on which we had a real talk with the Germans... It was impossible at Versailles... in the atmosphere which then prevailed.”¹³

After Spa, Lloyd George praised the two leading political representatives, Chancellor Muller and Foreign Minister, von Simons, describing them as “two perfectly honest upright men doing their best to cope with a gigantic task.”¹⁴ By the summer of 1920, German foreign policy had been taken over by bourgeois parties, especially the People’s Party (the D.V.P.), that represented most of the Ruhr coal and iron magnates. The leading political spokesman of this clique was Hugo Stinnes, whose coal, iron, steel and press empire amounted to almost one-third of all production in the Ruhr.¹⁵ Stinnes was chosen to be a delegate at the Spa Conference. When Stinnes was given the opportunity to speak, he launched an astonishing attack on the reparations policy, saying that the allies “were sick beyond the means of recovery.”¹⁶ Even Lloyd George was moved to describe Stinnes as “a real specimen of the jack-boot German.”¹⁷ He would have been unimpressed also when General von Seeckt, described by Harold Nicolson as “a man of extreme honesty and courage,”¹⁸ admitted that Germany had not yet fully disarmed.¹⁹ It still had twice the number of troops and five or six times the armaments permitted by the military

¹³ *Hansard*, 132, H C Debates, columns 486-487, speech by Lloyd George, 21 July 1920.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, col 487.

¹⁵ Stinnes’s business enterprises collapsed shortly after his death in 1924. See Holborn, ‘Diplomacy in Early Weimar’, p. 156.

¹⁶ Notes of an International Conference held at Spa, 10 July 1920, *DBFP*, 1, VIII, p. 521.

¹⁷ Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After*, p. 188.

¹⁸ Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 227.

¹⁹ Lentin, *Lost Peace*, p. 65.

clauses of the Versailles Treaty.²⁰ Following Stinnes' outburst, Lloyd George spoke to Marshal Foch and Sir Henry Wilson regarding a possible invasion of the Ruhr.²¹ In the summer of 1920, the Prime Minister was not pursuing what could be termed a policy of appeasement towards the German government. On the contrary, his policy was in complete accord with the relevant principles of the Crowe Memorandum, namely, firm, but fair treatment of Germany, without making concessions.

The main outcome of the conference was the decision granting what became known as the 'Spa Percentages.' German reparation payments were to be distributed as follows: France 52%, the British Empire 22%, Italy 10%, Belgium 8%, Serbia 5% and others 3%. There was also an insistence that Germany should deliver two million tons of coal. At Spa, Lloyd George, quoting verbatim from a Note sent by the British government to the French, repeated "the deliberate policy" of Britain on the issue of the German liability: "It is our interest that Germany should pay the highest figure that can be exacted from her."²²

The latter part of 1919 and the early months of 1920 were difficult ones for Crowe, the Foreign Office and Germany. As previously stated,²³ in an interview with Curzon in October 1919, Crowe had expressed his grievances, particularly about the prejudice against him inside the Foreign Office and threatened resignation. In December 1919, Crowe received the unfair criticism from Lloyd George.²⁴ Within a few days of the ratification of the Versailles Treaty in January 1920, Crowe was very sick.²⁵

²⁰ Nicolson, *Curzon*, pp. 227-228.

²¹ Notes of a Meeting held at Spa, 13 July 1920, *DBFP*, 1, VIII, p. 583.

²² Lloyd George, *Truth About Reparations*, p. 45.

²³ See Chapter 2, pp. 89-90.

²⁴ See Chapter 2, pp. 81-82.

²⁵ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 390.

When Crowe returned to duty in the middle of February 1920, the Foreign Office was in the process of structural reorganisation.²⁶ Several departments directly connected with the war were closed down, whilst functions of some departments were transferred to other ones or their officials were given new roles elsewhere. For example, Headlam-Morley of the Political Intelligence Department became Historical Adviser of the Foreign Office. Hardinge had been the moving spirit behind these reforms, among which was the reduction of the over-burdened Western Department and the creation of a Central Department including, among others, Germany, while the reduced Western Department included, among others, responsibilities for Anglo-French relations.²⁷

In the early months of 1920, there was a great debate inside the Foreign Office as to the most suitable diplomat to be the first post-war British Ambassador in Germany. Since 10 January 1920, Lord Kilmarnock had been *Chargé d'Affaires* in Berlin. On 1 July 1920, it was announced that Sir Edgar Vincent, 1st Baron (later Viscount) D'Abernon, was to be sent to Berlin with full ambassadorial status to replace him. D'Abernon was an old acquaintance of Lloyd George, a merchant banker, but with no experience as a diplomat. To many at the Foreign Office it was not only another example of the Prime Minister's contempt for their expertise, but also a devious ploy to keep them 'in the dark,' by controlling information dissemination and thus policy-making. Others saw it as another reward for services rendered (or money given) to the Prime Minister and his political group.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 390-397.

²⁷ In August 1920, Crowe played a more important part in another group of changes, including those connected with the implementation of the amalgamation of the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service. *Ibid*, pp. 392-393.

Gaynor Johnson has suggested that the truth is somewhat different. It was Curzon, not Lloyd George, who was behind the appointment. Johnson does not provide sufficient evidence to support her claim, but does give some plausible reasons. It was Curzon who appointed Sir Auckland Geddes, another businessman, to go to the Washington embassy in April 1920, describing him as a “new type of ambassador.”²⁸ D’Abernon had experience of work in the near East and had little prior knowledge of Germany – similar to Curzon himself, which could have proved a blessing. He knew that the appointment would enrage Hardinge. It did, and so he did not consult with him about the decision, which would have been easier had it been someone else’s.

The choice of D’Abernon was received with little short of hostility in Germany. On 3 July, the *Tagliche Rundschau* published an article that criticised D’Abernon’s appointment. He was described as an international banker with a murky past in Cairo and Constantinople. There was some truth in this accusation. He had been a soldier of fortune, who became a banker of fortune and was therefore not a member of the established banking élite, but belonged to a new financial and service class that operated on the periphery of the empire, if not necessarily according to the rules.²⁹ From 1883 to 1889 D’Abernon was a financial adviser to the Egyptian Government and he had resigned from the governorship of the Imperial Ottoman Bank in 1897 after speculating unsuccessfully in South African gold mines.

During the six years of his ambassadorship, Lord D’Abernon would often find his views of Germany at odds with the Foreign Office experts in London. In Germany in 1920, however, he shared many of the views of the soldiers under the

²⁸ Oriental and India Office Library, Curzon Papers, Curzon to Geddes, 27 May 1920, Eur F 112/206 cited in Johnson, *Lord D’Abernon*, p. 21.

²⁹ P. J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism – Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, London, 1993, pp. 406-407.

control of the War Office. It was the opinion of some of them that the Treaty of Versailles was designed to crush Germany and must be revised, if the spectre of Bolshevism was to be avoided. Hardinge and Crowe were furious at the desire of soldiers to be diplomats. The Foreign Office believed that it was not British policy either to appease or to crush Germany.

In administrative terms, the Foreign Office had already suffered a number of blows to its control over German affairs in 1920. On 2 February, the Treasury and the Foreign Office agreed that Sir John Bradbury should be directly responsible to the former and not the latter. Bradbury had been confirmed as His Majesty's Government's principal delegate to the Reparation Commission in 1919 and Sir Frederick Leith-Ross would be Britain's representative on its Finance Board. It was stipulated that Treasury ministers and Bradbury would keep the Foreign Office informed on all reparations questions on which it might be interested. Bradbury and other Treasury officials frequently delayed or failed to send key documents on reparations to the Foreign Office, or made announcements without first informing it of the content. The consequence of this accidental or deliberate lack of competence was that at precise moments in Anglo-Franco-German relations in the critical years after the end of the war the Foreign Office struggled to keep in touch with important developments on British foreign policy.

For the Foreign Office, and Crowe in particular, there were serious question marks against both the nature and the personnel of the Reparation Commission from the outset. It was meant to be 'independent' but this was "a fiction except as far as we were concerned; it is childish to imagine that a body of this importance will not act as an organ of the Governments, if only because its actions must, unless it is superseded by the Governments at every moment, have far reaching

political effects.”³⁰ For Crowe, the critical period began twelve months earlier when the total sum was fixed. A decision should have been taken as to whether the Commission was “a cipher... a convenient façade behind which, while it was busy with the unrealities of the reparation chapter of the treaty, the Governments were arranging a real settlement; or, we might have tried systematically to use it as the instrument through which to translate into practice our conception of a real settlement.”³¹

The French chose the first policy, the British the latter, but was not sure with the consequence that “we have fallen between two stools.”³² Crowe then observed that,

logically, the position assigned to the British delegate, responsible to the Treasury alone, although the only real importance of the Reparation Commission is political, is all in the direction of treating the commission as a cipher. But, if that was to be the arrangement, the logical corollary was that the Foreign Office should be responsible for policy at every stage of the commission’s work, whereas questions of policy, as well as detail, have been deliberately left to Sir J. Bradbury and to the Treasury. The result has been the maximum of friction with the French, who at each successive crisis have had reluctantly to accept the substitution of the Supreme Council for the Reparation Commission, combined with the minimum of power to secure due weight for the British point of view in the working of the commission. It seems likely that the future historian will attribute the failure of British policy in no small degree to this circumstance; he will in any case be amazed at the departmental incoherence which was permitted, nay, which was encouraged to produce this result in a matter of such moment. He will ask why the British representative was not a man of ripe political experience, versed in negotiations with foreign Governments, and endowed with those qualities of the British character which seldom fail to influence the French mind; he will enquire why it was supposed necessary that he should be a financial expert and no more; and he will find no intelligible answer.³³

³⁰ Memorandum respecting British Central European Policy in its relation to Genoa, 9 May 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, pp. 37-38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Crowe's argument was that, on the Reparation Commission, Britain should have been represented by someone with political and diplomatic experience – someone from the Foreign Office, presumably himself. The matter was further complicated by the choice of the British Ambassador to Germany, a post that had not existed since the summer of 1914. In 1920, as well as Crowe's own elevation to the highest post in the Foreign Office, new Ambassadors were put in place, including D'Abernon.

In the autumn of 1920, Hardinge was elevated to the most prestigious position in the Diplomatic Service, when he was made British Ambassador at the Paris Embassy. Crowe was able to gain promotion to the position of Permanent Under-Secretary of State in September 1920. Lloyd George had probably not forgotten the events of the previous December and would have preferred another candidate, but was persuaded by Curzon to select Crowe.³⁴ Hardinge had wanted a diplomat, Ronald Graham, to succeed him,³⁵ but Crowe was appointed, largely due to the support of powerful political patrons, including Balfour, Curzon and Cecil, all of whom respected his work during the war.³⁶ It was a decision that met with greater approval within the Foreign Office itself. Lancelot Oliphant sent his wife a letter expressing his happiness at Crowe's promotion, the latter claiming that there was widespread pleasure within the Foreign Office ranks as well. "I wish you could have realized the intensity of feelings in the office and our unbounded joy..."³⁷ These reactions were not based upon sentimentality or personal friendship. They were

³⁴ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 48.

³⁵ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 397-399.

³⁶ McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', p. 91.

³⁷ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, d. 2907, letters from Tyrrell and Oliphant to Lady Crowe, 30 September 1920, pp. 85-88. There is also a note of congratulation from the foreign correspondent of *The Times*, Valentine Chirol. "Of course there ought not to have been the slightest room for doubt. But in these days one never knows." *Ibid*, 30 October 1920, p. 88.

indications of professional respect, not only for Crowe's industry and talent, but also for his diplomatic manifesto, especially on German matters.

Crowe became the head of a post-war Foreign Office structurally changed and which had seen its participation in German affairs diminish. When, in July 1919, it amalgamated with the Diplomatic Service, it also became, against its will, part of the Home Civil Service.³⁸ In 1920, two outsiders, Geddes and D'Abernon, were appointed to key diplomatic posts in Washington and Berlin. The Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under-Secretary did not intend that the Foreign Office should remain 'in eclipse.' McKercher has argued that Crowe and Curzon worked together to lay the ground "for the Foreign Office's recapture of the centre of policy-making once Lloyd George left office..."³⁹ As Lloyd George had filled the great embassies with his men, they "ensured that as second-level embassies and legations fell vacant, they were filled by career diplomats who shared their views."⁴⁰ Crowe promoted his own men in Whitehall. Miles Lampson⁴¹ became head of the Central Department, responsible for Germany. Vansittart became Curzon's private secretary, John Gregory an assistant secretary, Gerald Villiers was appointed head of the Western Department, responsible for the League of Nations and Victor Wellesley became head of the Far Eastern Department. "In essence, Curzon and Crowe played a bureaucratic waiting game until Lloyd George left office – placing the right men in positions of authority."⁴² Thus, it is not surprising that Crowe's classic principles of the balance of power and the national interest continued to be propagated throughout the Foreign Office, as well as a sceptical attitude towards Germany and a desire for a

³⁸ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 393.

³⁹ McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', pp. 91-92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92. For example, Horace Rumbold was sent to Constantinople.

⁴¹ Lampson "always adopted a harsher attitude to the Germans than Crowe," according to Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 431.

⁴² McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', p. 93.

continuance, even a strengthening, of close relations with France. McKercher said that whatever the initial effects of the Crowe Memorandum, “Crowe’s juniors embraced it after 1920.”⁴³

Crowe’s outlook had much in common with his Prime Minister. He and Lloyd George profoundly disagreed over the role of the Foreign Office experts and diplomatic styles,⁴⁴ but not always over the policies towards France and Germany.⁴⁵ “The key to Lloyd George’s foreign policy ... is that ... he believed firmly in Britain and its empire as a force for order and civilisation in the world, at all times placed its interests first, and fought... to make those interests prevail.”⁴⁶ Lloyd George also shared similar attitudes to Germany. “No one at Paris spoke more tellingly against over-harsh humiliating terms that would drive Germany to extremes, or more clearly foretold the consequences of ‘injustice, arrogance, displayed in the hour of triumph.’”⁴⁷

Both men therefore believed in the contradiction that the major European nations must adhere to the provisions of Versailles and yet they resisted demands for severe treatment of Germany. They understood that it was in Britain’s interest for the German economy to revive, but also for it to submit large reparation sums. The situation was complicated by German internal politics. The Weimar Republic replaced the monarchical regime that had taken the country and Europe to war. What Crowe and Lloyd George wanted was a moderate German government that

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ Chapter 1, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁵ A great exception was the future of the former emperor. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Lloyd George wanted Wilhelm II put on trial. Crowe saw no value in this action. See Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 192; Bodleian Library, Crowe Papers, M S Eng e. 3025, 25 June 1919, p. 106 and Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles*, pp. 24-27.

⁴⁶ Lentin, *The Lost Peace*, Basingstoke, 2001, p. xi.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 10. Yet, Lloyd George always defended the war-guilt clause that was, to a large extent, for his benefit, *ibid*, p.12 and *ibid*, pp. 17-18.

would cooperate in the execution of the treaty,⁴⁸ but neither the government nor the Foreign Office knew whether the Republic's leaders or the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) could be trusted.

It is unsurprising that Alan Sharp believed that the Foreign Office was perhaps uncomfortable with the new German rulers and diplomats. He argued that "... Headlam-Morley instinctively wished to encourage the new liberal and republican Germany of Ebert, Muller and Noske, whereas one has the feeling that his colleagues felt more at ease with the old guard, despite the war."⁴⁹ Certainly, in terms of social class and party political affinity this might have been true, but, in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon wrote in his diary that he preferred the new German democratic policy-makers. He disliked the old officials and complained that they were "difficult to deal with, slow to be persuaded... disposed to quibble on small points, over-careful..."⁵⁰ Holborn believed that although D'Abernon's opinions should not be taken too literally, "they point up some of the shortcomings of the old time professional diplomats who were soon again to set the style of the foreign service."⁵¹

In the early years of the Weimar Republic, President Ebert insisted that German ambassadors should sometimes come from outside the bureaucracy, a policy followed by Britain and France at the same time. Dr Friedrich Sthamer, a businessman, was sent to London and he proved to be a good choice. His "absolute honesty and tactfulness helped to allay British resentment and, at least after Locarno, to give Anglo-German relations a rather cordial nature."⁵² Yet, within weeks of the

⁴⁸ It was also necessary, in 1920, to avoid embarrassing the Millerand government. Introduction by J. P.T. Bury, *DBFP*, 1, X, p. vi.

⁴⁹ Sharp, 'James Headlam-Morley', p. 277.

⁵⁰ Quoted by Holborn, 'Diplomacy in Early Weimar', p. 153.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

ratification of the treaty (January 1920), Germany was not fulfilling its requirements. The response of Britain and her fellow allies to the repeated defaults of, or requests for one moratorium after another from their former enemy was the major issue for the next three years in European diplomacy.

The key difference between the two men was over France. “After all, we must remember that our friend America lives a long way off. France sits at our door.”⁵³ As part of the Versailles Treaty, France was promised a security pact with Britain and the U.S.A.⁵⁴ This collapsed when the United States Congress refused to ratify the treaty. France was left insecure, although Lloyd George promised that should Germany ever attack Alsace-Lorraine, Britain would rush to France’s assistance immediately.⁵⁵

The drift to isolationism by the United States transformed the international situation after 1920. Crowe was not an admirer of the U.S.A., an opinion shared by some but not all of his colleagues.⁵⁶ When Foreign Office colleagues, including Harold Nicolson suggested the formation of an ‘Anglo-American Institute of Foreign Affairs’ in 1919, Crowe opposed it.⁵⁷ Cohrs rightly described the long-established attitude of British foreign policy culture towards the United States as being condescending. The Americans were ‘arriviste.’⁵⁸ In March 1925, weeks before

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 152.

⁵³ Minute by Crowe, 7 December 1918 cited in Dockrill and Goold, *Peace Without Promise*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ See chapter by Lentin, ‘The Treaty that never was: Lloyd George and the abortive Anglo-French Alliance of 1919’ in Joades (ed.), *Lloyd George*, pp. 115-128.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ Vansittart lampooned Senator Borah of Idaho, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for twenty years, before which time he had never left America. He called this “the worst joke in democratic history”. Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ N. Rose, *Nicolson*, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Cohrs, ‘The First “Real” Peace Settlement’, p. 25.

his death, Crowe minuted that the appeasement of the U.S.A. should stop: "I hope that we may cease to be obsessed by the idea of 'placating' the United States ... I have never believed in the policy of dragging the U.S. into our European affairs."⁵⁹

Yet, Cohrs said that in 1924, Ramsay MacDonald (in the dual role of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary), "forcefully seconded ... by Sir Eyre Crowe, the eminence grise of British foreign policy... took not only Britain's European policy but also its co-operation with the elusive U.S. partner to a new level."⁶⁰

Crowe understood that European peace was the responsibility of Britain and France, particularly after 1920. Despite having differences around the world they had to co-operate. Without American involvement, French attitudes to Germany hardened, resulting in a stricter reparations policy, but he believed that what the French government wanted most was guaranteed security against a future attack on the Rhine. It would then moderate its reparations demands.⁶¹ There were various barriers to an Anglo-French security pact. From 1920 to 1923, there were differences between the two powers in the near East over the issue of Greece and Turkey. Both Lloyd George and Crowe favoured the Greeks,⁶² but in October 1921 France and Turkey formed an alliance.

In February 1921, just before the start of the inter-allied conference in London, Crowe had suggested to Curzon that the government should consider a radical review of the Entente and giving France a guarantee. Britain had nothing to gain from a quarrel with France and feared a rupture with France. Without

⁵⁹ Goldstein, 'The evolution of British diplomatic strategy', p. 122.

⁶⁰ Cohrs, 'The First "Real" Peace Settlement', p. 14.

⁶¹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. xii.

⁶² "Venizelos, the Greek Prime Minister ... was greatly favoured by Lloyd George, and even the normally sharp-sighted and level-headed Foreign Office official Eyre Crowe admired the Cretan charmer..." Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 83. See also Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 217.

other allies, this would not be in Britain's interests. An offer of a guarantee of security to France similar to the 1919 guarantee "might make France more conciliatory, both in their attitude to Germany and in their policy in the Near East, and many sections of British opinion would support it."⁶³ But, the suggestion never reached the Cabinet. In 1921, Crowe appealed four times to Curzon to gain the agreement of the Cabinet for an offer of a Rhenish security guarantee pact to France. His biographers claimed that Curzon and Lloyd George rejected the discussion of such a pact until the differences in the Middle East had been resolved.⁶⁴ Lloyd George was also aware that British public opinion was against foreign entanglements so soon after the war.

Also many British politicians, diplomats and military leaders struggled to renounce the Francophobia of their forebears, despite the recent victorious wartime alliance. The traditional fear – that France would always strive to become the dominant power on the European continent – was revived in the immediate post-war years. It had always been one of the foundations of British foreign policy that no power should dominate the continent and the Great War had been fought to disabuse Germany of that intention. Thus Hardinge believed that he had seen through a French scheme to achieve their ends through an Anglo-French Alliance. Throughout this period many British diplomats and politicians would complain of French mendacity and the French would complain about British inconsistency. Hardinge was certainly consistent about French politics: "I mistrusted all French Governments, and especially Briand's, as being extremely imperialistic in their aims."⁶⁵

In December 1921, Lord Hardinge received a long despatch from Curzon about a conversation that he had with St. Aulaire, Paul Cambon's successor as the

⁶³ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. xiv and Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁵ Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, p. 264.

French Ambassador in London. St. Aulaire had proposed a new defensive alliance with France. When Hardinge met Briand, he discovered the French leader to be in ignorance of the Ambassador's plan. Yet, although Briand criticised St. Aulaire for exceeding his authority, he also expressed such enthusiasm for the idea that he went to London to discuss it. Briand claimed that it had been discussed with Lloyd George and Curzon, the latter being particularly interested. In his letter, the Foreign Secretary denied this.⁶⁶

Briand returned to Paris where he met Hardinge and apparently proposed a wide military 'entente,' which would secure and maintain European peace by accepting French military might on the continent and British naval supremacy. By his own account Hardinge was horrified, accusing Briand of using language similar to that of the Kaiser in 1908 when he had wanted a very similar alliance for Germany. Lloyd George, Curzon and Hardinge favoured a guarantee of British assistance should Germany invade France.⁶⁷ But, Crowe disagreed. Britain needed French co-operation and that depended on an Anglo-French alliance. In a memorandum written during his Christmas 'holidays' in December 1921, he said that "The one great preoccupation of the French mind is the danger of a German war of revenge. That Germany will prepare for it systematically, relentlessly so long as any hope of success remains, is indubitable. This danger clouds the French outlook like a nightmare."⁶⁸ William Tyrrell, Crowe's Assistant Under-Secretary and later successor, agreed that Germany wanted a war of revenge,⁶⁹ a belief shared by Hardinge and, following a visit to

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 263-264.

⁶⁸ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 116.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 55-56.

Germany in May 1924, 'Jack' Troutbeck, then Second Secretary in the Central Department.⁷⁰

Therefore, in December 1921, prior to the Prime Minister's departure for the Cannes Conference, the Cabinet had a brief discussion on the question of an Anglo-French alliance. The Foreign Office chose to investigate the matter further, but en route to the conference, Lloyd George re-stated that Great Britain would only agree to a guarantee. Crowe though favoured an alliance limiting military assistance to the example of an unprovoked German attack on France and which provided for consultation if either country's interests were threatened by another state. Other nations, including Germany, would agree to the latter contract, which would conform the terms of the Covenant on ways of dealing with disputes that might lead to war. Germany could join the League and all this would provide considerable guarantees of peace.⁷¹

The alliance alone would help keep any German aggressive designs on France in check; any danger from the Russian quarter, more particularly Russian or Russo-German movements against Poland, would be, if not absolutely prevented, at least rendered infinitely less probable, without at the same time finding England committed to go to war for Poland's sake in circumstances when Poland might be to blame.⁷²

In terms of western European diplomatic policy, the main area of disagreement between the two men was the choice between an alliance and a guarantee pact. Alan Sharp rightly pointed out that Crowe played almost no part in the meetings of the inter-allied reparation conferences of the early 1920's,⁷³ but analysis of the minutes reveals that the Prime Minister seldom veered away from a line that

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 38. Troutbeck was a senior official at the Foreign Office during the Second World War.

⁷¹ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, p. 14.

⁷² *Ibid*. See *DBFP*, 1, XVI, No. 768.

⁷³ Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse', p. 212.

was not in accord with almost all of Crowe's major principles, namely, make Versailles work, firm, but fair treatment of Germany, especially if it had peaceful intentions and to maintain good relations with France, while always putting Britain's interests first. In Paris in January 1921, Lloyd George told Briand that

there was no question of (Britain) not carrying out the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was our charter, and, so far as Great Britain was concerned, she proposed to stand by it. There was no question of modifying the treaty, but we would have to interpret it rationally, having regard to conditions of the moment and making allowances for the present state of affairs... The question for consideration was whether Germany is really trying to avoid carrying out the treaty, either in respect of disarmament or reparation. If the conference agreed that she is attempting to do so, it would be necessary for the allies to take stern steps, but if she were found to be trying to live up to the treaty, although under difficulties, the Allies should make allowances for those difficulties. This has been the spirit in which Great Britain has acted so far.⁷⁴

The year 1921 should have been one during which the Entente was tightened. In the tense weeks in the spring of 1921, when the British and French governments awaited the response of the German government to the deliberations of the Reparation Commission on the final sum, there was much common ground between the allies. Attitudes to the former enemy were not softening apparently. In Paris in January 1921 the allies had recommended that Germany pay an overall figure of 269 milliards of gold marks (over thirteen billion pounds) in reparations.⁷⁵ At Hythe, Briand complained of an "accumulation of bad faith and bad action on the part of Germany..."⁷⁶ This was particularly so on the vexed question of the 20 milliards of gold marks to be paid by Germany by 1 May 1921. The Reparation

⁷⁴ British Secretary's Notes of an Allied Conference held in Paris, 24 January 1921, *DBFP*, 1, XV, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵ Vansittart believed that there was no significant link between reparations and the accession to power of Hitler. See Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life*, p. 114. It may be noted though that on 3 February 1921 the NSDAP held its largest meeting until then – at the Circus Krone in Munich. See I. Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris*, London, 1998, p. 157.

⁷⁶ Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of Hythe (or Lympe), 23-24 April 1921 *DBFP*, 1, XV, p. 455.

Commission told Berlin on 26 February that it still had to pay at least 12 milliards and that a first instalment of one milliard must be paid by 23 March. Germany stated that it had already fulfilled its obligations.⁷⁷ When, also in March 1921, Germany defaulted in her deliveries of timber, Lloyd George decided to co-operate with France in a joint occupation of the towns of Düsseldorf, Duisburg and Ruhrort. Williamson said that, at Hythe, “Briand was able to manoeuvre a reluctant and hesitant Lloyd George into agreeing to a Ruhr occupation should Germany not accept its findings.”⁷⁸ Economic sanctions were imposed on 8 March via a customs line between the occupied and unoccupied territories. On 5 May, Germany was sent an ultimatum threatening the occupation of the Ruhr, but the threat was not carried out as Germany accepted their obligations on 11 May.

In the days prior to the German ‘surrender,’ the fourth London Conference took place. Curzon and his private secretary, Vansittart, represented the Foreign Office, but said little, the discussions being dominated again by the British and French Prime Ministers. The attitude of the Germans irritated the allied leaders. Aristide Briand said that, on 27 April, Dr Simons “had declared that the Wilhelmstrasse were busy collecting documents to show that the question of the responsibility of Germany for the war was still open.”⁷⁹ But on 28 April, the Reparation Commission informed the German government that the total amount of the debt under the Versailles treaty had been fixed at a total of 132 milliards gold marks.⁸⁰ When asked by Lloyd George whether Germany had been given an opportunity to state their case, Bradbury told the conference that the commission had

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, note 8, p. 455.

⁷⁸ Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 150.

⁷⁹ Notes of an allied conference held in London on 30 April 1921, *DBFP*, 1, XV, p. 489.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 493.

received 130 separate memoranda from the Germans and that they had been heard verbally at twenty-two separate meetings.⁸¹ Yet, in the Berlin note of April 24-25, Dr Simons had asked the American government “that Germany’s capacity should be assessed, not by the Reparation Commission, but by international experts.”⁸² Briand said that Germany now refused to pay the debt of 1 milliard marks by 1 May. The allies should discuss the occupation of the Ruhr. “The time for action had come,”⁸³ he believed.

Lloyd George told the House of Commons that the German proposals were “thoroughly unsatisfactory.”⁸⁴ The Allies, he said, were unanimous on this point. On 3 May, Austen Chamberlain told the House that earlier that day, the Supreme Council had discussed “the military measures necessary for the occupation of the Ruhr – if that occupation became necessary – and agreed upon them. They further discussed, and agreed to study more precisely, naval measures of coercion, if military measures be invoked and not be sufficient.”⁸⁵

Lloyd George told the House that Germany had defaulted “on some of the most important provisions of the Treaty – disarmament, trial of war criminals, reparation and four or five other Clauses of the Treaty...” For the previous two years, the allies had “shown considerable forbearance.” In every case “when Germany had given legitimate explanations of her difficulties, the Allies made concessions, extended time and generally made it easier for Germany to meet her difficulties...”⁸⁶ He said that since the Spa Conference, the Germans “had made a real effort” to reduce their army and to disarm. But there were “still far too many machine-guns and

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 503.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 141, H C Debates, col 344, speech by Lloyd George, 28 April 1921.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, col 869, speech by Lloyd George, 3 May 1921.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, cols 1275-1276, speech by Lloyd George, 5 May 1921.

rifles unsundered.”⁸⁷ He did not accept the German argument about the need to maintain arms against revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. Germany had not paid the £1,000,000,000 in cash and kind by 1 May 1921 as stipulated by Versailles. It had only paid a maximum of £400,000,000, much of which was to cover the cost of the Army of Occupation. On the reparations question, the default was “a very palpable one, and we have been driven to take strong action, not merely from the fact that Germany has defaulted, but by her general attitude to the whole question, and by the growing indication that Germany did not intend to carry out her obligations. She was making excuses, not merely for delay, but for avoidance. She was beginning to challenge her responsibilities.”⁸⁸

Many contemporaries and historians have criticised the apparently exorbitant overall figure of reparations demanded in May 1921. Yet, a German historian concluded that the reparations plan was “more realistic than the high total sum implied” as it was “first divided into three separate bonds – the so-called A, B and C Bonds – of which only the first two initially rise to annual payments (at different levels).”⁸⁹ A and B Bonds amounted to the total of 50 milliard gold marks (£2,500,000,000) and C Bonds to the total of 82 milliard gold marks (£4,100,000,000).⁹⁰ The London Schedule of Payments also required Germany to pay a total sum in 1922 of 3.3 milliard gold marks.

The response of Crowe and the Foreign Office to the actions of Lloyd George in the spring of 1921 should have been on the whole positive. The treaty had been respected, Germany treated firmly, but fairly, and the entente with France

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, cols 1276-1278.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, cols 1279-1280.

⁸⁹ Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ India Office Library, London, Treasury Memorandum to Curzon, May 1921, Curzon Papers, F 112/241, p. 38.

upheld. Yet, in 1923, "Tyrrell said that Lloyd George's consent to the allied occupation in 1921 placed the French in a very strong position."⁹¹ There was certainly much personal animosity towards Lloyd George within the Foreign Office, but there was also much support for his policies. Responding to criticism of the Prime Minister in an article in 'Le Matin' by Alfred Zimmermann, his former colleague in the Political Intelligence Department, Headlam-Morley wrote: "...after all, though the prime minister's methods may be often open to criticism, it seems to me that the ultimate objects for which he is trying to work are nearly always right."⁹²

Yet, Lloyd George was becoming too ambitious. His response to Saint-Aulaire's suggestion that Britain should 'guarantee' French borders against an external attack, presumably by Germany, was an extraordinary solution to the reparations problem and the European economic slump. At two meetings at Chequers and London in December 1921, he proposed a scheme to solve every possible issue of disagreement. In return for its main wish, security against a German attack, France "must agree to a moratorium on reparations for Germany, the opening up of markets in Central and Eastern Europe to German goods (thus facilitating the payment of reparations) and the establishment of an all-European body to manage the economic reconstruction of Europe. There would be recognition and economic aid for Bolshevik Russia if it permitted this organization decision-making powers and the right to private ownership within its borders. Unfortunately, by the time that Lloyd George went to the next conference, he had not told Curzon or the Foreign Office that he had made the offer of a guarantee pact or about the conditions attached to it."⁹³ Foreign

⁹¹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 432. See also Chapter 4, pp.148-149.

⁹² Sharp, 'Sir James Headlam-Morley', p. 277. This view was supported by Nicolson in *Curzon*, p. 55.

⁹³ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 80.

Office distaste for Conference Diplomacy would be further increased by events in the next few weeks.

The Cannes Conference was called in January 1922 to discuss reparations and economic recovery. Rathenau, the German Foreign Minister, was allowed to speak and Germany was granted a temporary moratorium. The foundations were laid down for the spring economic conference at Genoa and extending relations with Bolshevik Russia. Also at Cannes, the allied experts recommended a reduction to only 720,000,000 gold marks and deliveries in kind to a maximum value of 1,450,000,000 gold marks.⁹⁴ But when Briand suddenly resigned⁹⁵ and was replaced by Poincaré, no definite decision could be taken. The German government was then summoned to make its own proposals and to guarantee that they would introduce budgetary and currency reform in return for the granting of a partial moratorium by the allies, which were received on 28 January 1922. These were “not unreasonable as far as the guarantee of budgetary and currency reforms were concerned ” but “ they contained ... no definite proposals for the 1922 payments, the German Government contenting themselves with pleading their inability to make such large payments as those suggested...”⁹⁶ On 21 March 1922 the Reparation Commission demanded that the German government raise taxes by a further 60 milliard of paper marks. The German government seethed at such interference in its internal affairs.

⁹⁴ *DBFP*, 1, XV, p. 763.

⁹⁵ This followed the infamous incident when Lloyd George was photographed giving a golf lesson to the French Prime Minister. The French press reported that Briand's relationship with Lloyd George was similarly 'master and pupil' elsewhere. See Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 118; Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, p. 15. Lloyd George's version was rather different. He moved Briand out of the way for his own safety as “... if the ball hit him, it would be ‘Briand zap! and then ... Poincaré!’” See Kieger, *Poincaré*, p. 276.

⁹⁶ *DBFP*, 1, XIX, p. 740.

It was against this background that Lloyd George's great conference on European reconstruction took place at Genoa in Italy in the spring of 1922.⁹⁷ Prior to Genoa, there was much discussion of the composition of the British delegation. On 30 March 1922, the Leader of the House, Austen Chamberlain, told the Commons that there would be twenty Foreign Office staff at Genoa (altogether ninety people and three to five Ministers). Of these there were twenty-four "experts."⁹⁸ During the conference, Curzon was ill and unable to attend. Chamberlain was asked by Mr G. Murray "... if any steps have been taken to fill his place at that Conference by someone versed in foreign affairs ...?"⁹⁹ Sir W. Davison asked Chamberlain: "Does the Rt. Hon. Gentleman see that if foreign affairs were left to the Foreign Office we should not have got into the tangle we are now in?"¹⁰⁰

The Genoa Conference was the concept of Lloyd George. It was bitterly opposed by the Foreign Office.¹⁰¹ Lloyd George wanted to welcome Soviet Russia and Germany into the Concert of Europe. In a speech in the House of Commons, Lloyd George said that European problems had been blamed on the reparations

⁹⁷ See Fink, *The Genoa Conference* and Fink, Frohn and Heideking (eds.), *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction*.

⁹⁸ This information drew a request from Mr Lyle-Samuel to know: "What is meant by the word 'experts'? Could we have the names of these experts and in what are they expert?" *Hansard*, 152, H C. Debates, col 1527, question from Lyle Samuel, 30 March 1922. *The Times* revealed that the British delegates to Genoa were believed to be ("So far as the names ... are accessible...") Lloyd George, Hankey, Grigg, etc. (the Prime Minister's group would be about eight). Lord Curzon, plus Vansittart, J.D. Gregory and Sir Cecil Hurst would represent the Foreign Office and Sir Robert Horne, Blackett and Hawtrey, the Treasury.

