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# PACIFISM AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN, 1931–1935

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In the 1930s the British peace movement expanded rapidly from a preserve of small elitist peace societies into a mass phenomenon. More specifically, it was in the period from the Manchurian crisis to the Italo-Ethiopian war that what has been loosely called 'pacifism' gained political weight. Whilst its effect on the making of foreign policy has been the subject of much historical inquiry, the manifestations of the peace debate, including the famous Peace Ballot, can best be explained in the domestic context of party and pressure-group politics. The divisive nature of war rejection as an issue then becomes clearly apparent. Indeed the argument that the peace movement was a point of consensus can only be valid at a superficial level. One can agree with Marwick that a 'middle opinion' preferring peace to war developed in the thirties.[1] But in public discussion about collective security pacifists caused schisms which hindered the clarification of party and pressure-group policies.

To begin with one must respect important ideological differences in the peace movement. Conscientious objection could serve a variety of moral, religious, and rationalist ends. In addition, socialists continued to oppose capitalist war – in their case the Spanish Civil War later proved a decisive test, in which the justice of the cause played a crucial part. Of course in any particular individual, George Lansbury for example, ideological distinctions could blur to produce a politico-religious pacifism. More significantly, pacifists of different hue, even when they disagreed with one another, exerted a common pressure upon those who believed in the maintenance of peace through the system of collective security reserved to the League of Nations. With Marxists condemning the League as a capitalist war-instrument, and moralists reviling it as a sterile laboratory more concerned with forensic experiment than providing a moral lead in world affairs, organizations like the League of Nations Union (L.N.U.) were plunged into debilitating conflicts.

Indeed the impetus to the 'peace renaissance' came not simply from the plethora of anti-war literature which appeared from 1928 onward, but from the vacillation of collective security advocates themselves during the crisis in the far east. Viscount Robert Cecil, president of the L.N.U., knew that the

[1] Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the century of total war* (London, 1968), pp. 243, 247; 'Middle opinion in the thirties: planning, progress and "political agreement"', *English Historical Review*, LXXIX (April 1964), 285–98.

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abandonment of China was inevitable,[2] but he set the tone of the L.N.U.'s attitude – one of restraint and praise for the League's mediatory role. As late as May 1933 the editor of the L.N.U.'s *Headway* exhorted his readers to 'possess their souls in patience' because the League was breaking new ground. One could always argue that 'The failure of the League in regard to Shanghai would not, of course, be its deathblow. If its writ does not run at the other end of Asia that is no proof that its writ does not run in Europe.'[3] It was but a short, if unjustified, step to blame government disloyalty to the Covenant for the League's inadequacy. Had the government taken a lead against Japan at Geneva the aggression would have been stopped. As Gilbert Murray, chairman of the L.N.U. explained: 'The trouble is not that the sanctions are not severe enough but that the Governments will not use them at all. It is good faith and not physical force that is the key to the whole question.'[4] Cecil happily allowed the myth to circulate when promoting the Peace Ballot. Quite simply, the League's reputation had to be retrieved at the expense of the national government.

Other government critics had been almost as tendentious. The Labour party condemned Japan at an early stage in the dispute and, perhaps to dramatize the situation for political purposes, had represented the crisis as a test case for the League, with implications for the future of disarmament and security in Europe.[5] But the parliamentary leaders, Ponsonby and Lansbury, would not demand economic sanctions for fear they would lead to war. When the Commons debated an arms embargo, on 27 February 1933, Lansbury embarrassed his colleagues by calling for a ban on arms to both aggressor and victim. In any case the Labour party, like every other group interested in foreign affairs, had made support for economic sanctions against Japan conditional upon the participation of the U.S.A. – a confession that the League could not handle the business itself.

Collective security advocates could not completely disguise the League's impotence. As a decline in L.N.U. membership showed, the episode greatly

[2] Cecil to Murray, 13 November 1931, Murray papers, Bodleian Library; Cecil to Simon, 16 November 1931, Cecil papers, British Library, Add. MSS 51082. See also Christopher Thorne, 'Viscount Cecil, the government and the far eastern crisis of 1931', *Historical Journal*, XIV (December 1971), 805–26.

[3] *Headway* (March 1932), p. 51. It was even suggested (in *Headway*, November 1932), that the formation of a correct judgement about the dispute was more important than any action to give it effect.

[4] Copy of Murray to Hills, 31 March 1933, Cecil papers, Add. MSS 51132. See also Murray to Cecil, 7 March 1933, Cecil papers, ibid.; *Headway* (June 1932), p. 111; L.N.U., *London Bulletin*, LIX (June 1933); P. Noel-Baker, 'Note of the breakdown of the collective system over the Manchurian dispute', 26 February 1935, Lothian papers, Scottish Record Office, GD 40, 17/108.

[5] *Labour party annual report*, 3–7 October 1932, p. 68; *H. of C. Deb.* CCVII (10 November 1932), Col. 526. For Liberal party opinion see the National Liberal Federation Council's resolution of April in *Liberal Magazine*, XL (May 1932), 238; *New Chronicle* (11 November 1931), p. 8; *Manchester Guardian* (30 January 1932), p. 10. The interventionist myth is dealt with extensively by R. Bassett, *Democracy and foreign policy: a case history: the Sino-Japanese dispute, 1931–1933* (London, 1952), pp. 56–9, 150–81; Thorne, *The limits of foreign policy: the west, the League and the far eastern crisis of 1931–1933* (London, 1972), pp. 177–81, 217–21.

