THE POLITICS OF DISARMAMENT

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DISARMAMENT has been the dream of idealists for centuries; as a problem of diplomacy, it dates from the Treaty of Versailles. On the one hand, the Treaty radically reduced the armaments of the defeated Powers; on the other, it imposed on other signatories to the Treaty the obligation to disarm in turn—an obligation which is far from being fulfilled. In naval armaments alone and among the three great naval Powers, Great Britain, the United States and Japan, has there been progress. Land and air armaments in Europe are to-day greater than before the War, and it is to the limitation and reduction of these that the coming Conference will chiefly turn its attention. The obstacles to its success are tremendous. None is perhaps more serious than the fact that the problem of armaments cannot be isolated from politics. Disarmament, indeed, is primarily a political problem. Behind the inevitable disputes at the Conference over tons and guns, over tanks and aeroplanes, and over professional armies and trained reserves, will lurk the conflict in policies of the Great Powers. An understanding of the Conference requires, therefore, an understanding of the political situation.

The Conference meets in an atmosphere of discontent and insecurity in Europe. The primary reason for this state of nerves is the settlement of Versailles itself. While promising disarmament, it unleashed the forces of hate and reaction which have made armaments inevitable. The Settlement followed the approved tradition of crushing the vanquished, though it dressed the tradition in cant phrases of justice and self-determination. Austria-Hungary was dismembered, and Germany partly so. Virtually solid blocks of German population were handed to Poland and Czechoslovakia, and of Magyars, Russians and Bulgars to Roumania, thus creating new Alsace-Lorraine problems for future generations. Crushing burdens of reparations were laid on the vanquished in the name of an outraged humanity, while the defeated Powers were all radically disarmed and Germany subjected to the indignities of military garrisons on the Rhine for fifteen years. Above all, by Balkanizing Central Europe politically the Peace Settlement virtually

shattered the delicate economic organization upon which human welfare there depended, thus reducing millions to poverty and even starvation. The Treaty, indeed, sowed dragons' teeth in Europe.

The hope that the League of Nations would mitigate the "Carthaginian peace" has been realized only to a very limited extent. From the outset the absence of the United States has lessened the moral force of the League, and has made difficult of realization one of its cardinal principles—that it should provide a means for organizing not only the moral but the material forces of the family of nations against disturbers of the peace. Thus the League has not been able to guarantee to members like France, which have felt the need of strong material forces for their protection, that the collective force of its members will rally to their support in the hour of danger. Important as the League is as a means of settling disputes, it is by no means the mutual insurance scheme against external aggression intended by its framers. Nor has the League been able to carry successfully special burdens which the Peace Treaties laid upon it, such as the protection of national minorities in the new and enlarged states. Much less has it been able to check the growing economic nationalism of European states which has virtually completed the destruction, begun by the Treaties, of Europe's economic life. The nature of the Peace Settlement perhaps made it inevitable that brute force would be necessary to maintain it. A strong League might have secured peace by a minimum of force, and by mitigating the worst injustices of the settlement might have promoted peace by consent, once men's minds had become accustomed to the new political and economic order. But peace by consent in Europe is perhaps more remote than when the guns ceased over thirteen years ago.

The failure of the League to guarantee peace has been the excuse for the recrudescence of the old régime of arms and alliances. France, Belgium and Poland were early linked in alliances for their mutual protection against their common enemy, Germany. The Little Entente, Czechoslovakia, Roumania, Jugo-Slavia, was similarly a product of fear of a common enemy, Hungary. And the French "system of Europe", which unites all these states in military alliances with France, is the final outcome. Common fears and common desires to safeguard the treaty settlement are the psychological foundations of the system, and French military supremacy and loans for arms and military purposes its material foundations. Instead of the League, France and her allies are to-day the real guarantors of the *status quo* in Europe. By the Peace Settlement

Europe threw off a master, only to be controlled by a former mistress instead.

