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A Study of British Historical Treatment of the Origins of the First World War, 1918-1939

by

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ABSTRACT

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The connection between historical literature and public opinion relating to foreign policy is the primary concern of this thesis. It deals with British historiography on the origins of the First World War as it evolved in the years 1918-1939. Similarly it traces changing attitudes toward the conduct of foreign policy in the same period. By pointing to close analogies between these two situations, it is possible to suggest the crucial influence which the community of historians had on the consensus underlying the foreign policy of the British government in the interwar years.

During the War and immediately thereafter the historians laid heavy emphasis on primary German responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities. There was also a contemporaneous desire to recover the costs of the War by forcing the Germans
to make reparations payments for the damage they had inflicted on the Allies.

From 1919 to 1922 historians were confronted with evidence demonstrating that the Germans had not intended to unleash a European war. This first wave of documentary revelation coincided with a period in which the hopes of peace were wrecked by the widespread turmoil and continuing warfare throughout Europe. Both the historians and the politicians suddenly came to realize the limitations of the positions they maintained at the time of the Paris conference.

In the following decade historians and politicians both worked for international understanding and cooperation. The revisionist contention that all European powers shared responsibility for the outbreak of the War became the established historiographical position. Likewise, it was fondly hoped that by avoiding the practices of prewar diplomacy the nations of the world might escape war.

This expectation was doomed by the rise of the militaristic fascist states. Nevertheless the politicians in power endeavored to continue the policies of the preceding decade, even though they now served only to strengthen the German
position. Some of the historians did, however, come to realize at this time that the best way to deal with aggressive powers is by reliance on the ancient balance of power.

Historians, therefore, prepared the way for the foreign policy of the interwar years, but in the end they were among the first to criticize its inherent weaknesses. They did this by demonstrating the essential validity of the approach taken by Sir Edward Grey during his tenure at the Foreign Office.
PREFACE

This thesis began as a paper for the seminar on historiography conducted by Professor Francis L. Loewenheim in the spring of 1966. To Mr. Loewenheim the writer owes the original conception of the question discussed and a constant example of devotion to the highest standards of historical scholarship. To Professor R. John Rath the writer is deeply indebted for thoughtful supervision of the writing of this thesis. His painstaking concern for this manuscript in its several stages of preparation has been invaluable. I also wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Katherine F. Drew for her kind assistance to me on many occasions.

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My typists, Mrs. Jackie Miller, Mrs. Gene J. Riddle, and Mrs. James A. Castañeda have performed cheerfully and competently under difficult conditions.

R. A. B., Jr.

24 May 1967

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Chapter I: Introduction

From the morning when the British soldiers put away their guns in November, 1918, with a feeling of little more than physical and moral exhaustion, until the autumn day twenty-one years later, when their sons took them up again in a determination made grim by an awareness of the extreme insecurity of their position, public opinion had severely questioned England's responsibility ever to intervene again to preserve the European balance of power.

By displaying the amorality and viciousness involved in the conduct of international relations in the years before the War of 1914-1918, the historical community contributed to the lack of confidence in the traditional exercise of British power. Grave doubts had been raised about the reasons for which Great Britain and her Allies, France and Russia, went to war. Sir Edward Grey was bitterly criticized for his ambiguous commitments to the French. It was further suggested that the German government did not bear an inordinate share of guilt for the outbreak of hostilities, as had been widely believed during the conflict. These factors, combined with the tragic losses of the Great
War and the general instability which resulted from it, served to weaken the confidence of Englishmen in the traditional balance of power policy as applied to the conditions of the twentieth century.

Alternate ways of approaching foreign policy were thus sought by many students of public affairs. Historians had shown an international anarchy; now they looked for a pathway to international cooperation and conciliation in which armed force would have no role. Many advocated collective security guaranteed by the League of Nations, though there was great reluctance even here to countenance any force stronger than moral reprobation or embargo.

This approach did not, however, ensure the preservation of peace. It was not, in fact, possible to appease Nazi Germany. We are now able to see that those who destroyed public confidence in the balance of power tradition, which alone could have stopped Hitler, made a signal contribution to the perilous situation which confronted England as she stood alone in 1940.

There was, however, in the latter half of the nineteen thirties a new historiographical trend which showed the
extreme dangers which faced Great Britain in the first years of the century and the means by which Grey had ultimately preserved the independence of England. These conclusions, if they did not prevent the Munich debacle of 1938, at least provided justification for the opposition to the policies of appeasement which finally won the day.

We have undertaken to discuss the importance of historical writing to the creation of responsible public opinion. Since the conduct of foreign policy closely depends upon the consensus maintained by this informed public, we acknowledge the historian's special responsibility to treat issues of war and peace with great care. We study the origins of the First World War as interpreted by a generation of British scholars in search of evidence which will illuminate the international crisis of the

1 We use the term "informed public opinion" to designate the views prevailing among the academic, journalistic, and political elite, which has a far greater impact on British policy than is the case in the United States. For an able analysis of this group, see the recent work of Donald Cameron Watt, Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965).
nineteen thirties in which Great Britain had so vast a role.

Chapter IX: The Many-colored Books and the Paris Peace

Wartime opinion in England had been largely shaped by the various colored books issued by the several belligerents. Published in a single English language volume in 1915, they provided the most widely used source of information about the causes of the War until the close of hostilities in November, 1918. In every case the documents were highly selected, in many instances altered, and in a few cases actually forged. Doubt had been cast

1Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the Outbreak of the European War (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1915).

on their reliability by the sensational revelations of the Russian General, Vladimir A. Sukhomlinoff, at his trial in 1917, in which he related the disobedience of the General Staff in ordering mobilization contrary to the Tsar's orders. Subsequent disclosures were made from the Russian Foreign Office when the Bolsheviks took power and set about to discredit the Allied war effort. 3 Such revelations had few repercussions at the time.

An elaboration of the British official view on the origins of the war appeared in 1915: James Wycliffe Headlam-Morley's History of Twelve Days, July 24th to August 4th, 1914, being an Account of the Negotiations preceding the Outbreak of the War based on the Official

3 The disclosures were revealed to the British principally in the pages of the Manchester Guardian. Some were published as a book edited by F. Seymour Cocks entitled The Secret Treaties and Understandings: Text of the Available Documents (London: Union of Democratic Control, 1918). The first edition of this volume sold 5000 copies; the next, some 7000 volumes. See Helen Maria Swanwick, Builders of Peace, being Ten Years' History of the Union of Democratic Control (London: The Swarthmore Press, 1924), p. 110.
Publications.

Headlam-Morley was at the time working with the Propaganda Department, set up by Charles F. G. Masterman at Wellington House in August, 1914, and was later to become Historical Advisor to the Foreign Office.

His 1915 publication gave a brief treatment of the pre-1914 background of the War, clearly placing the responsibility for the conflict on Germany and emphasizing her blundering and menacing diplomacy.

In the weeks immediately after the close of hostilities Headlam-Morley's effort to present the British government's position on the origins of the War was supplemented by a documentary study written by Charles Oman, the Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford and at the time President of the Royal Historical Society. His

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4 Published in London by T. F. Unwin in 1915.

5 It has been suggested that many of the anonymous reviews appearing in The Times (London) and The Times Literary Supplement were written by him. See George Peabody Gooch, "Sir James Headlam-Morley," International Affairs, Vol. VIII (September, 1929), pp. 410-412.

work, somewhat more stridently anti-German than Headlam-Morley's, charged German cognizance and strong support of the Austrian ultimatum of July 24, 1914, which precipitated war. Inasmuch as German diplomats, according to Oman, naturally realized that action against Serbia inevitably involved Russia, "the only possible deduction must be that Germany was set on war from the first."\(^7\)

The question of war responsibility was much discussed at the Paris Conference. On May 18, 1919, the Commission of Responsibilities completed a report declaring that the War was premeditated by the Central Powers, that

\(^7\) The view was based on the Lerchenfeld letter of July 18, 1914, which stated that the ultimatum to Serbia had been jointly decided upon by Vienna and Berlin and that it was known in both capitals that war would be the result. See Alfred von Wegerer, *A Refutation of the Versailles War Guilt Thesis* (New York and London: A. A. Knopf, 1930), pp. 33-34.

\(^8\) Oman, *Outbreak of the War*, p. 36.

it resulted from acts deliberately committed in order to make it unavoidable, and that Germany, in agreement with Austria-Hungary, deliberately worked to defeat all conciliatory proposals. The British members of this Commission, Sir Gordon Hewart, the Attorney General; W. F. Massey, the Prime Minister of Australia; and Sir Ernest Pollock, a member of Parliament, signed a document which far exceeded the conclusions of either Headlam-Morley or Oman in placing upon Germany the burden of guilt for deliberately starting a world war. The report included the myth of the Potsdam Council of July 5, 1914 at which high German officials supposedly met to plot the outbreak of war. This legend was included notwithstanding the fact that its authenticity had been seriously questioned by Oman. Nor does the report suggest the altered significance of the Russian mobilization after the revelations of the trial of General Sukhomlinoff. The findings of this

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Commission, generally maintained by participants at the Conference, reflected what Headlam-Morley described in 1927 as the "ingenuous and almost childlike conviction of the leaders of the Allies in the complete guilt of Germany."¹¹

In the final treaty this belief in German guilt was reflected in the ambiguous words of Article 231 which asserts that Germany:

accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.¹²

The origins and significance of Article 231 were confused and controversial throughout the interwar years. Although there was a widespread conviction of German guilt


among the participants at the Conference, the drafters of Article 231 did not design it to express this belief. It was rather the result of a desire to find a formula which would justify integral reprations to all the Allied and Associated Powers. Nevertheless the words "causing" and "aggression" were felt, not unjustly, by the Germans to imply German responsibility for the outbreak of the War.

In protesting the wording of this clause, the Germans unintentionally caused the Allies to realize a moral implication of which they had not previously been aware. Moreover, "under the psychological conditions which then existed it was wholly impracticable for the Allied chiefs of state to repudiate publicly this construction which Germany assumed".


In fact, the official German protests elicited a stern rebuttal, written by an English participant, Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian), and signed by Clemenceau. The rulers of Germany, they insisted,

as soon as their preparations were complete... encouraged a subservient ally to declare war against Serbia at 48 hours' notice, knowing full well that a conflict involving the control of the Balkans could not be localized and almost certainly meant a general war. In order to make doubly sure, they refused every attempt at conciliation and conference until it was too late, and the world war was inevitable for which they had plotted, and for which they were fully equipped and prepared.\(^{15}\)

It was argued in the interwar period however that the Article itself was merely part of the reparations section and did not, in fact, make the charge that Germany and her allies were solely responsible for the outbreak of the War.

The position was first put forth by two American

\(^{15}\) Quoted in United States Department of State, Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919 (13 vols., Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1942-1947), Vol. XIII, p. 45. In 1945 Kerr was content merely to blame German bungling: "In the last days of July, 1914, there was no one in Berlin who was master of the situation and who was prepared to make clear decisions." The Observer (London), April 12, 1925, p. 10.
writers and was then more fully elaborated by two Frenchmen, Camille Bloch and Pierre Renouvin. This position was accepted by many in England, demonstrating that by 1930 it was impossible to defend the Article as a statement of historical fact.

Further evidence of the then current view of the origins of the War is found in the "hang the Kaiser" cry and in the campaign speeches of the coupon election of 1918 which


18. This election saw the defeat of most of the anti-war element, including many members of the Union of Democratic Control such as Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Arthur Ponsonby, Charles Trevelyan, and Noel Buxton. They came back in force, however, in the election of 1922 when they were joined by Clement Atlee and E. D. Morel, who defeated Winston Churchill at Dundee. It has been suggested that this influx of Labor intellectuals was in part a result of the dissatisfaction of the middle and upper classes with Lloyd George's foreign policy. See A. J. P. Taylor in his English History, 1914-1945 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 199.
resulted in the formation of the coalition government
headed by David Lloyd George. The Prime Minister, ever
a barometer of popular opinion, claimed in his defense
of the treaty of peace bill that, "Germany not merely
provoked, but planned the most devastating war the earth
has ever seen. She planned it and prepared for it for
years. She deliberately embarked upon it, not to defend
herself against assailants, but to aggrandise herself at
the expense of her neighbours." The *Spectator* commented
in September, 1919, that "surely all that we have learned
about German designs in the past five years has removed all
possible doubts as to the necessity of the decision of which
the vast majority of the British people approved on August
4th, 1914. and still approve." 19

In 1918 and most of 1919 the understanding of the
origins of the War derived from a study of the colored
books and expressed on a scholarly level by Headlam-Morley
and Oman had a great impact on public affairs, though per¬
haps in excess of the intentions of the scholarly community.

19 Parliamentary Debates: Commons, 5th series, CXVII
(1919), 1218.

20 Issue of September 27, 1919, p. 410
Both the insertion of Article 231 in the Treaty of Versailles and the purge of "pro-Germans" from the House of Commons may be regarded as results of this belief in German responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities in 1914. There was a latent uncertainty about Entente policy caused by the Bolshevik revelations, but at the moment historians and politicians were both determined to find Germany guilty.
Chapter III: "All Stark Mad Together...," 1919-1922

The climate of opinion which prevailed in the immediate aftermath of the War was, however, to be rapidly altered. Conviction of both German guilt and of the essential rightness of prewar British policy, so unquestionably affirmed in 1918 and 1919, was undermined by several factors.

In these years the community of historians was interpreting the first wave of documentary revelations and memoirs from Germany and, to a lesser extent, Russia. Many came to believe that, regardless of all other aspects of the crisis of 1914, the German government had not intended to provoke a world war. There was also a realization that the defense of France was as important to Grey's policy as the protection of Belgian neutrality.

Moreover, there was a large body of opinion, long in existence, but now coming to dominate the Labor Party, which maintained that diplomacy in general was irresponsible. When intellectuals who held this notion left the Liberal Party for Labor, they had a great influence on the trade unionists who had rarely before given thought to matters
of foreign policy.

Finally it should be remembered that the end of the War had not brought peace to Europe. There were hostilities between Greece and Turkey, civil war in Russia and in Eastern Europe, rebellion in Ireland, and conditions of anarchy in Germany. The British public, feeling the exhaustion of four years of war, reacted strongly against any suggested use of the British armed forces to settle these problems. The sustaining belief of 1917 that the Great War would end war was shattered.

The result of the separate trends was a widespread conviction that nothing had been gained from the World War - a war which had come as a result of the blunders of diplomats operating under the principles of balance of power politics. This revised historical opinion was to have a great impact on public affairs.