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weakened public support for the League. To right-wing observers the crisis had demonstrated the danger and futility of excessive faith in an international security system. And on the left, theories of conscientious objection – to capitalist war, national war, or all war – increasingly attracted public attention. When Brailsford announced that the League was dead he typified a response by no means confined to fellow-members of the I.L.P.[6]

The only people with energetic, if confused, ideas had been pacifists. Their idiosyncratic approach to the Shanghai crisis resulted from dissatisfaction with the League's failure to organize world opinion against aggression, and the fear that any sanctions would cause the war to spread. Significantly, Cecil's main antagonists at an emergency session of the L.N.U. in February 1932 were pacifists who sought assurance that any economic pressure by the League would not lead to war.[7] The curious blend of impatience and apprehension was expressed by Wilfred Wellock, chairman of the No More War Movement. In a letter in the *Manchester Guardian* (13 February 1932), typical of many then appearing in the Liberal press, he announced that vast numbers were losing faith in the existing peace machinery. Wellock called for an international 'army' of men and women to state 'that under no circumstances will they bear arms or render any form of military service', a declaration which presaged the notorious Oxford Union resolution. Three prominent divines, A. Herbert Grey, Maude Royden and R. H. Sheppard, took a more active approach, deciding: 'that the only way which would prove effective... is that men and women who believe it to be their duty should volunteer to place themselves unarmed between the combatants'. The *Manchester Guardian* (27 February 1932) thought the scheme intelligent, apt, and no more fantastic than war itself, and some 320 people (including Brigadier-General F. P. Crozier), offered their services to the League. Fortunately for the volunteers the League's secretary-general could only entertain proposals from governments.[8]

The new tempo of pacifism and socialist war resistance was manifested in changes to the organization and tactics of peace groups. In the twenties such groups had been basically old boys' clubs for C.O.s and their sympathizers – côteries of dedicated socialists, Christian pacifists, and rationalists like Ponsonby and Russell. The combined membership could not have exceeded about 25,000. One such group, the No More War Movement, was founded by absolutists in 1921 in succession to the No Conscription Fellowship. It had only 3,000 members, and its leading lights in the late twenties were still the war resisters of 1914–18: Fenner Brockway, Wellock, A. Barratt Brown, the Rev. Leyton Richards, W. J. Chamberlain and Walter H. Ayles. Already by 1931 this kind of vintage fraternity was no longer adequate to service the popular campaign for disarmament. Now the Shanghai Peace Army proposal also indicated the need for a more offensive outlook. Such an approach was

[6] *New Leader* (19 February 1932), p. 1.

[7] L.N.U. *Minutes of an emergency General Council Meeting*, 27 February 1932; *Headway* (March 1932), p. 50.

[8] Letters in the *Manchester Guardian* (26 February 1932), p. 18; (29 February 1932), p. 12; (12 March 1932), p. 4.

embodied in the Marxist British Anti-War Movement formed in 1933, and the moralist Peace Pledge Union formed in 1934. By contrast the old-style No More War Movement increased its membership between 1933 and 1936 by a mere 500. In 1937 it amalgamated with the P.P.U, which on the eve of the war boasted 130,000 members.[9]

In this development the National Peace Council (N.P.C.) played a professional role, co-ordinating the work of a host of pacifist and non-pacifist organizations. Its *Peace year book* appeared regularly after 1931 and its monthly paper, *Peace*, after April 1933. In the summer of 1933 the N.P.C. also sponsored the first of a series of annual peace congresses. For a while, the N.P.C. utilized the expertise of non-pacifists, particularly Norman Angell, Philip Noel-Baker, and W. Arnold-Forster. Full-time agitators, they moved from one pressure group to another regardless of basic ideological incompatibilities. Arnold-Forster, a sincere believer in League force, continued to serve as Geneva representative of the pacifist-dominated N.P.C. However, supporters of collective force were increasingly out of sympathy with the changing complexion of the peace movement. By 1936 the N.P.C. Executive had cast off most of its sanctionists in favour of a new breed, which included Sheppard, Vera Brittain, E. W. Barnes (bishop of Birmingham), and Dr Hewlett Johnson.

Heroes of wartime victimization and peers of liberal conscience still battled for peace after 1931, but they were being joined by bishops and actresses, army officers and students. The P.P.U., for example, was sponsored by Aldous Huxley, Rose Macaulay, Margaret Storm Jameson, Vera Brittain, Max Plowman, Siegfried Sassoon, John Middleton Murry, Sheppard, and Crozier. Well-to-do and cultured, but with little political experience, they possessed the useful attribute of being rebels at a time when conventional views about economics, parliament and foreign policy were at risk. Most of them had contributed to the war effort. Plowman and Sassoon had seen military service before making a stand against war; Sheppard had been a padre; Vera Brittain had served with a voluntary aid detachment; Murry had been a censor. The much-bemedalled Crozier was an interesting example of the flinty soldier who now displayed the same enthusiasm for peace as he had done for war. In Flanders he had assiduously directed the execution of a man for desertion and had committed an atrocity by killing a surrendering German. But he came to believe that a future war would break up the moral fibre of civilization.[10] As befitted a convert, his involvement in the war rendered his pacifism all the more zealous.