Yet in fairness to France it must be recognized that she has probably arrived at this position by inadvertence rather than design. The primary concern of France at the close of the War was military security against Germany. With this in view, Foch demanded the Rhine as a frontier. Mr. Lloyd George and President Wilson flatly refused, but undertook instead a military guarantee of France against further aggression by Germany. When the guarantee was repudiated by the United States, Great Britain refused to undertake it alone. France, having now neither the Rhine nor the guarantee, began the formation of alliances with the successor states of Central Europe. Yet even then she does not appear to have believed that this was the best avenue to security. She turned at the same time to the League, which she had hitherto regarded with tolerance rather than enthusiasm, and endeavoured to revive the idea that all members of the League should collectively guarantee the territorial integrity of each. Meantime it had become clear that France would not disarm without guarantees in advance. This situation induced the British Labour Government to meet the French half-way, and the Geneva Protocol of 1924 was the result. The Protocol aimed to strengthen the League by making more certain the application of sanctions against an aggressor, and provided for calling a disarmament conference once the Protocol was accepted by a certain number of states. The Protocol, however, received its quietus at the hands of the British Conservative Government and the Dominions. On second thought, all the British members of the League objected to definite commitments in advance. Moreover, they saw in the Protocol the possibility of friction with the United States, should they ever be called to fulfil their bond.

An alternative plan was, however, brought to maturity the following year in the Locarno Agreement, which marks the greatest concession (to French views) made by Great Britain since the Peace Conference. By Locarno, Great Britain and Italy agreed to come to the aid of France or Germany in the event of either being the victim of aggression at the hands of the other. It marked an equally important concession on Germany's part, since it assumed the acceptance of the territorial settlement in the West, that is to say, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and the demilitarization of the Rhineland and the strip thirty miles wide along the east bank of the Rhine. Germany in turn was to be supported for membership in the League and for a permanent seat on the Council.

The mothers of Europe might now sleep in peace, exclaimed Briand, as he welcomed Germany into the League a few months later.

Locarno has proved, however, a vain hope. By the alliances of France with the successor states of Central Europe, the security of France had become definitely linked with the security of existing frontiers from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Aegean. While Locarno guaranteed France specifically, it extended no specific protection to her allies. France has not, therefore, regarded Locarno as a substitute for a collective guarantee. Her system of alliances has continued and has, indeed, been strengthened since Locarno. Unfortunately also for the cause of disarmament, no *quid pro quo* in the shape of limitation or reduction of armaments was exacted from France. Indeed, France even refused to attend the Geneva Naval Conference held two years later, thereby endangering its success from the outset. And French military budgets have increased since Locarno.

It is extremely difficult for Canadians to understand the French attempt to build security by piling military guarantee on military guarantee. The veriest tyro in military strategy could scarcely see in Germany a menace to France within this generation. But France thinks, or rather feels, in long terms; it is not Germany of the present generation she fears so much as Germany of the future, a Germany recovered from economic convalescence and able to repudiate the Versailles Settlement. France perhaps more than any other country in Western Europe suffers from an inferiority complex due largely to the memory of two invasions within less than half a century, and to a low birth-rate, combined with the fact that its population is less than two-thirds that of Germany. To France the history of western Europe is the history of "a perpetual prize fight of which France has won this round, but of which this round is certainly not the last".[1] France would postpone the next round indefinitely if she could. And she proposes to do so by the approved Napoleonic tradition of force or threat of force, a tradition handed on to the present generation by Bismarck's policy of "blood and iron". The images of Napoleon and Bismarck are seared on the soul of France.

Yet the security which France has in view is undoubtedly wider than mere territorial and political integrity. It includes the security of the Versailles Settlement in Europe. But the Settlement in Eastern Europe might be overturned without endangering French soil. Why, then, should France be so concerned with its maintenance? Clearly the reason is that the Versailles Settlement made

1. Keynes: *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, p. 35.

France the first Power on the continent, and it is this position rather than the territorial arrangements as such that she is now endeavouring to safeguard. These curity of existing frontiers has become the security of her present prestige.