A very moderate attempt at revising the Germanophobia of 1919 was made by Richard Burdon Haldane, the former Lord Chancellor, who had been forced out of office during the War because of alleged pro-German sympathies. Haldane attempted to portray the former German chancellor,
Theobold von Bethmann-Hollweg, in a good light while strongly criticizing the aggressive policies of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. His conclusion was that the "proximate cause of the war was Austrian policy, a secondary cause was the Tirpitz theory of how to keep the peace, the theory that had come down from Frederick the Great and his father, and was barely a safe one in the hands even of a Bismarck." The Times Literary Supplement reviewer criticized Haldane's leniency in regard to Bethmann-Hollweg but agreed with Haldane's view that too many in Britain had overemphasized the Kaiser's personal influence. A reviewer in the Manchester Guardian concluded, after reading Haldane's book, that "there were thus two (if not more) powers [sic] in Germany - the civil and the military. The former desired peace, the latter headed by Tirpitz, if it did not precisely desire war, was determined to impose its will on Europe by terror."  

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1 See his Before the War (London: Cassell, 1920), p. 410.
2 See issue of January 22, 1920, p. 43.
More radical opposition to the prevailing viewpoint came from Lord Loreburn (formerly Sir Robert Reid) in a very influential book published in the summer of 1919:

*How the War Came.* Lord Loreburn did not go into the background of the War in a general sense but concentrated his attention on Grey's handling of British policy. He criticized the departure of Grey and his predecessor, Lord Lansdowne, from the former policy of splendid isolation, and for the close connection with France, which had been emphasized by the secret military and naval arrangements. It was these arrangements, Loreburn argued, and not the German invasion of Belgium which ultimately brought Great Britain into war. With relation to the crisis of 1914, his argument suggested the possibility that the World War might have been prevented if either the British government had told the Russians and French that it would on no account give them support (This would, supposedly, have prevented the Russian mobilization against Austria and Germany.) or if the German Foreign Office had been

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4 Published in London by Methuen in 1919.
informed that an invasion of Belgium would be met with British resistance (Which policy would, supposedly, have forced the Germans to stop the attack on France.).

Lord Loreburn's book was the first of a long series to level these strictures against Grey. The critical reaction to *How the War Came* was for the moment somewhat unfavorable. One writer suggested that the author was moved in some degree by a "desire to wipe off some old scores against his former colleagues," who were Liberal Imperialists, when he was a Little Englander and a pro-Boer. The *Spectator* also called attention to the possibility of Loreburn's engaging in political recrimination and went on to criticize his refusal to ask "whether our

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5 G. P. Gooch correctly pointed out that "on such conjectures it is not possible to express a final judgment, and, in any case, it would have been impossible to announce either of these decisions, since the Cabinet was divided." "Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, 1907-1914," *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919*, edited by A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch (3 vols., Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1922-23), Vol.III, p. 508

6 *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 18, 1919, p. 503.
national interest, apart from any understanding of Treaty, did not compel us to oppose Germany in her mad-striving for world-power."

The book did, nevertheless, point out the difficult problem of the limits to Parliamentary control of foreign policy. Charles Trevelyan, who in 1914 was Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, stated that he had "left the Liberal Government because I saw on August 3, 1914, enough of what Lord Loreburn now reveals, and censures, to feel that all my training and instincts reprobated the way in which we had been led to war." R. W. Seton-Watson, by no means a pro-German, in reviewing the work found that "once again it follows logically that 'we are not a self-governing nation in foreign affairs'; for Parliament not merely neglected the whole subject of our Balkan policy and its bearings upon Central Europe and upon Russia, but left a free hand to men who had not an inkling of the fundamental facts that governed the situation."

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7 Issue of September 27, 1919, p. 410.
8 Foreign Affairs, November, 1919, p. 14
9 New Europe, November 11, 1919, p. 135.
Other early revisionist sentiment was voiced by E. D. Morel, a writer who had in earlier years exposed the atrocities perpetrated in the Belgian Congo, and by J. A. Hobson, the author of a famous work condemning imperialism. Morel claimed that "the destinies of France were placed at the mercy of the diplomacy of Tsardom, whose internal structure was increasingly such that a popular war offered the one chance of conceivable salvation. Our diplomacy placed the British people in precisely the same position."  

Hobson maintained that "nationalism and capitalism in secret conjunction produced independent, armed and opposed powers within each country, claiming and wielding a paramountcy, political, social and economic, within the nation and working for further expansion." The cause of the War lay not in so-called doctrines of force but in "the feebleness of the safeguards against war upon which liberal and humane thinkers had relied, viz. economic internationalism, democracy and the restricted functions of

10 *Foreign Affairs*, August, 1919, p. 2.

the state."  

The collapse of the Imperial Government in Germany had provided its own domestic enemies with the opportunity of laying bare its secrets and crimes. In December, 1919, the socialist leader Karl Kautsky produced a well-known collection of documents, complete with the Kaiser's uninhibited

12 This economic interpretation was anticipated by Henry Noel Brailsford in his *The War of Steel and Gold: A Study of the Armed Peace* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914) - a work which went through many editions and revisions. Yet, in the interwar years the economic interpretation did not have an important influence on historiography. As A. J. P. Taylor has written, "Historians setting out to describe an 'imperialist' conflict, lost their balance in the flood of diplomatic documents. Some of them reached the conclusion, perhaps correctly, that conflicts such as Morocco or the Bagdad railway had more to do with power and less with profits than they had originally supposed. Certainly it is difficult to point to any really successful work of scholarship applying the economic interpretation, even by a Russian." "The Rise and Fall of 'Pure' Diplomatic History," *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 6, 1956, p. xx.

annotations. This material had the tendency to discredit the case made at Versailles by failing to provide evidence that the World War was a plot unleashed at Potsdam. One prominent English liberal, J. A. Farrer, noted that these documents showed that the localization of the war between Austria and Serbia "with absolute non-interference by Germany or any other Power, was the policy advocated and adopted by Germany from the first." For G. P. Gooch, the Kautsky documents "must be studied as a whole, not in selected extracts, and, if we approach it without presupposition, its message becomes perfectly clear. Germany did not desire the war, declares Professor Sidney Fay, one of the most impartial commentators; and I agree with him." The Germans continued to refute the position held at Versailles with respect to war responsibility with a new White Book and, similarly, the Austrians produced

a new Red Book which also revealed an absence of plans for world war.

Various German memoirs published in the early 1920's also served to suggest that Germany had never deliberately planned to go to war against Great Britain. The Erinnerungen of Admiral Alfred von Tripitz confused and annoyed the English by maintaining that a strong German navy would have improved Anglo-German relations. Charles Trevelyan did, nevertheless, find that Tirpitz's picture is one of "muddle, weakness, not of fierce conscious deliberate action." The English translation of the recollections of the former German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, gave a strong impression of the influence of

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19 Foreign Affairs, May, 1920, p. i.

personal animosities on German policy. George Peabody Gooch found that Bethmann's pages "on the outbreak of war depict a good man struggling with a situation to which he was unequal, and contributing by his blunders to the catastrophe which he was as anxious as any man in Europe to arrest."21 Arnold Toynbee categorized the book as the "record of an age which has learnt by terrible experience how readily mankind in the mass is stampeded into courses which every reasonable individual opposes."22

Other evidence continued to undermine the British conviction of German malevolence. Especially important in this respect was the publication of the recollections of Baron Hermann von Eckardstein, a former German minister in London. He revealed to the amazement of many that the British had proposed an entente with the German Empire at


the very time when popular antagonism between the two countries was at its highest point as a result of the Kruger telegram and various colonial incidents. The liberal historial J. L. Hammond, was shocked to realize that if Eckardstein "is to be trusted, English Ministers were prepared for a very comprehensive deal of the old diplomatic kind in which powerful Governments divided the property of their weaker neighbours." The Times Literary Supplement reviewer remarked, to the contrary, that Eckardstein "rightly regards the negotiations in which he had so large a share as a turning point in the history of the world, though no Englishman can to-day share his regret at the turning which history then took."

As the German material was tending to show that the policy of the Central Powers was not as black as it had been portrayed at Versailles, a mass of Russian documentation suggested that all Entente diplomacy was not without aggressive tendencies. Much of the distaste of certain liberals for the War had arisen from their disinclination to fight on the side of Tsarist autocracy; now they felt justified.

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24 Manchester Guardian Weekly, February 17, 1922, p. 133.
With documentary revelations indicating the extent of Russian aims in the Balkans, distaste for Grey's diplomacy greatly increased. Suspicions of Russian intentions were raised by a German scholar's discussion of the forgeries of the Orange Book. In 1921 Benno von Siebert published a suspiciously obtained (He was secretary of the Russian embassy in London before the War.), if accurate, collection of Russian documents. These increased the now widely accepted belief that no country had a government determined on European war; G. P. Gooch found "no evidence of any deliberate planning of aggressive war on the part of any ruler or minister."  

For a time the Soviets were willing to discredit their predecessors, as a consequence of which historians benefited from René Marchand's collection of Russian Documents. For those who were willing to reply on the telegrams of Izvolsky and Sazonov, it was possible to suggest broad and

26See ante, p. 2, n. 3.


dangerous plots among the three Entente powers. E. D. Morel charged that the Russian documents had been ignored by much of the British press, with the exception of the Manchester Guardian, since "They entirely destroy the whole edifice of falsehood which the Liberal and Coalition Governments...have erected in respect to the events which brought about the Great War." 29

There was some suggestion that the French and Russian governments collaborated in pursuing an aggressively hostile policy towards the Central Powers. Hamilton Fyfe, the editor of the Labor Party newspaper, the Daily Herald, stated in a review of Let France Explain, by an American, Frederick Bausman, that "the Russian Tsarist Government was thus, in the American jurist's view, the chief criminal. That, I may say, is the conclusion at which I arrived after I had the chance to study the proceedings of the Government in Petrograd during the years 1914-16." 31

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29 The Secret History of a Great Betrayal (London: "Foreign Affairs", 1922?). In the original text all the words in the quotation are in solid caps.

30 Published in London by G. Allen & Unwin in 1922.

31 Foreign Affairs, August, 1922, p. 42.
In the years 1919-1922 there was an increase in the number and influence of the radical groups that disliked foreign policy on principle. There had long been a feeling in some liberal quarters that diplomacy was in practice the prerogative of an aristocratic elite which concerned itself with matters of high statecraft and on which democratic opinion exerted little influence. This tradition, as A. J. P. Taylor has ably demonstrated, 32 extended back to the days of Cobden and even of Fox. A cardinal tenet was that wars did not arise out of the animosities of nations but rather from the blundering of proud and incompetent diplomats. In the midst of the War one Labor M. P. had even published a book entitled *How Diplomats Make War*. 33

Given either universal free trade or universal socialism, members of this group argued, international disputes would disappear. There were various suggestions for making the foreign service more open to all social classes and placing foreign policy under the control of the House of Commons. 34


The growing conviction of the irresponsibility of the European foreign offices was strongly reinforced by documentary revelations immediately after the War. The fact that English liberals had paid little attention to the problems of international affairs before the War only served to increase their horror when the power struggles that made Europe a diplomatic jungle were shown in all their detail.

The belief that diplomacy was corrupt increased with the publication of further revelations. The New Statesman found proof in the memoirs of the Austrian statesman Julius Andrássy that the old diplomacy was itself responsible for the War and added that this thesis, "which might be discounted if it came from Geneva or the Hague, must, when advanced by such an author, compel respect even from those who have concluded that in international relations there will never be anything new under the sun." In an even


36 Issue of June 28, 1922, p. 480.
more pessimistic vein, the Nation found a world "in which every Power armed and most Powers intrigued for stakes which were usually the profitable opportunities for expansion and development in the backward portions of the earth." 37

The influence of early revisionist writing is even reflected in the words of the Tory Austen Chamberlain, the Leader of the House of Commons in the coalition government, when he claimed that the German government was unprepared for British intervention in 1914 and declared that "if our obligations had been known and definite, it is at least possible, and I think it is probable, that war would have been avoided in 1914." 38

In the summer of 1922, William Ralph Inge, the Dean of St. Paul's, annoyed some of his co-religionists by claiming that "Most people now felt that something was wrong about the war. They need not now apportion the guilt.... The war while it lasted seemed to them to have been caused by the deliberate wickedness of an abstract demon called

37 Issue of September 9, 1922, p. 758
38 Parliamentary Debates: Commons, 5th series, CL (1922), 198.
Germany. The Germans were more or less honestly persuaded that similar abstractions called Russia, France, and England were the criminals. Now it seemed to most people that they were all stark mad together. 39

Perhaps the best contemporary summary of this revisionist position on the origins of the War was that of G. P. Gooch in an address delivered to the British Institute of International Affairs on December 12, 1922.

"Though the conduct of each of the belligerents appeared to its enemies to indicate a double dose of original sin, it was nevertheless in every case what might have been expected." Naturally Austria "should defend herself against the openly proclaimed ambition [of Serbia] to rob her of provinces which she had held for centuries." 41 Germany had to stand by the Dual Monarchy since it was her only reliable ally. Russia did not dare permit Austria to crush

39 Quoted in The Times (London), July 27, 1922, p. 10


41 Ibid., p. 26.
Serbia for thus she would lose all her influence in the Balkans. France had to satisfy her treaty obligations. England fought basically because of an "obligation of honour" to France. No statesman desired war in 1914; "the outbreak of the Great War is the condemnation not only of the performers who strutted for a brief hour across the stage, but of the international anarchy which they inherited and which they did nothing to abate."  

E. D. Morel spelled out the specific case against Britain's role in this European anarchy. "Sir Edward Grey with the knowledge of some of his colleagues, including Mr. Asquith, had bound this country to support France by armed force in the event of war between the Franco-Russian alliance on one side and the Central Powers on the other...[and] on August 3, 1914, neither the House of Commons nor the country were, in fact, free to decide an issue which had already been determined behind their backs."

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42 Ibid., p. 29

43 Foreign Affairs, October, 1919, p. 7.
To avoid a recurrence of such a catastrophe many believed in the necessity of a restructuring of international relations. Such a policy was supported by the Union of Democratic Control, an organization whose aims included making all treaties subject to Parliamentary consent, abolishing secret diplomacy, and the reorganizing the Foreign Office to remove its reactionary bias. Those who adhered to the Union of Democratic Control believed that balance of power politics was irrelevant in the postwar world in which they believed that the several nations could have no basic conflicts that could not be removed by peaceful revision of the Versailles settlement.