In political terms, pacifists extended their vision beyond the issue of individual consience to the prospect of converting whole societies. No longer content merely to protect the dissenter and justify the dissenting conscience,

[9] W. J. Chamberlain, *Fighting for peace: the story of the War Resistance Movement* (London, 1929), pp. 118, 126; David C. Lukowitz, 'British pacifists and appeasement: the Peace Pledge Union', *Journal of Contemporary History*, IX (January 1974), 115–27; A. C. F. Beales, *The history of peace* (London, 1931), p. 326; National Council for the Prevention of War, *Peace year book* (London, 1927), pp. 50 ff.

[10] Brig.-Gen. F. P. Crozier, *A brass hat in no man's land* (London, 1930), pp. 82–3, 111, 155.

the pacifist set out to win converts through missionary activity such as the lobbying of L.N.U. branches. It was this process of politicization which annoyed not only Beaverbrook but less hostile observers as well. Liddell Hart commented, for example: 'contact with many of my pacifist friends, with whose outlook I am naturally in sympathy, too often has the effect of making me almost despair of the elimination of war, because in their very pacifism the element of pugnacity is so perceptible'.[11]

One concomitant of this belligerence was an emphasis on positive, pragmatic reasoning. Naturally the religious aspect remained salient to Christian pacifists. But to make converts in a largely secular society a religious justification for conscientious objection lacked clout. A rational theory of international relations seemed necessary. Most pacifists confidently believed that war could be prevented, or neutralized, by the conversion of individuals to war resistance. Sufficient numbers of conscientious objectors would deprive the stage of manpower and cause it to sue for peace. The theory involved several false assumptions about potential aggressors: if they were not deterred by domestic or world opinion, their moral consciences would be impressed by non-resistance. 'I am certain', Donald Soper remarked, 'that pacifism contains a spiritual force strong enough to repel any invader.'[12] Pacifism was a positive strategy because, somehow, love and goodness were infectious. Inverting the metaphor, Huxley decided that: 'pacifism is to war what clean water and clean milk are to typhoid; it makes the outbreak of war impossible'.[13] Given the condition of Europe in the thirties this was a dubious assertion, and there remained the point that an aggressor state might not be impressed by pacifist postures. To this Bertrand Russell countered that if the worst came to the worst the consequences of being as insecure as, say, Denmark would be less terrible than war.[14] The validity of this, of course, could only be judged in particular contexts; in the second World War a large number of pacifists preferred to resist Nazism. To some extent, then, their pacifism exhibited a strong element of otherworldliness. In a rare moment of indiscretion the P.P.U. confessed: 'To test the truth of pacifist theory we must divorce ourselves from the meshes of immediate difficulties which owe their existence to the age-long application of wrong principles.'[15]

War resistance deriving from a Marxist interpretation of events also required faith in a distant ideal: international working-class unity, a fallacy exposed by the first World War but now given a new twist by the spread of fascism. The theory recognized no contradiction in the policy of resistance to both

[11] Liddell Hart to G. Glasgow, 14 May 1934, notes for history file, Liddell Hart papers, Medmenham. A minor testimony to pacifist pressure was the British Legion's public defence of the Remembrance ceremony as a celebration of peace and not war, *British Legion Journal*, XI (May 1932), 396.

[12] *Peace* (July 1933), p. 15. See also H. R. L. Sheppard, *We say 'No'* (London, 1935), p. 5; A. A. Milne, *Peace with honour* (London, 1934), p. 198.

[13] Aldous Huxley, *What are you going to do about it?* (London, 1936), p. 14.

[14] Bertrand Russell, *Which way to peace?* (London, 1936), pp. 135–7.

[15] P.P.U., *Is pacifism scientific or sentimental?* (London, n.d.), p. 10.

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fascism and war. They were both products of capitalism. Accordingly, the ideologues relied on the power of domestic and international working class action to foil the war plans of capitalist/fascist governments. Instead of alerting socialists to the prospect of a Nazi war against the West, events in Germany merely heightened fears about a comparable takeover in Britain, encouraging John Strachey in *The menace of fascism* (1933) to discern fascist tendencies in British capitalism.

Under continental influence British war resisters grasped the importance of 'united front' activities. Following a peace conference in Amsterdam in the autumn of 1932 (initiated by the German communist, Willi Münzenberg, and the French communists, Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse), the British Anti-War Movement was established. Its first public meeting was held in Bermondsey, in March 1933. The 1,500 delegates included communists (Emile Burns and Saklatvala), members of the Labour party (Woolf and Cole), I.L.P. members, and pacifists (Royden, Joad, Murry, Russell and Huxley). Claiming to function as a popular front for all pacifists – rational, revolutionary and religious – its chief officers, W. J. Brown, Percy Collick, Dorothy Woodman and Strachey, were more inspired by Marx than God. They regarded with horror the growth of fascism and the apparent connivance of the disarmament conference in rearming Germany. But Strachey also expressed the group's disillusion with collective security:

> We do not believe that it is any more use to appeal to the present Governments of the world when they are assembled together at Geneva and call themselves 'The League of Nations', than it is to appeal to them separately at home.[16]

The working classes, argued Strachey, would ensure peace by organizing mass resistance to the war policies of the ruling elite. It was not clear whether the Anti-War Movement was truly pacifist or entertained the possibility of a socialist war against fascism. With its reliance on working-class strength and unity it appeared to assume that fascism could be dealt with on the home fronts before a war occurred.