Security, whether of frontiers or prestige, attained by the methods France has adopted inevitably promotes insecurity of other states. This is specially true as respects Germany, which is surrounded by the armed ring of France and her satellites. While Stresemann remained at the helm the forces of reaction in Germany were held in check, but it is doubtful if even Stresemann could have made headway against the storm of the past few months. Germany has been profoundly disappointed with the results of the Stresemann policy of reconciliation with France and fulfilment of treaty obligations. Locarno did not lessen the military threat against Germany. Not until 1930 did the French troops leave the Rhine, and then only after combined diplomatic pressure on the part of Germany and the British Labour Government. Reparations still remain the occasion of trouble, in view of the French hostility to anything savouring of leniency. On top of the growing resentment came the economic depression to add fuel to the flame. Nor can Germans overlook the French delay of the Hoover moratorium last summer until it all but failed to save Germany from utter financial collapse.

German resentment, however, goes beyond immediate French policy to the Treaty of Versailles. The territorial settlement in the East which cut East Prussia from the rest of Germany by the Polish Corridor and which left, all told, some two and a half million Germans under Polish rule has not been accepted by the masses of Germany as a final settlement. The war guilt clause, by which Germany was compelled to accept responsibility for herself and her allies for starting the War, has never been believed by the German people. Historical research has confirmed their disbelief. To the patriotic German it is a living lie, reflecting on the honour of his beloved country.

No less a cause of bitterness is the inequality in armaments begun by the Treaty and still unadjusted. It must not be forgotten that in compelling the reduction of Germany's armaments the Allies definitely promised general disarmament.[1]

1. The preamble to the disarmament section of the Treaty of Versailles reads:
"In order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations, Germany undertakes strictly to observe the military, naval and air clauses that follow".
This clause was drafted by the Allies, not by Germany. Moreover, in their reply to the German delegation on June 16, 1919, they declared:
"The Allied and Associated Powers wish to make it clear that their requirements in regard to German armaments were not made solely with the object of rendering it impossible for Germany to resume her policy of aggression. They are the first steps toward that general reduction and limitation of armaments which they seek to bring about as one of the most fruitful preventives of war, and which it will be one of the first duties of the League of Nations to promote."

Germany has been disarmed; the Allied Powers have not made good their promise, and there is a widespread and growing opinion in Germany that they have no intention of doing so. Hence the rising demand which no Government in Germany can possibly ignore, that the Allies must disarm or the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles be repudiated. In part this demand is based on a feeling of helplessness against France and her allies, in part on a sense of inequality. In the family of nations states take rank largely in accordance with their military or naval power. To keep German armaments permanently lower than those of Belgium is to German nationals an intolerable injustice. And a sense of injustice is a dangerous emotion, whether in domestic or international politics.

It is on such sentiments that Hitlerism feeds. Hitlerism is largely a counsel of resentment and despair. It offers little that is constructive; its chief programme is simply the repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles. The economic depression has undoubtedly increased Hitler's following, but he was a growing force long before the depression hit Germany. To-day his party is the largest and most aggressive in Germany. So far it has been relatively content to advance to power by way of the ballot-box; but there are many who fear that it will resort to direct action, as did Fascism which it professes to follow. The present economic and financial crisis, the strength of Hitlerism and its appeal to the worst in national sentiment, make Germany ripe for revolution. The virtual dictatorship of the Bruening Government may, of course, stave it off, but there is the presidential election coming in May. Whether the personal popularity of the aged Hindenburg, if he chooses to stand again, will enable him to win against Hitler or one of his lieutenants, remains in the lap of the gods. In any case, the dangerous internal situation in Germany, both economically and politically, meantime tends to stiffen the French *bloc* against disarmament.

