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THE WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: 1932-1934.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
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THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ ISSUE AT THE WORLD
DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: 1932-1934

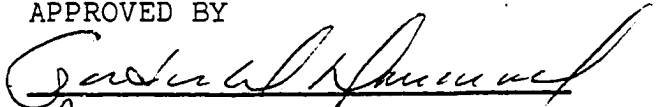
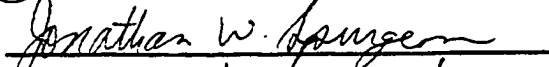
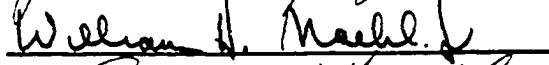
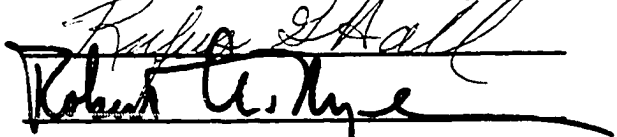
A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
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degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
V. LYLE HASKINS
Norman, Oklahoma
1973

THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ ISSUE AT THE WORLD

DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: 1932-1934

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ ISSUE AT THE WORLD

DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: 1932-1934

INTRODUCTION

In February 1932, the long-awaited World Disarmament Conference convened at Geneva, Switzerland. More than twelve years earlier, at the Paris Peace Conference, the Allies had forced Germany to accept extensive measures of disarmament, affirming that the severe military restrictions were necessary in order to make possible the limitation of every nation's armaments. The disarmament conference met to implement that promise.

Because of its size and timing, the conference was a momentous event of the inter-war years. It was the largest international gathering of that era: the sixty nations which sent diplomats and technical experts to Geneva represented the vast portion of the world's population. Accordingly, the meetings attracted universal attention when they began. The conference met at a time in which there were growing signs of strain and instability on the Continent, with relations between France and Germany especially entering a new phase of uneasiness. A pacific settlement of the armaments problem could ease tensions considerably in Europe. For these

reasons the disarmament conference was one of the most important international meetings during the twenty-year period between the two world wars.

The task which the League of Nations had set for the delegates at Geneva was to draft a convention that would reduce the military weapons of countries not disarmed by the war treaties and would restrict arms construction by all nations.¹ From a practical viewpoint, an accomplishment of that magnitude was not anticipated in any quarter because it would have required a greater rapport and mutual trust among nations than was evident in the early 1930's. The terms "disarmament" and "success," therefore, had limited connotations to the diplomats in 1932. Weapons which affected Europe, primarily land and secondarily air arms, were expected to dominate the negotiations. Even then it was assumed that the disarmament agreement could provide only a modest step toward arms control, to be followed by later attempts at greater regulation. Such a limited agreement, even only in the area of land arms, would have been considered a great achievement. The conference did not have to produce a general disarmament convention to be successful.

Although most nations sent delegates to Geneva, the conference was dominated by Germany, France and Great Britain. Accordingly, the disarmament negotiations must be examined

¹The formal title of the conference was, The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments.

in terms of Germany's demand for Gleichberechtigung, or equality of rights; France's claim for sécurité, or protection against German aggression; and Britain's ability to mediate the dispute between the two continental neighbors. The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to explain the policies of Germany, France and Britain toward the conference and the security-equality problem; second, to trace the development of the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung issue at Geneva and to investigate the extent to which it affected the outcome of the negotiations; and third, to determine why the diplomats were unable to prevent the failure of the disarmament effort. By pursuing these objectives, it becomes evident that the failure to resolve the security-equality controversy that existed between France and Germany led to the collapse of the World Disarmament Conference.

The foundation for the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité controversy was laid in 1919. The Allies dictated disarmament terms for Germany in Part V of the Treaty of Versailles. They left Germany with a professional army of 100,000 men, low-caliber weapons, a navy of thirty-six vessels, and no air force. The preamble to Part V explained, however, that Germany's disarmament would "render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations."²

²United States, Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), XIII, 301-71.