Banned as a communist satellite by the Labour party, the Anti-War Movement lasted only a year. However, the Anti-War Movement acted briefly as a focus for dissent from Labour's apparently spiritless response to the threat of fascism and war. Of course, the radical left had never harboured admiration for the League of Nations, but criticism had been muted by the campaign for disarmament – until the Manchurian crisis betrayed the inability of capitalist states to halt an imperialist venture.

British communists endeavoured to make the most of it, carving out their own uniquely devious course in foreign policy. As a Comintern satellite operating in an overwhelmingly hostile environment, the C.P.G.B. faced uncommon hazards – mainly on account of the Comintern. The environment, in fact, became more amenable. Economic crisis, the menace of fascism, and factionalism in the Labour movement, all contrived to favour the C.P.G.B. and

[16] John Strachey, *The British Anti-War Movement* (London, 1935), pp. 6–7. See also *New Statesman* (11 March 1933), pp. 283–4; *Manchester Guardian* (9 June 1932), p. 12; *Peace* (June 1933), p. 9.

its united front activities. But, ironically, of the 79 replies to a *Labour Monthly* survey on war, 35 per cent approved of moral pacifism, as opposed to 51 per cent who believed in revolutionary war resistance, 8 per cent League security, and an eccentric handful who favoured outright imperialism.[17] The sample was tiny and the replies confusing, but the editor, Ranji Palme Dutt, expressed dismay that his readers should appear to have been as influenced as other political groups by 'bourgeois pacifism'. Then in September 1934, after patiently waiting for the inevitable League war against the Soviets, communists were dumbfounded as the U.S.S.R. itself entered the 'thieves' kitchen'. The C.P.G.B. eventually explained Russia's new policy as an attempt to spread working-class objectives in the citadel of imperialism, openly dubbing the League as a tool of Soviet foreign policy. It also accepted military action against fascism on condition that it was in defence of a Workers' Britain.[18]

Marxists in the I.L.P. displayed somewhat less alacrity. Adrift from the Labour party, after their quarrel over parliamentary discipline in 1932, some I.L.P. members felt free to negotiate with the communists for a united front against the menaces of fascism and war. The talks took place in March 1933 on the initiative of a Revolutionary Policy Committee in the I.L.P. But irascible and domineering, the C.P.G.B. ridiculed Maxton as a reformist in Marxist clothing; whilst for their part, Brockway, Maxton, Paton and Wheatley deprecated the C.P.G.B.'s uncritical acceptance of Soviet policy. On the U.S.S.R.'s presence at Geneva, the I.L.P. remained uncompromising: 'Except as a romantic illusion, created to get public approval of armament schemes, the theory of collective security... is and will remain utterly worthless *so long as the League of Nations is largely, or mainly, composed of capitalist governments.*'[19] Despite such fine sentiment the Ethiopian crisis was to throw the I.L.P. into great confusion. It proved difficult to discriminate in practice between working-class sanctions and bourgeois collective security, and in the midst of the crisis a section of the I.L.P. defected to the Communist party in support of League, as well as working-class, sanctions against Italy.[20]

After years of being pushed in the direction of liberal internationalism the Labour party succumbed briefly to war resistance pressure. Had it arisen solely, or even primarily as a result of the disarmament deadlock, the pacifist threat might have been less critical. Despite a resurgence of opinion in favour of unilateralism, some pacifists had counselled a cautious strategy. Ponsonby, for example, argued: 'The principle of Anti-War in all circumstances has grown very strongly even to the extent of Disarmament by Example. But the Party as a whole does not accept this, and some would even agree to a League war... The best and simplest stand for us to make is to go out for disarmament

[17] *Labour Monthly* (August 1934), pp. 465–6.

[18] *Daily Worker* (17 September 1934), p. 1; *Labour Monthly* (January 1935), p. 17.

[19] *ILP News* (5 July 1935), cited in Fenner Brockway, *Socialism over sixty years: The life of Jowett of Bradford, 1864–1944* (London, 1946), p. 331; *New Leader* (11 November 1932), p. 6, (22 March 1935), p. 1.

[20] The I.L.P.'s membership fell from 21,000 in 1931 to 4,400 in 1935. See S. Hornby, 'Left wing pressure groups in the British Labour movement, 1930–1940', University of Liverpool M.A. thesis (1966), p. 70.

down to the level imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles while condemning Hitlerism within Germany.'[21] But following MacDonald's 'betrayal' of 1931, and in the wake of the Japanese aggression, the spirit in left-wing politics became cataclysmic.