Reaction to the French policy of military security has not, however, been confined to Germany. Italy, too, has been affected. There are, of course, specific points of dispute between France and Italy, as for example, boundaries between their African colonies, but the matter goes deeper. Italy has found herself diplomatically isolated by the French policy, and, what is more, strategically insecure. Without the resources at home to feed her people or to fight a first-class war whatever her armaments, Italy has become apprehensive of the growing French fleet in the Mediterranean and the alliance with her eastern neighbour, Jugo-Slavia. The situation would concern a Socialist Government scarcely less than that of

Signor Mussolini. It has had two results; it has stimulated counter-arming, and has turned Italy to strengthening her position by diplomatic means. Understandings, perhaps even alliances, have already been entered with Hungary and Bulgaria, and overtures made to Roumania. More significantly, Mussolini within the past two years has reiterated again and again that the Peace Treaties are not eternal and that they must be revised in the interests of peace and justice—a position even the German Government dare not take openly. While Italy would not be averse to a new territorial deal, this is perhaps secondary to the purpose of securing the emotional support of the German people. Recently the rise of Hitlerism has tended to cement the two peoples.

And a new ogre, Russia, has appeared on the fringes of the German camp. Until 1927 Russia was generally content to play the role of Ishmael in League affairs. In that year the Soviets entered League activities by attending the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament at Geneva. The reasons were perhaps two-fold—credits and security, the latter of which concerns us here. Bolshevik leaders seem generally convinced that war between Communism and Capitalism is inevitable. Marx predicted it; *ergo* it must be. Yet despite such superficial preparation as a well-drilled and equipped army, the Bolshevik Government knows well that at present war with any of the Great Powers would be disastrous, because of the immature industrial organization of Soviet Russia as compared with other industrialized countries. War might, indeed, mean revolution at home, hence their desire to stave off the "inevitable" war as long as possible. Yet the armed ring of French allies along the borders of Russia and their anti-Communist policies seem a menace to Russian security, the more so in Russian eyes because these states are satellites of capitalistic, bourgeois France. And on many points Russia finds herself in opposition to the French system of Europe and in substantial agreement with Germany and Italy. Indeed, a *rapprochment* between Russia and Germany was part of Stresemann's policy of advancing diplomatically on both fronts at the same time. Thus Locarno was balanced by a trade agreement with Russia, and the entry of Germany into the League by a security pact with Russia, which was supplemented in 1929 by provision for settling peaceably all disputes between the two countries.

Nor is Italy outside the picture. A trade agreement between Russia and Italy has been in existence since 1924, and a Russian Naval Mission actually visited Italy in 1930. Omens of a probable German-Russian-Italian *bloc* are becoming increasingly evident.

At the last session of the Disarmament Conference, for example, the three Powers on many occasions voted together and against the French group.

Thus distrust of France has become the Cave of Adullam to which the discontented states of Europe are resorting. Pacific in intention as the people of France undoubtedly are, French methods of guaranteeing security have gravely upset the balance of power in Europe. In the absence of a strong League of Nations which could guarantee peace and could promise a substantial measure of justice, the old order of the balance of power is an instinctive alternative. The balance of power is, indeed, as natural a habit of European diplomacy as the Monroe Doctrine for the United States, and discredited as it appeared to have been by the War, there are symptoms of an early return if France continues to dominate Europe as she has done since the War. And the impending weights in the scale-pan indicate a new and highly dangerous grouping. If the balance of power is restored, with its inevitable system of counter-alliances, what hope is there of disarmament, or of permanent peace, or even of civilization in Europe?

The prospects of any success in the coming Conference are gloomy, but not hopeless. Great Britain and the United States will sit as intermediaries between the revisionist and the French group of European states. Both are profoundly concerned with the rising tension and the mounting burden of armaments in Europe. With the possibility of naval rivalry between them now barred by the London Treaty, they will enter the Conference not as rivals but as friends who think alike on the general problem of armaments, and who are determined as never before that disarmament must be. Both are convinced that competition in armaments leads sooner or later to war, and that armaments are in a large measure at the root of the present economic condition of Europe because they have weakened confidence in its political and economic stability. Both, as trading nations, are profoundly concerned with the return of confidence and stability in Europe, and they believe that an agreement limiting and reducing arms would go far to promote confidence. To Great Britain there is the added factor that the increasing armaments in Europe tend to make her, like Italy and Germany, insecure. Yet disarmament cannot come by wishing; nor can the armed nations of Europe be compelled to disarm against their will. Progress at the Conference will be possible only if the forces which to-day make for armaments in Europe can be headed off or reconciled. If our analysis of the situation is correct, the questions at issue are these: Can the security of France and her allies be assured