In spreading these views, the Union of Democratic Control had no small success. The organization's official historian claimed that the Union of Democratic Control "conception of a new and cooperative order in international affairs were hammered into minds made plastic by the heat of conflict, and though many of these minds

45 It might be pointed out, however, that the Union of Democratic Control, at least its leadership, was itself an elitist group. Consisting mainly of intellectuals who had left the Liberal for the Labor Party, the group possessed the training, interest, and time to devote to the study of international affairs which had been of no concern to the rank and file of the Labor Party. One historian has written of the group, that "as a pathway from Liberalism to Labour its significance cannot be overestimated. Many of its members served on Labour's Advisory Committee on International Questions." William P. Maddox, Foreign Relations in British Labour Politics: A Study of the Formation of Party Attitudes on Foreign Affairs, and the Application of Political Pressure designed to influence Government Policy, 1900-1924 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 96. The membership of this committee was kept secret, but Maddox estimates (p. 100) that it included Norman Angell, H. N. Brailsford, G. D. H. Cole, G. L. Dickinson, Charles Trevelyan, J. A. Hobson, J. R. MacDonald, Leonard Woolf, A. J. Toynbee, Arthur Ponsonby, E. D. Morel, H. M. Swanwick, and C. R. Beasley - a veritable catalogue of revisionist writers. The role of the Union of Democratic Control in the emergent Labor party is also discussed in a valuable study by Catherine Ann Cline: Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963), pp. 8-23.
thought at the time that they rejected the whole scheme with contumely, the hour was to come when it proved to have become part of the mental furniture of countless thousands."46

The revulsion against the old diplomacy had a strong influence on the conduct of British foreign policy during the years of coalition government from 1919 to 1922. The Prime Minister constantly avoided using the Foreign Office and the regular diplomatic service. This maladjustment of policy-making and diplomacy persisted throughout the inter-war years with what many believe unfortunate results. There can be no doubt that revelations of prewar diplomacy were an important contributing factor to the development of this state of affairs.

It should be remembered that these were years of great turmoil in Europe. Revolution and disorder in Eastern Europe and the final bitter struggle for Home Rule in Ireland made the peace settlement less satisfying. The reparations clauses of the peace settlement were strongly criticized.47

46 Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 30
47 Above all by John Maynard Keynes in his The Economic Consequences of the Peace (London: Macmillan, 1919).
Furthermore, the United States had isolated itself from European affairs and France was increasingly concerned about her security. The perplexed mood of public opinion is suggested by a Manchester Guardian editorial of November, 1920:

Abroad we have been consenting to the repudiation of almost everything for which we went to war; we have been at war with the greatest of our original Allies and seem to have lost much of the respect and liking of both France and America. On the whole it is a worse world now than it was before the war, materially more united by famine and the worst diseases; socially more discordant, blatant, and vulgar; morally more shallow, greedy, and cynical. The really strenuous moral effort of 1914 has somehow gone wrong in its later development and results.  

The unsatisfactory results of the War and the peace treaties served to raise further doubts about the wisdom of going to war in the first place. Because the nature of the first documentary revelations seemed plainly to show that Germany had not deliberately provoked a world war, there was much questioning of the reasons for which Britain had gone to war in 1914. By the end of 1920 Lloyd George would

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feel he was on reasonably firm historical ground and, doubtless, sound political footing when, in a speech supporting the view that future wars could be prevented by the existence of an assembly of nations, he made the often quoted remark that "the more one reads the memoirs and books written in the various countries of what happened before August 1, 1914, the more one realizes that no one at the head of affairs quite meant war at that stage. It was something into which they glided or rather staggered or stumbled." 49

In the coming years there was seeming peace and a degree of stability, but the fact that the first revelations of a sensational nature coincided with a period when the entire war effort appeared to many to have been futile, radically shook the confidence of vast sections of public opinion in the rightness of British policy before the War. Indeed the entire historical justification of the traditional exercise of power among nations had been shattered. This situation would last until 1939, but in the twenties the tragic implications of a lack of any historical basis for foreign policy were unknown.

49 The Times (London), December 23, 1920, p. 9.
Chapter IV: The Years of Reconciliation, 1922-1929

The years from 1922, when peace was generally restored throughout Europe, to the end of the decade, when economic disaster was imminent, saw measures of general pacification and economic progress. It appeared that the League of Nations would be able to adjudicate international disputes through discussion and compromise. Germany seemed to sustain an intention to live peaceably, if not perhaps contentedly, with the Versailles settlement. We know, however, in retrospect that Europe was, in fact, in a very unstable condition. Economic development was not wisely directed. The democratic governments of several countries were ultimately unable to settle intense domestic controversies. Nor would the League be able to secure the peace through collective security. None of this, however, was generally perceived at the time; there was genuine expectation of peaceful reconstruction and social improvement.

Historians supported the widely felt desire for international conciliation by showing that all governments were responsible for the outbreak of war. This conclusion was sustained by research in the massive amount of available documentation. The Germans were in the field first and
their evidence had a heavy influence on much British writing during this time. Russian and French material came out shortly thereafter, much of which suggested that Entente policies contributed to the exacerbation of Eastern European rivalries.

The general reaction to the publication of documents and secondary works indicates that the revisionist conclusions reached by many in the traumatic years 1919-1922 came to be the prevailing historical orthodoxy by 1929. The understanding of the entire problem was certainly more sophisticated by then, but the conclusions were those that G. P. Gooch and, to a lesser extent, E. D. Morel had reached earlier.¹

Concern with the problem of war guilt led the German government to open their archives in the first half of the decade. This enabled German historians to write interpretative works several years before they could be attempted elsewhere. By thus getting a head start, the Germans facilitated the acceptance of their position among many leaders of public opinion throughout Europe and America.

¹See ante, pp. 19-20.
Memoirs continued to come from leading figures in government, diplomacy, and the military. The Kaiser and the Crown Prince made their own revealing contributions to this collection. William II's memoirs,\(^2\) translated into English in 1922, were an attempt to absolve the author's country from any guilt and himself from the responsibility of the unfortunate policies which Germany pursued. A *New Statesman* reviewer remarked that he "was fundamentally a fool."\(^3\) G. P. Gooch noted that the former emperor "stoutly denies that he or his Ministers or his soldiers or his people desired war, and portrays Germany as a profoundly pacific State wantonly attacked by the Triple Entente, a thesis as unconvinging as the rival superstition that Germany was the only wolf in the European sheep fold."\(^4\) The Crown Prince also made his attempt


\[^{3}\text{Issue of December 2, 1922, p. 276.}\]

\[^{4}\text{In his Recent Revelations of European Diplomacy (4th impression, London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1930), p. 14.}\]
to blame Germany's civilian leadership: "Thanks to an incredibly blind management of our foreign affairs, we just blundered into the world war."^5

Of outstanding importance for the historical community was the publication of Die grosse Politik,^6 the great collection of German documents covering the full range of European diplomacy since the establishment of the German Empire in 1871. Though the arrangement of the documents has been criticized, even today no historian would deny the importance of the collection for the study of European international relations before the War. G. P. Gooch affirmed that "A few voices have complained of this or that detail of editorial technique, but the bona fides of the enterprise is universally recognized."^7 E. L. Woodward was one of the few historians


^7Recent Revelations of European Diplomacy, (4th impression), p. 5.
to doubt the accuracy of the collection. That there were actual suppressions for political reasons was not proved until the Foreign Office archives were captured at the end of the Second World War.

In Die grosse Politik historians such as Gooch and William H. Dawson were to find justification for their admiration of Bismarck's virtuosity, though one Times Literary Supplement writer saw in the Bismarckian system, "no place...for recognition and development of those general interests on which the very spirit of peace depends." There had been established a "Europe in which the nations were always arming against one another; and if we ask why, no answer can be given."}

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8 See his autobiography, Short Journey (London: Faber and Faber, 1942).


10 The Times Literary Supplement, August 3, 1922, p. 497.
Acceptance of the German record and point of view was further facilitated by the works of two leading historians, Max Montgelas, who wrote a point-by-point refutation of Article 231 and the covering note of Clemenceau,\(^{11}\) and Erich Brandenburg, who produced an account of pre-war diplomacy which, though revisionist, was somewhat critical of many aspects of German policy.\(^{12}\) The English historian A. L. Kennedy found that Montgelas failed to "carry conviction on the main issue." Because Russia could not afford to suffer another humiliation like that of 1909, the customary belligerence of German diplomacy was unsuccessful in its ultimate test. Furthermore, "in the matter of war guilt the supreme question after all must be 'What reason had Germany for invading


Belgium? To this neither Count Montgelas, nor any other apologist for Germany, has ventured a satisfactory answer.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Times Literary Supplement} reviewer noted his evidence of Austrian diplomatic independence and admitted that "now we find that the German Government went much further than had been believed in trying to modify Austrian action." But the review continued by stating that Montgelas' treatment of the Kaiser's \textit{carte blanche} to Austria and his refusal to support Grey's call for a conference "seems to us profoundly unsatisfactory and most unconvincing."\textsuperscript{14} Brandenburg's work was praised in 1927 by G. L. Dickinson as an "objective, dispassionate and fair" summary of the documents.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{Times Literary Supplement} reviewer praised the work as "much the most well-informed and scholarly account of European diplomacy before the war which has yet appeared in any language." Brandenburg's acquittal of Germany for a "conscious desire to obtain

\textsuperscript{13}International Affairs, Vol. IV (May, 1925), p. 142.

\textsuperscript{14}Issue of February 19, 1925, p. 111.

\textsuperscript{15}International Affairs, Vol. VI (July, 1927), p. 253.
world predominance if necessary by war we believe will be the judgment of the future."

In the first half of the twenties many English writers were also wrestling with the problem of war guilt, and there came to be a widespread view that the responsibility was shared among the powers. A subjective influence on this reaction was no doubt annoyance at the vindictiveness of French diplomacy which culminated in the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. Once reasonable stability had been achieved in middle and eastern Europe, there was a not unnatural desire to normalize international relations. This desire implied the rehabilitation of Germany, her inclusion in the League, and perhaps a revision of the Versailles settlement.

The belief that responsibility for the outbreak of war was shared is apparent in the arguments used to refute evidence presented by the Germans. Asquith's *Genesis of the War* contains a lengthy polemic against Bethmann-

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16 Issue of August 7, 1927.

17 Published in London by Cassell in 1923.
Hollweg and the Kaiser and retains a still strong view of German guilt: "instead of attempting to hold Austria back, Germany incited and encouraged her to hurry forward." Though the book received respectful attention, its limitations did not go unnoticed. Several critics noted Asquith's failure to consider recently published documentary evidence. The Spectator's reviewer stated that although "we feel as deeply convinced as ever that Germany was the maker of the War, and that she could have had peace quite easily if she had wanted it, there is a large outer circle of facts, to some extent giving plausibility to Germany's arguments about encirclement, upon which Mr. Asquith does not touch at all." G. P. Gooch considered that while the former Prime Minister demonstrated the pacific aims of British policy, he should have considered the charge that Grey was too deeply involved with France and Russia. Gooch also deprecated his failure to mention Serbian intrigues against Austria. J. L. Hammond summed up current historical

18 Ibid., p. 186.
19 Issue of September 8, 1923, p. 320.
opinion in his review of the book: "In the early stages of the war Germany appeared as diabolically wicked and cunning. As one book after another has come out this first impression has given way to another: the impression of gross political incapacity." He went on to criticize Asquith's treatment of the role of Britain and Russia; "the long and painful chapter of our relations with Russia, including our shameful treatment of Persia, will always raise searching doubts among those who follow the history of those years."21

Henry Wickham Steed, a famous correspondent of the London Times published his story, Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922,22 with the special intention of justifying his advocacy of the breaking up of the Dual Monarchy. Steed was also critical, to a degree, of English policy: "To me, the issue appeared painfully simple. Germany and Austria-Hungary were bent on war; they were anxious to secure British neutrality; and the only chance, no matter how vain it might be, of deflecting them from

their purpose, seemed to lie in proclaiming that the provocation of war by the Central Powers would leave England no choice but to oppose them with all her strength."23

In 1923 Winston Churchill discussed the coming of the War with special emphasis on the naval preparations which had driven the British and French close together.24 "If Germany was going to create a Navy avowedly measured against our own, we could not afford to remain 'in splendid isolation' from the European system."25 His work clearly showed that when British political and military leaders thought of imperial defense, they did so almost entirely in terms of defending themselves against Germany. Churchill also defended British policy as having operated within the Parliamentary process. As far as the crisis of 1914 is concerned, "The more I reflect upon this situation, the more convinced I am that we took the only practical course


24In his The World Crisis, 1911-1914 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924).

that was open to any British Cabinet; and that the objections which may be urged against it were less than those which would have attended any other sequence of action."\textsuperscript{26}

In a larger sense, Churchill criticized the Anglo-French Entente, which "had led us into a position where we had the obligations of an alliance without its advantages."\textsuperscript{27} An alliance, he maintained, would have had a deterring effect on Germany and would have allowed Britain more influence over French policy. Churchill defended the old diplomacy for occasionally settling crises inasmuch as "a war postponed may be a war averted. Circumstances change, combinations change, new groupings arise, old interests are superseded by new."\textsuperscript{28} This was an often quoted remark at a time when most men wanted to face as few crises as possible.

Churchill and other writers who had been involved with the military and naval preparations made the point,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 218.
\item \textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 217.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 52.
\end{itemize}
which was not neglected by critics such as E. D. Morel, that plans had been carefully and thoroughly laid down by British and French officials for an anticipated attack by Germany through Belgium.29

Sir George Buchanan, the last British ambassador at St. Petersburg, attempted to refute those who charged Russia with pursuing a bellicose policy in 1914. Buchanan claimed that German preparations for war against Russia were known on July 30, 1914, before the Russian mobilization. Indeed, he insisted, "it was Germany's policy of piling up armaments...that forced Great Britain, France, and Russia to concert together for the protection of their respective interests."30 In 1923, as in 1914, Buchanan remained a strong advocate of British intervention alongside her Entente partners.

By all accounts the most important of the British memoirs were those of Sir Edward Grey, now Lord Grey of

29Important also were Haldane's Before the War and Charles à Court Repington in his The First World War, 1914-1918 (2 vols., London: Constable, 1920).

Fallodon. In addition to being a moving personal document, the work shows certain shifts in what may be considered official British opinion. Grey deals only tangentially with questions of the origin of the War beyond the events which took place in London. In describing his own role in the conduct of British foreign policy Grey emphasizes his perception of the growing hostility of the German Empire. He admitted that the Cabinet should have been informed more fully of the agreements on military conversations with the French.