In particular, the middle-class idealists who formed the Socialist League in 1932 made strenuous efforts to commit the party to organized war resistance. Cripps, Strachey, Cole and Laski presented a stark choice between full-blooded socialism and outworn capitalism on both domestic and international fronts. Cripps, like Strachey, became obsessed with the idea that the tories would find fascism at home and abroad a natural ally in time of trouble.[22] His fellow-malcontent, C. P. Trevelyan, introduced a resolution at the 1933 Labour Party Conference in Hastings, demanding a general strike in the event of war. 'From the League of Nations', said Trevelyan, 'there is no final safety now. The League of Nations is worked by feeble and sceptical Goverments like our own, or by Governments that openly deride world peace, like Italy and Germany.'[23] In an atmosphere somewhat reddened by economic and political events the Socialist League commanded support and the resolution went through unopposed.

Trade unionists, who occupied twelve of the twenty-five places on Labour's national executive, cavilled at such attempts by intellectuals to saddle unions with the responsibility of calling a general strike. But they were temporarily subdued, for the International Federation of Trade Unions had adopted a war resistance resolution in April 1933, and at the T.U.C. in September left-wing delegates had forced the leadership to prepare a report on the whole issue of trade union action against war. Further, many of Labour's outstanding pro-League internationalists (including Dalton) had lost seats in the 1931 general election. Henderson, as chairman of the Disarmament Conference, had become a prisoner of Geneva.

A wavering of conviction among Leaguists was perhaps as significant as these quirks of political fortune. Pethick-Lawrence, for example, retained his support for the League at the cost of much heart-searching: 'I was under no illusion that a war waged on behalf of the League would materially differ from any other war, either in its conduct or in its results.'[24] Leonard Woolf, a member of the Advisory Committee on International Questions, felt obliged to point out that Labour:

> will not support the League if it is used by our Government as an instrument of imperialist, anti-democratic, or anti-socialist policy. The Party cannot ignore the dangerous possibility of such a misuse of the machinery of the League with the present Government in power.[25]

[21] Ponsonby to Lansbury, 22 October 1933, Lansbury papers, vol. 13, London School of Economics.

[22] In L. Anderson Fenn et al., *Problem of the socialist transition* (London, 1934), p. 24.

[23] *Labour party annual report*, 2–6 October 1933, p. 186.

[24] F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate has been kind* (London, 1943), p. 186.

[25] Advisory Committee on International Questions, Memorandum No. 433A (April 1933), Labour Party Archives, Transport House. See also Leonard Woolf, 'Labour's foreign policy', *Political Quarterly*, IV (October–December 1933), 504–24.

The Hastings war resistance resolution reflected dissatisfaction with the League and the government's foreign policy. It did not, however, mark the party's conversion to pacifism. Rather, Labour became a party of confused and divided counsels (the conference had also assented to a League security force). Labour's executive could only salvage a semblance of logic by fostering the myth that non-military League sanctions would suffice to stem aggression. Yet the Socialist Leaguers offered no practical alternative. Indeed, two months after the 1933 conference Trevelyan himself backed the Covenant and urged the progressive implementation of non-military sanctions in the event of aggression.[26] Geneva was not abandoned.

This could not prevent conflict a year later at Southport. Sanctionists had utilized in the meantime their dominance of the National Joint Council to eliminate the more blatant contradictions of party policy. The entrenchment of Nazism confirmed their fears about the impotence of the German labour movement – hitherto Europe's strongest. Bevin also postulated that German 'Fascism' might lead to a war against capitalist states and that fascism might have to be resisted from without.[27] The National Joint Council's programme, 'War and Peace', published on 28 June 1934, insisted that Labour would support collective armed force under the Covenant, but would refuse to support a British government which resorted to war in defiance of the League of Nations. The Council reaffirmed that under the T.U.C.'s existing standing orders, the movement would convene an emergency conference to consider the general strike weapon. But it had effectively undercut the advance commitment to war resistance agreed to in 1933.[28] At Southport the combination of trade union votes and the prestigious influence of Henderson, Dalton, Attlee, Wilmot and Noel-Baker ensured the endorsement of 'War and Peace' by 1,519,000 votes to 673,000.

The divisions did not heal, however. Socialist Leaguers who clung to the principle of working-class action against war further antagonized party leaders by flirting with the communists – the tactic which was to destroy the Socialist League in 1937. They, too, aimed for an alliance with the U.S.S.R. to promote world socialism, using the League as a place in which to harangue capitalist governments.[29] This vague notion of an alternative world-order recognized the need for an alliance against fascism, but conflicted sharply with the pragmatic gradualism promoted by Bevin and Dalton. The debate overshadowed Lansbury's Christian absolutism. Caught in a no-man's land between the Marxists and liberal internationalists, Lansbury had elected not to speak on sanctions at Southport. But a substantial minority of the party continued to

[26] Letter in *New Statesman* (23 September 1933), p. 841. By 1935 Trevelyan was advocating a League force to curb Italy.

[27] Alan Bullock. *The life and times of Ernest Bevin*. 2 vols. (London, 1960), I, 546–7; *T.U.C. annual*

revisited', *Journal of Contemporary History*, VI (1971), 172–96.