to their satisfaction by means other than freedom in the matter of armaments? And can the defeated Powers be given the hope that the present system of inequality in armaments and other injustices of the Peace Settlement can be redressed by means other than war or counter-armaments? What help can Great Britain and the United States bring to the solution of these problems?

As for the first problem, in plain words the issue is, On what terms can disarmament be purchased from France? Speculation as to possibilities is perhaps not unprofitable. Head of the military group which to-day dominates Europe, suffering comparatively little from the economic depression which has compelled other states to look upon disarmament as a necessary economy, and with a huge gold reserve and Europe badly in need of credit, France is in a position to exact stiff terms. The military or naval limitations or reductions she may demand of her neighbours do not concern us here. France has always insisted that security must precede disarmament, and the type of security she obviously prefers is some form of a collective guarantee, such as the Protocol of 1924 provided, or as an alternative a specific guarantee from Great Britain, such as Locarno. France is, however, little concerned with a guarantee of frontiers throughout the world; her concern is with Central Europe and the Mediterranean. No French Government could probably carry the French parliament and the French people if it consented to limitation or reduction of armaments without at least the appearance of a victory in the matter of guarantees for these areas. The problem is then, Can Great Britain reverse her policy and consent to such guarantees?

The difference between the two Powers is perhaps more apparent than real. Great advances have been made on both sides since Locarno, and especially since the Protocol. One of the chief objections of Great Britain to the Protocol was the compulsory settlement of all disputes. Since then, all British members have accepted, subject to reciprocity, the compulsory jurisdiction of the World Court which provides for settlement of certain specified justiciable differences, and all but South Africa the General Act for the pacific settlement of all disputes. Moreover, Great Britain has accepted, subject to an agreement on disarmament being reached at the coming conference, the Convention for Financial Assistance to states the victims of aggression. This Convention is an important step in providing for the fulfilment of the obligations of the Covenant to preserve the territorial integrity and existing political independence of members of the League. In all these steps, France has kept pace with Great Britain. Above all, Locarno

has definitely linked Great Britain with European peace. Although Locarno professes to commit Great Britain only to the preservation of the *status quo* between France and Germany, it is inconceivable that Great Britain could keep out in the event of trouble in Eastern Europe which embroiled France and Germany, and any attempt to alter boundaries there by force would almost inevitably do so. It is nonsense to pretend that Great Britain retains complete freedom of action if trouble occurs in this area. And, of course, there are the obligations to assist in keeping the peace in Europe as elsewhere which, though indefinite, certainly exist under the Covenant of the League. Because of Locarno and the League, Great Britain has no longer a free hand in European affairs; yet because of her refusal to go farther than Locarno in making her promises definite, she has relatively slight influence in preventing the reactionary policies of the successor states which seem to be leading straight to war.

Great Britain's difficulty in going farther consists in her dual rôle as at once an European country with vital European interests, and a world Power with interests no less vital abroad. This difficulty has been accentuated by the rise of the United States as a naval Power. No British policy which endangered Anglo-American relations can be to-day satisfactory. Yet the risk of falling foul of the United States through guarantees to France is certainly less than it was prior to the Kellogg Pact of 1927. By the Pact the United States has become indirectly linked with the League in its efforts to preserve peace. The Pact, of course, makes no provision for sanctions against an aggressor as does the Covenant of the League. Yet since all League members are members of the Pact, the United States, even if it did not assist, could scarcely avoid permitting action against a state which resorted to war in violation of its obligations under the Pact. The recent Manchurian issue, when the United States freely co-operated with the Council in trying to effect a peaceful settlement, denotes a new departure in American policy towards the League. There is thus much less danger of the League, or any member thereof, resorting to action against an aggressor without knowledge of the views of the United States in advance. Yet the danger of friction has not been absolutely removed, and British policy must keep it in mind.