Grey acknowledged the widely held belief that he was convinced of the necessity of defending France. He affirmed that "if war came, the interest of Britain required that we should not stand aside, while France fought alone in the West, but must support her. I knew it to be very doubtful whether the Cabinet, Parliament, and the country would take this view on the outbreak of war, and...I had in view the probable contingency that we should not decide at the critical moment to support France. In that event I should have to resign; but the

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decision of the country could not be forced...." Thus Grey established the conviction of many revisionists that the interests of Belgium were subordinate to those of France in Foreign Office policy. Moreover, he acknowledged that British diplomacy was integrally involved in the maintenance of the European balance of power - a fact not generally appreciated by many Liberals before the War.

Grey defended the measures he had taken in terms of the growing menace from Germany. He felt that the German government was in the hands of military men who believed that "war must come and that in 1914 the time for war had come." Bethmann-Hollweg was seen as making genuine efforts for reconciliation in the 1914 crisis, but, in Grey's analysis, he was frustrated at Vienna. The War, for the British foreign secretary, was "a great struggle between the Kultur that stood for militarism and the free unmilitarist ideal." It was a direct result of the "militarism and the armaments inseperable from it."

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32 Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 302-03.
33 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 27.
Though most reviewers were genuinely respectful of Lord Grey, the reception of the book reflects the changed opinions of the problem of the origins of the War. The Spectator's reviewer felt that, not the specific policies of any one government, but "circumstances and in particular the manner in which the affairs of Europe were managed were responsible for the war."

J. L. Hammond expressed the opinion that because Grey so greatly feared Germany, he was afraid to put pressure on Russia to make concessions on Serbian sovereignty.

Caroline Playne, a literary critic turned political writer, claimed that the foreign secretary was "usually actuated more by preconceived notions and prepossessions than by understanding and informed judgment."

Raymond Beazley, of the University of Birmingham, pointed out that "to arrange with a foreign Power for a common war against another Power, should a crisis arise, is truly a weighty matter..., and whatever qualifications may be added about keeping our freedom of action, the

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36 Issue of October 5, 1925, p. 548.

37 Manchester Guardian Weekly, October 2, 1925, p. 265.

relations of the two countries must be deeply and vitally influenced by such cooperation."  

Leonard Woolf, the literary editor of The Nation, simply acknowledged that "Viscount Grey remains for me a psychological mystery."  

Some reviewers were less unfavorable. The New Statesman reviewer, for one, acknowledged that "Lord Grey's recently published memoirs offer the most complete and convincing evidence not only of the sincere desire of Great Britain to prevent a conflict, but of the fact that it was the attitude of the Kaiser's Government that made war inevitable."  

A German assessment of Grey's career, Lord Grey and the World War, by Hermann Lutz, centered on the alleged Germanophobia of the British leader. The book was criticized both in the Manchester Guardian and the Times Literary Supplement for the author's failure to consider the effect.

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39 Foreign Affairs, December, 1925, p. 172.  

40 The Nation, October 24, 1925, p. 151.  

41 Issue of October 3, 1925, pp. 684-685.  

on British official opinion of the methods of German
diplomacy.\textsuperscript{43} Or, as another reviewer put it, Lutz does
not "recognize the fundamental difficulties by which
Lord Grey was embarrassed--difficulties the ultimate
cause of which was the restless policy and unreliable
character of German diplomacy."\textsuperscript{44}

Throughout the decade, Grey came under heavy criti-
cism for his close alignment with French policy and for
his inability to induce a peaceful solution of the crisis
of July and August, 1914. He was frequently pictured as
a man more at home in the study of nature than in the
Foreign Office. As Algernon Cecil wrote, "Nature made
him for a country gentleman. Fate placed him, in a time
of unexampled importance, at the head of the Foreign
Office."\textsuperscript{45} Much of this vein of criticism was a result
of Grey's oft-stated pleasure in bird watching and dry
fly fishing, but it also indicates a lack of appreciation
of Grey's efforts in conducting foreign policy.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Manchester Guardian Weekly}, March 23, 1928, p. 233;
\textit{The Times Literary Supplement}, March 8, 1928, p. 159.


\textsuperscript{45}In his \textit{British Foreign Secretaries, 1807-1916: Studies
in Personality and Policy} (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1927),
p. 317.
Very influential among British interpretative accounts of the problem of war origins was G. Lowes Dickinson's *The International Anarchy, 1904-1914*. While generous to Grey, Dickinson categorically condemned the War as a result of the inherent premises of international politics. Power politics was, in Dickinson's view, "a matter of combinations based upon self-interest. Self-interest, in turn, is based upon fear and upon aggression; for it both expects attack and intends to profit by it."^47^ The work was widely read and quoted by those who continued to advocate the new diplomacy and who came to approve of the Kellogg-Briand pact. Having read the book, Leonard Woolf was convinced that "the whole of the foreign policy of Europe from 1878 to 1914 was based upon complete delusions which no rational man—if he allowed his reason to function—would accept for one moment."^48^ Such a view was so popular that one German writer noted, "It has become the fashion to-day to drown these differences [between nations] in the swamp of those universal sins of

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^46^Published in London by G. Allen & Unwin, in 1926.


^48^The *Nation*, March 6, 1926, p. 778.
'imperialism,' or 'capitalism,' or 'international anarchy,' and this fashion is especially favoured by British writers."\(^49\)

Yet there was criticism of this trend. One reviewer of *International Anarchy* claimed that it suffered from a false notion of "the condition of human existence and the nature of political action."\(^50\) A *New Statesman* writer criticized Dickinson for concluding that Austria should have been permitted to annex Serbia.\(^51\) At the time there were no serious threats to European peace and it was dimly, if at all, perceived that principles such as Dickinson's might lead to total and disastrous capitulations.

H. W. C. Davis, soon to become Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, took note of the general acceptance of the revisionist position in an article in the *English Historical Review* in 1924. He suggested that "it is highly convenient to make imperial Russia the scapegoat


\(^50\)The *Times Literary Supplement*, February 25, 1926, p. 127.

\(^51\)See issue of February 27, 1926, p. 622.
when war responsibilities come up for discussion."52 This had led, David pointed out, "in apologetic works, to the plea that Germany—otherwise the civilian ministers of the German empire—did not 'will' a world war, but blundered into it."53 To the contrary, Davis suggested that the pervasive influence of German militarism was the determining factor of that country's foreign policy. The German government was prepared "for the possibility of war with Russia; it knew that this meant also war with France. And to speak of a continental war on this scale as 'a localisation of the conflict' is absurd."54

53 Ibid., p. 238.
54 Ibid., p. 239. Significantly, in a 1927 review of a volume of British Documents on the Origins of the War, Davis took a more hostile view of Entente policy, critically treating the Russian mobilization of July 30, 1914 and the Anglo-Russian naval conversations. He wrote, "In these circumstances there was something casuistical in the foreign secretary's statement which he made in the house of commons on 11 June, and repeated to Count Benckendorff on 25 June..., that there was no naval agreement." English Historical Review, Vol. XLII (July, 1927), p. 447.
As a result of the decision to open the British archives, the first volume of the British Documents on the Origins of the War appeared in December, 1926.\(^55\)

The entire series was edited by G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, a historian of the Balkans. Neither of these men could be termed uncritical apologists for British prewar policy. Although there were a few excisions "due to a desire to consult the susceptibilities of the persons or of the Governments concerned;...the Editors have omitted nothing which they consider essential to the understanding of the history of the period."\(^56\)

The critical reaction to Volume XI was in line with the current views on the question of war origins. Arnold Toynbee, the historian and editor of the Surveys of International Affairs, in his review, wrote, "All these men were in the grip of a machine which multitudes of men had built up, and which no single man had learnt to control--and

\(^{55}\)British Documents on the Origins of the War, edited by G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (11 vols., London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1926-38). Vol. XI, dealing with the period immediately before the War, was published first and was edited by J. W. Headlam-Morley.

this state of affairs was not peculiar to the disaster of 1914."57 The Manchester Guardian reviewer found in the documents "fundamental difficulties in the politics of Europe, such as the character of the Kaiser and the strength of the military party in Germany, the instability of Russia and dishonesty of many of her politicians."58 One Labor Party writer claimed that the Entente policy was based on imperial considerations, "the fear lest, if we let Russia down, she would come to terms with Germany, break the Entente with us, and start all over again those Asiatic difficulties which seemed to have been almost surmounted."59

Other writers gave some credit to British diplomacy. G. L. Dickinson, in fact, found that British policy "during these three weeks, was almost impeccable,"60 James Alfred Spender, the Liberal journalist and close associate of Grey, saw a "very sick and demoralized world" in which

57. The Observer (London), December 12, 1926, p. 22.
59. Daily Herald, December 1, 1926, p. 4.
even "if France and Russia had been obviously in the wrong as we thought them to be in the right, and if Germany had never invaded Belgium, our position would have been exactly as perilous in the case of a German victory as on any other supposition." 61

Nevertheless the flow of revisionist writing continued. In 1928, Arthur Ponsonby, an early Union of Democratic Control leader, discussed the various official deceptions used to defend Allied policy before and during the World War. 62 He asserted that all the sympathy for Belgium was but a pretense to cover the clear commitment to France. This, he felt, was particularly reprehensible inasmuch as France had also contemplated military intervention in Belgium according to the French General Alexandre Percin. 63 Ponsonby also treated the legend of the Potsdam Council and revelations coming from:

61 Westminster Gazette, December 1, 1926, p. 6.

62 In his Falsehood in War Time: containing an Assortment of Lies calculated throughout the Nations during the Great War (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1928).

out of Serbia before going into the stories of the various wartime atrocities.

The year 1928 saw, in addition, the posthumous publication of Viscount Morley's Memorandum on Resignation: August 1914. In this document the veteran cabinet member provided an intimate look into the process whereby Britain issued the ultimatum to the German government which brought the two countries into war. Morley, who at the time had resigned in protest, explained his view that Britain might have been able to wield vast influence at the end of hostilities had she not been a belligerent. Morley intensely disliked British involvement in continental affairs and believed that the "precipitate and peremptory blaze about Belgium was due less to indignation at the violation of a Treaty than to natural perception of the plea that it would furnish for intervention on behalf of France, for expeditionary force, and all the rest of it." In addition, he feared the implications of a Russian victory and

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64 Published in London by Macmillan in 1928.
strongly criticized the arrangements with France and Russia which "were vast, indeed, because indefinite and undefinable."\textsuperscript{66}

Morley, like Loreburn, was representative of the tradition which maintained that foreign policy is basically irrelevant to democratic government and that in 1914 a German victory would have meant no great threat to British security. Some of the reaction to Morley's position was rather hostile. Lloyd George submitted that he and his colleagues were right in opposing the aggressive German march through Belgium and it was Morley "who deserted us when we had to come to a painful decision."\textsuperscript{67} The Observer complained, "It would be a fair inference from these pages that the writer was prepared to watch the obliteration of France with complacency."\textsuperscript{68}

By the middle years of the decade there had been a significant shift in the temper of the whole range of British opinion of the origins of the War. W. H. Dawson

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., p. 18.

\textsuperscript{67}Manchester Guardian Weekly, October, 1928, p. 330.

\textsuperscript{68}Issue of October 21, 1928, p. 9.
affirmed that Gooch's view of the mutual responsibility for the outbreak of war "was largely shared by an increasingly large body of informed opinion all the world over--that the theory of German's sole responsibility for the war is entirely untenable." Those who defended the war guilt clause of the Versailles Treaty were described by one writer as "singularly apathetic." When Herbert W. Wilson, who had been a champion of a powerful navy before the War, wrote a strongly anti-revisionist interpretation of the conflict, one reviewer pointed out that even he did not in fact allege that the Kaiser aimed at war in 1914. This was, the reviewer added, a view "very different from that maintained in this and other Allied countries during and immediately after the War, and it is of real value that what we may call this revised judgment should be put before the British public by one whom none would suspect of undue desire, out of a weak spirit of conciliation, to gloss over the responsibility of


Germany and her allies."71

These historical opinions were also widely shared by the leaders of government at the time. They supported the general desire for European pacification, sometimes known as appeasement. In the opinion of many, Germany was rehabilitated to the extent that she could now be included in the League of Nations. The first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, himself a onetime member of the Union of Democratic Control, proposed that this step be taken in a speech delivered in Geneva in September 1924. This could only have been done if British public opinion no longer held the views of the early part of 1919.

Other public figures were willing to go even further than MacDonald. The British Ambassador in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, felt that "Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles is too unsatisfactory. The first opportunity should be taken to dissociate German liability for reparation from the charge of war guilt. The ground is too open for controversy."72 The leader of the Labor government


in the upper house, Lord Parmoor, was also influenced by the revisionist position. In his opinion "the later information derived from Foreign Office documents had made it clear that there was, and had been, a strong influence in this country in favour of war, creating a position inconsistent with the subsequent plea that Great Britain was the victim of an aggressive German militarism, and the declaration of war was primarily consequent on the treatment of Belgium." 73

It might be noted that the first Labor government had not meant the apotheosis of Union of Democratic Control theories of foreign policy. 74 MacDonald, who became his own foreign secretary (Perhaps to keep E. D. Morel, a personal enemy by this time, out.); did not abolish

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74 Beside MacDonald there were in the first Labor government several men who had been strongly critical of prewar diplomacy: Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Noel Buxton, the Minister of Agriculture, and Charles Trevelyan, President of the Board of Education. All of these men were in the second Labor government of 1929-1931.
reparations and did not deny the problem of enforcing League decisions.

Revisionist history had an impact on the conduct of foreign relations, as we have suggested. The movement to demonstrate that the German government was not singularly guilty in 1914 was matched by a spirit of political and economic conciliation which provided some hope of international peace and cooperation in the second half of the twenties. With American assistance, the German economy was improving, and the German chancellor Gustav Stresemann promoted an atmosphere of harmony. With Briand as foreign minister, France was much less obsessed with her security than previously. Many hoped that collective security through the League of Nations would secure the peaceful settlement of disputes. There can be no doubt that many historians had consciously or unconsciously contributed to the substitution of the spirit of Locarno for that of Versailles.

Throughout the twenties historical opinion continued to be shaped by the great mass of documentation released by other governments and statesmen. This process was assisted by the first of the important secondary interpretations of the origins of the War. The Germans had been
first to present their evidence, and had a strong impact on British historical opinion. It is also important to consider other aspects of the literature.

From the first there had been suspicions about the intention of the Russian Empire in 1914. This feeling had been strengthened with the revelation of the secret treaties in which Russia had been promised Constantinople. Inevitably, however, the competition between Austria and Russia in the Balkans had not been as significant in public discussion as the Anglo-German rivalry. There had, of course, been several important British historians who had long devoted themselves to a study of Balkan affairs. Nevertheless there had not been much critical discussion of the importance of Eastern Europe in the problem of the origins of the War. There had earlier been a few sensational revelations, but only when the volumes by the German historian Friedrick Stieve and the memoirs of the

Tsarist foreign minister Sazonov came out was there a significant response.