⁹⁹ *Hansard*, 153, H C Debates, cols 962-963, question by Murray, 3 April 1922.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, col 962, question by Davison.

¹⁰¹ Crowe and Curzon were very anti-Bolshevik - Maisel, *The Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 54. He was also indignant at the attempt by a Board of Trade committee to discuss peace and disarmament. From January to March 1920, the Board of Trade had negotiated with the new Russian government - *ibid*, p. 198. Lloyd George told John Gregory that the Foreign Office was "out of touch." Gregory believed that that would have been true fifteen years earlier, but not then. In Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy*, p. 18.

executed by post-war treaties. “May I just say that those treaties did not create the reparations.”¹⁰² The problem was not that the allies were exacting reparations, but that there was “something to repair.”¹⁰³ If the Versailles Treaty had been altered, reparations would not be wiped out. Their burden would simply be passed to Great Britain, Belgium and especially to France – from those responsible to the victims. “So it is no use criticising reparations and saying that this gigantic debt of reparations is what is responsible for the economic disintegration of Europe. The point is – is the damage there? Has it to be made up? Who is to pay it? If Germany does not pay, France and England and Belgium must pay.”¹⁰⁴

He admitted that there was a difference between the payment of external debt and the payment of internal obligations. There were undoubtedly two considerations to be borne in mind on the reparations questions. Firstly, “... if we insist now upon payments beyond the power of a war-exhausted country, it would precipitate a crisis which would be by no means confined to Germany”¹⁰⁵ and secondly “... that Germany’s ultimate capacity to pay must not be judged by her capacity at this moment,” when, like other nations she was in difficulty, struggling to recover from the war, but by the machinery of the Versailles Treaty, “which is very elastic.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Hansard*, 153, H C Debates, col 1889, speech by Lloyd George, 3 April 1922.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd George also responded wittily to criticism from Labour members of his diplomatic style. “I do not understand criticism of conferences coming from the Labour Party. They have been brought up on conferences.” They were good for letting off steam and Labour naturally thought “that a good eruption now and again is better than a bad earthquake.” Lloyd George foresaw the imminent end of his Coalition, as his enemies had predicted and therefore offered the last words of advice “of a dying Minister.” He lambasted the press critics of his conference diplomacy by name, but did not “mention the ‘*Times*’ because it is only a tasteless rehash of the ‘*Daily Mail*’. But he did want “to utter one kindly word of warning to this grotesque

The Genoa Conference did fail though partly for the reasons that Nicolson later identified as weaknesses of Conference Diplomacy. Its aims were imprecise and the national leaders, particularly Lloyd George and Poincaré were not on good terms. The French Prime Minister refused to even discuss reparations at Genoa. In the U.S.A., the Secretary of State, Charles Hughes, believed that the result of the Genoa Conference was “positively harmful.”¹⁰⁷ But it was events outside the conference that dealt it the most shattering blow when news arrived that the two pariah nations, Germany and Bolshevik Russia, had concluded a treaty of friendship – the Treaty of Rapallo. The German government’s most influential figure, the Foreign Minister, Dr Walter Rathenau, had been pursuing a policy of ‘Fulfilment’ of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles with the aim of treaty revision and German recovery. His frustration at perceived allied, particularly French, inflexibility and vindictiveness over major issues such as reparations, may have made him look east.¹⁰⁸ He was also unsettled by parallel negotiations between the Soviet Union and the victorious allies, including talks on reparations and war debts. Rapallo though merely confirmed Anglo-French mistrust of Germany. Curzon called it “a gratuitous insult directed by

conglomeration not to tie their hands in advance about conferences. They will find it impossible in the state of Europe to get on without them.” They should not condemn “the only process, short of force, of bringing the world gradually back to something like normal conditions, and from normal conditions to something which is better.”

Ibid, col 1890.

¹⁰⁷ Schuker, ‘American Policy at Genoa, 1922’, p. 121.

¹⁰⁸ Detlev Peukert believed that it was “an additional trump card in the continuing strategy of developing cooperation and dialogue with the western powers.” But, to Britain, “the German proponents of a policy of fulfilment, having only just begun to make some headway, now appeared to have turned to be unreliable customers after all. Britain would now therefore adopt a restrained but loyal attitude towards the coming offensive mounted by her French ally, as long as the Germans continued to insist on an open-ended revision of Versailles.” Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, p. 59.

Germany against the Powers.”¹⁰⁹ Poincaré believed it to be a clandestine military alliance.¹¹⁰

From the British perspective, much of the blame for the surprise created by the news has been allocated to the Ambassador in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, who had known about secret talks between Germany and Russia since January 1922 and had not reported them to the Foreign Office. Salzmänn said that even before Rapallo “he had been watched suspiciously by many of his (Foreign Office) colleagues since he was not a career diplomat but an outside financial expert and Lloyd George's choice. As British ambassador, he had to work for ‘native’ British interests. His task was to observe and to analyse German policy, to report to London and to execute Foreign Office directives in negotiations with the German government. However, the longer D'Abernon stayed in Berlin, the more he identified himself with the German point of view on many issues, thereby losing the critical distance necessary to represent British interests.”¹¹¹

In Germany in April 1922, the assistant state secretary and head of the Eastern Department of the German Foreign Office was Ago von Maltzan. Carl von Schubert was head of Department III, which included Britain and The United States. Peter Krüger said that they were the “coming men” in the German Foreign Office.¹¹² The news of the Rapallo treaty horrified Schubert who had favoured a conciliatory German policy to support Lloyd George at Genoa, whilst Maltzan told his colleagues repeatedly that Germany needed “the Russian cloud over Europe.”¹¹³ Krüger

¹⁰⁹ C. Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis*, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Salzmänn, *Rapallo and After*, pp. 25-26.

¹¹² Peter Krüger, ‘A Rainy Day, April 16 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and the Cloudy Perspective for German Foreign Policy,’ in Fink, Frohn and Heideking (eds.), *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction*, p. 60.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 60.

believed that "Maltzan's decision to push the treaty was ... pure power politics."¹¹⁴

Rapallo was, he said, the work of Maltzan and Joseph Wirth, the Chancellor.

President Ebert, the Social Democrats and the Foreign Secretary, Walter Rathenau,

had opposed it.¹¹⁵ On 6 April 1922, Gerhard von Mutius, the acting head of the

Western Department of the German Foreign Office, stated that he believed that

unilateral French action, especially in the Ruhr, was imminent because it was the only

action that they could take without united allied consent. Germany should not take

any action that might provoke France.¹¹⁶ Yet, on 7 April 1922, the German

government rejected the Reparation Commission's plan to put Germany's finances

under its control.

In France, Poincaré capitalised on the opportunity presented to him. On 24

April 1922, he made a speech at his birthplace, Bar-le Duc, close to Verdun, which

"was intended to return the British to fundamentals, above all to the possibility of a

German default on the reparation payment due on 31 May and the prospect of a

French punitive response."¹¹⁷ He said that if Great Britain failed to support France

against Germany within the Reparation Commission, then France would defy Britain

and act alone. On 7 June 1922, Poincaré told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

that an occupation of the Ruhr was a last resort that meanwhile might be useful in

forcing Britain and America to make financial concessions.¹¹⁸

The Foreign Office, in an unusual bout of self-criticism, admitted some

degree of culpability. In a memorandum on reparations and security, Sydney

Waterlow of the Central Department, said that Britain had wanted pensions included

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 59.

¹¹⁵ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 119.

¹¹⁶ Kruger, 'A Rainy Day', pp. 58-59.

¹¹⁷ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 213.

¹¹⁸ Keiger, 'Poincaré and the Ruhr Crisis', p. 53. Also Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 245-261.

in the bill “and her record over the lapse of the 1919 guarantee was not good.”¹¹⁹ But Waterlow’s proposed policy revision did not match the depth of his analysis. He merely recommended a weightier political figure on the Reparation Commission and a more positive attitude to the League. When a sceptical Tyrrell made his own proposal, Waterlow wrote another memorandum, this time recommending the renewal of the offer of a pact with France, plus a set of agreements including Bulgaria, Italy and eventually Germany and an offer to reduce France’s debt to Britain in exchange for a fair settlement of the reparations issue.¹²⁰ In the tense atmosphere following Genoa and Rapallo such a proposal had little chance of being pursued.

A policy of ‘paying reparations to France’ earned Rathenau, the hatred of the extreme Right in his country, and led to his assassination. But his murder in June 1922 was received somewhat ambiguously by the Foreign Office. Addison, in Berlin, reported that “Rathenau was murdered this morning about eleven o’clock while in his motor on the way from his house to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Murderers were three men who overtook him in another motor, shot at him with revolvers and also threw a hand grenade.”¹²¹ To Lloyd George, it was an “abominable crime,”¹²² but some in the Foreign Office may have believed that it could have positive effects. Because of allied policy towards the Versailles Treaty and Germany, Rathenau had been an opponent of German application for membership of the League of Nations, something that Cecil, Balfour, D’Abernon, Hardinge and Crowe all considered to be a good thing.

¹¹⁹ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926*, p. 31.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 32. UKNA, FO 371/7567, C 6875/6200/18, 9 May 1922.

¹²¹ Balfour to Addison in Berlin conveying a message from Mr Lloyd George to the German Chancellor, 26 June, Note 1, telegram from Mr Addison, 24 June 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, p. 476.

¹²² Balfour to Addison, 26 June 1922, *ibid*, p. 476.

The policy of fulfilment effectively died with Rathenau. Could it have succeeded? Many French commentators believed so. During the Genoa Conference, Jules Sauerwein, writing in *Le Matin* described a garden party given by the managing director of *Berliner Tageblatt*, Theodore Wolf, at which the speakers were J.L. Garvin, the editor of *The Observer*, Keynes and Rathenau. He reported that "...when Keynes spoke of the impossibility of Germany's paying the reparations imposed on her, Rathenau quietly but firmly contradicted him."¹²³

Nor did the murder of Rathenau help international confidence in German currency, which was already depreciating at an alarming rate. On 12 July 1922 the German Government asked for a moratorium on cash reparation payments until the end of 1924 and a reduction of the clearing payments due under Article 296 of the Versailles Treaty. The British responded favourably. Germany did pay the instalment due on 15 July, but when its request was rejected by France and Belgium it then refused to pay the clearing debt of 40 million gold marks due at the end of July and the 50 million gold marks cash reparations payment due on 15 August 1922.

Lloyd George was content for Poincaré to be allowed to act alone and "learn by experience."¹²⁴ Meanwhile, he irritated the United States in an act of unreality that would be considered selfless wisdom by successive British governments for the next ten years. On 1 August 1922 Lord Balfour, temporarily back at the Foreign Office due to the indisposition of Curzon, sent a note to the French Ambassador "which stated that Britain was prepared to abandon all further claims to German reparations and to repayment by her Allies of their debts, provided this renunciation were part of a general plan to solve the problem of international

¹²³ Bonnet, *Quai d'Orsay*, p. 57.

¹²⁴ UKNA, CAB 23/30 cited in Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 188.

indebtedness.”¹²⁵ The ‘Balfour Note’ highlighted the frequent British failure to empathise with their former allies. “This note was ill-received in France and met with much scepticism in America.” The American financier, Bernard Baruch, understandably complained to Loucheur that the British were trying to place the blame on the American ‘Shylocks,’ having previously tried to blame the French ‘Napoleons.’¹²⁶ The British government failed to understand that other nations might too have self-interest. Most of all, they failed to appreciate the extent to which the driving force behind American foreign policy towards Europe after the Great War was Wall Street and, in particular, the great American banking houses. This lack of understanding would persist for the next ten years.

Historians have been highly critical of the Balfour Note. What is extraordinary is to discover that British policy-makers placed so much faith in the policy and were so hostile to other nations. Trachtenberg thought that by this time Lloyd George’s policies were due to his increasingly strong feelings of resentment as the contemporary documents “record sharp bursts of anger at France, America and even Germany – a clear indication that Lloyd George was losing his grip on events.”¹²⁷ Alan Sharp called it “an international disaster” and “an abdication of all responsibility for all European affairs.”¹²⁸ Zara Steiner said that it “was seen as a slap in the face to France.”¹²⁹

The rejection of the ‘Balfour Note’ was discussed at a meeting of the Supreme Council in the same month. In a speech at Bar-le-Duc on 21 August 1922, Poincaré proposed that Germany be made to pay in other ways. The Allies should

¹²⁵ W 6402/2618/50, Balfour to Saint-Aulaire, 1 August 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, p. 99.

¹²⁶ Preface by Douglas Dakin in *ibid*, p. v.

¹²⁷ Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 258.

¹²⁸ Turner, *Cost of War*, p. 70.

¹²⁹ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 217.

take possession of six 'productive pledges' in the Rhineland and the Ruhr, including the exploitation of state mines and forests. He believed that these pledges would yield as much as the required reparation receipts. How, he did not say, but until they did there would be no moratorium.

The 'Balfour Note' was a rare occasion during the Lloyd George premiership when the Foreign Secretary made a significant intervention in the Reparations Question. As Alan Sharp has shown, the Foreign Office was in a state of 'eclipse' during those years and particularly on German matters. But, in October 1922 the architect of conference diplomacy would himself be brought down, never to return to high office.¹³⁰ The issue that precipitated the downfall of Lloyd George was not Germany, but the Chanak crisis in the Near East. At the famous Carlton Club meeting, Conservatives, including Balfour, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Birkenhead, who favoured the continuation of the Coalition government, were defeated by those, among them Baldwin, Younger and notably Bonar Law, who wished to end it. Curzon hesitated, "a little afraid of overthrowing himself too, but eager to be a real Foreign Secretary,"¹³¹ and so joined the coup. He kept his job, but never gained the office that he coveted. When Bonar Law resigned less than seven months later he himself would be the victim of political intrigue, literally a 'palace coup.'

It must be stated that the differences between the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister were over style and character and not substance. Crowe had praised

¹³⁰ His enemies though received the news of the removal of Lloyd George with delight. Leopold Maxse, the editor of the *National Review*, was ecstatic. "What a triumph for the National Review, the Morning Post and the Diehards." The reaction was equally enthusiastic among his enemies in France. "Hoping never to see you again, Mr. Lloyd George," was the headline in *Le Matin*. See Chichester Record Office, *Maxse Papers*, undated and G. Bonnet, *Quai d'Orsay*, p. 56 respectively.

¹³¹ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 294.

Lloyd George's moderate, but firm policies in 1920: "It comes to this, that it is open for Germany to point out the clauses in the Treaty which it is impossible for her to carry out and to suggest an alternative procedure... it was with this object that Mr. Lloyd George pressed at San Remo that the representative of the German Government should be asked to meet the Council of the Allies at Spa; he quite rightly saw that we could not before the Treaty was signed."¹³²

The Lloyd George premiership was a turning-point in the history of the Foreign Office. Its prestige never regained the heights that it briefly attained pre-1914, but nor did Great Britain's. After 1922 Lloyd George went to the backbenches along with his Liberal party. "I never dreamed that the British would dispense with his dynamism 'for good and all,' but he had little regard for Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. They despised him and he was later frozen out of their Coalition governments."¹³³ Few at the Foreign Office regretted his removal or isolation. At times, its senior personnel used a similar degree of abuse to the Prime Minister as that given by senior members of the Conservative Party. Willie Tyrrell, in a letter to the editor of *The Spectator*, John Strachey, referred to "... the foreigner who happens to be our Prime Minister."¹³⁴ O'Riordan has shown that Curzon was appalled at Lloyd George's diplomatic activities, but tolerated the situation because the Prime Minister was only really interested in European affairs.¹³⁵

There were those who remained loyal to their former colleague. "The changeableness with which Lloyd George is usually charged was never shown in the course of the Conferences on Reparation. On the contrary, the line or policy taken from the first was adhered to steadfastly throughout. He was, indeed extremely

¹³² UKNA, *Crowe Papers*, FO 800/243, letter to Curzon, p. 134.

¹³³ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 294.

¹³⁴ Churchill College Archives, Cambridge, *Strachey Papers*, 20 March 1922.

¹³⁵ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 15.

obstinate.”¹³⁶ Lloyd George was hated by elements within the Foreign Office, but on Germany there was very little difference of opinion between him and Crowe. There was also much respect from both critics and admirers.¹³⁷ Vansittart reflected a traditional Foreign Office view when he wrote many years later: “I often think of Lloyd George with the old fascination, though he started the ruin of professional diplomacy both by superceding it by the extravagant futilities of diplomacy by conference and in his ejection of professionals for amateurs of wealth or weight.”¹³⁸ Yet by supporting the appointment of an international banker in the British Embassy in Berlin, Lloyd George demonstrated that he understood the realities of the present more than he valued tradition. Hardinge’s refusal to create an economics section typifies the pre-war mindset of many diplomats. What really mattered though was that Britain had lost a Prime Minister who was not afraid to take decisive action.

The administration of Andrew Bonar Law was the first Conservative government since that of Balfour seventeen years earlier. The new Prime Minister had a reputation for blunt-speaking in domestic politics, but had little experience in foreign affairs, despite his Canadian links and work in the wartime Cabinet. Austen Chamberlain, previously loyal to Lloyd George, had declined to become a member of the government. Bonar Law chose to keep Curzon at the Foreign Office where he had the unfinished business of the treaty with Turkey. He may have soon regretted his decision when he received a communication from Lausanne: “I sent yesterday a telegram to the Foreign Office telling them that it is quite impossible

¹³⁶ D’Abernon, *Ambassador of Peace*, Volume 1, pp. 36-37.

¹³⁷ Nobody worked more closely with him than the Cabinet Secretary. Hankey’s admiration for Lloyd George’s courage in adversity, concern for the under-privileged, personal magnetism and rhetorical skills was tempered by an awareness of his many faults, including his devious and idiosyncratic methods. Yet, he was still greatly impressed by him. See S. Roskill, *Hankey, Volume II*, p. 302.

¹³⁸ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 295.

for me to deal with the question of reparations here, or to answer the telegrams that pour in from Paris and Brussels. I had gathered that as soon as you were free from Parliamentary duties you were disposed to take up the job...’’¹³⁹ Thus, in the critical weeks of December 1922 and January 1923, it was Britain’s Prime Minister who was leading the diplomatic campaign prior to the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr. Conference Diplomacy did not end with the departure of Lloyd George.

The Foreign Office may not have had to work with a new foreign minister, but following the departure of Lloyd George it may have expected to restore much of its lost prestige and influence. Britain’s allies, especially the French, were also eager to know how much continuity and change would be demonstrated by Bonar Law’s policies and personality. One Foreign Office mandarin was eager to inform them. In Paris, Willie Tyrrell told Poincaré that the new Prime Minister would be more co-operative than his old nemesis. In his opinion, ‘‘the French Government would find in our new Prime Minister a man who would be both friendly and businesslike in his dealings, and who would look at things as they really were, and never become involved in far-reaching Utopian schemes.’’¹⁴⁰

His words delighted Poincaré who told the Belgian Ambassador in Paris on 30 November that, now that Lloyd George had gone, he was very confident that his new British counterpart would support any future French policy and action.¹⁴¹ Poincaré and the Belgian Prime Minister, Theunis, now agreed on the necessity of a

¹³⁹ House of Lords Record Office, *Bonar Law Papers*, Box 112, Folder 12, Document 35c, Curzon to Bonar Law, 28 November 1922.

¹⁴⁰ C 16688/99/18, letter from Tyrrell to Sir G. Grahame in Brussels, 30 November 1922, Tyrrell to Crowe, 30 November 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, p. 306.

¹⁴¹ C 17361/99/18, Hardinge (in Paris) to Crowe, 1 December 1922, *ibid*, p. 307.

changed approach “and that the Allied Powers should take Germany by the scruff of the neck and make her pay.”¹⁴²

Tyrrell, realising that he had blundered, quickly telegraphed Curzon in Lausanne giving a traditional Foreign Office spin on the unfortunate conversation, saying that “I thought it best to impress upon Poincaré that if he was able to submit to Mr Bonar Law a businesslike plan for the exaction of reparations out of Germany, he would find that his scheme would be considered in a sympathetic and businesslike spirit, and that if it entailed coercion I did not think that the new Ministry would shrink from applying it, provided it were convinced that it would yield reparation payment.”¹⁴³ Curzon then instructed Tyrrell to limit the damage by writing to Grahame in Brussels who could then “disabuse M. Theunis both as regards my position and influence in the Foreign Office and the tenor of my remarks to Monsieur Poincaré.”¹⁴⁴

Tyrrell’s extraordinary visit to Paris was the subject of a question in the Commons. E.D. Morel asked whether he had “conversations” with M. Millerand. Ronald McNeill, the Under- Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, made an astonishing and ridiculous reply. In his statement he said that he could not confirm or deny such conversations, but “all I can say is that Sir William Tyrrell was not sent to Paris by His Majesty’s Government to carry on negotiations with anybody.”¹⁴⁵ He had gone on a private visit to Paris, where he had many friends and if he met Millerand for a private interview he could not say.

Nor was the new government helped by the performance of its man at the Reparation Commission. The persistent criticism of Sir John Bradbury by officials of

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Tyrrell to Grahame, 30 November 1922, *ibid.* pp. 305-306.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 305.

¹⁴⁵ *Hansard*, 159, H C Debates, col 3344, reply by McNeill, 14 December 1922.

the Foreign Office, especially Ralph Wigram, reached their height prior to May 1921 and the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr. On 11 November 1922 D'Abernon informed Curzon that Bradbury had recommended to Dr. Wirth, the German Chancellor, that the German Government "should take its courage in both hands" and seek a moratorium of two years.¹⁴⁶ On 23 November Ralph Wigram sent a note to Miles Lampson that contained a fierce attack on Bradbury.¹⁴⁷ According to Wigram, in a memorandum dated 14 November 1922, Bradbury had spoken to the media without consulting his superiors, was naïve in his political judgements and had failed to supply the Foreign Office with "adequate and up-to-date information on reparations and other foreign relations matters, including copies of requests for instructions from the Treasury."¹⁴⁸ Wigram accused Bradbury of having great self-confidence in his own ability to solve every reparations crisis as well as the entire problem, a view shared by nobody else.

It was one month earlier that Bradbury had committed the blunder that graphically demonstrated his diplomatic ineptitude. He published a Note advocating a moratorium on all German reparation payments, something that greatly displeased Poincaré, at precisely the time when the Chanak crisis was threatening to cause a rift in Anglo-French relations. The Foreign Office learned about the Note too late to prevent its publication. 'Willie' Tyrrell minuted the feelings of many diplomats: "I confess to a feeling of bitter resentment to seeing part of our foreign policy in the

¹⁴⁶ C 15685/99/18, note by D'Abernon of a conversation with Dr Wirth, 11 November 1922, D'Abernon to Curzon, 11 November 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, pp. 288-289.

¹⁴⁷ Note by Mr Wigram on a discussion between the Prime Minister and Sir John Bradbury, held on 22 November 1922, dated 23 November 1922, *ibid*, pp. 293-296.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 295, Note 3.

hands of Sir J. Bradbury. Apart from the evils of such a system, the individual, whom I have known for years, is wholly unfit to deal with foreign affairs or people.”¹⁴⁹

O’Riordan believed that in the autumn of 1922 the Treasury did take effective control of reparation policy, but some in the Foreign Office were content that it should be so. Miles Lampson, head of the Central Department, “felt that the Treasury had already bungled the reparation issue so much that it was better to leave it holding ultimate responsibility!”¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Foreign Office had little faith in the Treasury plan proposed by Bradbury on 15 December 1922.¹⁵¹ These proposals would form the basis of the plan that Bonar Law took to Paris early in January 1923 and which was ridiculed by Carl Bergmann, the German reparations expert, who said that he would rather Germany pay reparations than have to try to understand it.¹⁵² It seems that the plan had the main purpose though of enabling Britain to save face internationally if Poincaré did occupy the Ruhr.¹⁵³

Yet, Crowe believed that the proposals could be used to demonstrate more evidence of German calumny if Germany refused to fulfil even these more reasonable demands. His attitude to Germany was not softening and he still wanted to work with France. He said that “the occupation of the Ruhr would be an effective means of coercing Germany into acceptance and fulfilment of the reasonable demands... Therefore provided such reasonable demands can be formulated, we should not refuse our associating ourselves with the occupation in case of Germany not carrying out what she may be induced to promise...”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ UKNA, FO 371/7486, C14305/99/18, 18 October 1922.

¹⁵⁰ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁵² Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p.220.

¹⁵³ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

But, in this period of increasing tension during the final months of 1922 the British political leadership proved incapable of any meaningful action. Bonar Law was a Prime Minister of just a few weeks experience and little in foreign affairs. Baldwin, the new Chancellor and to whom Bradbury was ultimately responsible, was never comfortable in foreign affairs.¹⁵⁵ Curzon was frequently in Lausanne and wanted to concentrate on the Near East, a point confirmed by an addition to an urgent telegram from Grahame in Brussels that he wrote on 28 November 1922: "I sent a telegram to the Foreign Office yesterday saying that it is quite impossible for me to deal with this case here. I have also written to the Prime Minister asking if he is prepared to take it in hand since at present we are making everyone angry by our assumed indifference. Would it not be well to submit the papers as they come in to the Prime Minister so that he may be familiar with its political aspect?"¹⁵⁶ The Belgian Foreign Minister, Henri Jaspar, had told Grahame that he was "quite in the dark as to what policy of British cabinet is likely to be in face of Monsieur Poincaré's attitude."¹⁵⁷ This is an understandable comment given that even Bonar Law admitted that he was going to the London Conference without a clear policy in his mind: "I may have to choose between two evils – between a breach with France which would mean chaos in Europe or concessions to France which would also involve great misfortunes."¹⁵⁸

The political indecision at the apex of British government was tragically mistimed, but the Foreign Office was not inactive in the weeks prior to the invasion. Following the failure in London to settle the dispute, the Foreign Office sent a

¹⁵⁵ The Bonar Law Cabinet was called "the government of the Second Eleven." See Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁶ C 16100/99/18, Sir G. Grahame to Curzon, 26 November 1922, Minute by Curzon, 28 November 1922, *DBFP*, 1, XX, p. 298.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 297.

¹⁵⁸ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 23.

telegram on 16 December to Geddes in Washington, asking him to seek the support of Secretary of State, Charles Hughes, and the American government to help Britain prevent a catastrophe. The United States might even send an observer to the forthcoming Paris Conference. Hughes though wanted an invitation to come from all the allies and so, two days later, he rejected the British idea. Kent believed that “the underlying impediment to action was his insistence that the United States ‘could not enter into discussion’ of war debts.”¹⁵⁹

Yet, on 29 December 1922, Hughes made a statement at New Haven in which he publicly declared that the United States supported the idea of appointing an expert financial committee to investigate the reparations question and particularly Germany’s capacity to pay. On 7 November, the U.S.A. had actually made such a proposal to France and on 14 December, Hughes repeated the suggestion to the French Ambassador. When the Foreign Office heard about these ‘private’ exchanges, Crowe rightly predicted that France would reject the concept of an American arbitrator.¹⁶⁰ On 21 December, Poincaré rejected Hughes plan, saying in effect that the European allies needed to settle the matter and that time was limited. Five days later, Bradbury was outvoted when the Reparation Commission declared Germany to be in default of deliveries of timber and coal. Germany’s deficiency was as follows:-

- i) Wood – it owed 200,000 metres of telegraph poles and had delivered only 65,000 metres and
- ii) Coal – deliveries worth 24 million Gold Marks were owed, yet

Germany had already delivered coal to the value of 1,480 GM. Bradbury sarcastically commented that “since, in the tenth year of the war, Troy fell to the stratagem of the wooden horse, history recorded no similar use of timber. The situation was at present somewhat different, it was the fifth year of peace, and the city under attack was not

¹⁵⁹ Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 203.

¹⁶⁰ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 29.

Troy, but Essen.”¹⁶¹ Hughes declaration at New Haven “came far too late”¹⁶² to prevent Poincaré, in Bruce Kent’s opinion, ‘from launching his nation into a self-indulgent act of criminal folly.’¹⁶³

On 11 January 1923, thousands of French and Belgian troops invaded and occupied the Ruhr. The action remains highly controversial, yet it had been threatened since the early conferences of 1920 and Lloyd George had supported the occupation of the three German towns. What did Poincaré want? At meetings in London in August 1922, he demanded ‘*gages productif*,’ productive guarantees or pledges that Germany had to give France and Belgium in lieu of reparations payments. “These were to consist of (1) the control already exercised by the Rhineland High Commission over the granting of export licences; (2) a customs barrier between the occupied territories and the rest of Germany; (3) Allied exploitation of German state mines and forests; (4) Allied participation in 60 per cent of the share capital of German chemical industries on the left bank of the Rhine; levies in the occupied territories; and (6) the German customs.”¹⁶⁴ These could only be gained by the administration and exploitation of the Ruhr. But would any occupation of the Ruhr be legal?

The events that led to the occupation of the Ruhr revolved partly around a difference of legal opinion about the interpretation of this controversial section of the peace treaty. Clauses 17 and 18 are as follows

17: In case of default by Germany in the performance of any obligation under this part of the present treaty, the (Reparation) Commission will forthwith give notice of such default to each of the interested Powers and may make such

¹⁶¹ Quoted by Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 202.

¹⁶² O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 29.

¹⁶³ Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 203.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 189.

recommendations as to the action to be taken in consequence of such default as it may think necessary.

18: The measures which the Allied and Associated Powers shall have the right to take, in case of voluntary default by Germany, and which Germany agrees not to regard as acts of war, may include economic and financial prohibitions and reprisals, and in general such other measures as the respective Governments may determine to be necessary in the circumstances.¹⁶⁵

The difference of opinion between the rival lawyers on either side centred on their interpretations of the word 'respective.' The semantic and legalistic dispute stimulated by this word and the complete clause would continue throughout and beyond the crisis of the following year.

At the London Conference of 9-10 December 1922, Britain hoped to prevent an invasion of the Ruhr, but it failed to settle the issue of German Reparation as well as the end of Allied Military Control of Germany and they therefore decided to meet again in Paris in early January. Poincaré could wait no longer once he had received confirmation of Belgian support for his threatened invasion. Few in Britain sympathised with the French position, but the French were equally frustrated with their partner in the entente. "... it was not always easy for us to follow Britain's policy, for it was subject to abrupt, confusing changes."¹⁶⁶ But this also applied to the French as throughout the second half of 1922 Poincaré explored a variety of possibilities. Zara Steiner said that his intentions "are still the subject of debate."¹⁶⁷

However, in January 1923, the French laid the blame fairly and squarely for the invasion of the Ruhr on Britain. St. Aulaire told Curzon that the French engineers (the M.I.C.U.M.) sent into the Ruhr "would not have been accompanied by troops had His Majesty's Government been able to co-operate with the French Government..." and "hoped that as soon as the engineers were installed, His

¹⁶⁵ UKNA, The Treaty of Versailles, Paragraph 18 of Annex II to Part VIII.

¹⁶⁶ Bonnet, *Quai D'Orsay*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁷ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 221.

Majesty's Government would send engineers to co-operate."¹⁶⁸ On the direction of Bonar Law, Crowe diplomatically rejected the French proposition. French historians have not necessarily concurred with the contemporary analysis. Having stated that the participation of inter-war Presidents in foreign affairs declined gradually up to 1940, Georges Dethan believed that an exception had to be made for Alexandre Millerand, "who in 1923 (sic?) gave Poincaré the idea of the occupation of the Ruhr, after having brought about his fall by recalling Briand."¹⁶⁹

In London in December 1922 Germany informed the allies that it was unable to pay the instalment demanded and therefore Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno asked for a two-year moratorium on reparation payments and also made an 'offer' of fifteen years guaranteed peace. The allies rejected the German proposal. France and Belgium stated their intention to send troops into the Ruhr if payment was not forthcoming. Britain requested another conference in the hope of preventing the occupation occurring.

In Paris in January 1923 the British government failed to persuade the French and Belgian governments from ordering the invasion of the Ruhr, which began on 11 January 1923. Bonar Law presented the Bradbury/Treasury plan that Bergman mocked. Its failure was inevitable. Allied debts to Britain would be cancelled and German reparations reduced, after a four-year moratorium. Belgium would give up her claim to reparation payments. France's share was reduced from 52

¹⁶⁸ C 541/313/18, Curzon to Crewe in Paris, 10 January 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 23.

¹⁶⁹ Zara Steiner (ed.), *The Times Survey of the Foreign Ministries of the World*, London, 1982. p. 211. President Millerand was a consistent advocate of the occupation of the Ruhr. On 13 November 1922, he claimed that, in a meeting of the Council of Ministers, his Prime Minister had expressed opposition to the idea, denouncing "the dangers which he foresaw from the enterprise." Millerand interrupted him, saying that "the military operation will not be a disaster or a bankruptcy." Poincaré's melodramatic response was to say, "I resign." He did not. See Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 222.

to 42 per cent and there was no mention of 'productive pledges.' Zara Steiner believed that the plan reflected the Treasury's "distrust and dislike of the French and appeared deliberately provocative."¹⁷⁰ It was furthermore little different to a plan rejected by France after the failure of the Balfour Note. What is extraordinary, as O'Riordan asked, is why Crowe and the Foreign Office did not oppose it, or try to get the Cabinet to veto it,¹⁷¹ unless it had their full support. The invasion of the Ruhr was ultimately a failure of Lloyd George's 'Conference Diplomacy,' during which he had tried to exclude the Foreign Office experts on Germany and in particular Sir Eyre Crowe. But the invasion can also be seen as an outcome of British policy towards Germany after the war, of which Crowe was a great influence.

It is not acceptable any more to lay the blame for the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr entirely at the door of the French government. It was in part due to the vacuum at the heart of British government. O'Riordan has argued that the events of January 1923 demonstrated "the confusion of British domestic policy."¹⁷² In her view, the Ruhr crisis "began in the autumn of 1922, when French patience with Germany over reparations was finally exhausted."¹⁷³ Also, in October 1922, the Lloyd George coalition fell and was replaced by a Conservative administration. But, O'Riordan said that "Bonar Law was elderly and his health was failing."¹⁷⁴ In fact, he was only sixty-four (younger than Churchill in May 1940 and October 1951 and almost twenty years younger than Gladstone in August 1892) and he had not yet been diagnosed with the cancer that killed him in October 1923. But it was true that he "lacked the energy and decisiveness necessary to lead a largely inexperienced

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 220.

¹⁷¹ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 26.

¹⁷² O'Riordan, 'British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis', p. 225.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 224.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 225.

Cabinet at precisely the point when the reparation crisis was at its most critical.”¹⁷⁵

Also Curzon was in Lausanne at the end of 1922 discussing the Near Eastern situation and was happy to pass on the responsibility for the Ruhr to the new Prime Minister. In September, while in Paris discussing the vexed question of Turkey, Curzon had been brought close to a nervous breakdown by a tirade of abuse from Poincaré that was allegedly only interrupted by an intervention by Hardinge, the British Ambassador.¹⁷⁶ Crowe and Corp showed that, in Lausanne, after sending for him on 17 January 1923, Curzon was extremely dependent on Crowe. In fact, Crowe was given a room next to Curzon and was at his beck and call for the next three months.¹⁷⁷ Michael Hughes believed that Curzon was “much less willing (than Lloyd George and Balfour) to delegate important decisions about policy” to Hardinge and Crowe.¹⁷⁸ However, three years after the death of both Crowe and Curzon, John Gregory extolled the Foreign Secretary’s great knowledge, but was mystified by his unwillingness to make a crucial decision.¹⁷⁹ Even in October 1922, in the critical final days of the Lloyd Coalition, Curzon hesitated over whether or not to support the plot against Lloyd George. One

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ See Maisel, *Foreign Office 1919-1926*, p. 122. Maisel quoted Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*, pp. 272-273, as well as Nicolson’s version of the conversation in an adjoining room. “Curzon collapsed upon a scarlet settee. He grasped Lord Hardinge by the arm. ‘Charley,’ he panted, ‘I can’t bear that horrid little man. I can’t bear him. I can’t bear him. He wept...’” in *Curzon*, pp. 273-274. See Maisel, *Foreign Office 1919-1926*, note 208, p. 263.