However, by the autumn of 1934 the prospect of even minimal British participation in collective sanctions under the League or Locarno diminished appreciably. A speech by Smuts to Chatham House on 13 November received widespread acclaim because it played down the danger of war in Europe. Loose war-talk, Smuts had indicated, was all the product of pacifist scaremongers. In an incomparably fatuous dismissal of Europe's headaches, he had proclaimed: 'Once Europeans admit to themselves that they are perhaps a little mad, the cure would come of itself.'[33] This mirrored the shift in official policy towards United States isolationism. Baldwin himself took up the theme of deference to American susceptibilities in speeches to Conservative organizations on 22 November 1934 and 27 May 1935. Right-wing opinion thus devalued the League at the very time that Cecil was promoting its virtues through the Peace Ballot. Further, by demanding rearmament, government supporters were now signalling an end to their acceptance of a vital internationalist ideal.

Whilst both pacifist and right-wing pressure weakened public faith in collective security, there was complete lack of communication between the two groups. They certainly did not see each other as potential allies against a militarized League. Right-wing critics rarely differentiated between moral pacifists and sanctionists, often accusing the former of attempting to involve Britain in a League war. Many Conservatives, too, would have agreed with Hailsham that foreign states would interpret 'the silly chattering of some of our boys at the universities' as an invitation to dismantle the British Empire[34] (though there is no evidence that 'pacifism' rather than Conservative policies influenced Hitler's calculations).

However, the 'silly chattering' did become a symbol of the new pacifist militancy. And the Oxford Union's resolution of 9 February 1933 (that 'this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and country') contributed to the pressure against collective security which was building up on all sides of the L.N.U. Collectivists maintained that the vote did not rule out fighting for international law and justice. Yet if the resolution meant anything it meant that the students would not follow king and country in any circumstances, not even in a League war. The notion that the result signified, by implication, a vote for the League, was a myth created a few days after the event by a non-participant.[35] The evidence points the other way. Frank Hardie, the president of the Union, regarded the vote as symptomatic of an increasing

extensive revision of the peace treaties, see 12 December 1933, p. 12. For the views of the Round Table movement, see Memorandum of the London Round Table Group, Blickling, 29 May 1933, Lothian papers, GD 40, 17/276. Among those who estimated Germany as the main potential enemy, Vansittart contemplated the recruitment of pro-League opinion and took the trouble to inquire how far the L.N.U. had fallen under the sway of pacifism. See Murray to Cecil, 5 December 1933, Cecil papers, Add. MSS 51132.

[33] Gen. J. C. Smuts, 'The present international outlook', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, XIV (January–February 1935), 6.

[34] *Daily Telegraph* (18 November 1935), p. 11.

[35] Jonathan Griffin in a letter in *New Statesman* (25 February 1933), p. 219. The notion was also fostered by R. B. McCallum, *Public opinion and the last peace* (London, 1944), pp. 177–80.

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left-wing trend in the university. A communist October Club with between 200 and 300 members had been formed in January 1932, and a previous debate in the Union resolved that 'in Socialism lies the only solution to the problems facing the country'. According to Hardie the Union had now decided that, Japan having called the League's bluff, 'the best method of ending war was that of individual resistance to any future war'. Michael Foot, president of the Liberal Club and Hardie's successor as Union president, also believed that the government's handling of the Manchurian crisis had 'driven student opinion into the consideration of an uncompromising attitude towards war'.[36] Cecil claimed with some justice that the motion merely expressed general disgust against war and could not be taken literally.[37] But given the left-wing developments in the university and the discredit which the League of Nations had incurred, many of the students undoubtedly suspected Cecil's brand of collective security.

Echoes of the undergraduate vote troubled the leadership of the L.N.U. Hitherto the L.N.U. had tolerated a certain amount of dissent. Co-operation with pacifists had occurred in campaigns for disarmament and against the private arms business. But on issues like League sanctions militant pacifism threatened the very basis of the organization. What might be described as an oblique probe by pacifists enlivened an otherwise dull meeting of the L.N.U. General Council on 22 June 1933. Citing the example of the Oxford students, a delegate moved that the L.N.U. should accept 'that individuals would be justified in refusing to fight or assist in any war which is declared by the League of Nations to be waged in contravention of the Covenant or of the [Kellogg] Pact'. In theory this did not exclude the possibility of fighting in a League war. Cecil realized, however, that this apparently harmless proposal might stigmatize the L.N.U. as an unpatriotic bastion of conscientious objection. Nor could he believe that Britain would engage in a war in contravention of the Covenant.[38] His cold douche angered those who had less faith in the government, and risked further loss of support. But it was a wise decision. There was no point in exposing the L.N.U. to misinterpretation.

Nevertheless, thanks to Cecil's resourcefulness, the L.N.U. displayed its adaptability to a changed political environment. Indeed it is only in the context of the pacifist challenge that the L.N.U.'s involvement in the Peace Ballot makes sense. Whilst it is true that Cecil devised the Ballot to exert influence on government policy, he also employed it to relieve pressure on the L.N.U. itself. The fortunes of the L.N.U. tended to fluctuate with the status of the League of Nations, and clearly the League had suffered major reversals. In fact the number of L.N.U. subscribers fell from 410,000 in 1931 to 377,824 in 1933. In the London region membership fell from 72,000 to 66,000 between 1932 and 1933. By early 1934 Arnold-Forster was indicating that defection

[36] *New Statesman* (18 February 1933), pp. 181–3: Michael Foot, in V. K. Krishna Menon, ed., *Young Oxford and war* (London, 1934), pp. 19–24.