A further difficulty arises from the constitutional position of the British Dominions. Foreign policy is no longer the sole concern of Downing Street, and four of the Dominions look upon European difficulties from a position of relative security overseas. The Dominions have never been enthusiastic about the obligations

in the Covenant of the League requiring aid in support of members the victims of aggression and action against aggressors. Much less are they likely to undertake definite commitments in Europe—no Dominion has ratified Locarno. While it is scarcely conceivable that further commitments in Europe by Great Britain if she felt them essential would be vetoed by any Dominion, further commitments would scarcely strengthen the Commonwealth relationship, and in the event of Great Britain being called upon to fulfil her bond under such commitments the Commonwealth would undoubtedly be put to severe internal strains.

At the conference, Great Britain may face the unpleasant alternative either to extend further guarantees to France in return for progress in disarmament, or to permit the breakdown of the conference. The risk in following either course is tremendous. The first involves possibilities of internal difficulties in the Commonwealth, and perhaps of friction with the United States. Both possibilities are, however, remote and would happen only in the event of Great Britain being called upon to fulfil her obligations, and the existence of a promise by Great Britain to take action against an aggressor might be expected to prevent any aggression in advance. On the other hand, to risk a breakdown of the conference is to risk a continuance of the present situation in Europe which is both retarding the economic recovery of Europe and setting the stage for war.

There remains to be considered the possible special contribution of the United States. Certainly no American Government could risk an offer of a collective guarantee to Europe or a specific guarantee to France. On the other hand, the United States possesses a powerful lever in the war debts. Mr. Hoover's message to Congress foreshadows action on war debts, and there are persistent rumours that an offer of cancellation will be made on two conditions—first, proportionate reduction in reparations, and secondly, a substantial measure of disarmament. Alone this offer might bear little fruit; a patriotic Frenchman might be expected to look upon an agreement of this sort as selling the security of France for a mess of pottage. Yet if some form of military guarantee were forthcoming from Great Britain, and France could strike a good financial bargain, as she well might, the offer might look attractive.

There is the final problem of assuring peace in Europe—the removal of the sense of injustice under which the defeated Powers are smarting. The loudest demands are for a revision of the territorial settlement, but this is out of the question. It could

not be obtained by pacific means, and war would simply rivet new and perhaps more terrible evils on Europe. In any case, given the ideal of national self-determination which at present holds Europe in thrall, no redrawing of boundaries could eliminate the minority problem or make state territory coincide with state economic need. Whatever Europe wants, what it needs is a liberal application of internationalism, not another dose of the poison of nationalism. A reinforced League of Nations seems to be its only hope, a League able to secure observance of minority obligations and to promote real economic co-operation between Europe's impoverished peoples. Neither of these objectives is at present attainable because the League is without the necessary moral force, largely because it is losing ground before the rising tide of militarism. No more practical step could perhaps be taken to revive faith in the League than progress at the Disarmament Conference, and particularly so if it were accompanied by drastic reductions in reparations. Such steps would tend to cut the ground from under the feet of Hitler and other chauvinists, and bring new hope to the defeated peoples, not so much for its immediate material effects, but as an earnest of the future. But the removal of the injustices of the peace is at best a long process.

"The problem of disarmament is not the problem of disarmament", says a distinguished student of the subject. "It really is the problem of the organization of the World Community."[1] Progress in disarmament at the coming conference seems to depend primarily upon two factors, the contributions Great Britain and the United States, but particularly Great Britain, are prepared to make to the building of the world-community, and the willingness of France to forego a policy which threatens to bring the half-completed structure tumbling down about our ears.

1. de Madariaga: *Disarmament*, p. 56.