¹⁷⁷ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 419. Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, d. 2906, Letter to Clema, complaining about the arrangements, 17 January 1923, pp. 75-76.

¹⁷⁸ Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy*, p. 250. After a one-hour long, masterly exposition to Gregory in response to his memorandum about Russia, Curzon then turned to the astonished official and said, “Now, what ought we to do? I was dumbfounded: for this was ridiculously putting the cart before the horse. Surely it was for me to expound the situation... and for him to take the decision.” Curzon’s biographer supported this opinion. He quoted the description given by the former minister, H.A.L. Fisher to Harold Nicolson – see Gilmour, *Curzon*, p. 510.

biographer said that “it is difficult to avoid the conviction that, throughout this period, Curzon was in a dither. He had lost his grip and did not know what to do.”¹⁸⁰

There was confusion in the weeks following the departure of Lloyd George in October 1922 leading up to the Franco-Belgian invasion of 11 January 1923. Curzon was more interested in the settling of near Eastern matters at Lausanne and the Treasury became more involved in diplomatic matters than it should have been. Bradbury’s actions at the Reparation Commission were, at best, unhelpful, but then so were Tyrrell’s words to Poincaré in Paris. Yet, even during this awkward period the main tenets of the Crowe Memorandum were still visible. Britain did not appease Germany, but tried to be firm and fair. The British government stated its wish to remain friendly with France. Britain’s interests came before everything else.

The ultimate failing of Conference Diplomacy was that, for it to be successful, it required decision-makers such as Lloyd George (as proven at Versailles) and not just situation analysts, however brilliant, such as Curzon. After Lloyd George, Britain’s political leadership on the international stage was in chaos. O’Riordan argued that while the Treasury had a strategy (based on the financial aspects of the matter), “the Foreign Office...did not recommend a definite strategy to the new government...” but instead “took refuge in inaction.”¹⁸¹ This is unsurprising. As leading members of Lloyd George’s government in 1921, Bonar Law and Curzon had rejected Crowe’s proposal of a military alliance with France. Had this been accepted there probably would have been no Ruhr crisis. However, a fit of official pique is unlikely to have been the reason for inaction. The British were simply in a dilemma. To support France might have made France too powerful on the Continent and worsen

¹⁸⁰ L. Mosley, *Curzon: The End of an Epoch*, London, 1960, p. 236.

¹⁸¹ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 226.

Franco-German relations, whilst to oppose the invasion would have ruptured the Entente and would have been a great triumph for Germany.

What then was the attitude of the Foreign Office to Germany between 1920 and 1923? Salzmann suggested that there was “a division of opinion inside the Foreign Office about Germany. The ‘old’ high ranking officials such as Crowe and Tyrrell had been prejudiced against Germany since before the war, whereas the younger ones (supported incidentally by Curzon), such as Wellesley and Gregory (assistant secretaries) and clerks such as Lampson and Harold Nicolson believed that the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty had inflamed Germany and made it likely to ally with Moscow.”¹⁸² This view is too simplistic and ignores the German education of Crowe and Tyrrell, Crowe’s repeated wish for a peaceful Germany to take its place in the international fraternity, as well as the friendships within the Office based on their shared perceptions. In December 1922, Lampson expressed his view that until the safety of France’s western frontiers was permanently guaranteed against German attack, there could be no lasting settlement of the reparation question, whilst another official warned of the dangers of treating Germany too leniently on the same issue.¹⁸³ Salzmann then said that “despite the diverging opinions on German policy within the Foreign Office there never was an open confrontation between the two groups. The prevailing view was that, for the moment, the treaty of Versailles was the basis of European relations. Moreover, until 1922 no long-term strategy for a policy towards Germany had been formulated.”¹⁸⁴ In the absence of such a clear policy, the views of

¹⁸² Salzmann, *Rapallo and After*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁸³ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, pp. 226.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 22.

Sir Eyre Crowe's 1907 memorandum still acted as an indispensable guide to British policy towards Germany.

Chapter 4

The Foreign Office and the Ruhr Crisis

This chapter will examine the twelve tense months from the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr in January 1923 to the election in January 1924 of the first Labour government led by Ramsay MacDonald. It will demonstrate again the influence in the critical year of 1923 of Crowe's views on Germany within the Foreign Office. The chapter will be divided into four sections: firstly, the period of so-called benevolent neutrality,' when the policy of the British government was one of minimum involvement in the Franco-Belgian dispute over the Ruhr; secondly, the involvement of Crowe and Foreign Office in the 'Curzon Note' of 11 August 1923; this perhaps marked the beginning of a more active strategy in the Ruhr; thirdly, the response of Crowe, the Foreign Office and the government to the collapse of the mark and hyper-inflation in Germany in the autumn of 1923; finally, the role of Crowe and the Foreign Office in the renewal of American participation in European affairs, the final outcome of which was the Dawes Report and Plan of 1924.

As has already been shown, most of the literature on the Ruhr crisis has tended to concentrate on the role of the French government and, in particular, Prime Minister Poincaré. Only recently, the roles of Curzon, Crowe and the Foreign Office have been scrutinised more vigorously. Even then, the emphasis has tended to be on Franco-British relations. It has already been stated that Curzon depended heavily on Crowe at Lausanne. In 1923, during the Ruhr crisis, this dependence increased

because the Foreign Secretary was less knowledgeable about European affairs.¹ It has generally been assumed that Curzon's mistreatment of Crowe was a type of industrial bullying. "Curzon acquired a reputation as an inconsiderate chief."² Owen O'Malley, a senior Foreign Office official, is often quoted: "Can't the man realize," Crowe used to say, "that long after he has gone home in his Rolls-Royce I have to catch a No. 11 bus for Elm Park Road and sup off sardines or cold sausages before dealing with the evenings telegrams?"³ The evidence will suggest that in 1923 Crowe was more than just a senior adviser to the Foreign Secretary. The chapter will also show that even when not personally at the heart of British decision-making, Crowe's beliefs in firm, but fair treatment of Germany, positive Anglo-French relations and avoiding the dominance of one power on the continent still dominated British foreign policy in 1923.

Following the defeat of the British in the Reparation Commission two days earlier, Franco-Belgian troops invaded the Ruhr on 11 January 1923. This action threatened the already shaky post-war entente between France and Great Britain. British policy-makers were placed in an extremely difficult situation. Their immediate aim was to ensure that there was not a rupture with France, whilst expressing clearly that Britain would neither participate nor take any responsibility for the invasion of the Ruhr. Every effort was to be made to ensure that relations with France remained cordial. It was also decided that Britain would not oppose the invasion by declaring it to be illegal.

¹ Harold Nicolson said that "he possessed, in European matters, little stability of objective...". *Curzon*, p. 223.

² K. Rose, *Superior Person – A Portrait of Curzon and his Circle in Late Victorian England*, London, 1969, p. 300. "I have to travel in the Underground," complained Crowe about being sent for in the evening by Curzon. *Ibid.*

³ Owen O'Malley cited in Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 50.

When the Ruhr was invaded in January 1923 and pledges were seized in the Rhineland, the Foreign Office and the British government had to choose between three alternative policies. It could contest the legality of the Franco-Belgian claim to act outside the limits of French and Belgian Sovereignty and withdraw the British representative from the Rhineland High Commission. It could contest every action taken by the French or Belgians that broke the Rhineland Agreement. The British chose to accept the final alternative. This was to disclaim all responsibility for the actions of her wartime allies, which the Legal Adviser of the Foreign Office, Sir Cecil Hurst, believed to be illegal under Paragraph 18 of Annex II to Part VIII of the Versailles Treaty. It was chosen because it was the least likely to offend the French government. At Paris, Bonar Law had told Poincaré that although Britain could not support or take any responsibility for the French measures, her feelings towards France and the French people remained amicable.

Therefore, as Curzon explained to Lord Kilmaarnock, “ Our object is to avoid friction with the French whilst at the same time keeping aloof from the application of and responsibility for a line of policy of which His Majesty’s Government disapprove.”⁴ To achieve this aim would have required a high level of diplomatic skills from both politicians and the officials in the Foreign Ministry, but they had other matters of concern as well. The government had to be aware that public opinion may have favoured the withdrawal of British troops from the Rhineland,⁵ a message that Curzon instructed Lord Crewe to convey to the French Government.

⁴ C 988/313/18, Curzon to Lord Kilmaarnock in Coblenz, 17 January 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 40.

⁵ C 1301/313/18, Curzon to Kilmaarnock, 24 January 1923, *ibid*, p. 59.

There were also repeated concerns about British trade including the delivery of coal to the Rhineland and Ruhr.

The question of the legal status of the Franco-Belgian actions was another major cause of debate in the next few months. When Dr Sthamer, the German ambassador, asked Miles Lampson if the reports in the British press were true that the Foreign Office law officers had expressed the view that the actions were a breach of the Versailles treaty, he replied that “there was not a vestige of truth in the allegation.”⁶ In fact, Lampson said that he was not prepared to discuss the matter, but instead posed another question: “Was there not an admitted right under general international law for any Power to take forceful measures to compel another Power to fulfil its treaty obligations? I had been informed that this was so.”⁷ This was true, but the Law Officers often failed to give clear decisions. The British government had never considered that the Franco-Belgian actions in the Ruhr and the Rhineland “could properly be taken under paragraph 18 ...(but) on the other hand His Majesty’s Government have never considered that the French and Belgian action was, because it was not covered by the treaty, contrary to the treaty.”⁸ A further complicated matter for the British government was that in March 1921 Britain had supported the French plan to occupy Dusseldorf, Duisburg and Ruhrort. In December 1922, the Solicitor-General, Sir Thomas Inskip, sent a note to the Foreign Office agreeing with the conclusion of the Attorney-General, Lord Hewart, in March 1921 that the planned occupation would not have been contrary to the treaty. By April 1923, though, Inskip had changed his mind and, along with the Attorney-General,

⁶ C 1818/313/18, Cuzon to D’Abernon, 30 January 1923, Note by Mr Lampson, 29 January 1923, *ibid*, pp. 82-83.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 83. See also C 1572/313/18, 25 January 1923, *ibid*, pp. 69-71.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 70.

Douglas Hogg, now declared the invasion of the Ruhr to be illegal.⁹ Tyrrell wished the legal question to be avoided, a view with which his friend would probably have disagreed, but the Permanent Under-Secretary was on holiday at the time. In April 1923, as O’Riordan pointed out, “the scope for effective pressure on France disappeared when the Law Officers reported that the French did have a plausible legal argument.”¹⁰ Yet, Crowe and Corp rightly emphasised that what was really beyond doubt, and, of greatest significance, was the fact that Poincaré had broken the solemn pledge given to Britain by President Millerand in April 1920 that France would not act independently of its allies in the future.¹¹

Attempts to sway the mandarins of the Foreign Office against the invasion were regularly made by the German government. They were consistently batted back, sometimes very strongly. In a note of 17 January 1923 to Dr Sthamer, Miles Lampson stressed “the folly of anything in the nature of resistance to French measures. Surely the German Government must realise the inevitable consequences of anything of that nature... the German Government had told Lord D’Abernon that there would be nothing beyond passive opposition.”¹² Five days later, Lampson rejected Sthamer’s protest against the shooting in the Ruhr of two Germans by the French. He stated that he needed to make no comment, as the British had no connection with those events. When Sthamer wanted to know the position of the British government, Lampson reminded him of the formal declaration made by Bonar Law at the end of the Paris Conference. “Whilst disclaiming all responsibility for separate action, of which he

⁹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 431-432.

¹⁰ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 231.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 430.

¹² C 989/313/18, Curzon to D’Abernon, 17 January 1923, note by Mr Lampson, *DBFP*, I, XXI, p. 41.

disapproved, Mr. Bonar Law had left no doubt in the minds of the public that Great Britain would throw no obstacle in the way of France.”¹³ Sthamer argued that British permission for the French to carry out arrests in their zone of the Rhineland was legally unacceptable, but Lampson told him that he “could conceive of no more foolish attitude (on the part of the German government) than to take action which would render our position increasingly difficult.”¹⁴ In a final thrust, Lampson defended the British press and public against the inference that it was biased, telling Sthamer that he “would do well to remember the memories of the war were by no means dead in this country. Moreover, the general opinion here was not that of sympathy with Germany; not at all. The average man no doubt thought that Germany had brought it (sic) on herself by not fulfilling the treaty; but he equally thought that France was applying a mistaken method of getting her debt out of Germany.”¹⁵

Lampson’s statements very much represented Foreign Office attitudes to Germany at the start of 1923. They tend to support Crowe and Corp’s aside that he “always adopted a harsher attitude towards the Germans than Crowe”¹⁶ It is hard to discover within the Foreign Office evidence of sympathy for Germany in January 1923, except from D’Abernon in Berlin who never ceased to mistrust France.¹⁷ Again though, despite the alternative view of the former banker, D’Abernon, it must be stressed that within the ranks of the Foreign Office mistrust of France ought not to be confused with a knee-jerk sympathy for Germany and certainly not in January 1923. Thus, it is not a contradiction to accept Douglas Dakin’s conclusion that the Foreign

¹³ C 1257/313/18, Curzon to D’Abernon, 22 January 1923, Note by Mr Lampson, *ibid*, p. 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54.

¹⁶ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 431.

¹⁷ C 1567/313/18, D’Abernon to Curzon, 24 January 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, pp. 61-62.

Office watched with some satisfaction the growth of German passive resistance in the Ruhr and the Rhineland, for it had always been their contention that the Franco-Belgian action would involve costs exceeding the amount of reparation forcibly extracted; and they were more inclined to believe

in reports that bore out this contention... than in M. Poincaré's claims... that the venture had been rewarding.¹⁸

At the start of 1923, the Foreign Office experts were no longer regarded with suspicion by the head of the British government and they were presented with an opportunity to regain much lost prestige. But it was the decision of the Bonar Law Cabinet on 11 January 1923 to adopt a position of what was later termed 'benevolent neutrality' (or 'wait and see') that had to be enforced by them. Unfortunately, as Elspeth O'Riordan said, this policy "may have sounded all very well, (but) it proved virtually impossible to implement in practice."¹⁹ The German government supported the campaign of passive resistance by the workers in the Ruhr and France and Belgium responded by increasing their forces and adopting harsher measures. Britain remained in dread of an open breach with France, but had to be very wary of appearing to criticise France for fear that this would be interpreted as supporting Germany.

In fact, every effort was made to support the French in the early weeks of 1923. The British government and the Foreign Office did not appease Germany, as, for example, Bonar Law agreed to Poincaré's decision to seize German customs receipts in the whole of the occupied territory, including the British Zone, provided that there was "no question of the use of British troops."²⁰ Britain allowed France to

¹⁸ Preface by Dakin, *ibid*, p. vi.

¹⁹ O'Riordan, 'British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis', p. 229.

²⁰ Foreign Office to Kilmarnock, 17 January 1923, FO 371/8704, fos. 63-64, quoted by D.G. Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 223.

use a railway line in the British Zone.²¹ Less than a week later, even the usually anti-French Kilmarnock wrote to Curzon: "...much as we disapprove of French action, we cannot afford to let them be defeated. If, as we anticipate, (the) struggle proves to be long and bitter (the) time will come when we shall have to decide what would be the position if (the) Germans were to win. The last shot of the Allies would have been fired and would have failed in its effects."²²

On 13 February 1923, Parliament re-opened and in the King's Speech Bonar Law government's policy in the Ruhr was stated to be as follows:

My Government, in their desire to hasten a complete settlement of the Reparation question, offered to the Allied Governments far-reaching concessions on Allied debts to this country. I greatly regret that it proved impossible to reach a general agreement. The French and Belgian Governments have, therefore, proceeded to put into force the plan which they favoured, and the Italian Government have countenanced their action. My Government, while feeling unable either to concur or participate in this operation, are acting in such a way as not to add to the difficulties of their Allies.²³

It has been argued that, soon after the invasion took place, the Foreign Office became responsible for the government's decision-making on the Ruhr crisis, although, given past and future events, it is debatable who really ruled in Whitehall. Zara Steiner linked the return of Curzon from Lausanne in February 1923 and his resumption of control of the Foreign Office with the policy of passivity until April.²⁴ Harold Nicolson believed that within the Cabinet, from that time, Curzon kept control of foreign policy away from Bonar Law and Baldwin, the Chancellor.²⁵ O'Riordan said that during the first weeks of the occupation, "policy in practice ... (was) guided

²¹ O'Riordan, 'British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis', p. 230.

²² Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 223.

²³ *Hansard*, 160, column 5, speech by King George V, 13 February 1923.

²⁴ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 226.

²⁵ Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 367.

by officials on the spot in the Ruhr.”²⁶ She believed that within the Foreign Office, “it was officials such as Lampson who were doing much of the work, with apparently little input from Crowe.”²⁷ But then, on 5 February 1923, Curzon returned to London and “European policy at last received some of the guidance it had been lacking.”²⁸ Yet, in a footnote, O’Riordan admitted that it was “worth mentioning that Crowe went to Lausanne to assist Curzon from 17 January until 5 February.”²⁹

The Bonar Law Cabinet continued to pursue the line of ‘wait and see’ at a meeting on 14 March 1923. For more than two months, the government had had to fend off considerable criticism from all sides in Parliament for a policy that it described as ‘passive acquiescence,’ or ‘benevolent neutrality,’ while opponents, such as Herbert Fisher called it things such as “a settled policy of inertia.”³⁰ Fortunately, for Curzon, he enjoyed shelter in the Lords, while his Under-Secretary, Ronald McNeill, had to deflect the main attacks in the Commons. There was little sympathy for Germany during debates on the matter. Sir William Davison pointed out that given that one-quarter of the German Reich was “under timber... For Germany to have made default, above everything else, in the delivery of timber, is one of the most flagrant abuses of which she could have been guilty.”³¹

On 14 March 1923, Curzon met Sthamer at the Foreign Office. Sthamer criticised the French for treating reparations as both an economic and a political question. To Germany, it was just an economic one. It wanted reparations put on a sound basis and the German government was interested in Hughes’ declaration at New Haven, would agree with the appointment of an international committee of

²⁶ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 64.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁰ *Hansard*, 161, column 1368, speech by Fisher, 13 March 1923.

³¹ *Ibid.*, column 1384, speech by Davison, 13 March 1923.

financial experts and would accept its report and then apply for an international loan. Sthamer asked Curzon, confidentially, for his opinion and if the German government should take its suggestion to Bonar Law “with a view of being forwarded to the interested Powers.”³²

Curzon replied that Bonar Law would be prepared to talk with Sthamer and himself, but felt sure that it would be a great mistake to communicate its proposals to Britain alone. France would instantly reject them. Any German proposals should be communicated to all the powers, and, if they wished, the United States. Again, Britain refused to advise the German government as to the nature of their proposals. Curzon warned Sthamer, though, that it would be very unwise to repeat earlier proposals or to make ones that were inadequate. This could only worsen the situation.³³ This applied particularly to relations with France.

The occupation of the Ruhr did not bring France the swift rewards that the government had promised and the franc fell. Poincaré was in trouble. In April 1923, the former Minister of Reconstruction, M. Louis Loucheur, made an ‘unofficial’ visit to London. He hoped that it would lead to Anglo-French negotiations, but when Loucheur spoke to Bonar Law and Baldwin on 7 April he revealed a plan to create an autonomous region in the Rhineland. Loucheur’s visit “revealed the extent of French ambitions to... Bonar Law and Baldwin... Ramsay MacDonald objected strongly to Loucheur’s suggestion for the creation of an autonomous, neutralized Rhenish state.”³⁴ O’ Riordan believed that the Loucheur mission demonstrated that France

³² C 4876/1/18, Curzon to D’Abernon, 14 March 1923, *DBFP* 1, XXI, p. 158.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 158-159.

³⁴ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 225.

wanted a settlement of the Ruhr question and that it was becoming harder for Britain to maintain a policy of inaction.³⁵

On 20 April 1923, Curzon made a speech in the House of Lords in which he invited the German government to submit an offer to help settle the dispute. It was based on Treasury memoranda of 18 April.³⁶ Gerald Feldman said that Curzon was responding “to his own domestic pressures that Britain do something...”³⁷

O’Riordan argued that this speech inaugurated a new British policy approach which she termed ‘tentative intervention.’³⁸ Neutral Britain, said Curzon, might be “converted into an agent, and a very useful agent...”³⁹ Steiner also felt that Curzon’s tentative move “marked the beginning of a change in British diplomacy.”⁴⁰ In fact, Crowe had previously urged the French and Belgian ambassadors in London to clarify the ultimate aims of their occupation of the Ruhr, a tactic followed by Curzon.⁴¹

During the early phase of the crisis, the Foreign Office made great efforts to discover the aims of the other powers involved in the dispute, as well as the aims of the powers on the periphery. It soon became clear that the German Government wanted to enlist the support of the British in their opposition to Poincaré, the aim being to drive a wedge between the allies, especially between Britain and France. Its initial diplomatic tactic was to attempt to entice British politicians and diplomats to give advice to Germany, breaching her neutrality in the dispute. In the early stages of the crisis, the Foreign Office personnel in London and the diplomatic staff in Germany constantly

³⁵ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 50.

³⁶ C 7177/313/18, *DBFP*, 1,21, D’Abernon to Curzon, 22 April 1923, Note 1, p. 222.

³⁷ Feldman, *The Great Disorder*, p.662.

³⁸ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 67.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 227.

⁴¹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 432-433. Also see minute by Crowe on Grahame to Curzon, 12 March 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, pp. 149-150.

had to avoid succumbing to this temptation.⁴² The response of the diplomats was to repeatedly tell Germany's representatives that it was their responsibility to make suggestions as to how to end the crisis. There were to be no concessions granted to Germany. The spirit of the Crowe memorandum endured.

Yet, O'Riordan was right to conclude that the Curzon speech "triggered a protracted diplomatic exchange which did nothing either to relieve the stalemate on the Continent or to ease the domestic political difficulties facing British policy-makers."⁴³ Even D'Abernon was unhappy at the German note of 2 May 1923, submitted by the unimaginative Cuno government. It was little more than a repetition of the 'Cuno Offer' of December 1922. This offered, in return for a moratorium on reparations payments, a promise by Germany of peace for fifteen years.⁴⁴ The French press was incensed. Crewe, the British Ambassador in Paris, sent Curzon a summary of their views. They described "this insult to France... French politicians and journalists express the hope that Your Lordship will deal severely with the frivolous nature of the German offer."⁴⁵

Feldman inferred that the 2 May note was partly the result of the discovery by Chancellor Cuno and Foreign Minister von Rosenberg "that the Curzon speech involved no change in British policy."⁴⁶ He pointed out, rightly, that Cuno's critics had realised that the note was bound to offend the British, as in Paris in January 1923, Bonar Law had presented a plan that set a new total sum, in real terms, of 25 billion gold marks (one and a quarter billion pounds). The German reparation plan of

⁴² C 1572/313/18, Lord Kilmarnock to Curzon, 25 January 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 77.

⁴³ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 67.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed summary of the 'Offer' see Feldman, *The Great Disorder*, p. 662. See also, Rupieper, *Cuno Government and Reparations*.

⁴⁵ C 7896/1/18, Curzon to D'Abernon, 2 May 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 243.

⁴⁶ Feldman, *Great Disorder*, p. 662.

December 1922 offered to pay a total sum, in real terms, of fifteen billion gold Marks. (three-quarters of a billion pounds). Cuno and Rosenberg declared that the 2 May note was the absolute limit of Germany's capacity.⁴⁷

The unfortunate illness and subsequent resignation of Bonar Law hindered the conduct of British foreign policy in the spring of 1923. Curzon was acting Prime Minister by the end of April 1923 and when Bonar Law resigned on 20 May, it seemed certain to many that the position would soon become permanent. Curzon was the most experienced member of the Cabinet. Yet, after the involvement of the King's Secretary, Lord Stamfordham and Bonar Law's Private Secretary, Colonel Waterhouse, it was the Stanley Baldwin, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was appointed. The reasons were apparently Curzon's membership of the House of Lords⁴⁸ and criticism by Bonar Law of his temperament in a crisis.⁴⁹

The late Conservative minister, Alan Clark, believed that the disappointment destroyed the Foreign Secretary. "Curzon's despair at being overtaken by Baldwin must exceed – excepting possibly the pain and incomprehension suffered by Margaret Thatcher when she was deposed in 1990 – the misery ever felt by any Conservative politician."⁵⁰ Harold Nicolson described him as being "shattered," his wife having to console her sobbing husband and listen to his dismissal of the inexperienced and largely unknown Baldwin who was "not even a public figure," in Curzon's opinion.⁵¹ Elspeth O'Riordan though argued that "Curzon behaved with great magnanimity. On 23 May he congratulated Baldwin on his appointment, and agreed to continue to serve as Foreign Secretary, believing it to be

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ House of Lords Record Office, *Davidson Papers*, Introduction.

⁴⁹ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ A.Clark, *The Tories 1922-1997*, London, 1999, p. 29.

⁵¹ Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 355.

in the public interest.”⁵² Whatever Curzon’s personal feelings, “these dramatic events were bound to affect foreign policy.”⁵³ Baldwin was considered an inexperienced leader on the national and international stage.

Close analysis of O’Riordan’s work revealed some inconsistency. She said that the Foreign Office, having encouraged the Germans to produce two notes, met with no success “largely because of the attitude of France.”⁵⁴ Earlier, O’Riordan wrote that the German note of 2 May 1923 “merely amounted to a revamped version of the one they had prepared in December 1922...”⁵⁵ She said that the German note of 7 June 1923 “was a great improvement on the 2 May plan,”⁵⁶ but Crowe was angry that it “made no reference to the crucial issue of passive resistance.”⁵⁷ He predicted, rightly, that Poincaré would ask Britain to join France in demanding the end of passive resistance as a precondition to the renewal of negotiations on reparations.⁵⁸ This, of course, opened up the question of the legality of the occupation, “thus highlighting what was in effect the crux of the British dilemma.”⁵⁹ If Britain supported France, it would effectively be declaring that its occupation was legal and the German actions an ‘act of war.’ If Britain did not support France, it would by default be seen as supporting Germany, viewing passive resistance as legitimate and therefore the occupation to be illegal. O’Riordan’s implication here is that Crowe and the Foreign Office seemed to be attaching much of the blame to Germany for the impasse.

⁵² O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 69.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ C 10185/1/18, Curzon to Crowe (Paris), No. 1955, 11 June 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 333.

⁵⁹ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 72.

On 30 July, a very agitated Dr Sthamer, the German Ambassador, went to see Curzon at the Foreign Office.⁶⁰ As a result of acute food shortages in Germany there had been riots and deaths in cities such as Leipzig, Dresden and Frankfort-on-Main. The value of the mark had collapsed in the most extraordinary fashion. Curzon asked what solutions the German government proposed and whether the unrestricted production of paper marks would continue? The Ambassador's answer astonished him. It intended to issue a gold loan immediately, to introduce new taxes, including one on capital, and a new system of levying these taxes. Why were these measures not introduced before if they were so necessary, he asked? Sthamer told him that there was no alternative to the issue of the paper currency until the new measures had been executed.⁶¹

When Sthamer wanted to know what the British could do to help, Curzon gave him the standard response. What could Britain do and could the Ambassador be specific? Sthamer had learnt little about the British diplomatic mind and the policy of 'masterly inactivity.' Would Britain support Germany's application for membership of the League of Nations at the imminent meeting of the Assembly, he replied, and would Britain support her attempt to refer the reparations question either to the League or to an international investigative body? Germany already knew of Britain's support for German membership of the League, but, Curzon told him, it would be best advised to postpone making public this request about the reparations

⁶⁰ C 13161/2719/18, Curzon to D'Abernon, 30 July 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, pp. 444-446.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 444-445.

question lest she receive an embarrassing refusal from the French and the Belgians.

Sthamer should really not have expected any other answer.⁶²

Not even the most sympathetic British ear accepted the German perspective in its entirety. D'Abernon gave Curzon a vivid description of the economic situation and potential for social chaos inside Germany:

... unless some rapid solution is arrived at, there is grave danger of anarchy... Depreciation has gone so far that it is today almost comic. Fares indicated on the meter of a taxi-cab have today to be multiplied by 150,000; tomorrow the multiplicator will be 200,000; one cannot pay a charwoman without a table of logarithms; a theatre ticket costs over 1,000,000 M., and a motor-car 10,000,000,000 M.⁶³

D'Abernon did not though accept the popular explanation for it. He felt that

There is unquestionably exaggeration in the German thesis that the Ruhr occupation is alone responsible for the financial catastrophe. German finance was in a perilous condition before 10 January 1923. No serious measures had been taken to restore order or stability in them. No government and no minister had enunciated any valid scheme of reform. Accusations of selfishness and want of patriotism have been brought against some of the larger German industrials and some of the financial interests. I am not disposed to contravert these accusations; on the contrary, I believe that certain leaders of industry and finance have exercised far too much influence and that their views have been at once selfish and, what is much worse for the country, short-sighted.⁶⁴

D'Abernon was careful in this despatch not to plead for a change to an interventionist policy towards Germany. On 11 August though, he informed Curzon of the imminent departure of the Cuno Cabinet as it had failed to prevent the escalation of food prices and the Communists were threatening a general strike.⁶⁵ On the same day, Curzon sent a very long note to the French and Belgian ambassadors expressing his government's "most sincere disappointment" at their governments'

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 445.

⁶³ C 13770/313/18, D'Abernon to Curzon, 8 August 1923, *ibid*, p. 466.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ C 13799/203/18, D'Abernon to Curzon, 11 August 1923, *ibid*, p. 467.

identical criticism of Britain. He said that His Majesty's Government was not inconsistent in its policies. It had participated in the occupation of the three towns in 1921 because of Germany's failure to fulfil its treaty obligations, "some of which had no connection whatsoever with Reparations."⁶⁶

The inconsistency for which the British Foreign Office and Government was justly criticised was certainly less apparent in 1923 and their ability to maintain the policy created in the early months of the year proved a critical disappointment to their German equivalents. Sthamer complained to Crowe that the British now appeared to be supporting the French position in the Ruhr. Crowe had to remind him that Britain had always demanded that Germany abandon its policy of passive resistance.⁶⁷ A month later, a bitter Sthamer read two letters that he had received to Cadogan, then serving in Whitehall, from Schubert, the head of the English section of the *Wilhelmstrasse*. Cadogan minuted Schubert's belief that "the silence and inaction of England was stultifying the policy which he, von Schubert, had consistently pursued, that those in Germany who had always maintained that nothing was to be expected from us were being proved right, and that in fact it was evident that in placing any hope in us he (Sthamer) had "backed the wrong horse".⁶⁸

The disrespect, even contempt, of the Foreign Office mandarins for their German counterparts, is evident here. Tyrrell "had known him (Schubert) a great many years, and all I could say was that, when I discovered that he was the head of the English section of the German Foreign Office, I regretted it exceedingly, as I did not think he was a fit and proper person for such a post... If, therefore, this incident

⁶⁶ C 13659/1/18, Curzon to Saint-Aulaire and Moncheur, 11 August 1923, *ibid*, p. 475.

⁶⁷ C 13399/1/18, Curzon to D'Abernon, Note by Crowe, 3 August 1923, *ibid*, p. 459.

⁶⁸ C 16199/313/18, Tyrrell to Curzon, note 1, minutes by Cadogan, 12 and 15 September 1923, *ibid*, p. 525.

leads to the eventual elimination of Schubert, I think good will have come of it.”⁶⁹

Tyrrell though would be disappointed. Within months Schubert would become Secretary of State of the *Wilhelmstrasse* in succession to Maltzan. On Crowe’s death in 1925, Tyrrell would become his British counterpart.

On 13 August 1923 Wilhelm Cuno resigned and was succeeded by Dr Gustav Stresemann, who remained as Foreign Secretary. It was well known to the Foreign Office that, during the Great War, Stresemann had been a fervent supporter of the expansionist aims of German foreign policy. It did not take Stresemann very long to adopt a pro-active approach. In Stuttgart on 2 September, he made a speech in which he stated his desire for a settlement of the frontiers adjoining the Rhine. He proposed a pact that would include France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, as well as Britain and the United States. The pact had similarities with that suggested by the former Chancellor, Cuno, in December 1922, but did not propose either a limit of just a generation for its duration or a referendum. On the matter of reparations, productive pledges and the Ruhr, the Stresemann Government

was ready to oblige owners of industrial and agricultural property not only of one particular region but of the whole Empire to mortgage their property for reparation purposes and the Allies would receive these mortgages as pledges. (The) German government was ready also to consider a mortgage on railways and the participation of the Allies in German industry... (and) cessation of passive resistance if an agreement in principle could be concluded on these bases and they thought it would be possible for evacuation of the Ruhr to be considered at the same time.⁷⁰

On 11 August 1923 the so-called ‘Curzon Note’ was sent to Poincaré.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Record by Sir William Tyrrell of a conversation with the German Ambassador, 15 September 1923, *ibid*.

⁷⁰ C 15404/1/18, Sir G. Grahame Brussels to Curzon, 5 September 1923, *ibid*, p. 505.

⁷¹ C 16359/1/18, Curzon to Saint-Aulaire and to Baron Moncheur, 11 August 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, pp. 467-480. Maisel said that “Crowe and Curzon induced the Cabinet to accept a full and strong statement of the British case...” See Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 126.

According to the recollections of Grace, the Marchioness of Curzon, the 'Curzon Note' was not written by the Foreign Secretary originally at all, but by Crowe.⁷²

Judging from Vansittart's remark, one should not, at first, be surprised by this.⁷³ But it was not simple plagiarism. Crowe wrote a first draft, which was given to the Cabinet, which approved its statement of the British case, but wished to soften parts of it, in respect of French public opinion. Curzon said that he toned down Crowe's most acerbic passages, re-phrased badly-expressed parts and omitted sections on French and Belgian financial demands as well as references to Lloyd George and the events of March 1921. The final paragraph stated that the British government "was reluctant to *contemplate* the possibility of separate action" instead of feel '*compelled*.'⁷⁴ Yet, Crowe and Corp believed that "it is not obvious that the minor alterations in phrasing introduced by Curzon had the effect of expressing any better than before the phrases that they replaced; and there were certainly many 'acerbities' left in the draft, for Crowe did not mince his words, and hammered home his arguments with relentless force."⁷⁵

In Germany, the impact of the 'Curzon Note' was "magical,"⁷⁶ according to D'Abernon. Gustav Stresemann called it the "clearest and strongest" State document that he had ever read.⁷⁷ He had the note published in every German newspaper. Several million copies were printed in parallel columns in German and

⁷² Quoted by Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 436-437.

⁷³ Her late husband was, according to Vansittart, prone to taking the credit for his officials work which "he annexed ... as the Germans annexed Shakespeare." Quoted by Rose, *Superior Person*, p. 300.

⁷⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 437.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Quoted by Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 365.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

English.⁷⁸ On 14 August 1923, Stresemann, making his first speech in the Reichstag as Chancellor, stated that passive resistance “has its deepest roots in the consciousness of the German people of its incontestable rights, which are now clearly recognized by the British government.”⁷⁹

Crowe and Corp said that the Germans had now been informed that Britain, on the advice of its highest legal experts, agreed that the invasion of the Ruhr was not sanctioned by any clause of the Versailles Treaty. Crowe had also said though that neither was passive resistance sanctioned by the treaty and it therefore must cease immediately. Germany must pay to the limits of its capacity, but there remained no estimate of this amount.⁸⁰ But, Harold Nicolson said that “the advantage gained by the Note of August 11 should have been pursued with unremitting vigour and consistency. It was not pursued.” The blame lay with the Foreign Secretary, who contracted another bout of phlebitis and during his recovery in Bagnolles preferred to write his book on British Government in India.⁸¹ O’Riordan argues that “Crowe’s subsequent backtracking helps explains why the notes threats were never implemented.”⁸² Maisel and O’Riordan both stated that Poincaré was unmoved by the note⁸³ and Britain was left impotent.