[37] L.N.U., *Minutes of the 14th annual meeting*, 20–22 June 1933, p. 47.

[38] Ibid. pp. 24, 43–7.

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from collective security ideals had reached the dimensions of a stampede – mainly in the direction of pacifism. Staff at the L.N.U.'s head office even took the unprecedented step of denouncing their employers, on the grounds that public confidence in the movement had been badly shaken by the executive's feebleness during the Manchurian crisis. Cecil struggled to stem the tide by charging the detractors with attempting to destroy the League.[39] But the situation demanded a dramatic stroke to halt the loss of confidence. Cecil therefore proposed a national referendum on the League and disarmament which would exploit the vague peace sentiment in Britain and transform it into support (albeit equally vague) for collective security.

The project bristled with difficulties. Cecil's colleagues voiced doubts. The L.N.U. secretary, Maxwell Garnett, believed it to be impracticable. Murray queried the reduction of complex questions to yes or no answers. A cautious executive insisted that the cost of the scheme be borne by an autonomous committee of several participating organizations. With customary lack of concern for democratic procedure Cecil established a National Declaration Committee on 27 March, before gaining the approval of L.N.U. branches. Submitting his *fait accompli* to the June council meeting he found several delegates reluctant to agree to an immediate commitment.[40] And, like every major decision of the L.N.U., this one led to a fresh crop of disputes and resignations.

Much of the quarrelling resulted from the fact that in his bid to capture pacifist sentiment Cecil had to slant the questionnaire in such a fashion as to preclude a negative result. A prototype survey by the editor of the *Ilford Recorder* in January 1934 had asked: 'Do you agree with that part of the Locarno Treaty which binds Great Britain to go to the help of France or Germany if the one is attacked by the other?' Only 5,898 answered 'Yes'; 18,498 answered 'No'. Such a decisive rejection of specific military involvement necessitated substitution of much vaguer questions in the Ballot proper. Even so, pacifists created difficulties over the question drafting and it was no doubt as a sop to appease them that respondents could specify 'I accept the Christian Pacifist attitude' in answer to the crucial question 5:

> Do you consider that, if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by
> (a) economic and non-military measures?
> (b) if necessary military measures?

Furthermore, to insure against failure the Ballot Committee's propaganda leaflet announced: 'In this Ballot you are asked to vote only on peace or

[39] Ibid., *19th annual meeting*, 15–17 June 1938, p. 29; *Headway* (October 1932), supplement, p. i; L.N.U., *Yearbook* (1933), p. 18 and (1934), p. 5; L.N.U., *London Bulletin*, LX (July–August 1933); National Peace Council, *Peace year book* (1934), p. 7; Freshwater et al. to Murray, n.d. [*c.* 20 March 1934], Murray papers; *News Chronicle* (21 December 1933), p. 6.

[40] Murray to Austen Chamberlain, 21 July 1934; Dugdale to Chamberlain, 9 November 1934, Austen Chamberlain papers, 40/6/45 and 47, University of Birmingham Library; L.N.U., *Minutes of the 15th annual meeting*, 26–29 June 1934, p. 29.

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war – whether you approve of the League of Nations, or not; whether you are in favour of international disarmament or not.'[41] It was this kind of misrepresentation which made the Ballot distasteful to Conservatives.

Cecil had stolen a march on them. A member of the L.N.U. executive, the tory watchdog Austen Chamberlain, had been absent from the decisive meetings. In an effort to repair his lack of vigilance, he organized an opposition, accusing Cecil of 'terminological inexactitude' and fraud. The Conservative party refused to participate in the Declaration Committee on the grounds that the Ballot questions involved complex issues, and that question 5 gave the false impression that it would be possible to stop aggression by economic measures alone. Amery called it a plot concocted by 'astute political gangsters'. Baldwin declared that it would be a bad day when questions of war and peace became sullied by party politics. Lord Eustace Percy, also a member of the executive, predicted that the stunt would drive tories out of the L.N.U. and into isolation.[42] Unable to get the scheme abandoned, Percy and Chamberlain forced the Declaration Committee to issue a leaflet outlining their objections. But such tactics did little to counteract damaging innuendoes which branded Conservatives as warmongers. Cecil could complain that the tories had allowed party spirit to poison a non-party enterprise.[43] Once Conservatives had shown their colours, the National Council of Labour overcame its initial wariness and openly supported the Ballot. In her Putney by-election campaign in November 1934, the Labour candidate, Dr Edith Summerskill, found it a useful vote-catching issue.[44] The National-Conservative majority fell from 21,146 to 2,663.