Stieve published a number of heavily documented books on the foreign policy of Izvolsky, who had been foreign minister from 1906 to 1909 and then ambassador to France. One of these works was translated into English in 1926, but its heavy anti-Russian and anti-French tone precluded general acceptance of Stieve's conclusion in Britain. A New Statesman reviewer found that "Dr. Stieve's ably prepared 'brief' against Isvolsky and, still more, Poincaré, appears unanswerable only so long as the reader has not also read the original material upon which it has been based. When he has done so, and when he had read Grey, Poincaré, and Asquith on the same subjects, the whole case, and especially that

part of it relating to Poincaré, is revealed for what it is worth, and Dr. Stieve's carefully built-up structure falls to the ground."77

When Sazonov's memoirs appeared78 a writer in the Saturday Review noted that "on the whole M. Sazonov takes an extremer view of the action of Germany—in the critical days, than the view which has been gaining ground in this country, namely, that while the Central Powers took steps which led right up to the abyss they did not deliberately walk over the precipice."79 R. W. Seton-Watson, having noted certain inaccuracies, maintained that when Sazonov told Pourtalès, the German ambassador in St. Petersburg, that he would stop the mobilization if Austria would not touch Serbian independence, "he was clearly exceeding his powers and going to the uttermost limit of concession in the conviction that he could carry the Tsar and even the

77 Issue of August 7, 1926, p. 478.


79 Issue of March 10, 1928, p. 291.
military chiefs with him; and the responsibility for its rejection rests with Jagow."80

The Times Literary Supplement reviewer called attention to the ultimate aims of Russian policy:

[Sazonov] lets us feel that he was encouraging both the Serbs and the Rumanians to hope that in the future, with the support of Russia they might obtain the realisation of their nationalist ambitions at the expense of Austria-Hungary; and he acknowledges that "too weak to renew the rusty machinery of State and to base it on a broader foundation more in accordance with the spirit of the times, Austria-Hungary had no choice but to come into open conflict with Serbia." But if this was so, the ultimate causes of the War cannot be found, as elsewhere he suggests, purely in the new aggressive policy of Germany and Austria.81

The increasing trend to fault Russian policy in the crisis of 1914 was perhaps most definitively expressed by the American scholar, Sidney Bradshaw Fay, who became increasingly critical of the Russian mobilization. In 1928 Fay published his well-known study, The Origins of the

81Issue of February 23, 1928, p. 119.
World War, \textsuperscript{82} in which he called special attention to the effect that Russian military plans had on the German government. The \textit{Manchester Guardian} reviewer acknowledged that "there were no great statesmen anywhere, and in the key countries--Austria and Russia, on which Professor Fay rightly lays the heaviest load--the statesmen were vain, incompetent and reckless with all the recklessness of the timid." \textsuperscript{83} The \textit{Times Literary Supplement} writer noted Fay's attention to "what we may all well recognize as a dangerous forward policy which had been pursued by Russia in the Balkans, to the support given to Russia by M. Poincaré, to the tendency constantly to tighten the ties not only between France and Russia, but of the Triple Entente as a whole." \textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{83}Manchester Guardian Weekly, May 24, 1929, p. 420.

\textsuperscript{84}Issue of April 25, 1929, p. 325. Yet he went on to suggest that "German action towards Belgium was a very significant indication of the mentality, if not of Bethmann-Hollweg, at least of the General Staff, and indicates better than anything else the kind of influence which was always at work in the highest circles at Berlin."
It is necessary to pay attention to the two British historians who devoted themselves to the particularly vexing task of sorting out the threads of the plot to assassinate the Archduke Francis Ferdinand. The question of Serbian complicity in the murder sharply divided Edith Durham and R. W. Seton-Watson, both of whom wrote books on the subject in 1925. Miss Durham was always strongly anti-Serb. In 1923 she wrote that "when Austria, in her ultimatum, demanded that Austrian officials should take part in the investigations, and called for the arrest of Major Tankositch, Serbia declared that no such share in the investigation could be allowed. This, we thought, looked bad. The innocent man is only too ready to turn out his pockets and discomfit his accuser." Miss Durham made great use of the sensational revelations of the former Serbian official, Ljuba Jovanović, published in England in 1925. He claimed that the Serbian government had been


been informed of the plot but had given the Vienna authorities no formal warning. 87

Seton-Watson, though strongly sympathetic to Serbian aspirations, was ultimately unable to find evidence to disprove Jovanović's story. Nor was his task made any easier by the fact that a public monument had been erected to Gavrilo Princip, the actual assassin, at Sarajevo.

The suggestion that France and Russia deliberately provoked the War was put forth by the American historian Harry Elmer Barnes. 88 His vitriolic attack on Entente policy did not, however, much commend his conclusions to British reviewers. A *Times Literary Supplement* writer questioned the reliability of Barnes' sources and wondered "whether Professor Barnes has ever read the more important of the original documents to which he refers." 89 The *Spectator's* reviewer suggested that Barnes would be more "certain

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89 Issue of September 30, 1926, p. 639.
of a hearing if he relied more on facts and less on
denunciation of Lord Grey, M. Poincaré and other Allied
statesmen."90

Actually few in Britain ever really believed that the French had a large responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities, though they might doubt certain aspects of the French version of the origins of the War. In 1921 J. A. Farrer, however, had found that "the evidence is incontrovertible that France in 1914 did not present either to Germany, or to a neutral country like Belgium... that absolutely pacific aspect of dovelike innocence which it suits the legend makers of history to assert."91

Two French works that had some impact on British opinion were the notebooks of Georges Louis, a French ambassador at St. Petersburg before the War,92 and a revisionist volume by Alfred Fabre-Luce, a journalist who would later welcome the Nazi invasion of 1940.93 Louis

90Issue of September 18, 1926, p. 440.
91In his article "The French War Legend," Foreign Affairs, November, 1921, pp. 75-76.
caused considerable comment in England because of his discussion of Poincaré's strong anti-German policies before the War. Caroline Playne found that Louis was recalled from his post which he had "admirably filled... with sole regard to his country's welfare and honour, because he would not lend a hand to dangerous and self-interested projects which were sending Europe nearer the precipice of general war."94

Fabre-Luce's strong revisionist interpretation of prewar events was criticized by the English historian A. L. Kennedy for losing its "historical balance" in attempting to condemn Poincaré's whole public career. Kennedy also found fault with the work for claiming that the elections of 1906 gave Grey an impetus to join in military conversations with the French and for describing Russia's desire to protect Serbia as a "Pan-Slavist intrigue."95

The policies of Poincaré in the twenties caused considerable consternation in Britain and his prewar reputation

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94 In her Pre-War Mind in Britain, p. 57.

probably suffered accordingly. In 1921 he published an interpretation of the origins of the War\textsuperscript{96} and in 1926 the first volume of a set of memoirs.\textsuperscript{97} Poincaré was often under heavy attack both in France and abroad, but in 1922 the \textit{Times Literary Supplement} reviewer of his work on the origins of the conflict found that Poincaré justly defended himself and his diplomatic colleagues and showed that they were not the authors of a bellicose policy. Moreover, "M. Poincaré's demonstration of the responsibility of the German and Austrian Governments, and in particular that of the Kaiser, is as complete as there has yet been."\textsuperscript{98} By 1926 a review in the same journal, of the first volume of the French leader's memoirs, maintained that in the larger context of French policy, the methods pursued by Poincaré would "in a critical moment [make it] impossible for France to exercise a


\textsuperscript{98}Issue of February 2, 1922, p. 66.
controlling and moderating influence upon Russia." In 1928 J. L. Hammond described Poincaré's policy for keeping peace in the Balkans and pointed out that "Russia was a very difficult ally and... neither France nor England could effectively restrain or advise her." The treatment of the beginnings of the War by the renowned French historian Pierre Renouvin was said to be "the most authoritative and impartial presentation of the French side of the last five weeks of peace." The work was also highly praised by the reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement, who accepted Renouvin's central thesis: "the critical event was the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria; this action, he shows by unanswerable evidence, was deliberately taken by Austria, not because of any military necessity but with the sole object of preventing the

99The Times Literary Supplement, June 10, 1926, p. 382.

100Manchester Guardian Weekly, June 22, 1928, 493.


continuation of negotiations." A more detached view was taken by G. Lowes Dickinson, who wrote "The major responsibility for the verdict is laid by M. Renouvin on Germany and Austria, because they were the only Powers that wanted war between Austria and Serbia. This view is disputed by the Germans, who lay the principal blame on Russia and her mobilization. On this point it is hardly likely that there will ever be a general agreement, for national prejudices are almost insuperable."

103 Issue of May 3, 1928, p. 323.

104 The Nation, April 28, 1929, p. 112.
Chapter V: Revision Acknowledged, 1929-1930

By the end of the century's second decade the historiographical picture had vastly changed since the dark November when Sir Charles Oman concluded his study. In essence, the view of deliberate provocation of a world war by the German government had been replaced by a belief that all the statesmen of Europe had blundered. The immoral structure of the international system had ensured that these blunders would have disastrous results. In September, 1928, the New Statesman complained that "there was no sufficient reason why the two peoples, England and Germany, should have drifted into war. Surely the mistake of Foreign Office diplomacy in the ten years before 1914--perhaps also now ten years after the war--was the professional unwillingness to trust public opinion." 1 J. L. Hammond believed that "there must be few people now who think that Germany wanted war and planned war from the first." 2 Lord Haldane suggested that there were strong

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1 Issue of September 22, 1928, p. 736.
anti-German influences in the Foreign Office and that Grey "seemed to doubt whether the Germans were genuinely good people, and they of course knew he doubted it."

The altered state of historical opinion is further shown in Harold Nicolson's biography of his father, Lord Carnock (formerly Sir Arthur Nicolson), the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1914. For the outbreak of the conflict, "the main onus of responsibility falls upon Serbia, Russia, and Austria. England and Germany were also deficient in foresight and decision. France, during these twelve days, was scarcely to blame at all." At the same time, Nicolson took the broader

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3 In his An Autobiography (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), p. 215. The sympathy that Haldane felt for Germany was widely shared during these years mostly as a result of what was considered the harshness of the reparations section and territorial provisions of the Versailles treaty.

view that "what was wrong was the civilisation which they [the old diplomatists] represented." Indeed, "the war was caused by an unhealthy state of mind in Europe, that state of mind had been created by the amassed unintelligence of international thought from 1878 onwards."

By 1930, even Wickham Steed revealed a different attitude toward the War, conceding that Russia was "probably" among the war makers. The continuing publication of the British Documents also tended to reduce anti-German feeling. Volume III, on the origins of the Entente, failed to reveal, in the words of one writer, "the imperialist ambition with which Germany was charged after the Great War began." The documents "show she was frightened, that she blustered a great deal, but not that she aspired to 'world dominion.' And after all, her fears of the Entente were justified later on."

5 Ibid., p. xi.
6 Ibid., pp. 218-219.
8 Manchester Guardian Weekly, August 3, 1928, p. 83.
In a review of the fourth volume of *British Documents*

Headlam-Morley provided a revealing explanation of the Anglo-Russian agreement on Persia:

The agreement as to policy in Asia inevitably implied cooperation not only about the Straits, but in Balkan policy generally. If the Russians did not find by experience that the understanding with England strengthened their hands in Europe, there was no chance that so complicated an arrangement as that of Persia would be loyally carried through: It was for this reason that a Convention which nominally had to do entirely with Asiatic problems, often of a normal technical character, became the turning point in the diplomatic history of Europe.9

In any event, Article 231, the basis of the reparations section of the Versailles Treaty, had been discredited, and was acknowledged to have been discredited, by a decade of historical scholarship. There was a general feeling that Germany had been wronged at the Peace Conference and that her responsibility for the outbreak of the War was shared with most of the other European countries including England.

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10. This was acknowledged by Grey in the introduction to a popular edition of *Twenty-five Years* in 1928.
Moreover, public opinion no longer supported the traditional understanding of the legitimate use of international power. One writer expressed the view that "the great diplomatists of the nineteenth century seem to have been governed by such obsolete ideas that the forces making for peace were left unused and even unnoticed, while everyone prepared for war in order to avoid war." In 1928 G. Lowes Dickinson had reiterated his position that "power politics, backed by armaments, were the real cause of this war, as of all wars; and so long as such policies are pursued by such means, so long will there be war."

By the year 1929 there was a sense of change in the public atmosphere of England and indeed of Europe and

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12 *The Nation*, April 28, 1929, p. 112.
and America as well. In Britain the Labor party was in power again, with Arthur Henderson as foreign secretary. The American stock market crash in October inevitably augured ill for the European economic structure. In Germany the Nazi party made substantial gains in the 1930 elections. There was once again talk about the "next war"--discussion which served to reinforce the pacifist sentiments of many. In a review of a French diplomatic history, one liberal writer, C. Delisle Burns, was astonished to find that "the whole theme of the two volumes, indeed, seems to imply that as 1871-1914 was between two wars, so 1918-1940 may be between another two!"

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13 Henderson, who, unlike MacDonald, had supported the War after the invasion of Belgium, pursued a foreign policy aiming at conciliation while strengthening the League of Nations. Yet the European situation was changing, and Henderson, "who accepted the need for a system of sanctions, never really faced up to the problem of power relationships in Europe". See Harry R. Winkler, "Arthur Henderson", in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, (eds.), The Diplomats, p. 328.

In reality the European nations were basically weak and vulnerable in 1930. They suffered from the kind of internal instability—political, social, and economic—that leads to a deterioration of international security. The European diplomatic system had been further damaged by the vacuum created by the isolation of two of the greatest powers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the dozen years following the end of hostilities we have seen the contribution, beneficial or otherwise, of historical literature to the public understanding of foreign policy. Most of the wartime studies had laid blame for the origins of the conflict solely on the German government; immediate postwar policy dictated a punitive peace at Versailles and, though perhaps inadvertently, justified reparations on the basis of German moral responsibility for initiating aggressive war.

This excessive emphasis on German guilt was, however, almost immediately altered. Conditions of turmoil throughout Europe made men doubt the point of going to war for so unsatisfactory a conclusion. Early revisionist writing demonstrated that the German government did not deliberately
plan a global conflict, but was, as much as any other regime, a prisoner of the European alliance system. Thus was blame shifted to the international anarchy. All diplomacy, including that of Sir Edward Grey, was given up to public execration. Long before 1929 the intellectual and moral underpinnings of traditional British foreign policy had been destroyed.