Nicolson, however, pointed out another factor that derailed the Foreign Office.⁸⁴ Following the murder of an Italian general on Greek soil on 31 August Italy occupied Corfu.⁸⁵ The ensuing crisis lasted until 27 September when Mussolini

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.366.

⁷⁹ Quoted by Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 224.

⁸⁰ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 437.

⁸¹ Nicolson, *Curzon*, pp. 367-368.

⁸² O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 244.

⁸³ Maisel, *The Foreign Office 1919-1926*, p. 126 and O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 81.

⁸⁴ Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 368.

withdrew his army. The incident undermined the League of Nations, “but most important for the British from the perspective of the Ruhr,” according to O’Riordan, “was that the events revealed Britain’s dependence on French support in such international conflicts.”⁸⁶ O’Riordan also saw from another different perspective the aftermath of the ‘Curzon Note’. “The sending of the controversial, 11, August note can only be understood in the context of Treasury/Foreign Office relations and the temporary ascendancy of the Treasury view within the Foreign Office.”⁸⁷ What happened in her opinion was that “from late September 1923 the Treasury and Foreign Office worked together and the driving force behind the Treasury approach was ... Sir John Bradbury.”⁸⁸

Yet, Crowe’s firm stance against passive resistance had already borne fruit as on 26 September 1923, Stresemann declared an end to the action. Kent believed that, for the first few weeks of his office, the Chancellor was sensitive to Nationalist criticism, but he gave in to Hilferding, the Finance Minister, who wanted to end the struggle to prevent the collapse of the mark and a descent into financial and political anarchy.⁸⁹ Another reason was the failure of the German government “to obtain any tangible British support.”⁹⁰ On the previous day, German isolation was emphasised when Baldwin and Poincaré claimed unity of purpose and principle between Britain and France and a renewal of the Entente. In the middle of the Corfu

⁸⁵ Greece, with British help, appealed to the League of Nations, but France blocked the appeal, fearing that the League would then have had a precedent for it to negotiate a settlement of the Ruhr crisis. Instead, the Conference of Ambassadors was given the task of investigating the matter. Having avoided the involvement of the League, France then supported Britain. Greece was given a large fine and Mussolini claimed a great propaganda victory. See O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 244.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* But, O’Riordan also believed that “Crowe ... played a key role in the Autumn of 1923.” *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 224.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

crisis, Baldwin had gone to Aix-les-Bains. Saint-Aulaire arranged that, on his return journey, the British and French Prime Ministers would have a private meeting in Paris.⁹¹ The end of German passive resistance in the Ruhr can be understood not only as a response to the growing hyperinflation, but also the repetition by the British government of classic Crowe principles of firmness towards Germany and a close bond with France.

The main criticism from within the Foreign Office came from an enraged Curzon. At the end of the meeting on 19 September 1923, a communiqué was issued that said that the two Prime Ministers “had been happy to establish an agreement of views and to discover that on no question is there any difference of purpose or divergence of principle which could impair the co-operation of the two countries, upon which so much depend the settlement and the peace of the world.”⁹² Curzon was “aghast”⁹³ that his Prime Minister had apparently repudiated the policy of strict neutrality between France and Germany that he had enforced since his return in February from Lausanne. Much of his fury in London was vented on Saint-Aulaire, the French Ambassador. During his previous few months in office, Curzon became obsessed with the belief that the French were plotting against him. Christopher Andrew showed that they were doing so. In October 1923, Curzon discovered, from French intercepts, an “intrigue between Poincaré, Comte de Saint-Aulaire and H.A. Gwynne (the editor of ‘The Morning Post’) to supplant me at the Foreign Office.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ According to Nicolson in *Curzon*, p. 372, this meeting took place on 20 September 1923, but O’Riordan in *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 97, stated that it occurred on the afternoon of 19 September. For a full account of the meeting see C 17871/1/18, notes on Conversation of September 19, 1923 between Mr Baldwin and M. Poincaré, , *DBFP*, 1, XXI, pp. 529-535.

⁹² Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 87.

⁹³ Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 372.

⁹⁴ C. Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 297.

The telegrams that were intercepted between Poincaré and Saint-Aulaire revealed that the French hoped that Gwynne could persuade Baldwin to replace Curzon with a more Francophile Foreign Secretary.⁹⁵ Henceforth, Curzon made any excuse to avoid speaking to Saint-Aulaire again. He also refused to speak to Tyrrell, the author of the communiqué, and, according to Curzon's widow, blocked Crowe's wish for Tyrrell to succeed D'Abernon in Berlin.⁹⁶

These events beg questions about the control of British foreign policy towards Germany in the autumn of 1923. Two factors are difficult to deny. Curzon's influence was diminishing, while Crowe's firm line was still pursued by the government and within the corridors of the Foreign Office. O'Riordan insisted that after the collapse of the German economy on 26 September 1923 British policy became much more consistent, contrasting positively with the earlier phase.⁹⁷

Stresemann's decision to end passive resistance in the Ruhr led to an extraordinary sequence of events in Germany, which the Foreign Office in London and their representatives 'on the spot' watched with mixed emotions. The decision led to a crisis in Bavaria where right-wing nationalists saw it as surrender to France. The Bavarian Prime Minister appointed von Kahr, a right-wing nationalist, as dictator of Bavaria, claiming that he acted in order to suppress both the revolutionary left and the extreme right, particularly Hitler.⁹⁸ But when Hitler's meetings continued and his newspaper still appeared, John Thelwall, Commercial Secretary to the Berlin

⁹⁵ Curzon said that it was "the worst thing that I have ever come across in my public life ... I had not realised that diplomacy was such a dirty game." Baldwin also admitted that he "unaware that such dirty things were done in diplomacy." *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 87.

⁹⁷ O'Riordan, 'British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis', pp. 236-237.

⁹⁸ The Foreign Office in London had been kept well-informed of the growing popularity of the N.S.D.A.P. or 'Nazi Party' in Bavaria by officials such as R. H. Clive, the Consul-General of Bavaria, who was based in Munich.

Embassy, thought that perhaps Bavaria planned to break away from the German federation.⁹⁹

In response to the appointment of von Kahr in Bavaria, Stresemann appointed the Minister of War, Geisler, as dictator of the whole Reich, causing a crisis between the Bavarian and Berlin governments in which a key factor was the control of the army of the German nation, the Reichswehr. The appointment of Geisler was also opposed though by the remnants of Stresemann's more liberal coalition supporters and he failed to gain victory in the Reichstag for an Enabling Act that would have increased his emergency powers. On 4 October 1923, Stresemann resigned as Chancellor, but six days later he formed a new government of similar character and therefore equally prone to collapse.

The threat to the German government from the revolutionary Left increased on 9 October when the Communists in Saxony made a deal with the Socialist government in which the K.P.D. gained some Cabinet posts in return for their support. Thuringia then seemed likely to follow suit. D'Abernon reported that the government in Berlin sent much greater numbers of troops to Saxony than to Bavaria, persuading O'Riordan to believe that the Stresemann government reacted more cautiously to the Bavarian Right than to threats from the Left. In November, in protest against Stresemann's turn to the Right, the Social Democrats withdrew their participation in his coalition, forcing his resignation. President Ebert, their former leader, attacked his erstwhile colleagues. He would be proven correct. In German politics they were to have a peripheral role for many years to come.

⁹⁹ FO 371/8745, C 17887/313/18, Thelwall to Wigram, 12 October 1923 cited in O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 198, note 5.

Meanwhile, in October 1923, the German economy collapsed into hyperinflation. Belatedly, on 21 October, the Reichstag granted Stresemann the powers necessary to introduce a new mortgage currency. However, the effects of these measures took time to work and therefore the hyperinflation continued. Edward Thurstan, Consul-General in Cologne, warned of the danger to Europe of the paralysis of German industry.¹⁰⁰ In Berlin though, the government was also in danger of paralysis. The anger of the Left to the greater severity towards the Communists than towards the Bavarian Right led to the departure of the Socialists from Stresemann's coalition. When he decided to fill his Cabinet with members of other political parties, the Nationalists were furious. Not only was Stresemann besieged politically from both the Right and the Left and was struggling to overcome the devastating economic difficulties, but he also faced opposition from the workers in the Ruhr to the possible threat to their unemployment payments.

There then occurred the bizarre, yet highly significant event known as 'The Munich Putsch.' In November 1923, Hitler attempted to overthrow the government in Bavaria in a violent coup. It failed and some Nazis were killed. Hitler himself was arrested and charged with treason. After a somewhat farcical trial, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment. The notorious events in Munich on 8 and 9 November 1923 were witnessed by R.H. Clive, H.M. Consul-General for Bavaria and his despatch is an invaluable document for historians.¹⁰¹ The putsch is often linked with the collapse of the German economy in 1923, a direct result of the swingeing allied reparations demands and the occupation of the Ruhr. Clive though does not

¹⁰⁰ "The measure of impending disaster is so stupendous that it would be idle for me to mince my words or to attempt to gloss over facts." O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 103.

¹⁰¹ C 19811/16779/18, Clive to Curzon, 11 November 1923, *ibid*, pp. 885-889.

mention reparations at all or the occupation of the Ruhr. It is described as an almost entirely internal Bavarian matter, a personal struggle between Hitler and the almost equally right-wing (and monarchist) regional dictator, von Kahr. Clive did identify how Hitler had already gained the sympathy of women and young men in particular but he was, “obsessed with ‘La folie de la grandeur’ ... is an atheist, anti all religion (which means a lot in this country) and not even a Bavarian.”¹⁰² Hitler did demand an end to what he called the criminal November Government of President Ebert, but the timing of the putsch, five years to the day after the abdication of the Kaiser, and Clive’s description, give the impression that it was an attempt to reverse history, rather than primarily a revolt against the Stresemann Government in Berlin and its abandonment of passive resistance. However, on 9 November 1923, the day of the putsch, Crowe minuted that “the threatened disruption of Germany is the direct result of French policy”¹⁰³ and it was difficult “not to believe that it represents an object for which they have systematically worked.”¹⁰⁴ He also wrote that the revolutionary movement in Germany was “the direct outcome of, or at least is closely connected with, the Separatist movement on the Rhine...”¹⁰⁵ that Poincaré’s government had encouraged.

President Ebert reacted to the ‘putsch’ by giving greater powers to the head of the Reichswehr, von Seeckt. More troops were sent to Berlin and von Seeckt banned the Nazi, Communist and Deutschevölkische parties. Stresemann’s government then lost even more support from the Left and when he lost a vote of confidence in the Reichstag, he was forced to resign. However, the new German

¹⁰² C19473/16779/18, Clive to Curzon and Clive to Lampson, 14 November 1923, *ibid*, p. 889, note 2.

¹⁰³ Carsten, *Britain and Weimar*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

Cabinet, led by Dr Wilhelm Marx, was very similar to the previous one. Stresemann even remained as Foreign Secretary, a position that he held until his premature death in October 1929. On 8 December 1923, the Reichstag granted the necessary emergency powers to the new government, thus ending the political crisis that had lasted since the end of passive resistance. O’Riordan believed that “the irresponsible tendencies of the Weimar political parties”¹⁰⁶ were largely to blame for the prolonging of the political crisis in the autumn of 1923.

Prior to the invasion, the official view of the Cuno government was that in view of “rejection of English proposal at Paris, German government refrained from submitting their proposals as there was no prospect of their being considered.”¹⁰⁷ German leaders had therefore placed themselves in a stalemate situation, preferring to pose rather than prevent a most serious international dispute. The simplest domestic political aim to accomplish was to secure the support of the German people for the opposition to the Franco-Belgian occupation. Capitulation could not be considered. The policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr was accepted by leading industrialists and workers, in particular the coal miners. The longer the occupation lasted though, the greater would be the strain on the struggling German economy. It appeared to be imperative to end the dispute quickly, unless there really was a deliberate plan to allow the German economy to implode.

Analyses of the wider political-economic aims of the German government have had to be revised following the opening up of the Reich Chancellery archives. These have revealed that “in 1922 and 1923 German leaders deliberately chose to postpone tax reform and currency-stabilization measures in the hope of

¹⁰⁶ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ C 277/1/18, D’Abernon to Curzon, 5 January 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 7.

obtaining substantial reductions in reparations.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, in 1923, many observers, including some from within the walls of the Foreign Office, but particularly some from inside the Treasury, felt that the reparation demands on Germany were simply too great and that she did not have the capacity to pay. The question of her willingness to pay was irrelevant. The German Government may have believed that, since the publication of Keynes’s book, there were many in Britain and the U.S.A. who sympathised with their case.¹⁰⁹ Yet, the British Ambassador in Berlin was not even one of them in the autumn of 1923. “I remain of the simple view... the point being not to endeavour today to estimate Germany’s capacity to pay, but to get German finance on to a relatively sound basis. Any report of Germany’s financial position today is a mere guess in the dark.”¹¹⁰

The British attitude in 1923 was “extremely interesting,”¹¹¹ wrote O’Riordan laconically. “The documentary evidence reveals the British to have been singularly unsympathetic towards the German collapse.”¹¹² Throughout the catastrophe, the Treasury opposed any aid to Germany. The Foreign Office, though, was never as hard-line as the Treasury and “was always alert to the dangers involved in a total German collapse.”¹¹³ The Treasury wanted to let things get worse, partly to demonstrate that the Ruhr crisis was the result of both French and German stupidity

¹⁰⁸ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 110. Stresemann though denied that the German government deliberately collapsed the mark. *The Times*, 25 August 1923, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ This included many in the Labour Party. See Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, p. 342.

¹¹⁰ D’Abernon diary entry, 29 October 1923, *Ambassador of Peace*, 2, p. 268.

¹¹¹ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 104.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ O’Riordan, ‘British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis’, p. 238.

and partly to enable Britain to be in a position to get its own way on the settlement of the reparations question.¹¹⁴ Throughout the collapse of the German economy, the Treasury favoured no aid being given to Germany,¹¹⁵ believing, improbably, that the route to the pockets of the German rich was via the starving bellies of the German poor. The Foreign Office partly agreed with this policy, but was against Germany's disintegration and the effective French colonization of the Rhine-Ruhr area, for reasons that again can be found in the spirit of the Crowe Memorandum. If, as O'Riordan believed, "the Treasury was driven purely by financial considerations,"¹¹⁶ the Foreign Office always remembered the primacy of British interests and the need to prevent a continental power becoming dominant.

In 1923 the U.S.A. was not disinterested in European affairs. Although in isolation from direct participation since the infamous vote in Congress in 1920, many American citizens and political leaders were keen observers of the unfolding events in Germany. There were still American troops in the Rhineland and there was the matter of enormous war debts to financial houses in the U.S.A.. For most people any involvement in European affairs aroused anger that so many young American lives had been lost in 1917 and 1918 defending old empires, particularly the British, although there was, as elsewhere, still the residue of wartime hostility towards the Germans. In the early months of 1923, Geddes in Washington reported that public opinion was increasingly pro-France and anti-Britain. President Harding and Secretary of State Hughes were personally sympathetic to His Majesty's Government, but these views met with opposition. It would have been even greater if the British

¹¹⁴ O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 104.

¹¹⁵ O'Riordan, 'British Policy and the Ruhr Crisis', p. 238.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

press or Parliament had favoured any early American involvement that would undermine French policy in the Ruhr.¹¹⁷

Hughes appeared “to hope that a situation ultimately will arise in which it will be possible for United States government to undertake some form of mediation leading to an expert examination of Germany’s capacity to pay which powers concerned might or might not have agreed in advance to accept ...” the mediation preferably being done by the United States alone, “however, he has not committed himself even in his own mind to any definite plan.”¹¹⁸ The U.S.A., like the Foreign Office, preferred to wait and see.

Having received a blunt rejection of the ‘Balfour Note’ in August 1922, the Foreign Office must have been both amused and surprised when in the summer of 1923 Poincaré asked the American Government to write off some of France’s considerable wartime debts. President Calvin Coolidge’s oft-quoted response was characteristically brief – “They hired the money, didn’t they ? ”¹¹⁹ Yet, in February 1923, Ambassador Geddes had told Curzon that “ (American) public opinion is tending more and more to support France in her dealing with Germany.”¹²⁰ Certainly, this had something to do with an emotional sympathy for France and Belgium, both of whom had suffered so much in the war, but American investors and newspapers were aware that the U.S.A. would not receive its debt repayments unless France and Britain received reparations from Germany.

¹¹⁷ C 2461/313/18, Geddes to Curzon, 8 February 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 94 and C 3633/313/18, Geddes to Curzon, 26 February 1923, *ibid*, p.126.

¹¹⁸ C 3633/313/18, Geddes to Curzon, 26 February 1923, *ibid*, p.127.

¹¹⁹ P. Neville, *France, 1914-1969*, p. 32.

¹²⁰ C2461/313/18, Geddes to Curzon, 8 February 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 94.

In 1923 British diplomats were in a dilemma regarding the United States. They often resented American interference, but as the extraordinary events of 1923 unfolded, the participation of the Coolidge administration in future discussions on German reparations and her capacity to pay became essential. There was also the sensitive matter of inter-allied war debts. For the United States Government the timing of any commitment to Europe was important. American public opinion had to be considered and there was still a legacy of ill-feeling, particularly towards Britain. At the start of the year, the French position was favoured and the diplomats in Washington had to tread warily until their moment came.

It was as late as October that Britain decided that the moment had come. In December 1922, The U.S. Secretary of State, Mr Hughes, declared that his government was willing to give assistance to Germany.¹²¹ For the Europeans' inability to provide a unified response, Britain entirely blamed France.¹²² On October 9 1923, President Coolidge repeated the offer.¹²³ Curzon and the Foreign Office responded positively and quickly.¹²⁴ On 13 October, Hughes told Chilton that, although he could not give a definite reply before speaking to the President and Cabinet, "you know what my own views are on the subject" and that "he had

¹²¹ *DBFP*, 1, XX, p.157.

¹²² C 17662/1/18, Curzon to Mr Chilton in Washington, Part 2, 12 October 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 563. On the abandonment of passive resistance, France resumed payment in kind of reparations, Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 439.

¹²³ *The Times*, 11 October 1923, p. 12.

¹²⁴ C 17662/1/18, Curzon to Chilton, 12 October 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 563. Crowe's role in the days prior to the Curzon response was discussed by Crowe and Corp. They wrote that on 1 October 1923, Baldwin "asked Crowe to come and see him in order to advise him as to what possible action we could take about the Ruhr." Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 439. Crowe thought that a speech should be made calling for Poincaré to publicly state his future intentions. He refused. The "one thing left to do ... was to appeal to the United States," *ibid*, p. 440. Coolidge had already made his offer on 9 October.

warned French Ambassador some time ago that France should renounce her obstinate attitude and come into line with the other Powers.’’¹²⁵

On 30 October 1923, having acquired the consent of the French, Italian and Belgian governments, Curzon formally invited the American government to participate in committees to be set up by the Reparation Commission to investigate Germany’s capacity to pay and to make recommendations ‘‘as to an appropriate financial plan for securing such payment.’’¹²⁶ By December 26 1923, the Reparation Commission had appointed the members of the two committees.¹²⁷ The First Committee, under General Charles Dawes, met on 14 January 1924 and the second met one week later. It was a successful conclusion for Curzon, Crowe and the Foreign Office. But it was one year too late.

As we have seen, when the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr took place in January 1923, Crowe and the Foreign Office faced many great difficulties. Firstly, it had to deal with a situation that senior officials believed would have been avoided if Crowe’s proposal for an Anglo-French alliance had been accepted in December. Secondly, there had been a political vacuum since the resignation in October 1922 of the Lloyd George government. Curzon had shown great reluctance to become involved in European affairs and especially the reparations question. His priority was Turkey and the Lausanne Conference. Bonar Law was inexperienced as a diplomat, but his illness was probably not a factor at that time. Thirdly, the British faced an intransigent French government (which had Belgian support) and an unrealistic German one. The United States was observing European events from afar. The Foreign Office and the British government could not support the invasion or the

¹²⁵ C 17706/1/18, Chilton to Curzon, 13 October 1923, *DBFP*, 1, XXI, p. 565.

¹²⁶ C 18741/1/18, Curzon to Crewe, 30 October 1923, *ibid*, p. 610.

¹²⁷ Reparation Commission to the British Delegation, Reparation Commission, 26 December 1923, *ibid*, pp. 734-736.

recipients of it. In the circumstances, neutrality was the only option. But, Britain was unable to execute an active policy in January 1923. Yet, O'Riordan's line that British inactivity in the early months of 1923 was indicative of an indecisive government strategy, whilst a '*laissez-faire*' attitude to the collapse of the German economy was one of the elements of a more dynamic British policy seems hard to comprehend.

In the final analysis, it must be emphasised that the crisis presented the Foreign Office with opportunities it had been denied for over a decade. To begin with, the 'Garden Suburb' no longer conducted foreign policy towards Germany from 10 Downing Street. The Foreign Secretary, Curzon, was not only less knowledgeable about European affairs than the Near East, but was an indecisive minister¹²⁸ who had relied heavily greatly on Crowe in Lausanne. Furthermore, the Foreign Office was composed of many senior officials, for example, Tyrrell, Lampson, Sargent and Wellesley, who shared Crowe's views on Germany. In 1923, even the British Ambassador in Berlin, the former banker D'Abernon, normally sympathetic to Germany, became frustrated at its government's failure to take remedial action during the economic crisis.

The events of 1923 showed that the principles of the Crowe Memorandum were not a dogma, but were capable of flexibility. In January 1923, Crowe did not crudely support France against Germany. In fact, he and the Foreign Office were frequently highly critical of France, Poincaré and the Quai d'Orsay. But they did not want to rupture the Entente. Only briefly, at the end of October, when Poincaré was causing problems following the American offer of participation, did they seriously consider an Anglo-French breach.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 32.

¹²⁹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 439.

At no stage during 1923, no matter how poor relations were with the French, nor how bad conditions were inside Germany, could the Foreign Office and the government be accused of moving towards sympathy, let alone support for Germany. The German government, often through the medium of its ambassador in London, tried repeatedly to get the British government to depart from its neutral position. Any British support for the campaign of passive resistance in the Ruhr would have been a victory for Germany, but it never happened. Lampson, the head of the Central Department, a Crowe appointment, countered every ploy by Dr Sthamer with such ease that the ambassador's own government eventually recognised that his gamble on Britain had failed. Sthamer's political masters at this time failed his country even more. When given the opportunity to put political pressure on the allies in the spring of 1923, Chancellor Cuno and Foreign Minister Rosenberg displayed a lack of vision and courage, merely repeating much of the earlier German offer. Poincaré was given an 'open goal.' The British government was let down.

Yet, Crowe and the Foreign Office wanted the crisis resolved. In private, the ministry expressed doubts about the legality of the invasion. Britain became increasingly concerned that France's real aim was to create an independent state in the Rhineland. Officials 'on the spot' though had the awkward task of opposing German passive resistance, not appearing to oppose the French army and engineers in the Ruhr and yet opposing France's greater ambitions. British policy in the Ruhr was complicated further by the internal political events following the resignation of Bonar Law due to ill-health. If Curzon was shattered by his failure to become Prime Minister in May 1923, then it is likely that Crowe and his tendency became even more potent within the Foreign Office, particularly as the German economy deteriorated. When Curzon did express his policy preference in the summer of 1923, his words could

have been those of Crowe himself. He said that he was unhappy with France's policy of trying to grind Germany down because it was "far from being favourable to the recovery of the world." There could be no European peace without an Entente, he believed.¹³⁰ The 'Curzon Note' of 11 August actually was the work of Crowe and although the French were unimpressed, it was a significant moment in the crisis. It was welcomed by the new more dynamic German Chancellor, Stresemann, although it can be argued that it was not a direct cause of the end of passive resistance on 26 September.

The Foreign Office maintained its unsympathetic stance towards Germany during the next few chaotic weeks, a period of mounting economic and political upheaval. Even after receiving reports of food shortages, both the Foreign Office and the Treasury rejected intervention. The officials 'on the spot' gave accurate and penetrating analyses of the events during and after the 'Munich Beer-Hall Putsch,' including descriptions of Hitler himself. During this period, not just in 1923, the Foreign Office diplomats, both in London and in Germany, consistently warned of the greater danger to the Weimar Republic of the German Right rather than that of the Left. There was no hint of 'appeasement' during the Ruhr crisis as British foreign policy in 1923 opposed making any concessions to the Germans, following faithfully the line that Eyre Crowe had advocated in 1907. This occurred not least because Crowe himself played such an important role in policy formulation and execution. The strategy in the long-term though was to help Germany recover, for the sake of Britain's interests. "By refusing to join in the occupation of the Ruhr, the British

¹³⁰ Sharp and Jeffrey, 'Après la Guerre finit, Soldat anglais partit...': in Goldstein and McKercher (eds.), *British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, London, 2003, p. 125.

government demonstrated its belief that the economic restoration of Germany was the key to a general economic revival.”¹³¹

¹³¹ Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 219.

Chapter 5

1924, Ramsay MacDonald, the Foreign Office and the Dawes Plan

On 22 January 1924, James Ramsay MacDonald, the son of a Scottish crofter, became the leader of the first-ever Labour government in Britain. He decided to serve in the dual role of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Labour held office with the support of the Liberals for nine months. This chapter will provide evidence that, despite initial mistrust on both sides, the working and personal relationship between Crowe and MacDonald was very positive and particularly so on German matters. It will demonstrate that Crowe's influence still pervaded the Foreign Office and this included the Prime Minister.

The chapter begins with the establishment and Crowe's attitude to the Labour government and to MacDonald, in his dual role, as well as the latter's history of scepticism towards the Foreign Office. Then MacDonald's decision to assume the dual role of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary will be analysed. The chapter will then discuss the attitudes to Germany of Crowe and MacDonald in 1924, and will argue that they actually shared many views and formulated a common strategy, namely a united acceptance of the experts report. It will then analyse events prior to, and following, the publication of the Dawes Report in the spring of 1924. The next section will concentrate on the London Conference of 1924 that resulted in the general acceptance of the Dawes Plan and will show that, despite Crowe's frustration at the conference (similar in some ways to Versailles), again his influence was still prevalent. There will be a brief account of Crowe's part in the fall of the Labour government following the controversy of the Zinoviev Letter which will suggest that

he may have made an error, but was not to blame for it. The final section, the link to the next chapter, will explain Crowe's opposition to the Geneva Protocol and will show that it was in line with that of the 1907 Memorandum.

The rapid rise to power of the Labour Party caused some concern, but more sceptical interest among the British Establishment. King George V wrote in his diary: "Today 23 years ago, dear Grandmama died. I wonder what she would have made of a Labour government? '"¹ Stanley Baldwin was confident that having allowed his opponents to suffer a brief, humiliatingly unsuccessful period in office, they would be consigned to political oblivion, after which 'the natural party of government,' the Conservatives, would return to the gratitude of the electorate and, probably, most Foreign Office mandarins. Indeed, there was a great deal of mutual suspicion between the Foreign Office and the parliamentary Labour Party. During the war, many in the latter had been pacifists or opponents of the war on either moral or political grounds, including the new Prime Minister. In 1918, MacDonald had lost his seat in Parliament as a result of his own opposition to the war.²

MacDonald was aware that in selecting suitable people to assume ministerial responsibility the Labour Party did not possess great talent in depth. Only his former rival, Arthur Henderson, had previous Cabinet experience, having been a member of Lloyd George's wartime administration. He chose to send a disciple of Gladstonian fiscal policy, Philip Snowden, to the Treasury to reassure the City that a Bolshevik revolution had not occurred, and on 23 January 1924 he took on the dual role of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. He appointed, not without significance, Arthur Ponsonby, to be his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Explaining why

¹ D. Murphy (ed.), *Britain 1914-2000*, London, 2000, p. 88.

² Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Politics*, p. 46.

he united the two offices, MacDonald said that he was very concerned that “the position of this country in Europe had become so unsatisfactory that I believed it would be a great advantage if, whoever was Prime Minister was also Foreign Secretary, in order to add the weight of office to any sort of policy that one might devise ... I will do my best to carry on both, on the clear understanding that as soon as I feel that I can relieve myself of the one I shall do so.”³

Taylor suggested that the Secretary of the Union of Democratic Control, E.D. Morel, was a central factor in this decision. The U.D.C. was a group within the Labour Party that had opposed the war and demanded a radically different conduct of foreign policy, and was, therefore, highly critical and suspicious of the Foreign Office and the methods of ‘Old Diplomacy.’ On taking office, Ponsonby (and Attlee) resigned from the UDC. “Morel had expected to become foreign secretary. MacDonald told him that J.H. Thomas must have the office and had refused to take him as under-secretary; then MacDonald became foreign secretary himself. Morel was soon convinced that MacDonald was the prisoner of his permanent officials, like Grey before him.”⁴

O’Riordan believed that MacDonald chose to become his own Foreign Secretary because of his party-political objectives: “His primary objective was to prove that Labour was fit to govern.”⁵ Both nationally and internationally, Labour ministers had to be adjudged responsible and respectable.⁶ There was no better vehicle than foreign affairs. Given the range of issues being fired at MacDonald from all directions, this decision could have proven a misjudgement. In May 1924, Sir

³ *Hansard*, 169, column 767, H C Debates, speech by MacDonald, 12 February 1924.

⁴ Taylor, *Troublemakers*, p. 168.

⁵ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 145.

⁶ Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, p. 312.

Kingsley Wood criticised him for never being in the House, a statement that he defended so vigorously that Wood was forced to apologise, claiming that he really meant that MacDonald's workload and responsibility were too much for one man.⁷

The mandarins of the Foreign Office had good cause to be suspicious of their new master. In the previous decade his comments about their work had been particularly negative. At the Labour Party Conference in 1916 he described himself as "an opponent of secret diplomacy, not a friend of Germany."⁸ In May 1919, criticising the appointment of Sir Eric Drummond as secretary-general of the League, he wrote in 'Forward' that Drummond had been "brought up in the ways of the Foreign Office, trained in the methods of discredited diplomacy, with no Democratic vision and no conception of what World Democracy means..."⁹ In 1923 he wrote of the Labour Party's foreign policy aims as including the desire to "disestablish the old methods of diplomacy which on principle withheld information from the masses of the people."¹⁰

If there was initial suspicion of the new minister within Foreign Office ranks in January 1924 much of it was soon dispelled by MacDonald's ability, but particularly his enormous charm, a characteristic clearly in sharp contrast to his predecessor: "The Foreign Office people appear delighted with their new Chief. He does not hustle them nearly so much as the Marquess; treats them with great courtesy, and is much inclined to fall in with their views. This impression may or may not be permanent, but for the moment they are gratified."¹¹ Indeed, MacDonald soon protested against "what appears... to be the determination of France to ruin Germany

⁷ UKNA, PREM 1, PRO/30/2, 30 May 1924.

⁸ Taylor, *Troublemakers*, p. 151.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 158.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 172.

¹¹ D'Abernon diary entry, 20 February 1924, *Ambassador of Peace*, 1, p. 55.

and to dominate the Continent without consideration for our reasonable interests and future consequences to European settlement.”¹² Crowe must have concurred with this opinion. The new government and Prime Minister also soon received praise from an unexpected quarter. “Within weeks even the normally unemotive President Coolidge expressed the ardent hope that the ‘reasonable hope of a Labour régime in Britain may point the way to a gradual adjustment of all the difficult European problems, both international and social.’”¹³ In order to accomplish this task, MacDonald knew that he had to improve what he called “the weather”¹⁴ – relations with the other major powers, namely France, Germany and the United States. This matched the aims of Crowe and other Foreign Office mandarins. The great stumbling-block between the Foreign Office and the Labour government were their respective attitudes to Bolshevik Russia,¹⁵ not Germany.

If MacDonald appointed himself to the Foreign Office for reasons of maintaining unity within the Labour Party, there remains much evidence that the Treasury wished to remain a major influence on reparations policy. Within days of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer assuming office, Bradbury had sent Snowden a note highly critical of France’s interpretation of Paragraph 18 of Annex II of Part VIII of the Treaty of Versailles, but also stating that the “essential conditions of peace in continental Europe are that the existing territories of France and Germany should be sacrosanct as against military invasion the one by the other, and that the other European nations should guarantee this condition subject only to an exception in the

¹² Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 251.

¹³ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 198.

¹⁴ O’Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 146.

¹⁵ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 456–458.

event of Germany failing to discharge a tolerable reparation obligation.”¹⁶ Bradbury also informed Snowden that, in its present constitution, the Reparation Commission was not an impartial body, Britain’s voice being in a permanent minority, yet also not, apparently, having enough teeth. “The question of the proper interpretation of Paragraph 18 of Annex II of Part VIII of the Treaty of Versailles is *prima facie* one which can only be properly solved by a unanimous decision of the Reparation Commission.”¹⁷ But, as Bradbury himself said, the Reparation Commission could not, on its own initiative, raise the question of the interpretation or pronounce on the legality or illegality of the Franco-Belgian action. Bradbury was actually revisiting the subject that had so angered the Foreign Office in December 1922. The question of the interpretation of this paragraph “was a question of vital importance for the peace of Europe, which could only be decided by a unanimous decision of the Commission.”¹⁸ In fact, Bradbury believed that the new Labour Government should not just acquiesce in the actions of the French and Belgian Governments, but should actually demand the suspension of the application of the offending paragraph. He may have understood the importance of allied unity, but seemed to believe that post-war treaties could be dodged or evaded.

It would be a notable success of the MacDonald premiership that he did alter the ministerial rank order. Original documents often show that throughout the Labour administration of 1924 the Foreign Office received information before the Treasury, particularly during the month of April when the Dawes Report was published and complaints about Bradbury and the Reparation Commission decreased.

¹⁶ UKNA, PRO 30/69/112, 26 January 1924, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Minute No. 343, 26 December 1922 reproduced in UKNA, PRO 30/69/112, 26 January 1924, p.9.

One of MacDonald's most vociferous critics, though, was John Connell. He wrote that, in 1924, the Foreign Office maintained efficiency and continuity "by reason of MacDonald's ignorance, apathy and vanity, and because Sir Eyre Crowe ... had gathered under his leadership in the Service a number of men of outstanding calibre, who contrived – almost regardless of their titular head – to execute a policy which they believed to be right."¹⁹ Therefore, Connell concluded that "...Ramsay MacDonald contrived to obtain a reputation for statesmanship in this field (international affairs) to which his claim was shadowy in the extreme."²⁰

Yet, Maisel identified the great administrative change that took place within the Foreign Office in the winter of 1924. Quoting MacDonald's own diary, he explained that the Prime Minister, because of overload, did not participate in the early stages, allowed officials to formulate policy and instead "put a premium on rapid decision-making once a matter had been brought to his attention."²¹ D'Abernon agreed with this judgement.²² "MacDonald ran Cabinet meetings and international conferences with extreme competence."²³ Therefore, when historians analyse MacDonald's foreign policy, particularly towards Germany, they need to be aware that its creation was largely the work of Crowe and his colleagues. In 1924, the views of the two men on Germany coincided.

¹⁹ Connell, *The 'Office'*, p. 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Connell also noted that Curzon criticised MacDonald's methods and the increase in Crowe's power, *ibid*, p. 62.

²¹ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 133.

²² D'Abernon told Curzon that MacDonald "had a marked rapidity of judgement in foreign affairs." Diary, London, 7 October 1924, in D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace*, 3, p. 102. Stresemann was impressed with MacDonald's conduct of the London Conference, *ibid*, p. 98.

²³ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 133.

MacDonald had been a pacifist during the Great War and his attitude towards Germany after 1918 remained generally in favour of reconciliation and appeasement. In 1923, he had written that the British “ have to see that the German people are not crushed, not enslaved, not turned into pariahs.”²⁴ In the same year he said to Morel of Baldwin: “On all essentials his views coincide with ours ... Germany must be maintained as much in our interests as anything else.”²⁵ On reparations, MacDonald did not have to convince his party. Many Labour members of the Cabinet “came to view reparations as a hangover of wartime passions perpetuated by precisely those forces in British national life that they most abhorred.”²⁶ Among those forces was, almost certainly, the Foreign Office. If so, then this was a misjudgement, as Crowe and many other diplomats believed, not in maintaining wartime hostility to Germany, but in the implementation of the terms of the peace treaty, including the possibility of its revision. This did not mean making concessions to Germany. Crowe opposed this in 1924, as he had done in 1906-1907, and as he had always done. Neither the Labour government nor the Foreign Office were ‘Germanophobic.’ Both understood the potential advantages to Britain, especially economic, of improved relations with Germany.