Article 8 of the League of Nations Covenant reiterated this theme, stating that the reduction of national armaments was necessary for the maintenance of peace. The Covenant added an important guideline for disarmament: each state was to reduce its armaments "to the lowest point consistent with national safety," taking into consideration its "geographical situation and circumstances."³ These references to disarmament left important questions unanswered. They did not specify how long Germany was to remain unilaterally disarmed, nor did they state that Germany would ever have the right to rearm. Although both the treaty and the Covenant promised reductions of the Allies' armaments, neither specified when this disarmament would occur or how extensive it would be. No power had agreed to disarm to Germany's level. The documents implied that the armaments gap between Germany and the Allies would be narrowed, but failed to include guidelines for determining the lowest point to which a country could safely reduce its weapons. By leaving these questions unanswered, the 1919 documents provided for differing views of the disarmament obligations. Germany felt that the severity of its own military restrictions implied substantial arms reductions by the other powers. France argued that its peculiar security needs reduced its disarmament commitment. From these conflicting interpretations developed the French and German policies of sécurité and Gleichberechtigung.

³Ibid., pp. 82-83.

The French had argued throughout the twelve years preceding the conference that they had to have sécurité against German aggression. It was their means of preserving security which fluctuated during those years--from an inflexible policy during the early 1920's of which the Ruhr invasion was an example, to a more conciliatory approach by Aristide Briand during the next several years which was designed to pacify Germany and thus reduce its threat to the status quo. By the early 1930's, Briand's method was giving way to a new skepticism toward Germany as the depression contributed to political instability in both countries. The disarmament conference brought the entire question of maintaining sécurité to the foreground because it proposed to reduce arms in France and hence lessen the amount of protection which those weapons gave the French.

To the French, sécurité involved two broad principles. First of all, France required protection against the existing military power of Germany. Since Germany was limited in the Versailles Treaty to a 100,000-man Reichswehr, the French felt secure because of their own superior military. Their only concern, then, was that Germany's military restrictions as stated in the treaty remain immutable and that a disarmament agreement not allow for increases in German weapons. The second and most important principle of the sécurité thesis was the need for guarantees of protection against the potential power of Germany. France, with a population of

41,200,000 in 1928 compared to Germany's 65,000,000, was at a disadvantage in raising a national army.⁴ France had less industrial and technical capability than Germany, which was also a liability in the event of war. In addition, France was apprehensive about the possibility of Germany overrunning the small countries in Eastern Europe, which would in turn increase its ability to make war on the Continent. France's military superiority was necessary, then, as a measure of safety against German potential as well as actual strength. The French could not ignore at the conference the practical problem that if they decreased their military strength the relative power of Germany would be augmented.

The demand for sécurité indicated that the French believed that they had not obtained sufficient guarantees in 1919 to allow them to reduce their weapons. Although the Versailles Treaty had required the permanent demilitarization of the Rhineland, the French had not obtained a buffer zone between themselves and the Germans. Germany was disarmed, but direct control of that disarmament terminated in 1927 with the end of the Allied Control Commission. After that time the only pledge of assistance for France against Germany was in the Covenant of the League of Nations. The League promised investigations of illegal German rearmament and assistance

⁴For statistics of the population of the European states see: League of Nations, Europe's Population in the Interwar Years, by Dudley Kirk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946).

to the victim in the event of war, but these guarantees were weakened by Britain's desire to remain uncommitted on the Continent and the United States' failure to join the League. France also lacked assurance that a majority of the League members would agree to effective action against German aggression. Germany had already found ways to violate the military restrictions in the treaty, and France realized that there was no practical means to keep that country from more flagrant violations. It was natural, therefore, for French statesmen to stress those statements in the Covenant which suggested collective enforcement of international obligations and which recognized that disarmament should not imperil a country's safety.

If the French had had some confidence that Germany would not take advantage of a disarmament agreement, they would have been less reluctant to narrow the military gap between themselves and their neighbors. The French lacked trust in Germany, however, which was not surprising since the war had ended only thirteen years before the conference began. Because they distrusted Germany, they argued at Geneva that their own disarmament by even limited amounts would have to be offset with new tangible methods of protection against future German aggression, such as guarantees of collective security.