From 1922 to the end of the decade and even beyond, the early revisionist conclusions were modified but not essentially altered. This climate of opinion strengthened the conciliatory international policy of Ramsay MacDonald, Austen Chamberlain, and Arthur Henderson as they attempted to find a means to European pacification. What success they had is perhaps due mainly to the absence of powerful governments hostile to the preservation of the status quo.

In the twenties historical opinion had thrown a great deal of light on the real causes of the World War. It had also made a signal contribution to the prevailing understanding of the nature of international relations. The ultimate significance of the work of these historians was not, however, to become evident until the middle of the next decade.
Chapter VI: In the Thirties

The conditions existing in the third decade of the century differed markedly in several respects from those of the years of reconstruction which followed the Peace of Paris. On the domestic side, the results of the monetary crisis were a series of national governments which effectively altered the usual party struggles and kept Labor out of power. In the area of foreign affairs the situation was also radically different. The illusions of the twenties were broken by the failure of the League of Nations to cope with increasingly serious international crises and by the growing militarism in many parts of the world.

The thirties were also, for many, the great age of ideology. The left and the right became, for the first time, terms applicable to British politics and, in fact, ideological cleavage affected both domestic and foreign policies. Disagreement over unemployment relief in 1931 was to be exceeded by conflict over the civil war in Spain which began in 1936. The period was made especially difficult by the knowledge, in the back of most everyone's
mind, that Great Britain's imperial role was not matched by the reality of her power to sustain her position. Several great crises were to be faced by the British in the nineteen thirties, the gravest of these from beyond the Rhine. Germany had been permanently crippled neither by the World War nor by economic depression; once again she strove for world power. It was in the handling of this problem that British political life would be subjected to some of the heaviest pressures in modern history. And it was at this point that historical opinion had significant influence.

We have seen that the old appreciation of balance of power politics had been destroyed by the outbreak of war in 1914 and the peace settlement of 1919. The view of international relations maintained by the Union of Democratic Control, and to a lesser extent by the League of Nations Union, in the conviction of the possibility of peaceful settlement of all disputes, led without much difficulty to a dangerous underestimation of the threat from a hostile and powerful state.
This absence of a realistic approach to foreign threats also made possible the substitution of ideological sympathy for national interest. The Conservatives, especially, allowed their hostility to the Soviet Union, the Blum government in France, and the Spanish Republic to influence their judgment concerning Germany and Italy. The left was not less myopic when it permitted hatred of militarism to prevent adequate assessment of the armament needs of the nation. Those who had strongly supported the League and the theory of international cooperation were handicapped at the beginning of the decade by the demonstrated inability of the League to deal with aggression in Manchuria (though this was due in part to the vacillation of the United States).

In essence, there was no consensus on the means necessary for the handling of international affairs. Neither balance of power diplomacy nor collective security commanded adequate support from public opinion. In 1914 there was the belief in the threat of Germany to establish a continental and world hegemony which guided Sir Edward Grey along accepted patterns of diplomatic action;
opposition was limited to a minority in one major party. In the thirties this was not the case, inasmuch as those policies which involved the use or suggested use of military force were anathema to almost every section of British political life during these years.

It is our view that historical opinion had made a signal contribution to this serious situation. Through this disclosure of the shared responsibility for the outbreak of the World War and, especially, by the partial absolution of Germany, British historiography had shaken the confidence of the public in the rightness of Great Britain's traditional exercise of power among nations. Toward the end of the decade, however, there is evidence that the essential validity of Grey's foreign policy came to be appreciated by a segment of the British historical community.

At the same time there was advocacy in some quarters of a return to a prudent balance of power policy to counteract the expansionism of Italy and Germany. Part of this movement was the Tory minority led by Winston Churchill. Another section was composed of Laborites and Liberals
especially concerned with the threat of international fascism. Unfortunately this trend did not spread early enough to counteract the atmosphere which supported the type of policies pursued at Munich. It remains one of the ironies of the century that the left was adopting a more favorable view of traditional British foreign policy, while most of the right was ignoring British interests in favor of unthinking pacifism.

It is not suggested that a different historiographical climate or even a settled resolve to meet the challenges from other nations with firmness and, if necessary, with armed force, could have saved either the peace or the empire. It is maintained, however, that revisionist historical opinion was an important contributing factor to the crisis in foreign policy and that the belated solution of this crisis was not unconnected with a new anti-revisionist historiography.

The view held by much of the informed public on war responsibility in the late twenties continued well into the next decade. Its impact on foreign policy was felt
almost until the outbreak of the Second World War. The
1
Austro-Hungarian documents were studied by a number of
British historians who began to comprehend the real dangers
to the monarchy from the Serbs. One liberal writer, I. F.
D. Morrow, claimed that

an unbiased study of the documents must in-
evitably lead the reader to the conclusion
that—unwise and ill-executed as it may have
been from certain points of view—there was
at least more than a shred of justification
for the Balkan policy pursued by Aehrenthal
and Berchtold in the six years that succeeded
to the Annexation Crisis of 1908. It also
seems safe to prophesy that a careful com-
parison of the documents contained in Volume
III (May 1-August 1, 1914), will neccesi-
tate the modification of the opinions ex-
pressed in certain quarters as to Austria-
Hungary's paramount share in the responsi-
bility for the outbreak of the War.²

1
Austria, Bundesministerium für Auswärtige
Angelegenheiten, Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der
bosnischen Krise, 1908, bis zum Kriegsausbruch, 1914, ed.
by Ludwig Bittner, Alfred Francis Pribram, Heinrich Srbik,
and Hans Uehersberger (9 vols., Vienna and Leipzig:
Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für neuere Geschichte
Österreichs, 1930).

2
International Affairs, Vol. IX (March, 1930),
p. 253.
Harold Temperley called attention to Aehrenthal's desire to end the "Balkan imbroglio" at almost any cost. Elsewhere there was criticism of German's close dependence on the Austrian foreign policy, reflecting perhaps the then current dislike of all bilateral agreements, as opposed to collective security arrangements.

The American historian, Bernadotte E. Schmitt in his two volume work, The Coming of the War had been much less lenient on the Central Powers than Sidney Fay, stressing the fact that Austria was determined on war to crush Serbia even though she knew full well that there was a strong possibility of international repercussions. Though the British reviews of the book were not unfavorable, Schmitt went against the prevailing historical opinion and was much less quoted than his fellow countryman.

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4 Published in New York and London by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1930.
The memoirs of Bernhard von Bülow, the former German chancellor, were published in English translation from 1931 to 1932. These brilliantly written and vindictive volumes had the effect of further impressing public opinion with the irresponsibility of diplomacy as conducted in the pre-war period. Most hostile of the reviewers was Lewis Namier, who wrote that of "political thought and penetration, of a critical analysis or evolution of events there is nothing in this fat volume; nor is there a trace of real wit, amusing malice or finesse." A liberal writer, Raymond Mortimer found Bülow "a habitual liar" but concluded that the "government of no great power wanted a European war in 1914." Bülow, wrote Mortimer, "may be believed when he states that if he had been Chancellor in July, 1914, he would have prevented the war. But only by abandoning the gambling policy which he bequeathed

6 The Observer (London), May 31, 1931, p. 7.
could the constant probability of war have been prevented."\(^7\)

Another reviewer went so far as to claim that "it is at least arguable that if he had gone sooner, Germany and her neighbours would have been spared a great calamity."\(^8\) There was remaining resentment of his "malicious" treatment of English moves toward an Anglo-German entente at the turn of the century. A devastating attack on his career by

\(^7\) *New Statesman* and *Nation*, April 30, 1932, p. 561.

\(^8\) *Spectator*, November 7, 1931, p. 616.

\(^9\) R. B. Mowat expressed regret for the failure of an Anglo-German rapprochement in his survey article, "Great Britain and Germany in the Early Twentieth Century", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. XLVI (July, 1931), pp. 423-441. This regret was also shared by James Louis Garvin, the editor of the *The Observer*, and biographer of Joseph Chamberlain. See his *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (3 vols., London: Macmillan, 1932-1934). (A fourth volume was written by Julian Amery and published in 1951 by Macmillan.) A discussion of the belief that Britain and Germany were "natural" allies is found in Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), especially pp. 140-141.
I. F. D. Morrow appeared in the Cambridge Historical Journal. Perhaps one of the most telling criticisms of German policy came from the Times Literary Supplement review: "the cardinal error [was] made by Bismarck in excluding the German nation from a real participation in the task of government and in leaving a vast responsibility in the irresponsible hands of the German Emperor."

In 1932 there appeared two volumes (VII and VIII) of the British Documents on the Origins of the War. The former, which concerned the Agadir crisis of 1906, caused a certain amount of doubt about the origin of Anglo-German hostility; reviewers criticized the suggestion of Sir Eyre Crowe that, in order to prevent Germany from attempting a divide-and-conquer policy, Great Britain must invariably stand with France. One writer found that "the result was that Germany did genuinely begin to feel herself 'encircled'." Others were less critical of

11 Issue of December 17, 1931, p. 1015.
British policy concerning Agadir, but even as strong a defender of Grey as J. L. Hammond called attention to the beginning of the secret military conversations with France which produced "a dangerous misunderstanding between the Government and the House of Commons". Volume VIII, a miscellaneous collection concerning security and arbitration, was seen as providing grounds for hope for the current state of international affairs. The editor of the Spectator wrote that study of the record "justifies a little guarded optimism regarding the days we live in now. The outlook is dark enough in many ways, no doubt, but there is not quite the sensation of living on the slopes of a volcano that may erupt at any moment."

The year 1932 marked the last year in which Great Britain and France would be able to attempt to appease Germany freely; it was the year of the Lausanne Conference which finally settled the reparations controversy.

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13 Manchester Guardian Weekly, March 11, 1932, p. 211.
14 H. Wilson Harris, in the Spectator, March 19, 1932, p. 416.
had been hope that there might at this time be a specific repudiation of Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, the notorious war-guilt clause which had been universally discredited by historians. There was, however, some annoyance when the Archbishop of York, William Temple, in a sermon on the eve of the Conference opening, expressed the opinion that "One clause there is in the existing treaties which offends in principle the Christian conscience and for the deletion of which by proper authority the voice of Christendom must be raised. This is the clause which affixes to one group of belligerents in the Great War the whole guilt for its occurrence."

Opposition to Temple was voiced by Sir Austen Chamberlain, the former foreign secretary, in a speech at the University of Wales in which he maintained that "a word from Germany would have averted the calamity which shattered the world, her Government refused to speak that word." Yet Chamberlain conceded, "I have no

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love for the war guilt clause. I think it was folly to bring on the Germans a humiliating avowal." Harold Temperley wrote to the New Statesman arguing that Article 231 was only a technical clause used to justify reparations and did not actually involve a general charge of war responsibility—a conclusion that convinced hardly anyone in view of the pejorative connotation of the word "aggression", especially in German translation. Two weeks later he more realistically pointed out that the clause could hardly be revoked inasmuch as that would deny the legal basis of all reparations past and present and technically mean that vast sums would have to be returned.

At Lausanne it was not even possible to state that Part VIII of the treaty (the reparations section) was no longer in force, though this was probably due to French and not British intransigence. The Germans had to content

16 The Times (London), February 13, 1932, p. 7.
17 Issue of March 12, 1932, p. 326.
18 Ibid., April 2, 1932, p. 417.
themselves with the understanding that, since the reparations issue was settled, Article 231 had no real significance. As the *Times* editorialized, "Moreover there is the further consideration that only operative sections of treaties can be worth revising; and it is precisely a merit of the Lausanne settlement that it renders the reparations section obsolete." This was not the case; Hitler unilaterally repudiated the "war guilt lie", and even as late as the summer of 1939 Sir Arthur Salter, the M. P. for Oxford University, wanted Article 231 to be spontaneously and finally expunged.

By 1932 historical revision and other factors had influenced Britain's political leadership to the extent that a general reconsideration of Germany's role in European affairs was contemplated and meaningful steps had actually been taken in that direction. It is an unfortunate circumstance that general European appeasement had been delayed long enough to permit German resentment,
which was at least in part a product of an obsession with the Kriegsschuldfrage, to boil over and make genuine pacification impossible. Toward the close of 1932 the liberal historian J. L. Hammond wrote that, "however good the ground for dissatisfaction with our progress, the world has learnt something from the war. Take for example the discussion before the Hague Conference. There is no Power to-day as definitely hostile to disarmament as the Kaiser was in 1906." Within two months Hitler came to power and all British efforts to appease Germany did not lessen the hostility which he engendered.

The advent of Nazi power did not, unfortunately, mark an important change in discussion of the problems of war and peace. Only to a few did Germany cease to appear as the pitiful victim of encircling powers. The eventual German rearmament only served to raise the distasteful question of British needs in this area. The diplomatic problems after 1932 became much more difficult for English governments. Given the confused

understanding of the very nature of international affairs, it became virtually impossible to reach a consensus on the best way to meet crises which might become matters of war and peace. Historians themselves inevitably brought to their continuing tasks an awareness of this crucial problem. They, too, were trying to find an adequate basis to assess international problems.
Chapter VII: The New Anarchy and the Ancient Policy

By the early thirties historical opinion concerning the general causes of the war was fixed. But no matter to what degree historians might acknowledge shared responsibility and the not unambiguous role of Russia in the Balkans, there always existed the special problem of British diplomacy in the prewar period. To what degree was British diplomacy correct in its approach to the international situation of the years before 1914? To what extent did its failure to keep the peace legitimize the practices of those who were not prepared to employ force to preserve the balance of power?

Sir Edward Grey had almost exclusive responsibility for the conduct of British foreign policy from 1906 to 1916; thus discussion of that policy was closely tied in with his historical reputation.

By an unfortunate coincidence the death of Lord Grey occurred in the same week as the publication of the first volume of the *War Memoirs* of David Lloyd George\(^1\) which contained bitter, even vicious, criticism of the Liberal

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\(^1\)Published in 6 vols. in Boston by Little, Brown in 1933-1937.
foreign secretary. Lloyd George wrote: Grey's personality was distinctly one of the elements that contributed to the great catastrophe.\textsuperscript{2} He was "a pilot whose hand trembled in the policy of apprehension, unable to grip the levers and manipulate them with a firm and clear purpose. He was pursuing his avowed policy of waiting for public opinion to decide his direction for him."\textsuperscript{3} More reasonably, Lloyd George argued: "Had he warned Germany in time of the point at which Britain would declare war--and wage it with her whole strength--the issue would have been different."\textsuperscript{4}

The reaction to this attack was varied. A former colleague of both men, Winston Churchill, denied that it would have been possible for the cabinet to issue any warning to the Germans immediately after the ultimatum to Serbia; "the Cabinet would have broken into pieces, and...the Germans would have been the exultant spectators of British confusion and paralysis." Churchill went on

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 82.