Personal relations between the Prime Minister/Foreign Secretary and Crowe “were always excellent, for MacDonald both liked, admired and also trusted him.”²⁷ Therefore, far from a clash between the two men over Germany, there was, broadly speaking, harmony. Hankey was right to believe that MacDonald wanted a

²⁴ J.R. Macdonald, *The Foreign Policy of the Labour Party*, 1923, p. 22, quoted by Taylor, *Troublemakers*, p. 168.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 168.

²⁶ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 8.

²⁷ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 448.

big success in foreign policy.²⁸ Crowe's desire for a settlement of the reparations question and any agreement with a Germany that rejected militarism was completely consistent with the principles of the 1907 Memorandum. Much though hinged upon the reports of the experts committees.

In January 1924, MacDonald was faced with the immediate challenge of resolving the Ruhr crisis, or at least avoiding a deterioration in Anglo-French relations. He chose to continue the previous policy of non-intervention and non-obstruction over the Ruhr. Lord Crewe, the British Ambassador in Paris, described MacDonald's strategy as "...to do nothing marked or conspicuous at any rate until the expert committees have issued their reports, and possibly not then."²⁹ His adoption of the policy of 'wait and see' did have another practical and rational basis as in 1924 all the governments of the major powers faced the probability or certainty of elections. In Germany and France these would take place less than five weeks after the publication of the Dawes Report.

In the first months of the Labour government, relations with France, Germany and Russia were apparently the priority, but MacDonald and Crowe both knew that the involvement of the United States in European affairs was imperative if there was to be a settlement of the German reparations question. Labour was fortunate that, since late 1923, the Dawes committees had been operating. America was participating, but "... France remained difficult to deal with..." Early contacts with the French were reasonably cordial, but MacDonald soon accepted the Foreign Office view about the undiplomatic behaviour of the French, especially Poincaré and the French Ambassador in London, Saint-Aulaire.³⁰ Lord Crewe thought that the fall in

²⁸ Hankey Papers cited in O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, p. 164.

²⁹ Crewe to Phipps cited in *ibid*, p. 146.

³⁰ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 448.

the franc caused many at the Quai and the nation as a whole to question the French policy towards Germany.³¹ Poincaré continued to tell the British government privately different things to those he told the French publicly.³² According to his biographers, “Crowe’s own view was that Poincaré was anxious, for the purpose of the forthcoming elections in France, to be able to announce that ‘conversations’ were actually in progress with England in order to impress French public opinion.”³³

The Dawes Report was published on 9 April 1924. It was signed unanimously by the experts who represented the United States, France, Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom. On 28 April the Government of Japan informed the Reparation Commission that they accepted the report in principle. The plan, in brief, proposed that Germany should manage its own resources, stabilize the Rentenmark and pay a sliding scale of reparations in German currency. To implement this plan, the German Government would receive a foreign loan.³⁴

The initial response of Foreign Office and Treasury experts was sceptical. They “remained unenthusiastic about the end product of the Dawes Committee’s labors”(sic) for a number of reasons: the payments were too heavy; the transfer provisions were unworkable, and the prospect of penalties, should Germany voluntarily default, were a serious cause for concern.³⁵ The Foreign Office noted the report’s absurd statement that military occupation must not hamper the economic

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

³⁴ UKNA, Annex 2 to the *Dawes Report*, p. 79.

³⁵ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 194.

activity of Germany.³⁶ The Treasury, though, reluctantly told Snowden, that acceptance of the report was “the only constructive suggestion...”³⁷

Like the French, MacDonald wanted to pass on the ‘hot potato’ (the Ruhr question) to the Reparation Commission, although not to keep the matter in Poincaré’s strait-jacket. He supported the restoration of economic and fiscal authority of the German Government over all German territory, as well as the inclusion, in a single annuity, of all German financial liabilities under the Treaty of Versailles.³⁸ Williamson believed that MacDonald “seized upon the report as the key to his plans for the pacification of Europe...”³⁹ Therefore, on 10 April 1924 MacDonald communicated to Lord Crewe that although the Report was not without fault:

H.M.G. attach so much importance to agreed recommendations which can be brought into immediate operation, that they for their part will be prepared to support the scheme in its entirety, provided that all the other parties concerned are willing to take the same course, agreeing to give the experiment a real chance and waiting to make modifications which may appear necessary after experience and by common agreement.⁴⁰

Yet MacDonald would not waver from his determination to achieve general European settlement of the reparations question through the Dawes Plan. Not surprisingly, though, Poincaré and the French, invoked procedure. Lord Crewe told MacDonald that they wanted to know why he needed to make an immediate statement in the House of Commons about the Report. The French Government would not do anything until the Reparation Commission had consulted with the German delegates on 17 April.⁴¹ MacDonald informed D’Abernon that he wanted the German

³⁶ UKNA, FO 371/9741, C 6676, FO Memorandum on the Dawes Plan, 23 April 1924, p. 202.

³⁷ Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 266.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 222.

³⁹ Williamson, *British in Germany*, p. 266.

⁴⁰ C 6020/70/18, Macdonald to Crewe, 10 April 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 619.

⁴¹ C 6160/70/18, record by Miles Lampson of a conversation with the French Counsellor, 11 April 1924, *ibid*, pp. 625-626.

government “to accept the scheme without hesitation and without delay whilst there is the chance and not by haggling over detail.”⁴²

When the Dawes Report was published, the Foreign Office and the British Government needed to know quickly how the German Government and its opponents would react to it. Gustav Stresemann called it “an earnest and impartial study by a body of men who are anxious to solve the reparation problem.”⁴³ If the British and French governments accepted the report equally sympathetically “it should mark a definite turn towards rehabilitation.”⁴⁴ D’Abernon informed MacDonald that the German Government considered that the reports were “a practical basis for rapid solution of problem of reparations”⁴⁵ and would give an assurance of its collaboration. At the *Wilhelmstrasse*, Schubert wanted the Report to be “a binding official document ... to be submitted to the Reichstag for ratification in the same way as a treaty.”⁴⁶

Much hinged on the results of the General Election held on 3 May. It was expected that the continued Ruhr occupation would cause the Nationalist Party to make considerable gains. It did, but not to the extent predicted in the press. With 96 seats it was the second largest party behind the Social Democrats (100 seats); the Centre Party with 65, the Communists 62, the *Volks Partei* 44 and several other groups a small number each. Dr Sthamer told MacDonald that “they were a demonstration against such things as the occupation of the Ruhr and the French support for the Separatist Movement.”⁴⁷ It was a partial truth, but there was heightened concern about the growth of support for nationalist groups within

⁴² C 6062/70/18, MacDonald to D’Abernon, 14 April 1924, *ibid*, p. 628.

⁴³ UKNA, T 160/178, F6970/3, p. 42.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, 11 April 1924, quoted in UKNA, T 160/178, F 6970/3, p. 42.

⁴⁵ C 6309/70/18, D’Abernon to MacDonald, 15 April 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 638.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 639.

⁴⁷ C 7426/70/18, Macdonald to Knox, 6 May 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 681.

mainstream German politics. Yet, MacDonald expressed his annoyance, “unofficially,” to Sthamer about the exploitation by Chancellor Marx of a rather careless statement he had made at York in April “that the worst form of German nationalism was the result of the way that Germany had been handled by the Allies...”⁴⁸ a comment as pleasing to many German ears as it irritated French and Belgian ones.

Observing the various coalition possibilities, Knox, acting as Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin, told MacDonald that the situation was very obscure and that there was the possibility,

that if social democrats are strongest party in the government, German Nationals would vote solid against legislation arising out of the experts report ... German Nationals who have definitely not committed themselves were in power it is not considered improbable they would accept report for which social democrats would in any case vote (sic).⁴⁹

The Marx-Stresemann coalition wished the Nationalist D.N.V.P. to participate in government, in order for it to assume some responsibility for foreign policy, but it was divided over Dawes. Many members realised its advantages for the German business sector, but acceptance risked upsetting its core supporters in its agrarian heartlands. What therefore mattered immediately was that the Centre parties preferred to accept the report in its entirety.

In Berlin, Knox discussed with Schubert the recent elections and their possible impact on the political situation. No progress had then been made in forming a government, but it was apparent that if the National Party were not in power they would be “ill-disposed towards the experts’ report.”⁵⁰ Knox told Schubert that he was “a little disturbed to gather the impression that even Dr Hergt’s grudging and

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 681.

⁴⁹ C 7448/737/18, G.G. Knox to MacDonald, 6 May 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 679.

⁵⁰ C7787/737/18, Knox to MacDonald, 10 May 1924, UKNA, PRO 30/69/102, p. 1.

very qualified reconciliation with the experts report was by no means endorsed by the bulk of his party.”⁵¹ Schubert agreed and, with a confidence which would probably have been lacking from one of his Whitehall counterparts, added, “thumping the table, that he could give me his word that by hook or by crook, and whatever the German Nationals might do, Germany would accept the report.”⁵²

In the event the Marx-Stresemann coalition remained in power.

Stresemann soon informed Knox that he had discussed acceptance of Dawes with the Nationalists. Both sides wanted an assurance about evacuation and the release of prisoners. According to Knox, Stresemann wanted to be able to say to Herriot, the new French Prime Minister: “I will put my legislation through on June 15th, will you evacuate the Ruhr on July 15th?”⁵³

On the Ambassador’s return, a more pessimistic message was delivered. D’Abernon said that he found “a considerable change in public opinion here regarding experts report. While political circles still favour acceptance there can be no doubt that popularity of experts scheme in government and financial circles has considerably diminished. As was inevitable the more closely it is read the more difficult does its execution appear and more disagreeable are various controls considered to be.

I hold, therefore, that it would be rash not to obtain as rapidly as possible a formal acceptance of report from German government through a reciprocal overhead agreement ...”⁵⁴

MacDonald was very unhappy with the German Government over its demands for conditions prior to acceptance. He said that it was

⁵¹ C 7787/737/18, Knox to MacDonald, 10 May 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 690.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 691.

⁵³ C 8388/737/18, Knox to MacDonald, 23 May 1924, *ibid*, p. 704.

⁵⁴ C 8478/70/18, D’Abernon to MacDonald, 29 May 1924, *ibid*, pp. 709-710.

both useless and unwise for German Government to look for anything of the sort at this moment, and they should rest content with the knowledge (which you can convey to them in form of an assurance from me if you think fit) that as soon as a new French government have been constituted and are in the saddle, His Majesty's Government are determined to spare no effort to secure prompt execution of the experts scheme in its entirety (sic).⁵⁵

D'Abernon was forced to think again after Chancellor Marx's speech in the Reichstag on 4 June. "Experts report is most important factor in Germany's foreign policy and acceptance of it is the only way out of Germany's uncomfortable if not desperate economic situation."⁵⁶

Much later in the year, two former Ministers of Finance, Dr Dernberg and Herr Raumer, gave a lecture in which they agreed that the scheme was incapable of execution,⁵⁷ delighting in citing the similar view held by Maynard Keynes. An extreme anti-French view was expressed in an article entitled 'Death By Starvation; the New Way to Slavery' in the *Munchener Neueste Nachrichten*. "Poincaré does not want money. He wants the Rhine."⁵⁸ Clive in Munich described the newspaper as 'Independent Chauvinist.' The headline-writers reflected an increasing sympathy inside Germany for extreme nationalist views. The Foreign Office 'man on the spot' reported this trend faithfully.⁵⁹

What the Dawes Plan had also achieved was to re-awaken the debate about German war-guilt. During a debate in the Reichstag on 26 July on Dawes and foreign policy there was a lengthy argument about the 'responsibility lie.' The Soviet Union had recently blamed Tsarist Russia and France. A Nationalist, Herr Berndt,

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 711-712.

⁵⁶ C 9059/70/18, D'Abernon to MacDonald, 5 June 1924, *ibid*, p. 714.

⁵⁷ UKNA, T 160/178, File 6970/01/7, 12 November 1924, p. 45.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, undated, p.57.

⁵⁹ In March and April 1924, Clive sent reports back to the Foreign Office about Hitler's trial. See *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, pp. 1017-1022.

said that Germany was not even partly to blame. “The publication of German archives has proved our innocence. Russia, France and England had repeatedly decided for war in the years before 1914. Germany made every effort to localise the war and acquiesced in all the suggestions made by England to that end.”⁶⁰

The former Social Democratic Chancellor, Philip Scheidemann, the man who had proclaimed the Republic in 1918, disagreed and used the debate to launch a scathing attack on his old adversaries. The foreign press were full of accounts and pictures of parades taken by dismissed generals and ex-princes. He quoted the memoirs of Admiral Tirpitz. “When all is said and done, the play-acting of the Kaiser was responsible... After the war I will join the Socialists and look for lamp-posts, and lots of them, for a regular hydra has got to be done away with.”⁶¹

Scheidemann was equally contemptuous of the former monarch. “ Even some Conservatives have declared that the ex-Kaiser was obviously a lunatic. It was he who raised the whole world against Germany with his idiotic boasting and challenging speeches, and he was mainly responsible for the outbreak of war.” The German people were not to blame, he concluded, but were being made to pay for the sins of their former “lunatic ruler.”⁶²

In 1924, attitudes to reparations were still inextricably linked to the question of German war-guilt. It should have been a matter of great concern to the Foreign Office and, in particular, its Legal Department, led by Sir Cecil Hurst, and it was in their interest to be informed of the current atmosphere in Germany and to detect any revisionism. The Treasury was determined, as long as Bradbury remained in post, to remain involved in the settling of the reparations question.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 26 July 1924, p. 34.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 35.

⁶² *Ibid*.

Much still hinged on the French. On 11 May 1924 the 'Bloc National' was defeated at the polls and Poincaré eventually resigned (on 1 June). Millerand, the ex-Socialist, resigned as President of the Third French Republic on 11 June 1924 and was succeeded by Doumergue two days later. Edouard Herriot did not become President of the Council (Prime Minister) until 11 June. The utter defeat of the Poincaré government led *The New York Times* to observe that "a rag-tag and bobtail of defeatists and Reds have been raised to power by Frenchmen."⁶³ Other newspapers were more sympathetic to the Herriot government, although they could not agree on whether it would lead to the withdrawal from the Ruhr and the execution of the Dawes Plan.

Three days after his electoral defeat, in an extraordinary act of arrogance, Poincaré wrote to MacDonald telling him that France would not evacuate the Ruhr until Germany had accepted the Dawes Report in full and that, if Germany defaulted on its pledges, France must remain in a position to act. The power of the French press and his precarious parliamentary position was therefore likely to prevent Herriot adopting a radical evacuation policy. The new Prime Minister also was concerned, following a conversation with Millerand which he related to Eric Phipps, that the Belgians were apprehensive about him and his intentions.⁶⁴ Worse still for MacDonald when he heard reports that French military authorities in the Ruhr were taking more punitive and coercive action, though Crowe suggested that they may have been taken without the knowledge of the French Government.⁶⁵ Such events

⁶³ C 8353, UKNA, Chilton to Foreign Office, FO 371/9746, 15 May 24, p. 37.

⁶⁴ C 9521/32/18, Crewe to MacDonald, 14 June 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 719.

⁶⁵ C 7591/1869/18, MacDonald to Crewe, 13 May 1924, *ibid*, p. 695.

threatened Macdonald's and Crowe's entire Dawes strategy of gaining united acceptance of the experts' report.

The accession to power of Herriot was though welcomed not only by the Labour Government, but by sections of the Foreign Office as well (probably aware that, knowing the volatile nature of the Third Republic, his tenure would be brief, as indeed it was). Phipps told him "in British eyes... there was now a better chance than there ever had been of reaching a satisfactory settlement of the reparations question, provided Germany proved reasonable."⁶⁶ Time could not be wasted though.

In June 1924, shortly after Herriot took office, he went to Chequers to meet Ramsay MacDonald. The informal meetings between the two Socialists were extremely cordial, as described in newspapers of the period and a book by the journalist, Georges Suarez, with Herriot's agreement. Schuker though said that the transcripts of the business meetings "convey a quite different impression. MacDonald and Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Eyre Crowe of the Foreign Office had prepared their case meticulously and operated as a brilliant team. MacDonald exerted his inimitable powers of obfuscation to avoid making any embarrassing commitments, while Crowe, with his mastery of detail and disciplined intelligence, pinned down the hapless French premier on point after point."⁶⁷

Early on, Crowe led the discussion in securing a specific date for the economic evacuation of the Ruhr. To avoid another Ruhr-type crisis, Crowe proposed that the Dawes Plan be seen as a "new treaty" requiring the voluntary signature of Germany. As it was separate from the Versailles Treaty, Crowe said that, under the new system, the Reparation Commission had no legal mandate to determine default.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ C 9521/32/18, Crowe to MacDonald, 14 June 1924, *ibid*, p. 719.

⁶⁷ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 238.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 239.

The guile of the two Britons though had adverse consequences for the French Prime Minister. Following the Chequers meeting, Herriot came under great pressure from the French press, especially 'Pertinax.' MacDonald responded to Herriot's plea for a 'rescue mission' by going to Paris on 8 July with Crowe. Crowe had already formulated an agenda for the London Conference, but in order to support Herriot, MacDonald agreed to French suggestions for its revision, more than Crowe believed to be wise.⁶⁹

Although MacDonald's performance at the London Conference of July and August 1924 was praised by some contemporary commentators, it did not receive equal applause from Foreign Office experts. The conference had two main purposes. It was designed to secure the agreement of the main powers for the implementation in full of the proposals contained in the Dawes Report, and secondly, to reach agreement on the question of arbitration of disputes arising from implementation. The greatest obstacle to progress was the issue of the military evacuation of the Ruhr. The general German view and particularly that of the Right was that the Dawes protocol should only be signed if this was to commence immediately. Under pressure from the French press and parliament, this was unacceptable to Herriot who would only agree to a withdrawal that took place one year after the date of the agreement.

On 24 July 1924, before the arrival of the German delegation in London, Macdonald sent a note to Herriot and Theunis, arguing that "the repeated declarations made by the French and Belgian Governments regarding the purpose of the occupation ... might gravely prejudice the application of the Dawes Plan."⁷⁰ On 9 August after the arrival of the Germans, Macdonald sent another note to Herriot and

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 258-261.

⁷⁰ C 13734/11495/18, UKNA, MacDonald to Addison in Berlin, 2 September 1924, PRO 30/69/102, p.1.

Theunis reminding them of “the deplorable effect that might be produced upon world opinion were the French and Belgian Governments, having occupied the Ruhr for one purpose, to remain there for an entirely different purpose.”⁷¹ After a week of lengthy, sometimes tortuous discussion, Macdonald achieved his aim. On 16 August, after an exchange of notes, the French and Belgian Governments while not renouncing their legal view of the occupation “agreed to proceed to the military evacuation of the Ruhr within the minimum delay of one year as from that date...”⁷²

During the concluding speeches, the American Ambassador, Frank Kellogg, called the Dawes Report “the greatest piece of constructive work of modern times”⁷³ and that the Conference was “the first step in the restoration of confidence in our civilisation... and puts into force a sound economic plan for uniting German industrial life.”⁷⁴ The party and nation that had rejected Versailles and European involvement now hailed General Dawes’s work: “... this plan has had the hearty and loyal support of the President of the United States, and of the American people.”⁷⁵

The Dawes Protocol was signed in London on 16 August 1924 because all sides had the political will to move forward. To prevent an even greater mauling by the French press ‘die-hards,’ Herriot had to stand firm on the matter of military evacuation and achieved his ‘victory’ and that of Belgium too. MacDonald had proven himself and a Labour government to be sufficiently competent, even progressive on diplomatic affairs. Germany would receive a substantial foreign loan, more than sufficient for its immediate purpose of paying reparation instalments, a

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷³ UKNA, PRO 30/69/103, 25 August 1924, p. 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

proposition so tempting to the German Right that it was divided as to whether or not to vote for acceptance in the Reichstag.⁷⁶ Finally, the Republican government of the United States satisfied the Wall Street investors by the decision to have an American leading the supervision of the collection of reparation payments.

The praise showered on the report in 1924 was not later shared by Bruce Kent who attacked the politics of the reparations issue. “The Dawes Plan, like the Young Plan which was to follow in 1929, was a flimsy improvisation which depended for its survival on continuing financial and political fair weather within Germany and abroad.”⁷⁷ It was only designed to be a temporary measure – enabling Germany to pay its reparations for precisely five years. But, even Kent conceded that Dawes gave “a substantial breathing-space”⁷⁸ in which Germany had five years to gain the confidence of the international political as well as the financial community. Contemporary statesmen were wrong in describing the Dawes Plan, as many of them did, as having solved the reparations question. The catastrophic events that followed October 1929 have tended to make students and some historians ascribe faults and blame to the Dawes Plan which were really outside its control, notably the continued mismanagement of the German economy. Between 1924 and 1929 the plan achieved most of its key targets.

Having been a major player at Chequers and in Paris, Crowe and the Foreign Office should have had significant roles at the London Conference. Maisel said that Bradbury, Crowe and Hankey did much of the organization prior to the conference. With MacDonald, Crowe discussed the composition of the British delegation, including that of the Foreign Office, and supervised Lampson’s placement

⁷⁶ Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 260.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 261.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

of the different delegations in suitable lodgings. According to Maisel, Hankey was asked by the Foreign Office to again take responsibility for the daily management and co-ordination of the conference, despite their previous differences.⁷⁹

For Crowe though, the London Conference was a painful reminder of the time wasting and his impotence at Versailles five years earlier. Crowe and Corp wrote that Crowe “does not seem to have taken any great part” in the discussions in July and August, but “after the arrival of the German delegates on 2nd August, Crowe played a major part in these negotiations...”⁸⁰ as adviser and interpreter for MacDonald. This is a rather misleading judgement. In Crowe’s letters to his wife there are echoes of his frustrations in Paris at the isolation of the Office and at the failure of politicians to move conferences forward at a gallop and to exploit his particular expertise:

The conference still hangs fire and I am personally quite in the dark as to where things stand. We are back to the worst days of Lloyd George as regards secret ways. One sad fact stands out: there is not yet sufficient agreement to allow of (sic) summoning the Germans. In these circumstances it is clearly impossible for the conference to finish this week.⁸¹

Crowe made the same complaint the next day:

The conference if it moves forwards at all, does so at a snail’s pace. No sign yet of invitations going out. At this rate, unless there is a speedy and complete collapse, the thing may spin out endlessly, although the Prime Minister again this morning spoke of finishing before the end of next week.⁸²

Crowe’s letter of 1 August revealed that he was far from idle or satisfied with his political masters:

I was kept very busy yesterday; there were prolonged committee meetings. One sat till nearly 3 a.m., but not one of which I was a member. Instead

⁷⁹ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 142.

⁸⁰ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 454.

⁸¹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, *Crowe Papers*, M S. Eng. d. 2907, Letter to Clema, Lady Crowe, 30 July 1924, p. 11.

⁸² *Ibid*, 31 July 1924, p. 15.

worked at home ... full conference tomorrow, at which it is hoped to get a decision to send for the German delegation at once... The Prime Minister finally hopes that negotiations with Germany will not last longer than the week. I have not that robust faith, and you can imagine what are in consequence my feelings on the subject (sic).

Matters did not improve when the Germans arrived. “There is to be a first business meeting between MacDonald and the principal German delegates tonight at 9, when I must attend.”⁸³ When the meeting with the Chancellor and the Minister for Foreign Affairs finally took place (at the House of Commons the previous evening), Crowe complained that it was “a tedious meeting because I had to translate the whole conversation on either side, as they proceeded.”⁸⁴ However, Schmidt recounted that on 5 August, the day that the German delegation of Marx, Luther and Stresemann arrived in London, Stresemann

wired von Schubert in Berlin... to describe a conversation with MacDonald and Crowe. When the German delegates had stressed the need for the evacuation of territory occupied in excess of Versailles provisions, Crowe had urged them not to overlook the fact that the French government had steadily viewed the Ruhr occupation as being completely in accord with the Versailles Treaty and had declined English suggestions for a Court of Arbitration. Crowe had also said that he favoured an attempt to bring the Germans, the bankers, and the Reparation Commission into association with each other.⁸⁵

Crowe’s version of the meeting on the evening of 5 August was again an angry one. Firstly, he had to go and collect the German delegates from their hotel and then take them to the House of Commons, via a private staircase, to see MacDonald in his room for the meeting in which he was reduced to the role of a bored translator. Things did change though. “No time for a letter today. Conferences and committees sitting continuously.”⁸⁶ Four days later, he wrote: “There was a full meeting at 11 of

⁸³ *Ibid*, 5 August 1924, p. 21.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 6 August 1924, p. 25. Crowe and Corp put a more positive spin on this task. *Ablest Public Servant*, pp. 454-455.

⁸⁵ Schmidt, *Versailles and the Ruhr*, p. 172.

⁸⁶ Bodleian Library, Oxford, *Crowe Papers*, 7 August 1924, p. 28.

the Heads of Delegations. My own special committee's work was passed without criticism, in fact was highly commended.''⁸⁷

Crowe may not have believed that he had much influence over the MacDonald government during the London Conference, but at least King George V confided in him. He had an appointment at the Palace at 9.45 on 12 August:

The King was very talkative afterwards and kept me for nearly an hour discussing conference, Bolsheviki, and MacDonald. The latter had told him he seriously thought of giving up as Foreign Secretary when Parliament meets again... But he had given no indication of whom he would choose as his Foreign Secretary. He will not find the choice easy.⁸⁸

Crowe was however beginning to give grudging credit to the conference. "I write between two conferences ... Progress is slow, but, I fancy fairly assured. The one great difficulty remaining is the duration of the military occupation of the Ruhr.''⁸⁹

Despite his apparent marginalisation at the London Conference, the outcome, the acceptance by all the wartime allies and the German government of the Dawes Report, was a triumph for Crowe's principles. The Dawes Plan gave Germany the opportunity to recover economically, something that was in the interests of both the Weimar Republic and Britain. The basis for the success in London was the work done by Crowe and MacDonald at Chequers earlier that summer.

An aspect of the Dawes Plan and the London Conference about which Crowe probably had mixed feelings was the return of the U. S. A. to an involvement in European politics. Having been in isolation from European events since 1920, American diplomacy in 1924, especially in the critical period before the completion and publication of the Dawes Report, was considered to be unwelcome and clumsy.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 11 August 1924, p. 34.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 12 August 1924, p. 38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

The British preferred to be secretive, in control and resented the use of American financial muscle in European diplomacy, though not when it suited them. “The less we allow the Americans to meddle the better. They do nothing but complicate and spoil matters.”⁹⁰ The American aim was to position themselves in the middle ground between the French and the British, a tactic that Crowe felt made them “impossible.”⁹¹ The ‘transatlantic scepticism’ occasionally shown by Crowe may have been irritation, but does question whether Cohrs’s enthusiasm for a British Euro-Atlantic policy in 1924 may need to be revised, certainly from a Foreign Office point of view.

The American Government was not officially represented on the committees of experts, although Charles Dawes and Owen Young were two leading members of them. On 18 April 1924 the Foreign Office sent a letter to Frank Kellogg, the U.S. Ambassador in London, asking, unofficially, about the American position on the Dawes reports. It wanted to know “whether your government would consider that some statement of its views, whilst in no way committing itself to action, might help European governments to take wise steps at the moment?”⁹²

On the following day the Foreign Office received a reply through Sir Esme Howard in Washington from Charles Hughes, the Secretary of State. The American Government were considering making a statement to this effect. As there was an increasingly favourable climate among the American press and public opinion,

⁹⁰ UKNA, FO 371/9813, C 5110/1288/18, minute on the Expert Committee by Crowe, 25 March 1924, p. 50. Crowe said that their colleagues on the reparation committees described the American experts as “impossible.” *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Schuker, *End of French Predominance in Europe*, p. 194.

⁹² UKNA, T 160/178, 18 April 1924, File 6970/3, p. 21.

“there is therefore little danger, which there might have been before, of a government pronouncement being criticized for internal political reasons.”⁹³

On 22 April Howard reported an unusually long speech by the famously laconic President. Coolidge spoke about American involvement in the war and the peace conference and insisted that the rejection of participation should be regarded as final. He commented favourably on the Dawes Report, saying that “nothing of more importance to Europe has occurred since the Armistice”⁹⁴ and expressed satisfaction that it had been given a positive reception in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. In his more usual brief style, Coolidge hoped that Dawes would solve the reparations problem and that private American capital “would be willing to participate in advancing this loan...”⁹⁵

Although President Coolidge supported the Plan, as well as assistance on a purely financial level for Germany and Europe, he re-iterated his unwillingness to involve the U.S.A. in the “purely political controversies of Europe.”⁹⁶ Coolidge was sufficiently impressed though by the success of General Dawes and his potential as a vote-winner that he offered him the Vice-Presidential ticket in 1924. In that role for four years from 1925, Dawes “continued to exercise a benevolent influence upon Coolidge’s attitude towards reparations and war debts during the rest of his term.”⁹⁷

The frequent accusation made by the French against British foreign policy-makers that they failed to pursue a consistent line in relation to other powers could not be levelled against them over their attitude to the United States. There was

⁹³ *Ibid*, 19 April 1924, p. 22.

⁹⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1924, Volume II, 22 April 1924, p. 14.

⁹⁵ UKNA, T 160/178, File 6970/3, p.30.

⁹⁶ UKNA, FO 371/9741, C6676, the Foreign Office Memorandum on the Dawes Plan, , 23 April 1924, p.197.

⁹⁷ P. Hayes, *The Twentieth Century, 1880-1939*, London, 1978, p. 243.

no Churchillian 'Special Relationship' in the 1920's. There may not have been hatred, but there was certainly irritation on both sides. In 1924, from the British perspective, irritation bordered on hostility. This frosty relationship was demonstrated in October 1924 during a meeting between Crowe and Frank Kellogg, the American Ambassador in London. The U.S.A. made claims for the costs of the Army of Occupation, reparations and participation in German payments under the Dawes Plan. Snowden and Crowe had refuted this claim earlier in the month. Crowe said that the Reparation Commission had not included American claims when it had informed Germany of the total amount of allied claims "as we did not ratify the treaty or come into the adjustment and that therefore technically we could not make a separate treaty or make our claims preferred over those of the Allies..." Kellogg then told Crowe that he "did not think his position well taken ... the United States as a participant in the war was entitled on equitable grounds to reparations."⁹⁸ It was fortunate that MacDonald was able to win the Americans over to Dawes.⁹⁹

It was vital that the French response to the Dawes Report was equally favourable. Seydoux, Director of Commercial Affairs at the *Quai D'Orsay*, believed, strangely, that the entry into power of the new Labour Government had coincided with a greater desire on the part of Poincaré to settle the reparations question,

⁹⁸ Kellogg to the Secretary of State (Hughes), 467. 00 R 29/31, 28 October 1924, *FRUS*, 1924, Volume II, pp. 68-69.

⁹⁹ David Dilks believed that "MacDonald had a marked talent for diplomacy, and a special interest in everything which concerned relations with the United States." See D. Dilks, 'The British Foreign Office Between the Wars,' in B.J.C. McKercher and D.J. Moss (eds.), *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939*, Edmonton, 1984, p. 189.

“... despite the fact that nobody in France was under any delusion but that in many things the policy of the Labour Government was likely to be more widely separated from French desires than was the policy of Mr Baldwin.”¹⁰⁰

The Dawes Report though did not lessen Poincaré's hostility to France's great enemy, Germany. He wanted to impose a decision upon its government, through the Reparation Commission (with its Franco-Belgian majority), rather than calling her into consultation. Poincaré believed that Articles 234 and 241 of the Treaty of Versailles permitted the Reparation Commission to implement the Dawes recommendations “without any active participation by the governments concerned.”¹⁰¹ The French sought a precise answer from the Reparation Commission as to the cost of the scheme's operation for the allied governments, Germany and the Reparation Commission itself. Poincaré claimed that Dawes did not recommend Franco-Belgian departure from the Ruhr and the Rhineland until Germany had executed the plan.

MacDonald did not under-estimate the necessity of gaining Belgian acquiescence for Dawes. On 2 and 3 May 1924 he received the Belgian Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Theunis and Hymans, at Chequers and urged them strongly to do all in their power to persuade their ally, Poincaré, not to reject “the last hope for a favourable and definite settlement of the reparations issue.”¹⁰² During their conversation he emphasised the danger to Belgian and French security if Soviet-

¹⁰⁰ Crewe to MacDonald, 10 February 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, pp. 538-539.

¹⁰¹ UKNA, FO 371/ 9741, C 6676, Crewe to MacDonald, 23 April 1924, p. 184.

¹⁰² UKNA, FO 371/ 9743, C 7137/70/18, notes of conversations held at Chequers between Theunis, Hymans, MacDonald and Crowe, 2 May 1924, p. 104. Crowe played a full part in these discussions.

German 'intimacy' was increased.¹⁰³ It was an argument that would be repeated in London that summer.

In addition to the apparent 'solution' of the reparations question, Macdonald had to turn his attention towards other affairs, particularly relations with Bolshevik Russia and the policy proposed at the League of Nations that would come to be known as the Geneva Protocol. The parliamentary position of the Labour government remained precarious, relying as it did on Liberal support and therefore the attitude of the Conservative government-in-waiting was of great interest to the Foreign Office experts. In a debate in the Commons in July 1924, Austen Chamberlain told members that "we should make the maintenance of the Entente with France the cardinal object of our policy."¹⁰⁴

MacDonald's honeymoon period with the Foreign Office could not and did not last. His charm could not permanently hide the considerable political differences between a Socialist and as élitist an institution as the Foreign Office. It was not though just Bolshevik Russia, but also diplomatic style that began to concern D'Abernon. He believed that

the original impression created at the Foreign Office by the Prime Minister, which was one of great rejoicing, is gradually giving way to apprehension. They are alarmed at his views regarding Lenin, namely, that his death was a great loss to the world. Moreover, they find their new Chief extremely firm on essentials in his discussions with Poincaré and with the French Ambassador. He has been particularly resolute regarding the Palatinate, demanding acts, not words - an attitude quite contrary to diplomatic tradition."¹⁰⁵

Russia, not Germany, would be the cause of most of the Foreign Office anger directed against the Labour government. Crowe felt that

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 176, H C Debates, col 109, speech by Austen Chamberlain, 14 July 1924.

¹⁰⁵ D'Abernon, *Ambassador of Peace*, 1, p. 59.

the Russian treaty is a farce and a disgrace to this office. However I have put it formally and repeatedly on record that I entirely disapprove and protest against the whole proceeding and that the Foreign Office as a Department is free from all responsibility – which rests entirely with Ponsonby (the Minister of State). In the end he will suffer for his idiotic performance. It may even bring the government down. But that depends on many considerations, party and other.¹⁰⁶

Having been stunned in 1922 (as had everyone else though) by the Soviet-German Treaty of Rapallo, the Foreign Office had been embarrassed by Labour's almost immediate diplomatic recognition of the Bolshevik government, but an Anglo-Russian trade treaty was too much for the conservative minds of Whitehall. Yet, his biographers seemed to suggest that Crowe and MacDonald had agreed to disagree about the matter.¹⁰⁷

Crowe was not the only Foreign Office expert involved in London. In July, H.C.F. Finlayson, Financial Advisor at the British Embassy in Berlin, who had acted as secretary to Sir Robert Kindersley during the writing of the Dawes Report, was brought from Germany to attend the conference. It was due to Finlayson that the Foreign Office was kept well informed of the content of some of the private meetings of the political leaders in the middle of August. He sent despatches to Miles Lampson, Head of the Central Department, with responsibility for German affairs. Finlayson had long conversations with Dr Ritter, Commissioner for economic negotiations and reparations at the German Foreign Ministry. Ritter told him about discussions between the German Foreign Minister, Stresemann, and the French Prime Minister, Herriot.