Several considerations affected the French policy of sécurité in 1932. Frenchmen could not forget their defeat

in 1870, nor the 1914 war in which they considered themselves the victims of a powerful and aggressive neighbor. They felt that maintaining military superiority over Germany was the best means to avoid another war. There was also a widespread opinion in France that a latent militaristic spirit existed in Germany. Because of these beliefs, there was a strong public pressure on the governments to maintain France's military advantage on the Continent. No cabinet could afford to appear too conciliatory toward German demands without arousing public reaction. Although the suspicious attitude of Frenchmen toward Germany was the greatest single determinant which guided French policy during the two-and-a-half years of meetings at Geneva, French statesmen also could not ignore the position of their allies on the Continent. France had to avoid making concessions to Germany that might threaten the security of the small European countries, since doing so would alienate its continental allies. These considerations militated against the French altering substantially their position of sécurité at the disarmament conference.

Like sécurité, the German policy of Gleichberechtigung, or equality of rights, had its origin in the 1919 war settlement. The Versailles Treaty with its extensive military restrictions for Germany caused bitterness among many Germans because it was interpreted as an attempt to imply their inferiority in Europe. Throughout the 1920's the goal of the Germans was to revise the terms of the treaty. Specifically,

they wanted an end of Allied occupation, an adjustment of their eastern borders, a favorable settlement of reparations, and a major step toward Allied disarmament. The latter three objectives remained unfulfilled in 1932. The Germans hoped that through the disarmament conference they would remove the stigma of inequality which Part V of the treaty placed upon them.

The Germans believed that they had a legal basis for their claim of equality. They argued that the Allies had committed themselves to disarm in the Versailles Treaty when they had agreed that Germany's disarmament would render possible general arms reductions. Article 8 of the Covenant obligated the Council, they noted, to guarantee that the armed nations reduce their armaments. Since Germany had fulfilled its duty to disarm, Gleichberechtigung was a bona fide claim and a legal right. Failure of the other countries to disarm would mean a violation of their promise and the perpetuation of German inequality. If the others broke their commitment, the legality of Germany remaining unilaterally disarmed would be in question.

There was considerable pressure upon the German government at the outset of the conference to gain an agreement that would satisfy its demand for Gleichberechtigung. It could not ignore the growing nationalistic mood in the country that the National Socialist Party, which had recently emerged as a major power in the Reichstag, was nurturing for its own

political gain. A disarmament convention, even though limited, would strengthen the position of the government leadership and help bolster its waning influence. A favorable settlement would be popular in Germany because it would be regarded as a first step in breaking away from the Versailles Treaty. The conference was important in German politics, therefore, as well as for the country's foreign policy.

Gleichberechtigung did not have an explicit meaning when the conference began and it underwent changes during the negotiations. It therefore defies a concise and fully descriptive definition. In its broadest sense, equality of rights meant that the heavily armed powers had to reduce their weapons. The Germans were not so unrealistic that they interpreted the disarmament obligations to mean reduction to their own level, however. They used the phrase, "substantial disarmament," to indicate the amount of Allied disarmament that they required. During the early months of the conference, therefore, they were not asking for practical military equality, or parity, with France and the other major nations. They were talking about theoretical equality, in which the military gap between them and the others was narrowed sufficiently to remove the stigma of inferiority which Part V of the Treaty placed upon Germany. The Germans were, of course, thinking in terms only of the time period of the disarmament convention and they expected greater reductions later on.

There was more to the idea of equality than disarmament by the war-time Allies. In order for Germany to feel equal while accepting something less than practical military parity, it had to have its military restrictions placed in the same agreement as the obligations of the other nations. It was necessary, then, for the disarmament convention to replace Part V of the Versailles Treaty. As the conference dragged on with no sign of progress, the Germans required additionally that they receive samples of arms which the other powers refused to abolish. Theoretical equality between the victors and the vanquished of the last war would then be confirmed further since Germany would obtain every type of weapon possessed by the others.

Allied disarmament was what the Germans claimed they wanted, but as the conference progressed without taking specific steps toward an agreement they raised the possibility of satisfying equality of rights by their own rearmament. Gleichberechtigung then began to lose the meaning of theoretical equality and gained the idea of practical military parity. The Germans hinted early in the conference that they could obtain their objective by rearming if the others failed to disarm, but they did not seriously threaten to do so until later in the negotiations. Their determination to reach a position of equality made German rearmament the logical alternative to Allied disarmament.