\textsuperscript{4}\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 86. There had, of course, been in discussion of the origins of the War a widespread notion that
had Grey warned Germany that Britain would go to war if Belgium were invaded there would have been no war. In 1929 G. P. Gooch, in the course of a somewhat unpleasant interview with Grey, noted, "In July 1914 the ideal would have been for you to state in good time what we should do. But I know that was impossible, as the Cabinet was divided." To which Grey replied, "Quite impossible." G. P. Gooch, Under Six Reigns (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. 229. Harold Temperley noted in 1935 that whether or not an obligation to France existed, "the majority of the Cabinet were determined to take no decision until the afternoon of August 2nd, and hence no warning to Germany or Austria could have been effective before that date." (Spectator, March 15, 1935, p. 442.) Another writer truthfully pointed out that had Grey warned Germany, "all who now revile him for his hesitation and indecision, would have reviled him for bullying Germany." (St. John Ervine, "Notes on the Way," Time and Tide, November 11, 1933, p. 1339.) Other historians maintain that such a warning would have never stopped Germany since she was counting on a quick campaign in France in which the small British army could not be an important factor. Yet the former view persisted. In 1938, even Norman Angell wrote that "had Germany known what the line of policy she followed before the war would produce she would have modified that line and there would have been no war." Manchester Guardian Weekly, April 1, 1938, p. 247. Indeed, it was hoped that Chamberlain's declaration of March 31, 1939, expressing British determination to protect Poland, would work where Grey's ambiguity did not. See Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 403-404. This criticism of Grey's diplomacy was essentially tangential; as Herbert Butterfield has said: "Any serious criticism of British policy would have to go back to an earlier stage in the story--back to the time when it might be argued that Grey played his part in dividing Europe into two irreconcilable blocs." "Sir Edward Grey in July 1914," in Historical Studies: Papers read before the sixth conference of Irish Historians, ed. by J. L. McCracken, Vol. V. (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1965), p. 17.
to ask, "But if this was Mr. Lloyd George's view, he should certainly have proclaimed it to his colleagues at the time, instead of heading the tremendous opposition to our plunging into the struggle."5 Churchill's view was echoed in the following terms by Sir Frederick Whyte, the Spectator reviewer: "Lloyd George was himself the fons et origo of the British Cabinet's agony of indecision." Thus, "Mr. Lloyd George's indictment of Sir Edward Grey is singularly unfair."6 J. L. Hammond pointed out that "a study of the description of those days left by Lord Oxford, Lord Grey, and Lord Morley suggests that it was not as easy as Mr. Lloyd George's language might lead one to suppose to get a clear view of policy even on that question from the Cabinet. The Cabinet was in a strange state of confusion in foreign policy. For that state of confusion a special responsibility no doubt rests on the Foreign Secretary."7 A New Statesman writer agreed with Lloyd George, while

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5Daily Mail, September 7, 1933, p. 8.
6Spectator, September 8, 1937, p. 314.
7Manchester Guardian Weekly, September 8, 1933, p. 196.
noting his wisdom of hindsight. Still arguing the benefits of "open diplomacy," the reviewer continued, "for a country such as ours, the Grey plan is the worst possible. Will any responsible public man affirm that the Foreign Office under Sir John Simon is any different or any better?"^8

In the whole discussion of Grey's diplomacy there were still found the same basic arguments, that were suggested by Lord Loreburn in 1919, over popular control of foreign policy, the secrecy of certain military commitments, and Britain's uncertain intentions in July, 1914. There was perhaps much more sympathy for the foreign secretary than Lloyd George would personally acknowledge, but there was no small amount of active distaste for his handling of international affairs. A wider appreciation of his achievements would have to wait until they could be placed within a broader context.

Further discussion of the problem of prewar British diplomacy came from T. P. Conwell-Evans in his Foreign Policy from a Back Bench: a Study based on the Papers of Lord

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^8Issue of September 9, 1933, p. 298.
Noel-Buxton. The volume contains the usual criticisms of Grey for pursuing policies not authorized by the Parliament, emphasizing the position taken by Noel-Buxton against the Entente before the War. Conwell-Evans also criticized the Germanophobia in the Foreign Office. Sir Eyre Crowe's conviction of Germany's hostility to England "was a belief that the knowledge we now possess proves to have been mistaken." For Conwell-Evans, had the League existed in 1914 it could have prevented the War by providing time for careful, cautious negotiations.

The same type of arguments were used by Philip Snowden, the controversial ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Autobiography published in 1934. Snowden, who had jeopardized his career by refusing to speak for the war effort, maintained that the country "had been

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10Ibid., p. 45.

11Published in 2 vols. in London by Ivor Nicholson and Watson in 1934.
embroiled in this conflict by the policy of European diplomats for which Great Britain has as great a responsibility as any of the other belligerents. A terrible thing about war is that politicians make wars and innocent people have to fight them."\(^{12}\) Snowden was, of course, very close to being a pacifist, and it was on the grounds of his lack of concern for military matters that he was criticized by J. A. Spender, who concluded: "From the fact, which everybody admits, that the war was a great calamity, Lord Snowden seems to infer that nothing was saved or gained by those who won it— which is an altogether different proposition."

Furthermore, Spender asked how it was possible for men who had lived through the crises of Algeciras, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Agadir, who had seen all important Foreign Office papers, never to have considered the military aspects of the situation in which British and French interests were identical.\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 361.

\(^{13}\)Spectator, September 7, 1934, p. 330.
We have previously suggested the crucial importance of the reputation of Grey as an indication of the appreciation of the balance of power policy. The attack on Grey, begun even before the War, was taken up again in 1919 by Lord Loreburn. It was continued by the Union of Democratic Control writers, by Lord Morley, and, most viciously, by Lloyd George. Yet as the international situation darkened in the mid-thirties, a few historians began a judicious reconsideration of the enormous difficulties which confronted Britain and her foreign secretary before 1914 and the manner in which Grey responded.

A new interpretation of this type was given by J. A. Spender in his *Fifty Years of Europe: A Study in Pre-War Documents*. Spender emphasizes the exacerbating role played by German navalism in Anglo-German relations; it was "the permanent fact which finally determined British relations and drove British statesmen to find their security with the Dual Alliance." 15 He pointed out the inevitability, considering British imperial interests, of

14 Published in London by Cassell in 1936, in a revised edition. The first edition came out in 1933.
15 Ibid., p. 148.
English involvement in any great conflict between the European states. The diplomatic structure of which England became a part possessed an equilibrium "so delicate that a puff of wind might destroy it, and the immense forces on either side were so evenly balanced that a struggle between them was bound to be stupendous. The very success of the balance of power was in this respect its nemesis." While Spender defends Grey, he is critical of the old diplomatic world with its "ethics of war."\(^{16}\)

J. L. Hammond found in the book a "hard, realist world...with no place for the dreams of the Tsar Alexander about religion, of Napoleon III about nationality, or of Gladstone about public law."\(^{17}\) Leonard Woolf saw "not one single object of policy, the pursuit of which caused the war, which any sane or civilised man would consider worth the life, not of a Pomeranian Grenadier, but of a sparrow." Looking at the present, he added,

\(^{16}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 389.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Spectator}, \text{ September 8, 1933, p. 314.}\)
"And thanks to the peace and Hitler we are getting back again rapidly to the same primeval nightmare." The Times Literary Supplement reviewer pointed out that the trouble arose from Germany's attempt to combine with her usual European policy world political ambitions—the naval race and an interest in Turkish military affairs.

The attack of the partisans of Grey against Lloyd George had been undertaken by one Politicus in 1934, and, most impressively, by G. M. Trevelyan, the famous historian of Garibaldi and of nineteenth century England. The former volume attacked Lloyd George for not seeing the coming of war in July and August, 1914. Furthermore, the author attempted to answer the suggestion that Grey could have prevented war by threatening to enter it if Germany invaded Belgium. He pointed out that Germany was reckoning on a very quick war in which the addition of the small British Army had been considered and dismissed as an important factor.

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18 New Statesman and Nation, October 14, 1933, p. 659.
19 Issue of October 5, 1933, p. 659.
Trevelyan's biography was one of the most empathetic ever written of a British statesman. In part, it was another attempt to refute Lloyd George and to supplement the record of British prewar diplomacy. Trevelyan analyzed Grey's policy as having two main principles: "entente but not alliance with France and Russia, accompanied by constant efforts to achieve more friendly relations with Germany."\textsuperscript{21} These aims were precluded by "the march of German power towards hegemony by land and by sea."\textsuperscript{22} Nevertheless Trevelyan submitted that "the principles which were the pillars of his policy still challenge refutation. They failed indeed to keep the peace in the end; but they kept it for nine years, and they secured that Britain entered the war with powerful allies and with a fair name among neutrals on both sides of the Atlantic. Where he failed no one could have succeeded; where he succeeded many would have failed."\textsuperscript{23} The author,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 247.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 137.
\end{itemize}
who was the brother of the Union of Democratic Control leader Charles Trevelyan, also endeavored to show the private side of the foreign secretary; he later claimed that Grey "in his grand simplicity...was the finest human being I ever came across." 24

The reaction to Trevelyan's work was mixed. Attention was called to the undeniable fact that it might have been very difficult to bring Great Britain into the War if Germany had not invaded Belgium. Raymond Mortimer pointed out that "If the Germans had not by invading Belgium converted the Government and the country to intervention, Grey's sleight of hand would have been exposed, and he would have resigned, a pitiable, not to say disgraceful figure." 25 J. H. Hammond called attention to the personal integrity of Grey, though at the same time he also criticized him for not sufficiently realizing the implications of the Anglo-Russian conversations of 1914. 26 The Times Literary Supplement found


26 Manchester Guardian Weekly, March 5, 1937, p. 194.
a "tragic figure, Aeschylean in the quality which enabled him to wage a conflict with destiny, to which there could be but one end, but to which he, nevertheless, was not unequal."^27 Churchill, as might be expected, placed Grey within the historical tradition of British policy: "His life's justification depends upon whether England ought to have done in 1914 what she did against Philip II of Spain, against Louis XIV and against Napoleon."^28

Trevelyan's work did not put an end to criticism of Grey and his policies, but after 1936 we hear a little less of the view that Grey could have prevented the War and insured continued European peace by sending off a round of telegrams explaining British intentions. Resurgent Germany, as well as the historians, had brought home to the British public the difficulties in treating expansionist world powers.

Perhaps of all the histories of the prewar period turned out in this period the best is G. P. Gooch's two

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^28 Quoted in Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon, p. 248.
volume work, *Before the War: Studies in Diplomacy*. The books consist of chapters each portraying the prewar situation as seen through the eyes of a leading participant. The final effect, as would not be unexpected, tends to suggest that the prewar diplomatists were all justified from their own national viewpoint. "It is part of the tragedy of the world war that every belligerent can make out a case entirely convincing to itself," he writes, "For tragedy, in Hegel's words, is the conflict not of right with wrong but of right with right." This theme was taken up by J. L. Hammond, who, in reviewing the first volume, claimed that "the Slav threat was as serious to Austria as the German bid for naval power to England." E. L. Woodward argued against this view by pointing out that German militarism and lack of parliamentary control made her position fundamentally different from that of Great Britain.

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29 Published in London by Longmans, Green in 1936 and 1938.


31 *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, January 24, 1936, p. 76.

32 *Spectator*, January 24, 1936, p. 139.
Immediately after the publication of the first volume of Before the War came the fourteenth volume of the Oxford History of England. R. C. K. Ensor's England, 1870-1914 contained an unusually strong view of Germany's guilt for the outbreak of the war. "The earthy fact was that Germany had at enormous expense been keyed-up and prepared, as no nation ever equally was before, to fight a war at that particular time, and that nobody, not even the Kaiser, durst baulk the military chiefs of the opportunity offered them." Grey's policies were justified on the ground that if "as is the strong presumption, nothing that a British statesman could do would have averted eventual war between his country and Germany then credit is due to that statesman who ensured that when Great Britain, France, and Russia had to fight for their lives, they stood together to do so, and did not wait to be overwhelmed piecemeal." Most critical attention was not directed to the sections of the work dealing with foreign policy, but J. A. Hobson, the veteran

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33 Published in Oxford by the Clarendon Press in 1936.
34 Ibid., p. 488.
anti-imperialist, did feel that "All readers may not agree with him entirely in assessing the origins either of the Boer War..., or of the Great War, where he leans too heavily in favour of the sole guilt of Germany, ignoring the part of Alsace-Lorraine in the stimulation of France's foreign policy."\textsuperscript{36}

For the first time since the end of the War, Great Britain in the mid-thirties had to face seriously the problem of her military position. Rearmament was strongly opposed by those who shared the prevailing view that the prewar arms race greatly contributed to international tension. Indeed, Grey had himself specifically pointed out the lamentable results of such competition. The first detailed historical discussion of the problem did not come until 1935 with E. L. Woodward's \textit{Great Britain and the German Navy}.\textsuperscript{37} The book was a vindication of British policies under the threat of German plans for challenging her position in the world by a combination of both military and naval superiority. Woodward was, as his autobiography\textsuperscript{38}
makes clear, rather anti-German and he sought to encourage a strong anti-German policy: "I chose this subject," he wrote, "because it seemed to me extremely relevant to the situation after 1930 and because I believe that, if I treated the question objectively and with complete fairness, I might at least suggest to readers certain obvious historical parallels."\(^39\) It was, indeed, true, as Woodward admitted, that "as a political warning, the book was a failure."\(^40\) Nevertheless, the book's reception was not unfavorable, at least in some of the quality press. Lewis Namier wrote an appreciative review and claimed that "In fact, the rulers of Germany regarded--and still regard--'disarmament as an insult to human nature.'"\(^41\) The Times Literary Supplement reviewer pointed out that the decision to build the Dreadnought was a necessary response to the German challenge and was, moreover, "inopportune at a time when a Government intensely desirous of economy in armaments was in power, for it made it more difficult to find

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 241.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 242.