The most significant revelation from Finlayson was that the German government would sign the Protocol at the end of the conference, if it was given a date for the military evacuation of the Ruhr, or at least the major areas. Stresemann

¹⁰⁶ Bodleian Library, *Crowe Papers*, MS. Eng. d. 2907, 8 August 1924, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰⁷ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 457.

knew that Herriot had to save face and therefore a few French troops might have to be left in some small towns near the border between the occupied and unoccupied part of Germany. He would also have to agree to some French economic conditions.

Macdonald himself confirmed that much hinged on the ongoing problem of the occupation. “Much to my regret, I see no prospects of getting the French out of the Ruhr short of a year, (and) I do not feel inclined to break the Conference on that point – the difference being only from 4 to 6 months.”¹⁰⁸

Not for the last time Britain’s Ambassador in Germany also provoked problems. In September 1924, MacDonald received a despatch from D’Abernon that contained two memoranda from two of his subordinates in the Berlin Embassy, Finlayson, the Financial Advisor, and Joseph Addison, the Counsellor. It had been decided that a loan of £40 million (800 million Gold Marks) was to be given to Germany, of which Britain was to advance £10,000,000 (most of the subscription came from the United States), a payment agreed at the conference on August 16th. This had caused uproar in certain sections of the press, who believed that it would have very harmful effects on British trade.

Finlayson and Addison observed that Britain expected “to receive in return as her share of the reparation payments of the First Reparation Year 22% (the Spa Percentage) of the total amount available (viz. 1,000 million Gold Marks or £50,000,000. The payment was to be made through the Reparation (Recovery) Act. The purpose was to enable Germany to pay its reparations ‘tribute’ in the first year of the Dawes Plan (although it appeared that Great Britain was merely paying itself),

¹⁰⁸ C 12939/11495/18, Finlayson to Lampson, 12 August 1924, Minute by MacDonald, 14 August 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 830.

“... it has been found necessary to give Germany a loan so as to put her in a position to pay such a tribute.”¹⁰⁹

Addison concurred. It had “two specific objects... maintaining the stability of her currency and enabling her to pay her reparations in kind to the Allies during the first year of the operation of the Dawes plan, because, in the estimation of the experts who prepared the plan, Germany will be unable to do so without this foreign assistance.”¹¹⁰ It was a reconstruction rather than a development loan and therefore it was different. It was for repairs (he compared it to the loan to France after the war to repair the devastated regions or to Japan following the terrible earthquake of 1 September 1923) rather than to directly effect an increase in Germany’s productive capacity,¹¹¹ although that would happen.

Addison’s enclosure contains a strong attack on the whole policy of reparations and must have been supported by D’Abernon. It is apparent that the events of 1923 had been a turning-point inside the Foreign Office. In the aftermath of the war there had been little support for the Keynes-Nicolson critique on Versailles, but it now became possible to articulate a less strident attitude to Germany. Addison’s attack was not however concerned with Germany’s capacity to pay or a need to relieve her financial system. It could have solved its own problems two years earlier, as the Embassy had frequently pointed out.

We harped on the point that Germany had eighteen months ago nearly £50,000,000 gold reserve, and this was ample both in order to convert a currency which only amounted to about £10,000,000 and to preserve stability of currency; but I presume that the political situation was such that this policy could not be followed.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ UKNA, PRO 30/69/102, C 14673/70/18, D’Abernon to MacDonald, 16 September 1924, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Addison stated that the press criticism, though confused, did wake people up to the realisation that, as the Embassy had often said, “it is not to the ultimate interest of the British Empire that any reparation be paid at all, that we lose more than we gain...” He then repeated his remarks in the margin of a Foreign Office document not preserved in the archives: “Reparations are bad, especially for us who are attempting to maintain for as long as possible the position won from 1849 to 1890 of being the workshop of the world.”¹¹³ Addison was a close friend of Crowe and it is unsurprising to discover him repeating the importance of Britain’s national interests within the 1907 Memorandum.¹¹⁴

What was even worse, though, was the economic collapse of Germany, affecting all of Central Europe. Given the political situation, a compromise had to be reached on the principle that half a loaf was better than no bread. The Dawes Plan had obvious disadvantages, but its inevitable consequences were unavoidable and Britain had therefore chosen the lesser of two evils: “In short, what might have been attacked, but what is now too late to discuss, is the whole policy of reparations. But it is idle, and also incorrect, to attack merely one side of it, namely a loan made in order to enable this policy to be carried out, on grounds which do not bear examination.”¹¹⁵

Following the success of the London Conference, MacDonald’s attention was diverted away from reparations. In September 1924, the League of Nations in Geneva proposed ‘The Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes.’ It was a rather convoluted plan. In essence, in the event of an international dispute, the

¹¹³ C 14673/70/18, D’Abernon to MacDonald, Minute by Addison, 16 September 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 888.

¹¹⁴ *Friends of Europe*, p. 28

¹¹⁵ UKNA, PRO 30/69/18, C 14673/70/18, D’Abernon to MacDonald, 16 September 1924, p. 5.

League would settle the matter by arbitration. The Council of the League of Nations would ask all the signatory states to apply sanctions against the aggressors. Herriot was immediately enthusiastic and hoped that his fellow socialist, MacDonald, would be equally willing to sign. MacDonald hesitated, partly because of his government's precarious situation. The Foreign Office had no doubts. It was a bad idea for Britain and its empire. Sibyl Crowe said that the Foreign Office objected to the provision about compulsory arbitration and also because of "its extended rules for the application of sanctions and the definition of aggression."¹¹⁶ It would have meant that Britain would be participating in a world security agreement. British imperial entanglements were paramount and certain foreign entanglements were to be avoided. The issue though did not fester because before the end of the year Labour and MacDonald were out of office. Sibyl Crowe argued that even before October 1924, Labour had had a change of heart and had no intention of proceeding further with it."¹¹⁷ Both MacDonald and Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had become hostile to it

In the autumn of 1924, following the controversy over 'the Campbell case,' the Conservatives and the Liberals combined to defeat the government in the Commons. In the General Election of October, Labour won only 151 seats to the Conservatives 419. On 4 November Baldwin again became Prime Minister. The role of leading Foreign Office officials, and Crowe in particular, in the events leading to Labour's defeat has had a lasting effect upon relations between the party and the Civil Service. During the campaign, the Labour Party was smeared by the publication of the infamous (and probably fake) 'Zinoviev Letter.' After the Foreign Office received a copy of the letter from the Secret Service (who, of course, believed it to be authentic)

¹¹⁶ S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', p. 51

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

in the second week of October, Crowe advised MacDonald to send a strong protest to the Soviet Government through its Embassy in London. After the delivery of the note, they agreed that it should be immediately published. Crowe sent a draft of the note to MacDonald, then in the middle of an election campaign in South Wales. Having made a number of amendments, MacDonald sent it back to Crowe on 24 October. On the same afternoon, Crowe was told that *The Daily Mail* had obtained a copy of the 'Zinoviev Letter' and was going to publish it the following morning. It is a matter for debate whether historians accept the argument that Crowe sincerely believed that he had MacDonald's authority to tell his Department to send the amended Note and to immediately publish it. MacDonald was certainly horrified to see it appear in the press because he had informed Crowe that he had expected to see it again before its publication.

Crowe was apparently mortified and it has been suggested that the furore surrounding the controversy contributed to his early death several months later. It has been suggested by a number of historians of the Left that it was neither an innocent mistake on Crowe's part nor a failure by Macdonald to communicate his instructions clearly, but a deliberate conspiracy by Foreign Office personnel, and Eyre Crowe in particular, to embarrass the Labour Government and Party before a General Election. Crowe was certainly a Conservative, as were most of the senior members of the Foreign Office, and he had expressed great criticism of Macdonald's appeasement policy towards the Soviet Government. But it seems to be a conspiracy theory too far. Crowe surely would have balked at any action that would have compromised his professional integrity and that of his Department. With or without the 'Zinoviev Letter' the Labour Government were not going to win the forthcoming election, although the Labour Party would certainly have done much better without it. What

may be totally discounted is the notion that Crowe, being a mere public servant, could not have appreciated the political sensitivity of the 'Letter.' Similarly, Macdonald did not deliberately engineer the defeat of the Labour Party, having proven that it was capable of being a party of government. Despite the spirited and understandable defence of her father, historians cannot accept Sibyl Crowe's argument that her father was entirely blameless and it is probable that neither would he.

To Morel of the U.D.C., the affair demonstrated "the powerlessness of a Labour Government to control the permanent officials of the Foreign Office and to protect itself against their incapacity or worse."¹¹⁸ Ever since 1924, conspiracy theorists on the Left have been presented with a 'free hit' by the 'Zinoviev Letter.' They may have exaggerated their case, but the relationship between the Foreign Office and Labour Governments have and perhaps always will be tainted by its memory.

After electoral victory, the first priority of the new Conservative government was to respond to French demands for British signature of the Geneva Protocol. They refused to sign, but a debate soon began as to the immediate future of European security. It would lead to Locarno. It was widely assumed that the decision would be that of a Foreign Office again under Lord Curzon. Having done nothing wrong during the months of the Macdonald government, Curzon presumed that Baldwin would restore him to the Foreign Secretaryship, but heard rumours though that the Office was going to someone else and went to see Baldwin. Again he cracked, complaining emotionally that

I cannot believe that you would propose to put such a terrible slur on my administration which was conducted amid extreme difficulties but not without success in the closest and pleasantest co-operation with yourself and your

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *Troublemakers*, p. 168.

predecessor, and I have always been led to think, with your just approval. It would be too much to expect me to accept such a situation.¹¹⁹

His fears proved to be justified. He was offered the Lord Presidency of the Council and the leadership of the House of Lords, a post he only accepted to please Grace, Lady Curzon, who believed that George “would be intolerable at home” with nothing to do.¹²⁰

In nine months Labour had demonstrated to many sceptics not only that it could govern, but that as a political force they were not going to go away, as some like Stanley Baldwin had hoped. John Wheatley made an impact on the Ministry of Health and Housing, Philip Snowden proved a competent Chancellor in the Gladstonian mould, but it is beyond doubt that, as both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Ramsay MacDonald was the star performer. “The government’s greatest success was in foreign policy, where the success was personal to Macdonald. Policy was conducted by him and Ponsonby, with the machinery of the Foreign Office, in more or less complete detachment from the Cabinet.”¹²¹ The manner in which MacDonald handled the London Conference drew praise even from Stanley Baldwin in the autumn of 1924,¹²² raising the question of how much experience of international negotiations and diplomacy a statesman needs to have had prior to having greatness thrust upon them. Certainly, Ernest Bevin proved a generation later (Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951) that a senior Labour politician with a history of trade union work and internal party wrangling was in possession of many of the skills required.

¹¹⁹ Curzon to Baldwin, 31 October 1924 cited in Gilmour, *Curzon*, p. 595.

¹²⁰ Clark, *The Tories*, p. 50.

¹²¹ M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour*, Cambridge, 1971, p. 37.

¹²² Baldwin went up to MacDonald after Labour was defeated in the Commons and told him: “You have done at least one good thing – the London Conference.” See Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 447.

Admiration for MacDonald's diplomatic skills was not universal though. St. Aulaire, the "arch-conservative and snobbish French Ambassador"¹²³ thought that he was "too cordial to be honest and especially too conciliatory to be sincere."¹²⁴ This cordiality certainly won over his fellow socialist, Herriot, who felt that they shared "a social and humane mystique... Even in later years he recalled their friendship with emotion; if it failed to bear fruit at subsequent conferences, the 'trickeries of expert appraisals and the ambushes of diplomats' were largely to blame."¹²⁵

In Berlin, D'Abernon did not share MacDonald's views. The openly pro-American Foreign Secretary was delighted with the Dawes Plan and American 'involvement' in Europe. In 1924, D'Abernon still believed that Britain should take the leading role in European diplomatic and financial affairs.

Ivone Kirkpatrick, later Permanent Under-Secretary at the time of the Suez crisis, but whose Foreign Office career began on leaving the army in 1919, believed that MacDonald took on too much responsibility in 1924. He thought that

the experiment of combining the two offices was not a success. In my experience no minister has any idea of the burden imposed by the Foreign Office until he has to tackle the job. MacDonald thought, for example, that he could delegate to Ponsonby and the Permanent Under-Secretary (Crowe) the duty of receiving the heads of foreign missions. But the ambassadors did not wish to be ignored and insisted on exercising their right of access to the Foreign Secretary.¹²⁶

Kirkpatrick too believed that MacDonald learned from his mistake in 1929, when Arthur Henderson filled the post. Historians though should treat with scepticism the criticism that MacDonald was wrong to assume the 'dual role.'

¹²³ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 199.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 199.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 237.

¹²⁶ Kirkpatrick, *Inner Circle*, p. 37.

Stresemann had done this for several months in 1923 and Briand, Poincaré, Laval, Tardieu and Herriot (the last three in 1932) all held the offices of President du Conseil and Minister for Foreign Affairs simultaneously. Between 1933 and 1939 (when Daladier did both until 1940) the roles were divided, with no obvious advantage to the conduct of French foreign policy. Sharing the responsibilities would have had dubious benefits for the Labour Party and may have deprived the country of a very successful Foreign Secretary in a critical year.

Some favourable winds did blow for Macdonald during 1924. In June D'Abernon reminded him that "the last few months" had seen "the removal from the path of international peace and understanding of three such obstacles as Stinnes, Helfferich and Poincaré."¹²⁷ Stinnes, the great German industrial magnate whose rant at Spa almost sabotaged the conference, died on 10 April. Helfferich, a leading Nationalist in the Reichstag, was killed in a train crash in Switzerland on 23 April. Poincaré was defeated at the polls in May and was replaced by a fellow Socialist. Germany's economy and political condition was far more stable than it had been in the previous year. The Marx-Stresemann coalition remained in power after the election in May.

Stephen Schuker believed that the 1924 financial crisis caused France, despite the short-term 'success' of the Ruhr occupation, "to give up any attempt at meaningful enforcement of the reparation clauses in the Treaty of Versailles."¹²⁸ Certainly, French governments never again attempted to use direct action in order to force Germany to fulfil its reparations obligations, but, even in 1932, there was a great reluctance to let Germany avoid submitting a final payment. It was not though a

¹²⁷ C 9765/737/18, D'Abernon to MacDonald, 16 June 1924, *DBFP*, 1, XXVI, p. 724.

¹²⁸ Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 3.

perception of the failure of the Ruhr invasion that led to a moderation of French policy, it was the benefits to France of the Dawes Plan which Poincaré himself confessed had “functioned marvellously.”¹²⁹

The accession to power of Herriot was a great stroke of good fortune. Relations with France improved, although Franco-Belgian troops were still in the Ruhr in October 1924 and would remain so until the summer of 1925, Herriot was also deeply disappointed at the opposition in Britain to the Geneva Protocol and was grateful for MacDonald’s support, despite its eventual failure.

Yet, perhaps the greatest example of good fortune was that the leader of the first Labour government became Foreign Secretary and was so knowledgeable diplomatically. This was not just a relief, but a great stimulus to Crowe and his colleagues. Despite past differences on German affairs, in 1924 the two men shared many of the same opinions and although the British Ambassador in Berlin favoured a general policy of appeasement, the Foreign Office view of Germany, as expounded in the 1907 Memorandum still held sway.

1924 was therefore a far more successful year for the Foreign Office than any since the Great War, despite the controversy over the ‘Zinoviev Letter.’ It had regained much of the influence that it had possessed before December 1916, particularly because Crowe and his staff were able to establish quickly an excellent businesslike relationship with Labour, especially with MacDonald. If Crowe’s great talents were again wasted at an international conference, others worked hard to keep other senior officials informed about negotiations behind the scenes in London. Furthermore, recently, there has been a re-evaluation of the achievements of the

¹²⁹ Bonnet, *Quai d’Orsay*, p. 88.

foreign policy of the first Labour government. This required a review of the respective roles of MacDonald and Crowe. Maisel showed, using the evidence of MacDonald's own diary, that Crowe and the Foreign Office had primary roles in policy formulation. In fact, other inexperienced Labour ministers allowed civil servants greater roles in similar ways, possibly because they wished to 'learn the ropes.' After only two months in office, MacDonald wrote that "officials dominate ministers. Details are overwhelming and ministers have no time to work out policy with officials as servants; they are immersed in pressing business with officials as masters."¹³⁰ In 1924, there was no official more likely to dominate even a Prime Minister than Sir Eyre Crowe.

Philip Bell wrote that, in 1924, Crowe "set himself to argue the case for bringing Germany into negotiations as an equal partner. So for a time MacDonald's vague idealism chimed in with Foreign Office concepts of power politics."¹³¹ In fact, Cohrs argued that MacDonald's policy towards Germany was thoroughly designed. "His core aim remained to draw Weimar Germany into a reformed Euro-Atlantic 'society' of democratic nations."¹³² If this is so, then it was MacDonald, not the privately transatlantic- sceptical Crowe, who must have formulated this policy. After the commencement of work by the experts in December 1923, the United States returned to its policy of neutrality, refusing to dictate a reparations settlement, and therefore it fell to MacDonald "not merely to bring Paris and Berlin in line behind the Dawes report of 9 April 1924, but to prepare the political ground for a sustainable reparations settlement."¹³³

¹³⁰ Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Politics*, p. 47.

¹³¹ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 146.

¹³² Cohrs, 'The first "real" peace', p. 12.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Crowe's triumph was to be in the vanguard of British policy towards Germany in 1924. It was extraordinary that MacDonald, who had been an opponent of the 1919 treaty, should have supported the continuation of reparations, albeit through the Dawes Plan. For this, Crowe must take much credit for influencing MacDonald to change his mind. On German matters, MacDonald quickly accepted Crowe's policies. These had been formulated almost twenty years earlier, but still had relevance in 1924. Crowe had consistently maintained that he would welcome a Germany that rejected militarism. Although he was not a creator of the Treaty of Versailles, he supported its compliance and, in the case of the Dawes Plan, occasional sensible revision. Crowe did not want the economic destruction of Germany as it was in Britain's interests for it to recover, not collapse. This also was the objective of both the Dawes Report and MacDonald. The great obstacle was the French government and it was MacDonald's achievement that he more than Crowe understood the necessity of American participation. At London in August, Crowe privately demonstrated that he held an outdated belief that Britain could do without the diplomatic interference of the U.S.A but again such views were widely held within the Foreign Office. Although Crowe was relegated to a minor role at the London Conference (as had happened to him at Versailles in 1919), this was primarily due to MacDonald's desire to demonstrate that a Labour leader and Foreign Secretary could function independently of an *éminence grise*. Yet when it came to the policy adopted by MacDonald, Crowe's views on Germany triumphed in London. To secure the agreement of all sides to the eventual evacuation of the Ruhr was a remarkable achievement. The inter-allied loans to Germany, particularly from the United States, did help facilitate its economic recovery. The Dawes protocol was a vindication of not

just Crowe's work in 1924, but was in harmony with his long-term philosophy on how best to deal with Germany in the re-shaped Europe after the First World War.

Chapter 6

The Foreign Office and Locarno

In the autumn of 1925, the Locarno Treaty was signed. This chapter will analyse the highly significant role of Sir Eyre Crowe and the Foreign Office prior to this event. It will show the considerable influence that Crowe continued to have on perceptions of Germany within the Foreign Office, even after his death in April 1925. The chapter will be divided into a number of sections. Firstly, the relationship between Crowe and the new Conservative government and particularly his influence on the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain will be discussed. Secondly, it will discuss the influence of the 'Crowe-Nicolson' Memorandum of January-February 1925, followed by the part played by Crowe weeks before his death in April 1925 in enlisting the support of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin for a western European security pact that included Germany. The final section will analyse the events leading to the signing of the Locarno Pact and will demonstrate that Crowe's influence inside the Foreign Office barely diminished up to that point.

The comfortable victory of the Conservative party in the general election of October 1924 enabled Stanley Baldwin to have greater freedom to choose his senior ministers. His choice of Winston Churchill, until recently a Liberal, to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a surprising one. Many observers expected Curzon to return to the Foreign Office, but instead Austen Chamberlain, the former party leader and Chancellor, was chosen after a campaign by some Tories to block Curzon's

restoration because of his poor relations with the French in the past.¹ Austen Chamberlain was a very different Foreign Secretary to Curzon. In his own estimation, he was “as true and warm a friend of France as any Englishman can be”² and claimed to “love France like a woman.”³ It was to his great advantage that he had many old friends in Whitehall and around Europe. Horace Rumbold, then in Madrid, sent a telegram of congratulation to him saying “how pleased I am to think that you are going to be my Chief.”⁴ It seems that the new Government also had admirers. Graham in Rome claimed that “There is real delight in Government circles here over the Conservative victory and you will find a very friendly disposition and desire to co-operate on the part of Mussolini...”⁵ Crowe told Chamberlain that the Diplomatic Corps “like your frankness.”⁶ He was said to have been not only admired, but liked within the Foreign Office, being described as a gentleman with “with more modesty than is usual on high.”⁷ Maisel said that “Foreign Office members viewed with appreciation Chamberlain’s intellectual abilities and the manner in which he represented their views in Cabinet.”⁸

Crowe and MacDonald had generally had a successful working relationship and it is rather surprising that Goldstein said that the appointment of Austen Chamberlain “gave Crowe the opportunity he had been waiting for, a foreign

¹ Grayson wondered why Chamberlain was appointed Foreign Secretary. Until his pro-French speech of July 1923, he had not made a great impact on foreign affairs. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and Commitment to Europe*, pp. 8-9.

² Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain*, p. 235

³ C. Petrie, *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain*, London, 1939-1940, II, p. 304.

⁴ UKNA, *Chamberlain Papers*, FO 800/256, p.3.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.6.

⁶ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 155.

⁷ ‘Locarno 1925 – The Treaty, the Spirit and the Suite’, *Historical Branch of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Library & Records Department*, No. 3, October 1991, p. 9.

⁸ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 155.

secretary he could collaborate with. The synergy Chamberlain and Crowe produced would become a powerful, if short-lived force in foreign policy.’’⁹ The Locarno Pact would eventually be the result of this collaboration, although Crowe himself did not live to see it signed. In many respects, Austen Chamberlain was, like Crowe, a man of the late Victorian and Edwardian period. In November 1924, Chamberlain may have believed that Crowe’s attitudes to Germany and France were similar to his own. Yet, they were not romantic or emotional, as his seemed to be, but were based upon a rigorous, at times cold analysis of contemporary diplomatic realities. Chamberlain was also aware of the limitations of his knowledge of foreign affairs and had little objection to the Foreign Office ‘experts’ shouldering much of his burden, but not that it should share the credit for his achievements.

For many years, the role of Sir Eyre Crowe in the genesis of, and philosophy behind, the Locarno Treaty (or Locarno Pact) of 1925 was largely unknown to historians. Credit has been given to various statesmen – Chamberlain, Briand and Stresemann – even to D’Abernon. Crowe’s daughter stated that her father’s role in the treaty’s early stages was only partly told and it took the release of the official archives to fill in the many gaps.¹⁰ It is now clear that Chamberlain’s Locarno policy was formulated in consultation with Crowe and other Foreign Office experts.

Erik Goldstein analysed the early months of the new Conservative government, prior to the death of Sir Eyre Crowe and also concluded that the Locarno Pact of 1925 was

the result of the convergence of several factors occurring simultaneously between November 1924 and March 1925, events which made Britain the diplomatic pivot of Europe. The period coincided with the beginning of

⁹ Goldstein, ‘The evolution of British diplomatic strategy’, p. 127.

¹⁰ S. Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno Pact’, p. 50.

Austen Chamberlain's tenure as foreign secretary, as well as the last months of Eyre Crowe's career as the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office.¹¹

The role played by the diplomats in the successful conclusion of the Locarno Pact had more positive results for the ministry. Goldstein felt that "these events acted as a catalyst for a resurgence in Foreign Office influence, after more than a decade in the doldrums."¹² Austen Chamberlain, often adjudged to have been a statesman of less than the highest merit,¹³ has also been praised for his work in 1924 and 1925. McKercher said that "...within five months of taking office, he forced the Cabinet to accept a Foreign Office strategy designed to end the continuing crisis on the continent."¹⁴ He did not, though, plough a lonely furrow. "Supported by Crowe and Foreign Office experts like Harold Nicolson, he sought in his own words to be 'the honest broker' in continental affairs."¹⁵

In October 1924, when Stanley Baldwin formed his second ministry, British foreign policy in Eastern Europe, and particularly towards Germany and France, was still in transition. There was still much post-war antipathy towards Germany, but French and Belgian troops were still in the Ruhr. The Dawes Plan had been adopted at the London Conference of 1924, but many people in Britain felt that the future peace of the world had, by no means, been secured. Many diplomats believed that a resurgent Germany was a serious threat to European peace.¹⁶ As we have already seen, against the wishes of many in the Foreign Office, and especially Crowe, the Coalition government of Lloyd George, including Curzon, had rejected the idea of an Anglo-French alliance in 1921. Some, including leading members of the

¹¹ Goldstien, 'The evolution of British diplomatic strategy', p. 115.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 254; Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, pp. 31-33.

¹⁴ McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', p. 96.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p.55.

recently departed Labour government, favoured a strategy in which the League of Nations acted as the guarantor of security. This required Britain to agree to a protocol that could have required British forces to be sent to any part of the world to serve under a foreign command. Crowe and many in the Foreign Office were vehement in their opposition to the protocol.¹⁷

What the Foreign Office ultimately proposed was a pact that guaranteed both France's western frontiers from attack (presumably by Germany) and yet embraced Germany as a partner in the maintenance of peace in Western Europe. However, there were a number of members of the new government that were strongly opposed to an agreement with not just the German government so soon after the end of the war, but also the highly unpopular French. To gain Cabinet support for this new strategy was a considerable achievement and "in all of this, Crowe played a central role, as much to force the Foreign Office vision of foreign policy on recalcitrant politicians as to revitalise 'the brotherhood'. Although he died in April 1925, his successors – and Chamberlain's – built on these accomplishments for the next dozen years."¹⁸ McKercher agrees with Goldstein's view that Locarno enabled the diplomats to gain much prestige, so much that McKercher said that the remaining years of the 1920s "were the salad days of the interwar Foreign Office."¹⁹ Goldstein also believed, like McKercher, that "the move to develop a focused and coherent foreign policy was driven by the combined forces of the new foreign secretary, Austen Chamberlain, and his dying permanent under-secretary, Sir Eyre Crowe."²⁰

¹⁷ See R. Henig, 'Britain, France and the League of Nations in the 1920s', in Sharp and Stone (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 151.

¹⁸ McKercher, 'Old diplomacy and new', p. 97.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Goldstein, 'The evolution of British diplomatic strategy', p. 116.

Crowe's daughter believed that the origins of the Locarno Pact "must be sought in the decision of the conservative government, after it had come to power in 1924, to reject the Geneva Protocol, and the need therefore felt to put something in its place, to satisfy the French demand for security."²¹

The year 1925 was a turning-point in the history of the Foreign Office and the German question. The acceptance of the Dawes Report at the London Conference of 1924 had led to an improvement in relations between the German government and the victorious allies. The military occupation of the Ruhr was expected to end at some time during the year and the popular clamour to exact every penny in reparations from Germany had considerably diminished both in Britain and France. The issue had not been solved, though, because the matter of inter-allied debts remained. The Conservative government that replaced Labour before the end of 1924 did, however, have a much calmer international situation to face than did the Bonar Law administration before the end of 1922.

The Dawes Plan was a temporary measure (for just five years) and the 'experts' in the Foreign Office were fully aware of this. The new Conservative Foreign Secretary gave his opinion that he was broadly "optimistic and believe that the Dawes Report can be carried out."²² But, in 1925, Austen Chamberlain needed the reparations issue to be relegated to the background of international diplomacy. It was an extremely sensitive issue for both him and the Foreign Office. It could very easily have been a barrier to diplomatic progress. Yet, neither the Foreign Office nor the Treasury tried to use it as one. In fact, in 1925, members of the Foreign Office,

²¹ S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', p. 51.

²² UKNA, Austen Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/256, p.11.

such as Crowe, Harold Nicolson and Lord D'Abernon were in the vanguard of the tendency towards reconciliation with Germany.

However, the interpersonal and interdepartmental rivalry in the senior ranks of the government became a major factor in the unfolding of events. The new Conservative Cabinet has intrigued historians as much as it must have surprised the Tory Party in November 1924. Stanley Baldwin was not in the front rank of Prime Ministers in terms of intellect, but he was one of the most astute of all party managers. Baldwin gave the two most senior offices of state to two of the leading supporters of the Lloyd George coalition. Austen Chamberlain went to the Foreign Office while Winston Churchill, twenty years in the Liberal Party and not yet even a Conservative M.P., accepted an invitation to go to the Treasury, the post having been declined by Joseph Chamberlain's other son, Neville, who preferred to return to the Health Ministry. The selection of Austen was in no small measure due to his undoubted Francophilia; the memory of Curzon had to be erased quickly from diplomatic minds. Churchill, the master showman, could put the case for the government in the Commons with the rhetorical gifts and exuberant verbosity his rivals lacked.

Historians and contemporaries have not been generous to Austen Chamberlain, "a financier-politician who knew little of Europe and a sentimentalist much devoted to the empire."²³ Churchill said that "he always played the game and always lost it."²⁴ Unlike Balfour and Curzon under Lloyd George, his Prime Minister, who was "not much interested in foreign affairs,"²⁵ gave Chamberlain considerable latitude. Therefore "Chamberlain was able to conduct his policies without interference from Baldwin, with whom his prickly temper had led him to have several

²³ M.R.D. Foot, *British Foreign Policy Since 1898*, London, 1956, p. 97.

²⁴ 'Locarno 1925 – The Treaty, the Spirit and the Suite', p. 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

quarrels before he went to the Foreign Office; though his own health broke down under pressure of work; and for much of 1928 he was away ill, leaving the office to Cushenden, a dogged Ulster Tory, his parliamentary under-secretary.”²⁶ If Chamberlain loved France and, by implication, the French, his attitude to Germany and the Germans was a different matter: “They cringe or they bully; they speak like master or servant and seem incapable of behaving as equals, simply and naturally, or of believing that are not again top dog ...”²⁷ Believing, like many of his Foreign Office mandarins, them to be politically hopeless, he told a German diplomat that they were “a nation of Poincarés.”²⁸ He was able though to sustain a good enough working relationship with Stresemann for him to have been genuinely moved by the Foreign Minister’s premature death in October 1929. The machinations of the A.A. (the German Foreign Ministry) and the Reichstag left Chamberlain as infuriated as most of his diplomats. It did not take long, therefore, for rumours to circulate in London that there might soon be an Anglo-French alliance.²⁹ Lampson minuted, on 5 November 1924, that a guarantee pact with France, similar to that of 1919, could replace the Geneva Protocol.³⁰ Later, Crowe himself, on 14 January 1925, minuted his support for such a pact.

On 16 December 1924, the Committee of Imperial Defence met and heard the views of the governments of France, Belgium, Italy and Czechoslovakia on the Protocol. France and Belgium wanted a tripartite security pact with Great Britain. Chamberlain agreed, saying that “... it would give far more effective security than

²⁶ Foot, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 101.

²⁷ UKNA, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 4/1/1269, Chamberlain to Mary Carnegie, 25 April 1926.

²⁸ AC 53/569, Chamberlain to Tyrrell, 9 December 1926.

²⁹ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 389.

³⁰ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 164.

the Protocol could ever do.”³¹ Curzon suggested that Crowe, “with his great authority,” should be the chairman of a sub-committee of the C.I.D. Chamberlain, not wanting to overload Crowe, opposed this and so Hankey was given the job.

In Berlin, on 29 December 1924, having recently returned from a visit to London, D’Abernon suggested to Carl von Schubert, State Secretary at the German Foreign Office, that the German government revive the Cuno offer of December 1922. Stresemann believed that D’Abernon must have been acting with his government’s backing and on 20 January 1925, through D’Abernon, the German government proposed a multilateral pact also involving Britain, France and Italy, with the United States acting as trustee, ensuring that no party waged war “for a lengthy period (to be eventually defined more specifically)...”³² Although the reaction of the experts in London was ‘cool,’ Crowe and his colleagues believed that the proposals could complement the initiatives then being proposed by the Foreign Office.³³ In fact, on 19 December, Crowe had said that a declaration could be framed that both France and Germany could sign, although there were problems with the issue of the defence of Germany’s eastern frontier.³⁴

Austen Chamberlain, the Conservative Party and the Foreign Office had strongly opposed the Geneva Protocol,³⁵ but did want to reduce tension in Europe, partly by allaying many of France’s security concerns. He “saw Franco-German tensions as the crux of the continent’s problems. He believed that the only way to

³¹ S. Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno Pact’, p. 52.

³² C 980/459/18, memorandum from the German Foreign Office, enclosed in a telegraph from D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 20 January 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 283.

³³ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 168.

³⁴ S. Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno Pact’, p. 54.

³⁵ W 362/9/98, minute by Chamberlain, 4 January 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 255. See also Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 163.

promote conciliation was to reduce France's fears of a resurgent Germany."³⁶ To this end, on 4 January 1925, Chamberlain sent a memorandum around the Foreign Office seeking the experts' wisdom on the matter. The papers that he received reveal much about their attitude to Germany just over six years after the end of the war. Ronald McNeill, Chamberlain's Parliamentary Under-Secretary, wrote that Germany "always has dishonoured her signature when it suited her."³⁷ However, the historian of the Foreign Office, Headlam-Morley, minuted to Eyre Crowe that "a statement of this nature should not be accepted and should not be made the basis of our policy without a fuller statement of the facts on which it is based."³⁸ Historically, as far back as Bismarck, was Germany any worse than any other State, he asked?

McNeill then analysed the options open to Great Britain and of the possible future European situation. Britain must either keep Germany effectively disarmed, or, must maintain superior defensive forces which will succeed in "making Germany dangerous to herself." The traditional policy of preventing the dominance of any one power on the continent must be maintained and therefore Britain could not "allow the low countries to fall into the hands of a great military Power." In an age of submarine and aerial warfare this policy was more, not less necessary. McNeill asked if an order to reduce the danger of a repetition of a German invasion of France and Belgium "what are the advantages in, and the objections to, proclaiming that intention in advance?" He believed that "if we had been definitely committed beforehand to support France in 1914, there would have been no war." He recognised though what would be the possible objections to this announcement of British foreign policy – "our traditional dislike of putting our signature to any document that may

³⁶ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 388.

³⁷ W686/9/98, note by R. McNeill, 16 January 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 269.

³⁸ W686/9/98, minute by Sir James Headlam-Morley, 16 January 1925, *ibid*.

commit us to engage in a future war; and the opposition to which this dislike would give rise in the press and in Parliament. Also, perhaps, the difficulty of obtaining consent of dominions.’’³⁹

Unfortunately, there are no minutes of the conference that took place within the Foreign Office on 18 January 1925, but we do know its conclusions because they were summarised in a paper written by Harold Nicolson on 23 January. Geographical and demographic factors meant that Britain would never be able to extinguish French fears of Germany. Britain must either have no foreign policy at all (still a popular option inside the ministry) or have some kind of security agreement that included France. Chamberlain himself though ‘‘was much struck with one observation made by Mr Headlam-Morley at our conference... that the first thought of Castlereagh after 1815 was to restore the Concert of Europe, and that the more ambitious peacemakers of Versailles, when they framed the Covenant, still left a gap which only a new Concert of Europe can fill.’’⁴⁰ Grayson claimed that the idea of a new Concert of Europe ‘‘became a hallmark of Chamberlain’s policy,’’⁴¹ including the League of Nations.

Salzmann totally disagreed that Chamberlain had such an aim and even believed that Grayson misunderstood the term, ‘Concert of Europe.’⁴² What is undeniable is that the aims of the senior officials of the Foreign Office were in complete accord with Chamberlain’s aims. They had moved easily away from the post-Versailles hard line on reparations fulfilment, through Lloyd George’s and

³⁹ W 686/9/98, Note by Mr Mc Neill, 16 January 1925, *ibid*, pp. 269-271.