Because of the seriousness of the Gleichberechtigung-

sécurité dispute, Germany and France could not easily reach an accommodation on their own. The conflict required a mediator. Of the major countries at the conference, Great Britain alone had the power and influence to mediate. The Italian government was regarded by the French as insufficiently impartial to mediate between France and Germany. The United States refused to take an active role in European problems and was too far removed from the Continent to understand fully the situation. Britain was removed from the Continent, but was close to European problems. The British also enjoyed a degree of rapport with both the French and German governments. Thus, the role of mediator fell upon the British government.

Britain assumed leadership at Geneva because it recognized that a disarmament agreement could help promote stability on the Continent. Conversely, a Franco-German rift over the arms question could endanger European peace and in turn disrupt Britain's trade and economy. Strife between France and Germany would also raise the possibility of involvement by the British in a continental conflict, a prospect that they were anxious to avoid. Because of their interest in continental stability, the British wanted a disarmament agreement and became involved at the conference in an effort to reach a rapprochement over Gleichberechtigung and sécurité.

A proper understanding of Great Britain's role at the conference requires an explanation of its attitude toward the Allied commitment to disarm. The British government felt

that the Allies were obligated to reduce their armaments because Germany had disarmed, but the Foreign Office contended during the conference that this obligation was moral rather than legal. To maintain peace on the Continent, Britain was willing to accommodate German demands for equality by supporting general disarmament and had, in fact, set the precedent for disarming by its reductions during the 1920's. The British acknowledged that France had to have security, but maintained that disarmament was the best answer to providing security for all European countries.

There were limitations upon the ability of Britain to mediate the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité dispute. One of these was the security needs of the country. Since they depended upon their naval power for defense, the British could be relatively impartial mediators as long as they were able to guide the conference toward a discussion of land and air armaments. Those areas were of prime concern to France and Germany anyway, so such a course was realistic. Whenever the conference broadened its scope to discuss all aspects of disarmament, the impartiality of Britain diminished.

Another limitation on British mediation was the influence of public and political opinion. There was considerable public support for disarmament, as evidenced by massive demonstrations for the conference in 1932 which were larger and more numerous than in other nations. Nevertheless diverse views existed, especially in Parliament, regarding the extent

of disarmament and the degree to which the British should accommodate French demands for security and German arguments for equality. The coalition cabinet--dominated by Conservatives with an ex-Labour prime minister--could never count on the complete support of any single party within the coalition itself. Individual Conservative members argued against a disarmament agreement and warned of the dire consequences which would follow from appeasing a militant Germany. At the other extreme, Labour members of the Opposition consistently rebuked the government for failing to go far enough in promoting disarmament toward the levels of the defeated war powers. The government had to steer a course between the two extremes during the conference in order for its policy to win support in Parliament.

The military departments also exerted a restraining influence upon British intercession at Geneva. Those departments, which helped plan the disarmament policy, vetoed certain arms reductions on the grounds that they might threaten British security. The government was, therefore, restricted as to the types of arms that it could relinquish, which reduced its ability to offer Germany appealing disarmament terms.

Finally, the ability of Britain to mediate the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue was limited by its reluctance to assume additional military commitments in Europe. This resistance to commitments, which had characterized British

policy since 1919, placed the government in a weak position to offer a compromise if France refused to disarm without new security measures. The British wanted to convince France to reduce its weapons on the basis of existing security in the Versailles and Locarno Treaties and the League Covenant. If they failed, they would have to find a means, without becoming deeply involved on the Continent, of satisfying French demands in order that France would disarm sufficiently to appease the Germans. This was a delicate combination and would be difficult for the British statesmen to achieve.