As a public relations exercise the Ballot exceeded Cecil's wildest hopes. At one extreme the anti-League press was virtually cowed into silence by the results. A foolish anti-Ballot crusade by Beaverbrook in the *Daily Express* had merely contributed free publicity. Pacifists had also counter-attacked in October 1934 – with an appeal by Sheppard for war resistance pledges. But no substantial organization had emerged from this until the P.P.U.'s first public meeting in May 1936, after the Italo-Ethiopian war. In fact Sheppard paid a tribute to the Declaration Committee's efficiency.[45] Pacifists came out of the Ballot badly. A mere 14,121 gave the Christian Pacifist alternative to question 5a and 17,482 to 5b – fewer even than either 'doubtfuls' or abstentions. By contrast, 87 per cent of the responses to 5a and 58 per cent to 5b were positive.

[41] National Declaration Committee, *Yellow leaflet* (London, 1935).

[42] Percy to Murray, 19 November 1934, Murray papers. The other evidence of Conservative opposition to the Ballot is from: Chamberlain's letter in *The Times* (12 November 1934), p. 15; reports of speeches by Amery and Baldwin in *The Times* (19 November 1934), p. 14; (23 November 1934), p. 7; Minutes of Executive Committee, 9 May 1934, and G. Herbert to the Declaration Committee, 23 July 1934, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations Archives. See also *Daily Mail* (3 April 1935), p. 12; *Morning Post* (4 July 1935), p. 10.

[43] Cecil to Baldwin, 26 November 1934, Cecil papers, Add. MSS 51080. See also Murray's letter in *The Times* (28 November 1934), p. 10.

[44] Hugh Dalton, *The fateful years* (London, 1957), p. 111; *The Times* (28 November 1934), p. 15. The Conservative majority in Putney had been 8,521 in 1929.

[45] Sheppard, p. 149.

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Obviously the degree to which the Ballot had actually educated people about collective security is open to grave doubt, especially as the questionnaire assumed the existence of international co-operation. Significantly enough, as the results for December 1934 and January 1935 came in, the proportion of 'Yes' answers to 5 b fell markedly. No doubt this reflected the widespread fear that conflict over the Saar plebiscite of 13 January might present the voter with the opportunity of putting his principles into practice. Certainly the Labour movement was anxious at first not to allow the use of British troops in the Saar.[46]

On the other hand the Ballot had been no vote for pacifism. And for the L.N.U. the operation had been of special significance. 'I hope very much', commented Cecil afterwards, 'that one of the results of the Ballot may be a large increase in the membership of the League of Nations Union.[47] By the end of 1934 paid-up membership had improved on the previous year by 20,000 – an increase which undoubtedly reflected the L.N.U.'s exertions. It was one of the most brilliant pieces of pressure group maneouvring in the thirties and a highlight in Cecil's career. He had overcome the opposition of L.N.U. colleagues, overshadowed the pacifists, out-manoeuvred the Conservatives, all but silenced the anti-League press, earned the *New Statesman's* admiration, and successfully veiled the L.N.U.'s feeble policy on collective security in the far east – all financed by donations.

Success had its price. The Ballot recorded majorities for collective security principles, but it did not prevent a hardening of attitudes. For it had commenced and subsequently developed as a political football. To the right, Conservative isolationists used it as evidence that all 'pacifists' were bellicose, and suspected that the Ballot was part of an attempt to besmirch the government's foreign policy. Collectivists insinuated that Conservative objections evinced an anti-League attitude. In addition, pacifism had been overshadowed but not eliminated as an element in politics; by 1939 the P.P.U. claimed over 100,000 adherents. Thus the Ballot represented a milestone in pressure group relations which only temporarily halted the drift away from collective security ideals. Should these ideals miscarry again desertion would be all the more swift. Indeed during the Italo-Ethiopian war the P.P.U. and the L.N.U. were at loggerheads, and the National Peace Council paralysed on the sanctions issue. Pacifists were told not to countenance the fine phrases of Leaguism: '"Collective security" means, in the cirumstances of today, a system of opposed alliance. And "international police force" is merely a composite army furnished by a group of allied powers. As for "military sanctions" – they are plain war; and war is always war, whatever you may choose to call it.'[48] In 1938 Noel-Baker proposed another Ballot to stem the decline of the L.N.U.'s membership. But Cecil had no hesitation in refusing.[49] He could not have pulled it off twice.

[46] *Daily Herald* (6 November 1934), p. 10.

[47] Adelaide Livingstone, *The Peace Ballot: the official history* (London, 1935), p. 64.

[48] Huxley, ed., *An encyclopaedia of pacifism* (London, 1937), p. 112.

[49] Noel-Baker to Cecil, 3 January 1938 and Cecil's reply, 6 January 1938, Cecil papers, Add. MSS 51107.

The notion that a body of 'middle opinion' worked for peace in the thirties is a misleading truism; its various elements could not agree on a line of approach. On the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute there was still an element of co-operation between sanctionists and moral pacifists in the N.P.C. But the upsurge of war rejection movements which opposed the idea of League force had contributed to factionalism in the Labour party and had increased tension in pressure groups such as the L.N.U. The Peace Ballot result masked the hardening of attitudes which were to become apparent during the new and momentous crisis which confronted the League of Nations. Within the very broad (and largely meaningless) span of consensus that peace was better than war, the disagreements were a potent force in preventing the development of a common policy. Indeed the very existence of new peace groups testified to dissatisfaction with the other vehicles of opinion. Given the politicization of pacifism, collision was unavoidable.

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