⁴⁰ FO 371/11065, W 1252/9/98, minute by Chamberlain, 21 February 1925 cited in Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and Commitment to Europe*, p. 39.

⁴¹ Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and Commitment to Europe*, p. 38.

⁴² Salzmann, *Rapallo and After, 1922-1934*, p. 56.

Curzon's difficulties with Poincaré, MacDonalds's determination to gain acceptance of the Dawes Report and on now to Chamberlain's vision of international 'bonhomie.'

At the end of January 1925, the sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence submitted its report, rejecting nine of the sixteen articles of the Geneva Protocol. It also submitted a declaration, written by Crowe, to be signed by Britain, France and Belgium and which assumed that Britain would be prepared to fight if the Channel ports of France and Belgium were in danger of being invaded by another nation.⁴³ It was a declaration that was certainly in the spirit of the 1907 Memorandum.

When the French government revealed on 9 February 1925 that it was willing to discuss the German offer, Chamberlain concurred. He was "strongly backed by Crowe, who was quick to welcome the German offer, declaring that it was 'a move in the right direction and ought to be encouraged'."⁴⁴ But, on 19 February, in the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Foreign Secretary was attacked by a group of Cabinet colleagues including Churchill, Birkenhead and Curzon. Desperately, Chamberlain requested that

if any member of the committee has any doubt about the extreme difficulty of conducting foreign policy when in fact you have no foreign policy, or of the dangers which assist us in Europe if we do not come to an early decision, I would beg them to hear my chief of staff, Sir Eyre Crowe, who has not only studied but handled foreign affairs for forty years. He will speak with an experience which gives him more authority than I have in my official capacity.⁴⁵

Chamberlain's "passionate view that you cannot conduct the foreign policy of this country unless you give France some feeling of security"⁴⁶ temporarily

⁴³ See S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', pp.53-54.

⁴⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 476.

⁴⁵ S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', p.62.

⁴⁶ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 478.

convinced Balfour to reluctantly support him. Curzon, unsurprisingly, “hedged... and refused to come to any decision.”⁴⁷ The question was then referred to the whole Cabinet for further discussion. One thing was not in doubt – the dependence of the Foreign Secretary on his Permanent Under-Secretary in matters related to Germany and western Europe. This was soon proven even more.

Following Austen Chamberlain’s departmental conference, Harold Nicolson, under the supervision of Sir Eyre Crowe,⁴⁸ drew up a memorandum that analysed the current situation in Europe. On 20 February, Chamberlain minuted that “it represents not only the personal opinion of the Secretary of State, but the considered view of the Foreign Office as a whole.”⁴⁹ Crowe and Nicolson identified the lingering anger of the Central Powers at the loss of territory in 1919, the fear of Great Britain’s former allies of losing what they had won and the isolation of Russia from the Concert of Europe.

The primary concern of the British government, though, remained Germany, which although currently impotent “will sooner or later again become a powerful military factor.”⁵⁰ Yet, few Germans wanted another war against the British Empire and it was doubtful that most wanted a war of revenge against France. To all Germans the two most objectionable provisions of the Peace Settlement were “the Polish corridor and the partition of Silesia.”⁵¹

In Nicolson’s opinion, “Germany will sooner or later recover. She will certainly desire to revise the Polish clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. If France were isolated, and British neutrality to be assured, she might also endeavour to attack

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ C 2201/459/18, memorandum by Nicolson and minute by Chamberlain, 20 February 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 311.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

France.⁵² He also believed that “unless France can be secured against their menace, she will be driven to expedients which in the end will only provoke the German revenge of which she stands in terror.”⁵³ Nicolson stressed that in a situation “of such incertitude, the only sound line of British policy is the path of British interests. The road is too dark for any altruism or digression; it is our own security which must remain the sole consideration.” The policy of ‘splendid isolation’ was not practicable any longer. “Geography and aeronautics show that isolation is not in our case a scientific fact.”⁵⁴ Britain had to defend her imperial dominions, the sea communications between herself and those dominions and, of course, Britain itself. The defence of Britain required that no continental Power could be allowed to dominate the ports of the Channel and the North Sea and that the hostility of any of the countries that possessed these ports to Britain was to be prevented. Any country that invaded France or Belgium threatened Britain both via the Channel and aerial invasion. It was therefore imperative that Britain reached some understanding with France and Belgium, perhaps a guarantee, that no other Power would be permitted to control these ports. A guarantee to France and Belgium would make “a very important contribution to European security.”⁵⁵ The smaller nations would be given greater security and be encouraged to make peace. As McNeill had written, Germany would not have risked war in 1914 had she known that Britain would assist France.⁵⁶

Nicolson saw no reason “to prevent the eventual inclusion of Germany within the guarantees of security thus established.”⁵⁷ As far as the French were concerned, they would know that their “ultimate security is regarded as of direct

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 315.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 316.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 317.

⁵⁶ W 686/9/98, notes by Mr R. McNeill, 16 January 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 271.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 317.

interest to the British Empire. The provocative policy inspired by her present uncertainty will tend to diminish; she will contemplate with less alarm the impending evacuation of the Rhineland; she will be less inclined to contemplate the Little Entente as an armed camp to the east of Germany; she will be able to settle down to financial stabilisation and to policy of debt-repayment.”⁵⁸

Nicolson’s (and Crowe’s) conclusion was unequivocal: “... until we can quieten France, no concert of Europe is possible, and we can only quieten France if we are in the position to speak to her with the authority of an Ally.

“The essential interests of Imperial Defence are thus closely related to a policy of European security. The first hope of stability in Europe lies in a new entente between the British Empire and France.”⁵⁹

The memorandum was sent to the Cabinet, but was forcefully opposed by a “powerful coalition of Curzon, Balfour, Amery, Churchill and Birkenhead, all of whom wanted no continental commitments.”⁶⁰ They may have believed that the memorandum would affect the solidity of Germany’s pact with Russia made at Rapallo.⁶¹ It was a powerful argument, as no member of the British government wanted a powerful union of Germany with Bolshevik Russia, although D’Abernon argued that such a bloc posed no military threat to Europe.⁶² Churchill though, wrote a long letter to Chamberlain in which, in effect, he argued against the Crowe Memorandum. “It should never be admitted ... that Britain cannot, if the worst comes to the worst, stand alone.”⁶³ When France made a real peace with Germany, he said,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁶⁰ Goldstein, ‘The evolution of British strategy’, p. 132.

⁶¹ Northedge, *Troubled Giant*, p. 249.

⁶² Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 164.

⁶³ S. Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno Pact’, p. 63.

then Britain “will seal the bond with all our strength.”⁶⁴ Chamberlain replied, repeating his (and Crowe’s) earlier arguments and so stormy Cabinet meetings soon followed.

At a Cabinet meeting on 4 March, at which the Prime Minister, Baldwin was absent because he was visiting his critically ill mother, Chamberlain was only permitted “to tell Herriot that he attached the highest importance to Germany’s overture for a quadrilateral agreement of mutual security, hoped that the proposal would be most carefully considered, and would like to know whether the French shared the British government’s views.”⁶⁵ If they wished the British government to participate, it would not obstruct any such project, but Chamberlain had to say that he could not agree to any specific plan or promise the support of the Dominions. “These half-hearted overtures caused dismay...”⁶⁶ not just to Herriot, but to Chamberlain and Crowe.

But, on 4 March, the former Liberal Foreign Secretary, Lord Grey of Falloden, still a figure of great authority in diplomatic circles, made a powerful speech in Parliament in which he advocated the British Empire’s participation in a regional security agreement.⁶⁷ On the following day, Chamberlain admitted that the German government had made a proposal and said that the government were considering such an agreement. Chamberlain then travelled to Geneva to attend the Council of the League of Nations. In Paris, on 7 March, en route to Geneva, Chamberlain held a critical meeting with Herriot. He told him that not only was Great Britain unwilling to make a security pact with France, nor an Anglo-Franco-Belgian

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 479.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Northedge, *Troubled Giant*, p. 250.

one, but it was also not going to sign the Geneva Protocol.⁶⁸ “On the other hand, the German proposals seemed to us to offer a hope of a solution in which we might co-operate.”⁶⁹ Herriot could not hide his disappointment. Herriot suspected that Dr Luther, the German Chancellor, “up to a point an honest man,”⁷⁰ was really playing to his domestic political audience. Herriot was bitter that France had been forced to subscribe to the German loan in 1924 by the United States while being unable to repair her own devastated regions. Germany was now spending large sums on re-development and was therefore rapidly recovering. Herriot was profoundly worried: “From my heart I tell you that I look forward with terror to her making war upon us again in ten years.”⁷¹

For one British diplomat, this was too much. From Geneva, Chamberlain questioned Crowe about the opinions of the British Ambassador in Berlin:

Lord D'Abernon's telegrams seem to indicate that he thinks that Germany has offered everything that could be asked and it would be fatal to demand more. If this is the real attitude of German government nothing can come of their memorandum... Is there not a danger that Lord D'Abernon misunderstands real situation... If Germany does not advance with every step we take, still more if she retreats as we advance, our effort is doomed to failure and must be abandoned at once; does Lord D'Abernon see this and does he hold suitable language to German government? Unless we press Germany at least as much as France our whole effort will fail? Does not Lord D'Abernon need full confidential instructions for his guidance, lest in atmosphere of Berlin he should wholly misconceive situation?⁷²

Chamberlain believed that Germany foresaw too many difficulties about joining the League of Nations and questioned the Ambassador's resolution. He asked,

⁶⁸ C 3367/459/18, Chamberlain to Crowe, 7 March 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 344.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 344.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 345.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 346.

⁷² C 3376/459/18, Chamberlain to Crowe, 9 March 1925, *ibid*, p. 356.

“Does Lord D’Abernon realise that unless they join League on the same footing as other Great Powers nothing can come of their proposals?”⁷³

The Foreign Secretary’s main difficulty, though, remained convincing his sceptical Cabinet colleagues. In Geneva, Chamberlain wished to tell the disappointed and worried Herriot that the British government agreed to become part of a western European security agreement and he telegraphed Baldwin seeking the authority to do so. On 11 March, the day before Chamberlain announced that Britain would not sign the Geneva Protocol, Crowe was present at an informal Cabinet meeting in which strong objections were given by Amery, Churchill and Birkenhead. Chamberlain’s hope of a four-power pact seemed forlorn. Crowe wrote angrily to him in Geneva: “I cannot describe to you the despicable impression made upon me by this discussion, nor the feeling, I may frankly say, of indignation in which I left it.”⁷⁴ Churchill had said that France “could be left to stew in her own juice... all we had to do was to go our own way and in a few years time we should see France on her knees begging for assistance and allowing us to impose anything whatsoever on her.”⁷⁵ Amery thought that the Dominions would oppose it and that the government should just “avoid the danger of any entanglements and to restrict ourselves to developing moral atmospheres by pacific methods, to the exclusion of anything to do with war.”⁷⁶ Crowe told Chamberlain that he had never heard “even Ramsay MacDonald, in his most woolly-headed pronouncements, talk such utter rubbish as Mr Amery poured forth.”⁷⁷ Only Lord Robert Cecil said anything sensible.⁷⁸ After hearing other ministers expressing their doubts, Crowe was given a final chance to speak. “This he

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 357.

⁷⁴ Dutton, *A Gentleman in Politics*, p. 244.

⁷⁵ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p.481.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ Dutton, *A Gentleman in Politics*, p. 244.

⁷⁸ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 173.

did without mincing his words.”⁷⁹ Churchill was wrong. A quarrel with France would lead to a break in the Entente, with serious consequences for Europe. The statements of some ministers would, in effect, make it appear that the British Foreign Secretary had “grossly misled the French Prime Minister.”⁸⁰ Baldwin, who had remained silent throughout, thanked Crowe and asked him to leave the room whilst the Cabinet discussed the policy privately. Crowe told Chamberlain that he was left with the impression that the Cabinet group was not judging the issue on its merits, but deliberately placing the Foreign Secretary in an untenable position.⁸¹ Chamberlain had to consider his response.

On 18 March 1925, the Cabinet majority, led by Churchill, rejected the proposed pact again. Northedge observed, but did not explain why, only six days later, Chamberlain stood up in the House of Commons and made a speech in which he was able to sum up the German offer, with some amendments favourable to the British government.⁸² Days earlier, Chamberlain had considered resignation. He could no longer tolerate the interference of his colleagues in the management of his ministry.⁸³ On 15 March, he directed Crowe to speak on his behalf to the Prime Minister, informing him that, were it not for the serious consequences, he would have cancelled his meeting with Herriot and returned immediately to London in order to resign. Crowe and Corp argued that

this threat had a dramatic effect when conveyed personally by Crowe to Baldwin over the weekend. Baldwin at once told him to reassure Chamberlain ‘that there is no question of his not having his full confidence. What was said

⁷⁹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 482.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Dutton, *A Gentleman in Politics*, p. 244.

⁸² Northedge, *Troubled Giant*, p. 250. See also, *Hansard*, 182, column 316, speech by Austen Chamberlain, 24 March 1925.

⁸³ See Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and Commitment to Europe*, pp. 51-55 on the question of the evacuation of Cologne, Chamberlain’s threat to resign and Crowe’s role.

at the informal meeting by individual ministers must not be taken as constituting a decision of the Cabinet.’⁸⁴

On 19 March, Chamberlain returned to London and quickly met Baldwin. The next day, Chamberlain attended a Cabinet plenary that accepted that the German proposals were the best way forward as a basis for European security. But, Maisel said that “Crowe’s words in the conference of Ministers of 11 March had had a decisive effect.”⁸⁵ After he had left the room that day, the Cabinet had decided “to continue the policy of refusing any pact with France... unless a quadrilateral arrangement could also be made to include Germany.”⁸⁶ However, Steiner agreed with Crowe’s biographers that

it would take Chamberlain’s threat of resignation and further arguments in the cabinet in his absence (with Eyre Crowe... playing a vital part) before Baldwin authorized the specific offer of British participation in future talks for a quadrilateral pact.⁸⁷

When Chamberlain spoke in the Commons on 24 March he first announced that the British government was unable to sign the Geneva Protocol⁸⁸ and then informed the House, officially, of the German proposals:

If I understand them rightly, they amount to this: that Germany is prepared to guarantee voluntarily what hitherto she has prepared accepted under the compulsion of the Treaty, that is, the status quo in the West; that she is prepared to eliminate, not merely from the West, but from the East, war as an engine by which any alteration in the Treaty position is to be obtained... In regard to the West she is prepared to renounce all desire of change, and to enter into a mutual Pact to guarantee the existing situation. In suggesting arbitration in the East, she does not propose or suggest that her Eastern frontiers should become subject to such treaties of arbitration. She is prepared to say that she renounces the idea of recourse to war to change the frontiers in the East.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 483.

⁸⁵ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 175.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 391.

⁸⁸ *Hansard*, 182, column 314, speech by Austen Chamberlain, 24 March 1925.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, column 318. Chamberlain also favoured Germany’s membership of the League of Nations on an equal footing to all the other nations. *Ibid*, column 321.

Therefore, this was what Crowe had sought in the 1907 Memorandum – a peaceful Germany. From the perspective of the British government, it was a very significant development. Crowe did not live to witness the signing of the Locarno Pact. On 28 April 1925 he died of kidney failure. He had been ill for some time and had belatedly agreed to go on an extended sick leave. Crowe then became seriously ill and within a few days was dead. Austen Chamberlain was deeply affected: “He was a great public Servant, devoted to duty, delightful to work with, of immense knowledge and experience and proved judgement ... I did not think that I would have felt so much for a man whom I have only known intimately for a few months.”⁹⁰ The Foreign Office was “plunged into gloom”.⁹¹ The respect with which Crowe was held by many of his contemporaries was undeniable, from Clemenceau in Paris in 1919 (“Crowe, c’est un homme à part”) to young members of the Foreign Office such as Ivonne Kirkpatrick and their seniors (Vansittart, etc.). Ramsay Macdonald was surely not being insincere when he told Lady Crowe in 1931 that “even after all these years it is impossible to speak of Crowe without tears in one’s eyes.”⁹²

Some historians though have mistakenly accused Crowe of being ‘anti-German.’⁹³ His biographers rightly denied this. He believed, they said, in a strong Germany that could be a positive advantage for the world, but if it turned to militarism and tried to dominate Europe, Britain had to oppose it. Many very important members of the Foreign Office, Hardinge, Tyrrell, Rumbold, Vansittart, Wellesley and Sargent, for example, shared Crowe’s view. This firm attitude to

⁹⁰ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 176.

⁹¹ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 489.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 490.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 134-135, Note 64. Several authors, for example G.P. Gooch, believed that Crowe suffered from a ‘violent Germanophobia.’ Gooch, *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft*, p. 9.

Germany was generally, but not entirely in opposition to any policy of appeasement. They did not support the French and the Belgians in the Ruhr, did not oppose the Dawes Plan or the early evacuation of the Rhineland, but they observed the frequent breaches by the Germans of the disarmament clauses of the Peace Treaty and retained a suspicion of German governments and politicians throughout this period.

It was no surprise that Sir William Tyrrell was quickly chosen to replace Crowe. Despite a history of drink problems, particularly following the loss of a son during the war, he was the natural successor. Tyrrell had an unrivalled *curriculum vitae*. From 1907 he had been Grey's Private Secretary and had worked closely with his two predecessors at the Foreign Office. He had much in common with Crowe in particular. Tyrrell had been educated in Germany, spoke the language fluently, was profoundly suspicious of German militarism and favoured an Anglo-French alliance to contain Germany. In August 1916 he and Ralph Paget had proposed that Germany should be checked in Eastern Europe by the creation of buffer states such as Poland and Yugoslavia. Unlike Crowe, Tyrrell believed that Germany was actually planning a war of revenge in Europe.⁹⁴ Tyrrell believed that Germany had few arguments, only excuses, for not paying reparations and was deliberately weakening her own economy in order to avoid fulfilling her obligations. He disagreed with the view held by many Frenchmen that by destroying Germany's economic base her military threat would best be diminished. Tyrrell supported an alliance with France because it would either guarantee her security against German aggression or would effect a greater degree of moderation in her views.

There were other new men in 1925 who had some influence in the events that unfolded. On 15 January 1925, in Germany, Dr Hans Luther formed a

⁹⁴ FO 371/6880, N 13814/105/38, Minute by Tyrrell, 19 November 1921 cited in Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 55.

minority cabinet consisting of two Liberal and two Catholic parties. The new Chancellor was not affiliated to any political party, but did have a recent record of achievement. From 1918 to 1922 he had been Mayor of Essen, followed by a year as Minister of Agriculture. Between 1923 and January 1925 he had been Minister of Finance under Stresemann and Marx, during which time he had been responsible for currency reform and the acceptance and execution of the Dawes Plan. D'Abernon said that he had "none of the minor graces, but a sturdy presence not unlike a Thames tug."⁹⁵

The most significant feature of the new coalition was the continued presence of Stresemann as Foreign Minister. The foreign policy of Germany between 1923 and 1929 was the foreign policy of Gustav Stresemann. He had been a German Nationalist during the First World War. The Foreign Office was aware of this. In the chaos of party politics in the early years of the Weimar Republic, Stresemann became the most significant figure in the German National People's Party (the D.N.V.P.), a right-wing political group that favoured the return of the monarchy, but not the violent overthrow of the Weimar Republic.

Stresemann though, due in part to his mishandling of the election,⁹⁶ was partly responsible for the new German Head of State. Following the death on 9 February of Ebert, Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg was elected President of the Weimar Republic on 26 April 1925. Ambassador Sthamer tried to reassure Austen Chamberlain that the hero of Tannenberg was no threat, telling him that the Marshal

was an honest man, a soldier who had seen too much of the horrors of war to desire a repetition of them, and who knew too well Germany's incapacity to wage a war to think of provoking it. He was a man who would keep his oath, and his assumption of the Presidency threatened no monarchical restoration.

⁹⁵ 'Locarno 1925 – The Treaty, the Spirit and the Suite', p. 9.

⁹⁶ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 392.

He would observe and defend the Constitution, and behind him were gathered all the sober and strong elements of the German people.⁹⁷

Chamberlain was impressed. He told Sthamer that it “would be idle to pretend that the election ... had not produced a very unfavourable impression upon public opinion in this country as well as in France (but) ... I myself did not take this view. ” Having read the Chancellor’s recent speech and of the President’s approval of it, “in these circumstances, I saw no reason to change my policy.”⁹⁸ Thirty years later, Vansittart wrote a far more damning criticism of Hindenburg and the Germans.⁹⁹

In April 1925, the Foreign Office was eager to circulate American concern. In Paris, Seydoux informed Phipps that he had had a conversation with Winston, an American official about the matter. Winston “seemed to be in absolute despair over Hindenburg’s election”¹⁰⁰ and asked what could be done to satisfy France’s security requirements. Seydoux told him that the only answer was “a close understanding between France, the United States and Great Britain.”¹⁰¹ Phipps was certainly articulating the feeling of the British Government when he told Seydoux that he hoped that the conversations then taking place with the Germans would not be affected by the result of the election. Seydoux agreed that they must continue, although perhaps with less speed than previously. It could not be disputed that fourteen million Germans had voted for Hindenburg. Yet, not for the only time, Phipps praised Seydoux who “seemed very frightened, but only too anxious – as

⁹⁷ C 5852/459/18, Chamberlain to Addison, 30 April 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 469.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 471.

⁹⁹ “... he too fitted his people, for like them he had no political mind.” Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁰ C 6047/459/18, Phipps to Tyrrell, 29 April 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 464.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

indeed he always is – to find some peaceful issue to all our terrible problems.’’¹⁰²

Phipps though was less impressed with the return to high office of Philippe Berthelot, who following the amnesty given by Herriot’s government, had regained his old position of Secretary-General at the Quai d’Orsay in April 1925. Berthelot was believed to be opposed to the talks with the German Government and Phipps hoped that he would not be able to influence Briand to adopt that view.

In Berlin, Stresemann told D’Abernon that he feared that the extreme Right would exploit Hindenburg’s elevation to challenge his policy of conciliation, although he admitted that a security pact signed by the Field-Marshal would have more weight than one signed by a socialist president.¹⁰³ Stresemann told D’Abernon that Hindenburg was initially reluctant to stand, but had been persuaded by Tirpitz. Stresemann assessed ‘‘the slyness and duplicity of Tirpitz (as) extremely high’’¹⁰⁴ and ‘‘with every good reason.’’¹⁰⁵ D’Abernon was apparently less nervous. He told Chamberlain that, according to Hindenburg’s friends, the ageing President was particularly ‘‘not to be troubled and to get to bed at 9.’’¹⁰⁶

1925 also saw changes of government in France. On 17 April, the Herriot government fell. Paul Painlevé became President of the Council, but of far greater importance was the return of Aristide Briand as Foreign Secretary. Other changes, more remarkable, also occurred. *Le Matin* sent its notoriously Germanophobic commentator, Jules Sauerwein, to Berlin for the presidential elections. Confirming both Sthamer’s and D’Abernon’s opinion given to the Foreign Office, he told his readers that the Field-Marshal was very honest, but was ‘‘not likely to take a very

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 465.

¹⁰³ C 5969/459/18, D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 3 May 1925, *ibid*, p. 476.

¹⁰⁴ C 6250/35/18, D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 3 May 1925, *ibid*, p. 477.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, minute by Tyrrell.

¹⁰⁶ C 5969/459/18, D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 3 May 1925, *ibid*, p. 476.

close interest in politics or diplomacy.”¹⁰⁷ Most significantly, Sauerwein reported that many Germans now favoured a rapprochement with France. The new government must now reply quickly to the German offer of a pact. Stresemann told him that if no reply was received in the next week, then he would have to announce in the Reichstag that the allies had failed to respond to an offer made by Germany because of their continued suspicion of her and their own internal divisions.¹⁰⁸ On 12 May 1925, the French Government gave its response to the German offer to the British Government.¹⁰⁹ The change of administration was not the main reason for the delay. France would not respond until they and the British agreed on military control. France refused to separate disarmament from the evacuation of the Cologne zone and the question of general security.

In the Prime Minister’s room in the House of Commons on 26 May 1925, Chamberlain gave his comments on the French reply to the Cabinet.¹¹⁰ Briand had replied in a “general tone ... (that) was all that could be desired and more than could have been expected.”¹¹¹ Briand had two main principles and Chamberlain assented to them both: firstly, that any pact should supplement and not contravene the Versailles Treaty, and secondly, “to avoid all possibility of war by providing for a peaceful solution of all conflicts.”¹¹² But, Chamberlain reminded the Cabinet that in February 1921 France had made a treaty with Poland and that any western security pact might weaken this. France again wished the British Government to “extend their

¹⁰⁷ C 6056/459/18, Crewe to Chamberlain, 5 May 1925, *ibid*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁹ C 6493/459/18, Crewe to Chamberlain, 13 May 1925, *ibid*, pp. 493-495.

¹¹⁰ C 7204/459/18, notes on meeting of the Cabinet Committee, 26 May 1925, *ibid*, p. 534.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹¹² *Ibid*.

obligations.”¹¹³ The French proposals “sought to link up the western with the eastern settlement ... (and therefore) it was necessary for His Majesty’s Government to guard themselves.”¹¹⁴

At 5 p.m. on 20 July 1925, Dr Sthamer delivered the German reply to the French note to the Foreign Office.¹¹⁵ In the Reichstag, Stresemann welcomed the honouring of the commitment made at the London Conference in August 1924 that the Ruhr would be evacuated twelve months hence and was confident that the three towns in the Cologne zone would also be evacuated.

In 1925, the Foreign Office diplomats generally agreed about the nature of German foreign policy. There were though dissenting voices. From Warsaw, the Minister Plenipotentiary, Sir William Max Muller, wrote a private letter to Miles Lampson, in which expressed his doubt about Germany’s renunciation of the use of force and its guarantee of the eastern frontiers of France and Belgium: “do you really maintain that, after our experience in 1914, we are justified in considering that future generations in Germany would hold themselves bound by any such declaration?”¹¹⁶ Muller believed that Germany was untrustworthy and through the proposed pact that it was distinguishing between its eastern and western frontiers. Muller felt that “the real object of the proposals is to pave for a revision of the Eastern frontiers.”¹¹⁷ Months earlier, the German minister in Warsaw, had told him that the Germans “would never accept the Polish Corridor” and Muller admitted that he could

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ C 9636/459/18, Chamberlain to D’Abernon, 20 July 1925, *DBFP*, 1, XXVII, p. 686.

¹¹⁶ FO 371/10732, letter from Muller to Lampson, 20 May 1925 cited in Carsten, *Britain and Weimar*, p. 171.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

understand their “natural and even inevitable” position.¹¹⁸ Carsten pointed out that regaining the Polish Corridor was one of Stresemann’s main foreign policy aims. He accepted the western boundaries as imposed by the Treaty of Versailles as final, but that those in the east should be revised. Carsten said that these opinions were also held by nearly all the other German political parties.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, was Sybil Crowe being naïve when she suggested that had Eyre Crowe lived, he would have completed the ‘other half’ of the Locarno Pact by gaining Germany’s agreement to its eastern frontiers?¹²⁰ This would definitely have been far more difficult to seal than just the proposed western pact.

On 7 September 1925, Stresemann sent a confidential letter to ex-Crown Prince Wilhelm in which he explained the real German foreign policy aims on the eve of the Locarno Conference: “In my opinion there are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the more immediate future.

“In the first place the solution of the Reparation question in a sense tolerable for Germany, and the assurance of peace, which is an essential premise for the recovery of our strength.

“Secondly, the protection of Germans abroad, those 10 to 12 millions of our kindred who now live under a foreign yoke in foreign lands.

“The third task is the readjustment of our eastern frontiers; the recovery of Danzig, the Polish corridor, and a correction of the frontier in Upper Silesia.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ S. Crowe, ‘Crowe and Locarno Pact’, p. 56.

“In the background stands the union with German Austria, although I am quite clear that this not merely brings no advantages to Germany, but seriously complicates the problem of the German Reich.”¹²¹

It should be repeated that Stresemann was a fervent Nationalist during the First World War. Unlike many other nationalists though, he was a realist. He did not believe that the return of the monarchy was a possibility in the near future. The allies would not permit it. Nor would they accept wholesale treaty revision, but with a subtle diplomatic approach, Stresemann believed that gains could be made, satisfying German demands for greater national prestige by the restoration of some of the losses suffered in Paris in 1919, eventually even the removal of the hated war-guilt clause and an end to the payment of reparations. An international conference was therefore a critical vehicle for him to move Germany forwards in this direction.

If Paris was completely the wrong venue for the post-war peace conference with Germany in 1919, then the little lakeside Swiss town of Locarno was an inspired choice. More importantly, though, was that members of the German delegation were treated as equals, not as pariahs. During the conference, Briand was able to exploit the beauty of Lake Maggiore to further the cause of diplomacy. On 10 October 1925, he hired a small launch, the *Orange Blossom*, and invited the leading players, especially Chamberlain, Luther and Stresemann to celebrate Mrs Chamberlain's birthday. The future Lady Chamberlain must have been disappointed as the statesmen used their brief separation from press and technical experts to discuss

¹²¹ Stephen J. Lee, *The Weimar Republic*, p. 87.

a compromise on the awkward question of Germany's future participation in League of Nations sanctions.

The statesmen present at Locarno on 16 October 1925 initialled the following eight documents:-

1. A Treaty of Mutual Guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy.
2. An Arbitration Convention between Germany and Belgium.
3. An Arbitration Convention between Germany and France.
4. An Arbitration Treaty between Germany and Czechoslovakia.
5. An Arbitration Treaty Between Germany and Poland.
6. A Note to Germany regarding Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.
7. A Treaty between France and Poland.
8. A Treaty between France and Czechoslovakia.

“The Treaty of Mutual Guarantee confirmed Germany's frontiers with Belgium and France as agreed at Versailles, stipulated that Germany, Belgium and France would not attack one another or resort to war except in legitimate self-defence or in consequence of a League of Nations obligation, and that they would settle their disputes by pacific means. The Treaty was underpinned by the Arbitration Treaties Agreement to sign Treaties of Guarantee with Poland and Czechoslovakia.”¹²²

The Locarno Treaty, initialled at Locarno on 16 October 1925, was formally signed at the Foreign Office on 1 December 1925. King George V said,

¹²² ‘Locarno 1925 – The Treaty, the Spirit and the Suite’, p. 4.

“ This morning the Locarno Pact was signed at the Foreign Office. I pray this may mean peace for many years. Why not for ever?”¹²³ Berthelot and Schubert represented their foreign offices, while Tyrrell, D’Abernon, Crewe, Grahame, Lampson, Selby, Bennett, Cavendish-Bentinck and the international lawyer, Sir Cecil Hurst, who had written parts of the treaty, represented the British equivalent.¹²⁴

It was an extraordinary occasion in the magnificent setting of the great, barrel-vaulted Reception Room (later re-named the Locarno Room). The venue was crowded. “Behind a barrier journalists from half the world were wedged in tiers, and photographers and cinematographers were perched high up in nooks above the windows. It was very modern and really extremely simple.”¹²⁵ The B.B.C., founded in 1922, had wanted to broadcast the event, but the Foreign Office considered that the results might be negligible. Austen Chamberlain opposed the idea on the basis that he might utter an ungentlemanly oath if his pen failed him as he was signing the treaty.

The Locarno Conference of October 1925 was the most important of its kind since Versailles in 1919. Compared to the shambolic disorganisation in Paris this conference was assiduously planned by the Foreign Office and *Quai d’Orsay* over a period of months. Not even the tragic death of Eyre Crowe in April 1925 disrupted the planning of Locarno inside the Foreign Office. His successor, Tyrrell, and Lampson, the head of the department responsible for Germany, both enthusiastically promoted the conference and greeted favourably the final treaty.

In his own mind, the Locarno Treaty was a landmark achievement for Britain’s Ambassador in Berlin. “It has been a wonderful negotiation, both on account of the speed with which it has been carried through, and the results which

¹²³ Nicolson, *King George V*, London, 1952, p. 410.

¹²⁴ *The Times*, 2 December 1925.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

may be anticipated from it.”¹²⁶ It was the culmination of D’Abernon’s long-cherished aim of restoring Germany to diplomatic parity with the other great European nations. His opinions were not popular among most of the Whitehall mandarins and Locarno must have been a great satisfaction to him. He had consistently rejected the widely-held diplomatic conception of Germany as the ‘mad-dog’ arch-militarist of Europe, the warmonger and perpetual threat to both continental and world peace. To D’Abernon, the Locarno Treaty both ended the war against Germany and reduced the danger of her being sucked into the tentacles of Bolshevik Russia, as had seemed a serious possibility to him after the Treaty of Rapallo.

Certainly, in that brief period of the Locarno ‘honeymoon,’ D’Abernon attracted an interesting variety of admirers. In his diary, he described a dinner given to him on December 11 1925 by Sir Abe Bailey, a South African financier and racehorse owner. Bailey and D’Abernon were old friends from South Africa from before the Jameson Raid of 1895. The purpose of the dinner was to celebrate the Ambassador’s role in the Locarno negotiations and he could not disguise his satisfaction at the celebrity guest list: “A Belshazzar’s feast, of a refined order, with a wonderful collection of guests. Two ex-Prime Ministers, Balfour and Asquith, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, Keynes, Philip Kerr, and several magnates.”¹²⁷ D’Abernon had no major reservations about the significance of the pact, nor which nation deserved the most credit: “English diplomacy never achieved a more striking success than the Treaty of Locarno.”¹²⁸ England did not monopolise the receipt of his praise though, as “it

¹²⁶ D’Abernon diary entry, 25 October 1925, *Ambassador of Peace*, 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 212.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 24.

required indeed exceptional ability and skill on the part of the three Foreign Ministers concerned. While the highest praise has deservedly been allotted to Chamberlain, Briand and Stresemann, it would be unjust not to recognise the immense service rendered by others like Schubert and by the legal advisers of the Foreign Offices of the three countries. These latter luminaries were called together in advance of the meetings of Ministers, and to their detached discrimination and to their skill in drafting much of the final success was due.”¹²⁹

Yet, while extolling the “sagacity and moderation”¹³⁰ of the German Secretary of State, Schubert, D’Abernon made little mention in his diaries of the work of his colleagues in London. In the whole three-volume diary of his Ambassadorship there is only one brief reference to Sir Eyre Crowe. D’Abernon may have felt that Whitehall officials were a greater danger than Germany to peace, but more likely he may have believed that they were now just minor players on the diplomatic stage.

D’Abernon was probably right to attribute a measure of luck to the pact. “Locarno was one of the most surprising strokes of good fortune recorded in history ... (because) public opinion in both France and Germany was far behind the progressive spirit which animated the negotiators, and finally led to success ... the broad spirit of appeasement which animated Locarno was in strong contrast with the somewhat vindictive preoccupations which hampered wisdom at Versailles.”¹³¹

The Locarno Treaty has thus been much criticised by historians since the Second World War. Yet, Austen Chamberlain believed that, through the treaty, he had achieved a lasting peace in Europe, although he remained deeply suspicious of

¹²⁹ D’Abernon, *Ambassador of Peace*, 3, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

German political unreliability.¹³² Tyrrell believed that, within a few years, Germany would go to war again. The biographers of Sir Eyre Crowe though are more sympathetic: "It seems ...unrealistic to blame the authors of the Pact for not foreseeing... the political mayhem, including the rise of Hitler, by which it was followed. In the context of its time it was a great achievement."¹³³ The 'wisdom of hindsight' argument is not convincing. M.R.D. Foot believed that it failed for three reasons. The guarantees only applied to Germany's western frontiers (as the Bolshevik government could not fail to observe); there was no connection between policy and strategy, and there was very little that was really new in the treaty.¹³⁴ At least the first and last of these were identified as weaknesses in 1925.