\(^{41}\)New Statesman and Nation, December 14, 1935, p. 939.
the money needed. The Government of Germany was quickly alive to the possibility offered in starting a naval competition from somewhere not very far from scratch."^42

One of the more important volumes^43 of the British Documents on the Origins of the War was published in the spring of 1938. Entitled The Last Years of Peace, it dealt with Anglo-German negotiations concerning the Bagdad railway and the Portuguese colonies. The volume also contained documents relating to the transfer of the British fleet from the Mediterranean to the North Sea in 1912. Suggesting that contemporary statesmen might study the collection with profit, E. L. Woodward noted that England and Germany were arguing at cross purposes inasmuch as the latter believed "a European war...inevitable owing to the internal condition of Austria-Hungary."^44 Barbara Hammond also saw contemporary implications, though she criticized bilateral arrangements whether undertaken before 1914 or in 1938 since they "lead inevitably to aggression by other Powers."^45

^43 Vol. X. Part II.
^44 Spectator, May 27, 1938, p. 698.
C. K. Webster wrote of this documentary collection: "The scene closes, in spite of the new effort to come closer to Germany, in an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. The world was, in fact, at the mercy of an 'incident'--as we are to-day. Yet some people seem glad we are getting back to the old diplomacy.\footnote{The Observer (London), May 15, 1938, p. 4.}

Gooch's second volume of \textit{Before the War} was published in the summer before Munich. Gooch had not changed his basic position on the question of the origins of the War, but the reception of the book indicates that others were more ready to appreciate the necessity of Grey's policy against an expansionist Germany. J. L. Hammond found, after reading the work, that "It seems surprizing to-day that any body could have hoped that Europe, whose complications and difficulties are unravelled in this masterly series of studies, could long escape war."\footnote{Manchester Guardian Weekly, June 17, 1938, p. 474.} This second volume contained a chapter on Grey and his handling of British diplomacy. The \textit{Times Literary Supplement} noted Gooch's criticism of the
"chilliness" found in Grey's references to Berlin and suggested that the "reason for this chilliness lay in the immediacy of the German challenge to British security, and it says something for Grey's wide grip on affairs that, with the danger always before his eyes, he perceived that the actual cause of war was likely to be found in the Near East."48 R. W. Seton-Watson drew a careful and telling analogy between Grey's situation and that of 1938 and noted that the foreign secretary had resolved that Britain would not withdraw from the confrontation with the German threat, although "there are signs that he was ready for generous consideration of German colonial claims and ambitions."49

By the end of 1938 the crisis over Czechoslovakia had brought home to the British the reality of Germany's aggressive diplomacy. The necessity of strong British policy was becoming increasingly obvious to many on the left. When a new edition of G. Lowes Dickinson's *International Anarchy* appeared, A. J. P. Taylor found it "a

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49 *Spectator*, September 2, 1938, p. 377.
curious memorial of a time when well-meaning men thought that peace could be secured by being sympathetic to Germany; that the Concert of Europe could be made real by calling it the League of Nations; and that the League of Nations could then overawe the lawbreaker without the backing of superior force."

Defense of British prewar military policy came from J. E. Tyler, of the University of Sheffield, who claimed that the Liberal government of 1906 continued the Entente policy, not because of Liberal Imperialist influence, but because it was the only alternative to surrender and was recognized as such by the Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman. In fact,

the true moral to be drawn from Campbell-Bannerman's premiership is, thus, not that a weak prime minister is at the mercy of a determined minority, especially in matters of foreign affairs. It is to be found rather in the light which it throws on the compelling force of those tendencies which transformed world-politics at the turn of the century. The Gladstonian tradition in foreign policy did not crumble before the onslaught of individuals, it went down in face of the conversion of

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of the powers to imperialism and before the arrival of Germany as a Naval Power.51

In his book, The British Army and the Continent, 1904-1914,52 Tyler criticized many aspects of the handling of the military conversations, but pointed out the leverage that British policy gave in influencing both the Germans and the French; "to make Germany, that is, fear that Britain would support France in case of war and France only hope so."53

Lord Elton in his biography of Ramsay MacDonald, published in the spring of 1939, pointed to the German threat existing before 1914, the fact that "Germany could only achieve her constantly proclaimed ambitions by war." The veteran socialist also suggested that the view that all countries were equally responsible for the conflict could no longer be maintained.54


52Published in London by Edward Arnold in 1938.

53Ibid., p. 164.

Lloyd George had a memory ever at the service of his present needs, but his changing views on the question of war responsibility demonstrate the politician's use of history. In 1936, in the final summary of his War Memoirs, Lloyd George wrote: "No sovereign or leading statesman in any of the belligerent countries sought or desired war--certainly not a European war."55 Furthermore, "I am convinced after a careful perusal of all the documents available on all sides that the Kaiser never had the remotest idea that he was plunging--or being plunged--into a European war."56

In 1938 the former Prime Minister recalled, in his work on the Peace Conference, the German protest of May 29, 1919, against the war guilt charge. He remembered that as to the "challenge of the war guilt of Germany, I could not accept the German point of view without giving away the whole of our case for entering into the War." He also recalled that he did, however, review "the considerations which had impelled us to throw in our lot

55Vol. VI, p. 306.
with Belgium, Serbia, France and Russia and I had not one wavering of doubt as to the culpability of the Central Powers. I am still of the same opinion."\(^{57}\)

It might be recalled that between 1936 and the Munich crisis Lloyd George shifted from warm admiration of Hitler to strong opposition to Chamberlain's appeasement policies and support of an alliance with the Soviet Union.

The most eloquent demonstration of the realization of the necessity of the return to a balance of power policy was provided by Harold Nicolson in a speech in the House of Commons on October 5, 1938:

For 250 years at least the great foundation of our foreign policy, what Sir Eyre Crowe called 'a law of nature,' has been to prevent by every means in our power the domination of Europe by any single Power or group of Powers.

I know that those of us who believe in the traditions of our policy, who believe in the precepts which we have inherited from our ancestors, who believe that one great function of this country is to maintain moral standards in Europe, to maintain a settled pattern of international relations, not to make friends

with people whose conduct is demonstrably evil.... I know that those who hold such beliefs are accused of possessing the Foreign Office mind. I thank God that I possess the Foreign Office mind.\textsuperscript{58}

Before 1939 many men were forced to reach a new understanding of the role of foreign affairs in the face of a changing world.

\textsuperscript{58}Parliamentary Debates: Commons, 5th Series, CCCXXXIX (1938), 433-434.
Chapter VIII: The Lessons of History

There are several factors in the British policies of the years 1933 to 1939 which are related to the prevailing historical opinion in the twenties and the first half of the thirties. There was a belief that much of the Versailles settlement was based on a notion of German war responsibility and that this concept had been thoroughly disproved and discredited. There was a strong spirit of pacifism in English society which was influenced by the belief that the War had its origins in capricious diplomacy. There was a dislike of bilateral alliances because of the fear that England might be dragged into another continental war as in 1914. There was a desire to employ the good will and conciliatory attitude that many believed lacking in foreign relations before the War.

Finally there was an inability to see the threat to international security posed by the fascist powers and that this challenge could not be met with sweet reasonableness. This incapacity to come to terms with existing conditions in Europe, it is suggested, resulted in part from the fact that historical literature had not shown sufficient
appreciation for Sir Edward Grey's policies when confronted with an essentially similar situation. It is at least possible to argue that had the western democracies and Russia been able to resist Nazi aggressiveness with the same policy that Grey employed, Hitler might not have been in a position to initiate and sustain a world war.

In a larger sense, however, both the policy of appeasement as practiced in this period and the distrust of competent diplomacy were in actuality the results of the absence of consensus on the exercise of power among nations. It is true that the policies called for by the balance of power principle had ultimately meant war in 1914, but it was becoming equally obvious that a policy of non-involvement and capitulation to aggression could be even more dangerous.

Foreign policy is inevitably influenced by domestic considerations. On the left, the interwar years marked the collapse of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labor. Emerging immediately after the War, Labor held a view of the possibility of peacefully settling international disputes which simply failed to take into consideration the
unbridgeable divisions in a world which was not willing to operate along the lines of compromise found in the English political system. The lack of realism of men such as E. D. Morel and Arthur Ponsonby did not, however, have a large influence on foreign policy on the two occasions in which the Labor party formed the government. MacDonald in 1924 and Arthur Henderson in 1929 both worked with the existing European system for peaceful, and realistic, settlement of disputes. Much emphasis was laid on the role of the League of Nations, though not all on the left were willing to countenance the use of force on its behalf. When in the thirties it was seen that the League would be unable to maintain the peace, Labor had to undergo a long and difficult process of rethinking its position on Britain's foreign policy. To a large extent the Spanish Civil War convinced the movement that it is sometimes necessary to combat aggression with force. The contribution of the historical community was also influential at this point. It was realized, though very late, that the revisionist case against Grey was not made. Given the international anarchy before 1914, his policies were the
best protection for British security and most conducive to
the preservation of peace. Given the not dissimilar at-
mosphere of the nineteen thirties, it is understandable
that the merits of his position at last came to be
appreciated. It was Labor that supported the alliance
with France and the Soviet Union against fascist aggression
as Grey had supported the Triple Entente against Hohenzollern
and Habsburg aggression. The return to a balance of power
policy and the renewed appreciation of Grey's work went
hand in hand, the latter providing the historiographical
justification of the former.

The case of the Conservatives is different. They
had probably never rejected the old balance of power tra-
dition intellectually. With them (always excluding the
Churchill-Eden bloc) fear of communism, a desire to main-
tain their position at home, and a real and genuine horror
of the results of the World War were more influential than
historical revision or idealistic desire for peaceful
settlement of disputes. In the late thirties, for reasons
which are still not adequately explained, they found it
impossible to deal with Hitler in the same way that they
had been prepared to confront Imperial Germany. The *Times* editorialized in August, 1937, that "As the vision recedes of that summer night, twenty-three years ago, when Great Britain dedicated herself to the hazard of war in defence of a small country and of our national safety, the memory of all that was suffered as a consequence of the great resolve becomes more rather than less poignant. As we survey the world around us we are assailed by the bitterness of doubt whether anything good or useful was accomplished by the dreadful slaughter that ensued." On the occasion of the annexation by Germany of Austria, Lord Lothian, by then one of the most thoroughgoing appeasers, felt that "the most important single aspect is that at long last it ends the disastrous period when the League of Nations Powers attempted, in the name of the Covenant, to deny to the Germans, who were certainly not solely responsible for the Great War, their national unity and so drove them to

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*Times Weekly Edition*, August 12, 1937, p. 4. It was left to a writer in the *New Statesman and Nation* to suggest that the world would have been worse off if Germany had not been resisted. *Issue of October 9, 1937*, p. 528.
accept a totalitarian régime as the one method by which they could recover their unity." Ironically, Lothian realized that he himself was unthinkingly responsible for the introduction of the loaded word "aggression" into Article 231. Perhaps he spent the whole decade repenting for his error.

Revisionist history appealed to the Tories when its political ramifications were disastrous. As Norman Angell remarked in April, 1938, "one of the interesting facts about this new, and for the time being, very pro-German view of foreign policy, is that [it] is put forward largely by persons who before the war (and in most cases at the making of the Treaty) were notable for their virulent anti-Germanism; and who resisted passionately any peace by negotiation." Angell found that "now the very same

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3 See Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement, p. 31.
people who used the Balance of Power arguments so persistently, so warmly, just abandon them, abandon them completely."

Many old revisionists were changing their opinions at this time. T. P. Conwell-Evans saw the folly of appeasement in the summer of 1938. In 1939 Dean Inge, who had been among the first to accept a revisionist interpretation of the origins of the War, countered a suggestion that

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4 Time and Tide, April 2, 1938, p. 459. Even G. M. Trevelyan penned a letter to the The Times which, though affirming the dangers of a German hegemony in Europe that Grey had foreseen, went on to suggest that "Germany and England must learn to 'tolerate' though they cannot envy or imitate each other's form of government. Dictatorship and democracy must lie side by side in peace, or civilization is doomed. For this end, I believe Englishmen would do well to remember that the Nazi form of government is in large measure the outcome of Allied and British injustice at Versailles in 1919. As to 1914 and the years before. . . Germans and English will seldom agree, the less so, I would add, because of the egregious folly of the 'guilt' clause of the Treaty of Versailles, which has acted, as might have been foreseen, as a challenge to Germans to prove that their Government was not to blame at all." Times Weekly Edition, August 19, 1937, p. 23.

Britain should renounce war as Denmark had done. "Denmark and the other small States of Europe do not feel at all safe; and it must be remembered that though wars between powerful nations are almost equally ruinous for victors and vanquished, an attack upon a wealthy and defenceless neighbour need not be bad business." It was Norman Angell, a founding member of the Union of Democratic Control, who came to admit that "When half the world was dragged, as a measure of its own defence, into the defence of a principle whose violation began with the threat to Serbian independence, it did not argue the merits of the Serbian case. To do so would have been fatal to the defence of the principle which is indispensable to us all."

The reality of the situation is not, as A. J. P. Taylor believes, that "Until 22 August 1939 the Labour movement from Right to Left retained its old principles or, if you prefer, its old illusions. It still held the

6 Spectator, May 19, 1939, p. 864.
7 Time and Tide, September 3, 1939, p. 1230.
outlook of Keir Hardie and E. D. Morel, of Brailsford and J. A. Hobson."
This is, of course, nonsense. The left had learned a great deal about foreign policy in the preceding two decades. Part of this lesson was learned from the historians. Soon they would share in defending the interest and honor of England. They would have no better historical example than Sir Edward Grey, who protected British interests while never sacrificing her honor.

In this study I have attempted to demonstrate the close interaction between historical consciousness and the intellectual framework which influences and even determines the nature of decision taken in matters of foreign policy. I feel it is possible to suggest that the historiography of the origins of the First World War was an integral part of the uncertainty over the appropriate British response to the challenge of resurgent Italy and Germany in the nineteen thirties.

Historical opinion had helped to discredit the Versailles system. It had raised questions about the

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8 The Trouble Makers, p. 199.
intentions of Britain's Entente partners and contributed to English sympathy for German grievances. Most importantly, historians helped to destroy the traditional understanding of the exercise of power among nations. By making clear the inherent dangers in balance of power politics, they had contributed to the pervasive feeling of helplessness when confronted with a Germany preparing for a thorough and drastic revision of the Peace of Paris.

Yet at the same time, a few historians come to appreciate the realities of the world in which nations, as well as individuals, must live. These men suggested a way out of the moral and intellectual dilemma which they and their predecessors had helped to create. They showed, in short, the necessity of defending a bad policy against one that would be far worse.

The attempt to treat foreign policy in accordance with any standard of morality is a tragic affair, involving compromises that seem at every moment to vitiate the ends sought for. But for both the historian and the statesman, it is a task dictated by duty. Grey sought to cultivate a respect for the public law of Europe;
men such as Arthur Henderson and Norman Angell continued this effort in promoting collective security through the League of Nations. That the prevailing conditions in each case prevented their success is part of the nature of our life in this century. From their final failure to secure an honorable peace, we may at least find examples of men willing to do battle with history as it actually is.
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