For Austen Chamberlain, Locarno was the zenith of his career. "Certainly no other single achievement of Chamberlain's political life earned him so much praise and admiration."¹³⁵ He was made a Knight of the Garter. In his own estimation, in November 1925, his achievement was comparable to that of Castlereagh after 1815 in rehabilitating Europe after a great war. Even his critics have conceded that his intentions were creditable. "He wanted to promote peace" and "saw that the key to it, for the time being, lay in Germany."¹³⁶

Whose achievement was the Locarno Treaty though? Chamberlain has not been the only recipient of praise for its architecture. "The first and most memorable product of Briand's new policy ('apaisement') was the Treaty of Locarno which was signed by France and Germany in 1925 with Britain and Italy as guarantor

¹³² Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 183.

¹³³ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 485.

¹³⁴ Foot, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 98.

¹³⁵ Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain*, p. 230.

¹³⁶ Foot, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 98.

powers.”¹³⁷ According to *The Times* on 2 December, the great crowd outside the Foreign Office when the treaty was signed shouted ‘Vive Briand.’ None of the other statesmen were given that accolade. Briand himself allocated shared credit: “At Locarno we spoke European. It is a new language which one would do well to learn.”¹³⁸ Other historians have given the greatest praise to Stresemann, as “on every major issue raised at the Conference the German view-point was the one that found acceptance.”¹³⁹ Only recently, has Crowe been given any credit.

Chamberlain himself evaluated the purpose and achievement of the treaty in a conversation with the Lithuanian Minister, M. Galvanauskas, at the Foreign Office in November 1925. In response to praise for improving relations between nations not even signatories of the pact and a question about its ultimate effects on British policy, the Foreign Secretary replied:

Our policy was one of appeasement...From the day I entered this office I had worked under the conviction that unless we could change – and that within a few years – the spirit of the relations existing between France and Germany, we should move fatally towards a new catastrophe. The Conference of Locarno had produced an immediate change greater than I had expected, but the merit of Locarno lay in the manner in which agreement had been reached and in the spirit in which the treaties would be executed. They were the voluntary acts of the nations immediately interested, sprung from their own initiative and not imposed by any external power. It was because they were the result of free consent that they appeared to me to give such hope for the future. I knew that many difficulties still lay in our path, but I kept before my eyes, as statesmen in all countries should do, not merely to-day or to-morrow, but the future. What we must do could forget an unhappy past and come to manhood without the desire to renew the old struggle.¹⁴⁰

Grayson claimed that Austen Chamberlain “originated and controlled much European policy in the Foreign Office. There, those with the greatest influence,

¹³⁷ Neville, *France 1914-1969*, p. 60.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 61.

¹³⁹ ‘Locarno 1925 – The Treaty, the Spirit and the Suite’, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ C 14493/459/18, Chamberlain to Vaughan in Riga, 10 November 1925, *DBFP*, 1A, I, pp. 122-123.

Crowe and Lampson, were influential because their views coincided with Chamberlain's interpretation of what was necessary."¹⁴¹ This was certainly not true in the early months of 1925 when the new Foreign Secretary was vacillating and sought the help of his experts. On 4 January 1925, Chamberlain was "frankly at a loss."¹⁴² His policy was to a great extent based on Foreign Office views – notably Crowe, Nicolson, and Headlam-Morley, although D'Abernon less so.

Erik Goldstein had no doubts about the major role played by Crowe in the evolution of the Locarno Pact.

What is particularly intriguing about the whole episode is how most of the recommendations went through Crowe. . It is worth pondering how much Crowe, whose health was rapidly deteriorating was driving events. Having helped engineer Chamberlain's, and by implication the Foreign Office's victory over internal interference in policy, Crowe had achieved one of his great goals. A few days later he went on indefinite sick leave, and Chamberlain went on to negotiate the Locarno Pact.¹⁴³

Crowe and Corp agreed with Goldstein about Crowe's influence. The early stages of the process were very difficult, but

the back of the problem had really been broken once initial agreement had been reached in the Cabinet on the Quadrilateral Pact, in whose formulation and acceptance Crowe had clearly played such a vital part. It was a fitting conclusion to his untiring efforts since the end of the First World War, both to maintain and strengthen the Anglo-French Entente, however difficult this might be, and in this very way, the only practical way, as he rightly saw that there was, to bring Germany back into the comity of Nations. Just as before the war he had supported a strong policy towards Germany, not, as sometimes been alleged, in order to provoke war, but in order to avoid it, as now, after the war, he worked for a closer understanding with France not to crush Germany, but to reinstate her.¹⁴⁴

This argument can be strengthened by reading the 'Crowe-Nicolson Memorandum on British policy in Europe of 20 February 1925. Chamberlain minuted

¹⁴¹ Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe*, p.33.

¹⁴² S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', p. 55.

¹⁴³ Goldstein, 'The evolution of British strategy', p. 134.

¹⁴⁴ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 484.

that it represented his views and those of the Foreign Office. But it was, quite simply, the 1907 Crowe Memorandum, re-written for the altered situation in 1925. It contained many of the older document's themes, for example, the link between Britain's imperial interests and European security. Yet, in its desire for a peaceful Germany to become a full member of the western European fraternity, the flexibility of the 1907 Memorandum was again demonstrated.

In his persuasion of Baldwin in March 1925, Crowe, the man whom Lloyd George accused of being ill-equipped to cope with matters on a high political level, achieved something of a political masterstroke. As Crowe's daughter discovered, the archives revealed that during Chamberlain's absence in Geneva, "it was his permanent under-secretary, Sir Eyre Crowe, who, bearded these same cabinet colleagues, and, persuaded the prime minister, Baldwin, to agree to proposals for such a pact."¹⁴⁵ How extraordinary it was that a politician of Chamberlain's vast experience should entrust his political career to the persuasive powers of a public servant, unless one is aware of the abilities and character of that individual.

However, just criticism of Locarno must be given some response. "The real losers at Locarno were Poland and, to a lesser extent, Czechoslovakia. The terms of the treaties provided no safeguards for the eastern frontiers."¹⁴⁶ Although hypothetical, the question of an 'eastern Locarno,' and what part Crowe might have played, has to be raised. Goldstein's view is that

Chamberlain ... during his remaining tenure of office never evinced any real interest in moving to the implicit second phase of negotiating an eastern Locarno. Indeed, the remaining period of his foreign secretaryship is but a pallid reflection of those first energetic months. Inevitably this raises the question of how far Crowe was, as he so often had been, the real engine. It is of course impossible to say what would have happened had Crowe lived, but it

¹⁴⁵ S. Crowe, 'Crowe and Locarno Pact', p. 49.

¹⁴⁶ Steiner, *Lights That Failed*, p. 403.

is possible to imagine that he would have acted to deal with the many loose threads left by Locarno.¹⁴⁷

Historians of the Foreign Office have described it as being in a state of 'eclipse' in the immediate post-war years.¹⁴⁸ It is an interpretation that is similar to the analyses of those who worked in the Foreign Office during that period in connection with Anglo-Franco-German affairs.¹⁴⁹ In a hagiographic biography of her father, Sibyl Crowe, in partnership with Edward Corp, gave a different opinion, as it is Lloyd George's administration of foreign affairs from the 'Garden Suburb' that had been the subject of critical scrutiny, not Crowe's leadership of the Foreign Office while Permanent Under-Secretary. They accept that its influence was diminished in the 1930's, but not in the twenties, "least of all between 1920 and 1925." They questioned "the alleged domination by Lloyd George of British foreign policy between 1920 and 1922...and the growing influence of the Treasury over foreign affairs during the whole period between 1920 and 1925."¹⁵⁰

Eyre Crowe's outstanding achievements are almost beyond question. The tributes of his contemporaries are remarkable for a civil servant, although his biographers believed that

...the influence of Lloyd George over foreign policy was not as great as some, including he himself, have maintained; and though it is true that the Treasury played an increasingly significant part in the development of British foreign policy between 1920 and 1925, it would be wrong to assume that this automatically led to a drop in the power and prestige of the Foreign Office, for in fact, under Crowe's skilful guidance, it considerably enhanced it. As documentary evidence shows, he not only made full use of the expert information and advice which the Treasury offered him, he constantly asked for it himself, whilst, at the same time, keeping the direction and control of

¹⁴⁷ Goldstein, 'The evolution of British strategy', p. 135.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Sharp, 'Foreign Office in Eclipse'; Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Nicolson, *Peacemaking - 1919*; Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy*; Wellesley, *Diplomacy in Fetters*; Vansittart, *Mist Procession*.

¹⁵⁰ Crowe and Corp, *Ablest Public Servant*, p. 402.

policy firmly in F.O. hands. When he died in the Spring of 1925 the prestige of the F.O., like his own, consequently stood high both at home and abroad.¹⁵¹

The influence and prestige of the Foreign Office after the end of the war is a highly debatable subject. Crowe and Corp did not discuss Sharp's evidence of the absence of Crowe and his colleagues from many of the post-war reparation conferences, for example.¹⁵² Nor did they publish details of exactly what Crowe did at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 or the London Conference of 1924 and this is one of the important gaps that this research has filled. Their priority seems to have been to show that Crowe was a truly great man whose role has been undervalued by history, that he was frequently mistreated or misunderstood, and that he was right on foreign policy matters when others were wrong, or simply lied. There is strong evidence for each of these points, but the purpose of this thesis is far more limited and it is not a hagiography. It aims only to show that the principles of Crowe's Memorandum of 1907 were the guide to British policy towards Germany in the seven years following the end of the First World War. This was never better demonstrated than in the year prior to the signing of the Locarno Treaty of 1925.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² See Chapter 1, p. 16.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that from the end of the First World War in November 1918 to the signing of the Locarno Treaty in December 1925, the predominant attitudes towards Germany within the Foreign Office were those of Sir Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1920 until his death in April 1925. These attitudes had been expressed with extraordinary clarity and vision in a classic memorandum submitted by Crowe to the Foreign Office on 1 January 1907. It can also be argued that the attitudes towards Germany of Crowe were shared by many of the leading government ministers between 1918 and 1925, most notably, Lloyd George, Curzon and Austen Chamberlain. Crowe even managed to influence the policy towards Germany of Ramsay MacDonald and the first Labour government.

As explained in Chapter 1, Lloyd George did not like Foreign Office 'experts' and wished to make diplomatic decisions without them, especially on German matters and evidence from Crowe presented in Chapter 2 showed that in Paris in 1919, before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, he and his colleagues were, to a large extent, humiliated by their Prime Minister. Moreover, for the next forty months, at the post-war reparations conferences, as Sharp showed, FO experts were marginalised. Yet, analysis of the policy of the British government towards Germany between November 1918 and October 1922 has also revealed that the ideological influence of the Crowe memorandum remained considerable. During this period there was no appeasement of Germany. The German government was treated firmly, but fairly, from a position of strength. British interests were paramount primarily because Anglo-German trade needed to be restored to its pre-war level as

soon as possible. This required the German government and people to reject militarism and embrace peaceful policies. Lloyd George had been a government minister since 1905; he knew the principles of the Crowe Memorandum of 1907; and he supported them in his dealings with Germany while Prime Minister.

The influence of Crowe on Curzon, MacDonald and Chamberlain was more direct and personal. They relied upon Crowe, not only for his industry and knowledge, but also because of his ability to formulate policy without fear or desire for obfuscation. In Chapter 3 it was shown that European affairs were not Curzon's preference and that he experienced great difficulties in dealing with Poincaré. This thesis has emphasised Curzon's reluctance to take decisions on European affairs and his reliance on Crowe to assist him even on Turkish matters. Curzon's conduct of the Ruhr crisis was frequently disinterested, even incompetent. At first, he passed the problem to the ailing Bonar Law, and then, in 1923, as was argued in Chapter 4, it was Crowe who stimulated the only positive direction of British government policy on Germany,

In the first six months of the first Labour government, Crowe was also indispensable to Ramsay MacDonald, but for very different reasons. To begin with, MacDonald wanted to give greater responsibility to his Permanent Under-Secretary because he needed to prove the competence of his party to govern. It was remarkable that a First World War pacifist should entrust the formulation of policy towards Germany to a Foreign Office official who had been labelled an 'anti-German scaremonger' in the Edwardian era. But the fact that MacDonald respected Crowe's views and knowledge of German affairs reveals the commanding influence he exerted on politicians across the political divide. Indeed, Chapter 5 showed that the French and German acceptance of the Dawes Report in London in August 1924 was at least

as much due to Crowe as to MacDonald. This thesis has also shown that there would have been no Locarno Treaty, but for the work of Crowe in the final months of his life. Foreign Office archival evidence presented in Chapter 6 demonstrated that when the Conservatives returned to power in November 1924, it was Crowe who had the solution to Chamberlain's difficult question, namely, how to bring France and Germany together and solve the problem of western European security. When members of the Cabinet objected, Chamberlain trusted Crowe to convince them of the correctness of the proposed course and then to persuade the Prime Minister to support his Foreign Secretary. His early death was a national and an international misfortune and historians can only hypothesise about what policies he might have advocated in the next few years. It is difficult to evaluate the influence of a person on government policy in the months and years following their death, but, in Crowe's case, it cannot be easily dismissed.

Of course, it could be argued that John Maynard Keynes had a greater influence than Crowe over British government policy towards Germany during the entire inter-war period, following the publication of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in December 1919. Yet this is not true of the period up to 1925. As has been shown in Chapters 1 and 2, Keynes's book was heavily criticised by, for example, Lloyd George, Crowe, Hardinge and Vansittart. In fact, the book had a bigger impact in the United States and Germany in the 1920s, not in Britain and France. Even Keynes' economic views were not adopted in Britain before the Second World War. Of course, Keynes had been a member of the Treasury team in Paris in 1919. He had accepted that Germany was greatly responsible for the outbreak of the war and, in a report, proposed that Germany should pay a reparations sum of £3 billion. Nor can it be said that the Dawes Plan was the result of allied guilt inspired by

Keynes' book. Crowe had wanted Germany to recover economically in order to increase British trade, as well as it being a way of preventing the resurgence of German militarism. Wall Street bankers saw it as a means to ensure the repayment of wartime debts to the U.S.A..

Academic historians have known the name of Sir Eyre Crowe since at least the publication in 1928 and 1933 of books by former colleagues such as John Gregory and Harold Nicolson. Public servants tend to be unknown to the general public, but, in the interests of historical accuracy and human justice, when the contributions of such people were so influential, their work must be given due credit. For this to have happened, it was vital that the recollections of former major actors, for example, ministers and ambassadors, were as true a record of past events as was possible. If not, as a consequence, this can result in biographers of statesmen omitting the role of their most important public servants, or, at best, relegating the work of public servants to almost nothing. Readers of history are then presented with the false impression that politicians originated, developed and executed policy.

In writing their memoirs, or writing letters to members of their families, Lloyd George and Lord D'Abernon, for example, were guilty of gross historical deceit. In attempting to justify and elevate their roles in great historical events, these men distorted historical truth by largely ignoring, in the formulation of policy regarding the German government, the role of Sir Eyre Crowe and some of his Foreign Office colleagues. Austen Chamberlain paid a glowing tribute to Crowe when he died, but he did not sufficiently shed light on how much he had depended upon him in the few months that they had worked together. Despite the publication in 1934 of the memorandum of 1907 and the autobiographies of senior officials, for example, Vansittart, Hardinge, Strang and Kirkpatrick, little was known about Crowe until the

late 1960s. Since the opening up of the archives in 1967, historians such as Zara Steiner, Roberta Warman, Sibyl Crowe, Alan Sharp, Erik Goldstein, Edward Corp and Ephraim Maisel have attempted to increase awareness of the work of Crowe at the Foreign Office in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They and others have stimulated academic research (this thesis, for example) and have provoked much academic debate on subjects such as the influence of the Foreign Office before, during and after the First World War.

When the First World War ended in November 1918, the Foreign Office needed to recover much of the influence that it had lost during and even before 1914. In wartime, power had been concentrated in the hands of a smaller group of people than had been the case in peacetime. It was Grey, the Foreign Secretary, not Asquith, the Prime Minister, who announced in the House of Commons on 4 August 1914 that Britain was at war with Germany. If it was true that Eyre Crowe's advice was ignored in the critical weeks in the summer of 1914, the influence of his famous memorandum of 1 January 1907 had been considerable in the previous seven years. This memorandum had articulated the concerns of many Foreign Office experts about the Kaiser's empire. Crowe was Head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office and was the ministry's leading expert on the country of his birth, upbringing and education. He identified Germany's militaristic and imperialistic tendencies to be a threat to Britain's interests. British government policy towards Germany before 1907 had been characterized by the granting of repeated concessions and, like a blackmailer, Germany had responded by demanding more and more. Crowe proposed an end to this policy and advocated a firm, but fair line towards Germany instead, as well as a tightening of the 'entente' with France.

In July 1914, Crowe urged Grey to clarify Britain's intentions to stand by its obligations to Belgium, but Grey did not do so. In the opinion of his future Prime Minister, Lloyd George, as well as Crowe's biographers, the Foreign Secretary proved incapable of decisive action. During the war, Crowe's exceptional industry and expertise were largely utilised organising the blockade of enemy ports, a vital factor in the final allied victory. Crowe's family connections (his mother was German and his uncle a senior German admiral) had resulted in him being the victim of prejudice within the Foreign Office earlier in his career, but, in the paranoid atmosphere of 1917 and 1918, Crowe became one of the main targets of a group of 'Hun-baiters' that included Horatio Bottomley and some leading Suffragettes. A mob of 3,000 people marched on his house and Crowe had a gun loaded to defend his home and family, but police prevented the threatened attack. He later confessed that he seriously considered resignation and not even speeches in Parliament praising his invaluable work for his country, nor the sweetener of a knighthood, could compensate for the injustice that he suffered. When the war ended, Crowe believed that he faced an uncertain future. What happened was that his career became entwined with that of another remarkable individual, the Prime Minister.

In his memoirs, Lloyd George, published in the 1930s, criticised Grey's fatal indecision in 1914, but, on becoming Prime Minister in December 1916, blamed the Foreign Office 'experts' for the outbreak of war. For the next six years, he determined foreign policy towards Germany with a small coterie of advisers known as the 'Garden Suburb.' The 'experts' were marginalised and nowhere more so than at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. In meetings preparatory to the signing of the German treaty in June 1919, policies were formulated and decisions taken by Lloyd George and his 'friends.' The Foreign Secretary, Balfour, played little part, as did the

Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Lord Hardinge. The advice of Sir Eyre Crowe, Britain's leading expert on German affairs, was not sought. Crowe's private papers have revealed that he and his colleagues were largely idle in Paris during the early months of 1919, but then were expected to work with indecent haste translating (with one dictionary) inter-governmental notes of enormous importance to the future peace of the world.

Yet, Crowe praised the Versailles Treaty, highlighting particularly the clause that permitted Germany to ask for revision within four months. He also praised Lloyd George's repeated concern with Germany's capacity to pay reparations. However, after the extraordinary period of the post-war general election, Lloyd George's attitudes towards Germany had much in common with that of Crowe. Biographers of Lloyd George and other historians have described the Prime Minister's attitudes towards Germany and his foreign policy aims in terms that were very similar to those expressed in the Crowe Memorandum of 1907. In Paris, the Prime Minister, like Crowe, had spoken in favour of a moderate peace settlement with Germany and supported the two-year delay in deciding the final total reparations sum. Lloyd George though signed a treaty that almost all Germans believed was a dictated, vindictive, victors peace, that many French people believed was too lenient on Germany and that many in Britain were determined that Germany fulfil, whatever they believed about the treaty. Between 1920 and 1922, the view generally held by both Crowe and Lloyd George was that Germany must fulfil the treaty.

Although Lloyd George and Lord Hardinge did not want Crowe to become the Permanent Under-Secretary in 1920, Crowe's wartime work as well as the all-round superiority of his candidature had convinced a number of influential figures, including the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, to demand his promotion. Yet Crowe and the

Foreign Office were marginalised during the three years of 'Conference Diplomacy,' a period when Anglo-French relations exceeded Anglo-German relations in importance. The reparations question dominated European affairs. France wanted Germany to fulfil its obligations to the letter and was in favour of military intervention in German economic affairs and Britain attempted to restrain French aggression. Crowe, who had always been unconvinced about the effectiveness of the League of Nations and was an implacable opponent of disarmament, proposed a traditional solution to ease French worries about Germany.

Believing that security, not reparations, was the primary French concern, Crowe proposed a radical solution in December 1921 – an Anglo-French military alliance, to be operational in the event of aggression by Germany against either nation. Curzon and the rest of the Lloyd George Cabinet rejected the idea, not because of a softening of attitudes to Germany, but because of a growing antipathy towards France inside government and a desire to avoid continental entanglements so soon after the end of the war. As the United States had chosen 'isolation' in 1920, the rejection of Crowe's security pact was one of the great errors of British foreign policy in the inter-war period. Like many leading Foreign Office mandarins in 1921, including Crowe's predecessor, Hardinge (then British Ambassador to France) and his deputy and successor, Tyrell, Crowe believed that Germany was planning a war of revenge.

Instead, in 1922, Lloyd George placed his faith in European reconstruction, to be discussed at an international conference in Genoa. Poincaré, who had replaced Briand as French Prime Minister, had insisted that reparations were not to be on the agenda. Crowe and his senior colleagues opposed the conference, but it collapsed anyway when news emerged that Germany and Bolshevik Russia had

signed the Treaty of Rapallo in April 1922. Poincaré's policy towards the fulfilment of the reparation clauses of the Versailles Treaty by Germany now became more uncompromising. For the next six months, Crowe remained on the margins of government policy towards Germany whilst Anglo-French (and, owing to the fiasco of the 'Balfour Note,' Anglo-American) relations deteriorated. Lloyd George's personal style of diplomacy was exposed by the bitter atmosphere between himself and Curzon on the British side, and Poincaré on the French side. Yet, during this time, as for the previous three years, there were no concessions given to Germany by the British government. This was a principle Crowe had insisted upon in the 1907 memorandum. He had also said that if Germany was non-militaristic, then it ought to be welcomed by Britain. Lloyd George did not differ from this line in principle or action at any post-war reparations conference or at Genoa. Hence, the Foreign Office was in 'eclipse', but the influence of Crowe's memorandum in relation to dealing with Germany was not.

In the final months of 1922, urged on by President Millerand, Poincaré threatened, in response to a default by Germany on timber payments, a military occupation of the Ruhr industrial region. In October 1922, Lloyd George was removed from office following a Conservative party revolt and Bonar Law became Prime Minister. Curzon remained Foreign Secretary, but immediately abrogated responsibility for the crisis in Western Europe and asked Bonar Law to negotiate with the French. Curzon's priority was the Turkish peace treaty and demanded that Crowe was in Lausanne and was at his 'beck and call.' The evidence that Curzon, though an extremely knowledgeable minister, needed others to assist his decision-making, is considerable. Therefore, Crowe was not a British representative at the London and Paris conferences prior to the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr in January 1923

because Curzon wanted him to act as his personal adviser. Indeed, such was Curzon's reliance on the advice of Crowe on German affairs, it can be argued that Crowe was more in command of Foreign Office policy towards Germany in 1923 than the Foreign Secretary.

Following the occupation of the Ruhr, the policy of the British government was described as "benevolent neutrality." Crowe and his senior Foreign Office colleagues, especially Lampson, the Head of the Central Department, were privately critical of the Franco-Belgian action, believing it to be illegal, but had to avoid giving any impression of support to Germany. This precarious task was accomplished, despite repeated attempts by Sthamer, the German Ambassador in London to split the 'entente.' Nor did the Foreign Office show any sympathy for the campaign of passive resistance in the Ruhr. However, as the occupation continued, the British grew impatient with the words, actions and ambitions of Poincaré and the French. From April 1923, the policies of the British became more pro-active, beginning with Curzon's speech to the House of Lords on 20 April and climaxing with the 'Curzon Note' of 11 August. Grace Curzon later wrote that Crowe was the author of the latter and it is probable that he was also the inspiration behind the former.

In the summer and autumn of 1923, the German economy collapsed as hyperinflation struck. The suffering of the German people elicited little sympathy in London. Crowe and Lampson hoped that events in Germany would demonstrate the folly of Poincaré's strategies, particularly his attempt to create an autonomous republic in the Rhineland. The despatches of Clive from Munich about Hitler and the Nazis showed that the Foreign Office watched the extreme nationalist, militarist, German right very carefully and certainly not with any affinity. In Paris in 1919,

Crowe's opposition to a future ban on a union between Germany and Austria had been sensible given the dissolution of the Hapsburg Empire, but the allied leaders, especially Clemenceau, did not agree. Neither confrontations nor concessions were the best way of dealing with Germany. It was by having the right policy towards it. This was what Crowe and the Foreign Office believed.

Therefore, in 1924, on matters related to Germany, Crowe and his colleagues were on the same wavelength as Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in the first Labour government. MacDonald had been a pacifist during the war as well as a critic of the 'Old Diplomacy' and the Labour Party had been opposed to the Treaty of Versailles. It is a testament to the talents and characters of both men that they soon established a good working relationship. Before the end of 1923, they had welcomed the return of American involvement in European affairs when the Dawes committees were formed. Despite some criticisms of the report, Crowe and the Foreign Office fully supported the implementation of the Dawes Plan. The greatest obstacle was the approval of the French. This was made easier by the electoral defeat of Poincaré, but the plan had to be sold to the new Prime Minister, Herriot. At Chequers and then in Paris, Herriot was dominated and then saved by the combined force of Crowe and MacDonald. But, strangely, at the London Conference in July and August, Crowe was marginalised as he had been at Versailles in 1919, reduced to the role of an interpreter. Yet, Crowe was present at the negotiations which he had not been during the period of the Lloyd George premiership and Conference Diplomacy. Furthermore, the success of the London Conference, the French acceptance of the Dawes Plan and the setting of a date for the Franco-Belgian evacuation of the Ruhr were a triumph for Crowe as well as MacDonald. Crowe and

his colleagues had done the planning and preparation for months, even if the final result was due to the negotiating skills of MacDonald.

The London Conference did not solve the problem of German reparations because the Dawes Plan was only ever intended to be a temporary settlement. However, it did improve 'the weather,' in Europe, as MacDonald had intended. For Crowe, to pursue policies that encouraged Germany to recover economically and to become a peaceful nation was completely consistent with the principles that he had set down in 1907. It was also in Britain's interest to do so. What was not in Britain's interest was for it to become entangled in foreign matters that did not directly affect Britain and therefore he opposed the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance (much to Cecil's annoyance) and the Geneva Protocol. MacDonald seemed to be a supporter of the Protocol, but it was over Bolshevik Russia that he and Crowe disagreed the most, although it can be stated categorically that neither Crowe nor the Foreign Office used the 'Zinoviev Letter' to bring the Labour government down in November 1924.

When Baldwin formed his second ministry, Crowe was very pleased at the appointment of Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary (and probably relieved at the demotion of Lord Curzon). Chamberlain was highly sceptical about the Geneva Protocol, but did want to reduce tension in Europe. This had to accept France's fears of a resurgent Germany. He did not have a solution of his own and so sought and utilised the expertise of the Foreign Office by way of an internal ministerial conference. Crowe encouraged Harold Nicolson to write a memorandum on European security, while Headlam-Morley provided an historical overview in response to a vitriolic analysis of recent German history produced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, McNeill (later Lord Cushendun). On the basis of these discussions, Crowe and Chamberlain formed a policy to be placed before the Cabinet that advocated a

western security pact including France and Germany. It met with fierce opposition from senior ministers such as Curzon, Churchill, Balfour and Birkenhead. It was Crowe who told a despairing Chamberlain that he had to be prepared to threaten resignation in order for his plan to be accepted. Then, with Chamberlain in Geneva, it was Crowe who faced the Cabinet and then persuaded Baldwin that he must back his Foreign Secretary. It was the final great success of his career. Within two months (28 April 1925) he was dead.

The Locarno Treaty was finally signed in December 1925. This would not have occurred without a conjunction of like-minded statesmen simultaneously in office from Britain, France and Germany – Austen Chamberlain, Briand and Stresemann. However, in the genesis and evolution of the pact, Crowe played a role of great importance and, had he lived, there might have been a second treaty focusing on eastern European security.

Firstly, as Head of the Central Department, and then as Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, Crowe's views on Germany had incomparable influence. Nobody in the ministry (not even Tyrrell, who had also been educated there) had his knowledge of Germany and awareness of its military and imperial ambitions. Before he submitted the 1907 Memorandum, successive British governments had repeatedly made concessions to Germany. After it, British governments should have followed his philosophy of a firm, fair line towards Germany, but in the summer of 1914, the advice of Crowe and the Foreign Office was ignored, with catastrophic consequences. Yet this, plus his outstanding wartime work and the respect he gained as Ambassador Plenipotentiary in Paris in the second half of 1919, increased his reputation within the Foreign Office. His elevation to the highest position there was welcomed by both junior and senior colleagues.

Crowe's response to the anti-Foreign Office attitude of Lloyd George was to quietly promote men of similar views to key positions. It has been shown that, although Lloyd George marginalised the Foreign Office on matters relating to Germany, Crowe and Curzon planned for his departure. By the time that event occurred, there were men who were sympathetic to Crowe's views in key posts within the Foreign Office. In November 1918, Hardinge, Crowe and Tyrrell, all sceptical towards the German government for more than the previous decade, were three of the leading members of the Foreign Office hierarchy. After November 1920, when Crowe became the Permanent Under-Secretary, he, with Curzon's support, placed many who shared his views in embassies around the world. In October 1922, Lloyd George resigned. Crowe had been Permanent Under-Secretary for two years and Robert Vansittart and Victor Wellesley, a future Deputy Under-Secretary, had become senior officials in Whitehall. In addition, Miles Lampson was head of the Central Department and Esme Howard, Horace Rumbold and Hardinge were in key ambassadorial posts.¹ By January 1925, Hardinge had retired, but Harold Nicolson, John Gregory and Orme Sargent had been promoted to the rank of First Secretary or above, as well as Ralph Wigram, Head of the Central Department in the 1930s, during which time he passed information about Nazi Germany to Winston Churchill.²

There were dissenting voices. Sydney Waterlow, a senior official in the Central Department, expressed opinions between 1920 and 1922 that deviated from the Crowe line. In 1920 and 1922, he questioned the ability to fulfil the Reparation clauses of the Treaty of Versailles of Germany. On the latter occasion, Tyrrell had to bring him back into line. The main voice of dissent came from Lord D'Abernon the

¹ They were in Madrid, Constantinople and Paris respectively. Howard and Rumbold went on to Washington and Berlin later in the decade.

² UKNA, *Foreign Office Lists*, 1918, 1922 and 1925.

British Ambassador in Germany. In July 1920, Curzon and Lloyd George appointed D'Abernon, a banker, to the post in Berlin. For the next six years, he promoted the view that the British government had more to fear from France than Germany and that the main danger in Germany was a left-wing rather than a right-wing revolution. In 1923, especially, D'Abernon's views often clashed with those of Crowe and the Foreign Office.

There is a long catalogue of memoirs, autobiographies and biographies of former Foreign Office personnel who were Crowe's subordinates and admired him greatly – Harold Nicolson, John Gregory, William Strang, Ivone Kirkpatrick, Owen O'Malley and Robert Vansittart, for example. As Crowe lacked, according to Vansittart and others, a sense of humour and could be abrupt and bad-tempered,³ they knew his personality defects and qualities. It was his industry, knowledge and insight that astonished them. "His minutes and memoranda, particularly pertaining to Europe, are staggering not just because of their number, but also because of their very content, which combines historical and strategic analyses, and an ability to see the situation for what it was."⁴ On no other matter was this truer than on the foreign country that he knew best – the one in which he grew up. As a result of the war, there was much hostility to Germany within the ministry in the early 1920s. Some mandarins had lost loved ones in the war and were unable to forgive. Crowe's attitude to Germany was rational, unemotional and consistent. It was consistent because it was founded upon his own creed, as laid down in the 1907 Memorandum. The attitudes of most of the Foreign Office towards Germany were also based upon this and other of Crowe's memoranda. Even after his death, Austen Chamberlain suggested that the

³ Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, p. 211.

⁴ Maisel, *Foreign Office, 1919-1926*, p. 49.

best way to deal with the Germans was to “read Crowe’s minutes to them.”⁵ The esteem in which the Foreign Office experts held Crowe’s views can further be demonstrated by the publication of the 1907 Memorandum several years after his death.⁶ It was extraordinary that such a State document should be accorded this honour. It not only demonstrated the intellectual authority of the treatise, as well as finally vindicating his patriotism that had so shamefully been questioned during the war, but revealed the support for it within the Foreign Office. This applied as much in the early 1920s as in the early 1930s.

In the early 1900s, a previous Permanent Under-Secretary of State responded to an attack by the German Ambassador, Count Hatzfeld, upon him, His Majesty’s Government and British policy. “Lord Sanderson retorted that we had no policy, that our policy was to have no policy, that we lived from hand to mouth...”⁷ This attitude did not apply after the end of the war. In 1907, the Crowe Memorandum had been an attempt to formulate a clear basis upon which a decisive line on Germany could be taken. The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 had demonstrated the inadequacy of an uncertain, *ad hoc* approach. After November 1918, and especially after Crowe became the Permanent Under-Secretary, the Foreign Office had a framework within which British foreign policy towards Germany could be conducted. This was the 1907 Memorandum.

As John Gregory said, Crowe dominated the Foreign Office. He was behind many of the reforms of the early 1900s. He did this intellectually by producing

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Connell quoted the complaint of Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times* for almost all of the period from 1912 to 1941. In 1934, Dawson said that a colleague that he referred to as ‘X’ had had Foreign Office officials waving copies of the Crowe Memorandum at him as he walked along the street. The newspaper tended to have a sympathetic attitude to Germany at that time. See Connell, *The ‘Office’*, p. 164.

⁷ Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life*, pp. 23-24.

a memorandum that articulated many of the concerns about Germany within the Foreign Office. During the First World War, Crowe did work of such vital importance at the Ministry of the Blockade that he won the admiration even of men such as Balfour, Curzon and Lord Robert Cecil. In Paris in 1919, while his superior, Hardinge, lost his authority, Crowe enhanced his own, despite the absurd way in which he and his Foreign Office colleagues were treated by Lloyd George in the period prior to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. In the second half of the year, he became Britain's representative on the Supreme Council, with the rank of Ambassador Plenipotentiary, earning the great respect of Clemenceau, "who had an eye for value", called him "un homme à part"⁸ - an exceptional man.

In January 1920, the treaty was put into operation, but in the same month, Crowe became seriously ill. By the end of the year though, Crowe held the post of Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office. Until he went on sick leave in March 1925, Crowe had a powerful influence over three Foreign Secretaries (Curzon, MacDonald and Austen Chamberlain) and almost all of his colleagues, especially on the subject in which he was Britain's foremost expert – German affairs. They followed his principles – firm, but fair treatment of Germany, maintain close ties with France and assert the primacy of British interests. The most senior members of the Foreign Office also followed Crowe's line on Germany and played vital roles themselves, especially the head of the Central Department, Miles Lampson and Crowe's deputy, Tyrrell.

It has been shown that, on Germany, Lloyd George largely shared Crowe's views. Between October 1922 and February 1923, when Crowe returned from Lausanne with Curzon, there was a policy vacuum at the head of British

⁸ Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 211.

government and the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 was not prevented. Later in that year, the policy initiatives often credited to Curzon, especially the 'Curzon Note' of 11 August 1923, were the work of Crowe. On German matters, the policy of the Labour government reflected his views as well as those of MacDonald. This meant the acceptance of the Dawes Report on reparations by all of the major powers concerned. This was achieved at the London Conference of 1924, the prelude to which Crowe made a very significant contribution, if not at the conference itself. When Austen Chamberlain became Foreign Secretary in October 1924, it was Crowe again, this time with Harold Nicolson and the historian Headlam-Morley, whose memoranda were of such assistance to their minister. Aside from his critical meeting with Baldwin, at Chamberlain's behest, in March 1925, Crowe therefore played a major part in the evolution of the Locarno Pact. He now had what he had always wanted since 1907, a German government that wanted peace and cooperation, not conflict, with Britain and France, but he had also argued that should a militaristic government ever take power in Germany then only a strong stand would suffice. It is, therefore, a great pity that Crowe was not alive when the great international crisis of the 1930s erupted.

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