Other countries in addition to France, Germany and Great Britain were periodically involved with the security-equality problem. The Italian government, which maintained relatively good relations with both Britain and Germany, gave valuable assistance to the British mediation efforts at critical moments during the conference. Unfortunately, at other times the Italians advanced the interests of Germany, which was not surprising since they too maintained a revisionist policy. The United States participated in most of the top-level negotiations at Geneva too, although its contribution was limited because it considered itself unaffected by the Franco-German dispute. The continental allies of France, such as Belgium and the Little Entente, also had considerable influence on the disarmament effort. They supported France as long as it remained adamant on the questions of security and treaty observance. Most of the other governments

which took part in the conference were only marginally involved in the security-equality negotiations.

The difficulty of dealing with the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité controversy was compounded by the adverse world situation when the conference met. In Europe, the depression caused political instability and the unsettled reparations problem contributed to rising international tension. In the Far East, China and Japan were engaged in an undeclared war, adding uncertainty to world peace. These problems, by 1932, made the setting for a successful conference less than favorable.

The outcome of the disarmament conference would have a great impact on European relations in the 1930's. Success at Geneva would strengthen the declining prestige of the League of Nations, which had devoted much effort to sponsoring the disarmament attempt. Success would improve relations between Germany and France and help to check the growing tension between them before it became so serious that it led to an open rupture. On the other hand, failure at Geneva would encourage Germany to adopt a more aggressive policy of treaty revision. There was a possibility that the Germans would repudiate the military restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and begin rearming openly, claiming as justification that the Allies had broken their pledge to disarm. The French and British would in turn be forced to re-evaluate their own policies and the state of their militaries. An

arms race, therefore, would likely follow failure at Geneva, and international tension consequently would rise as it did before the 1914 war. Success required promptness in dealing with the French thesis of sécurité and the German demand for Gleichberechtigung in the early stages of the meetings. Only by facing and resolving that controversy would the World Disarmament Conference have a chance of drafting even a limited convention.

CHAPTER I

PREPARATION AND SETTING FOR THE CONFERENCE

Preparation for the World Disarmament Conference began in 1920 when the League of Nations established the Permanent Advisory Commission to advise it on arms reductions and created the Temporary Mixed Commission to study the relationship of security to disarmament.¹ During the next twelve years, negotiations for European security, preliminary work by the Preparatory Commission, and discussions for naval arms control at Washington and London all paved the way for the 1932 conference.

The Washington Naval Conference, which began in November 1921, prepared the way for the general conference by setting a precedent for arms control. By the end of the discussions in February 1922, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States had approved a ten-year holiday on capital ship construction and had set maximum tonnage ratios on those vessels for themselves.² The naval agreements were regarded

¹League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments: Preliminary Report on the Work of the Conference, by Arthur Henderson (Geneva: Publications Department, 1936), pp. 9-10.

²"Treaty on Limitation of Naval Armaments, Washington,

as a great success and demonstrated the possibility of limiting and regulating armaments.

Although the Washington treaties gave an impetus to the disarmament effort, they did not touch upon the more complicated problems of land and air arms which had to be resolved by the World Disarmament Conference. A discussion of those questions raised new issues as French Premier Aristide Briand had warned at the Washington Conference. French disarmament beyond navy arms, he had said, would require further guarantees of security.³ Recognizing French interests, the League postponed the Preparatory Commission for the conference while it explored new security measures for Europe.

The League's first proposals to increase European security failed. In September 1923, the Temporary Mixed Commission submitted the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance which provided for a system of collective security to accompany disarmament. The French were satisfied that the Draft Treaty offered some protection against a German attack because it emphasized military sanctions by League members and gave the Council

February 6, 1922," United States, Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Disarmament, Disarmament and Security, a Collection of Documents, 1919-1955, 84th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), pp. 13-26.

³Third Plenary Session, November 21, 1921, United States, Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, Washington, Nov. 12, 1921-Feb. 6, 1922 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), pp. 116-35.

authority to determine the aggressor.⁴ Since the Draft failed to lay down guidelines for the Council, the French assumed they would be able to influence its decision against Germany. That part of the Draft Treaty which the French found so appealing, its failure to define clearly an aggressor, was unacceptable to the British Labour Government of James Ramsay MacDonald. Opposition from countries which did not feel directly threatened by Germany added weight to Britain's efforts to kill the plan. The Germans naturally opposed a scheme they considered to be aimed against themselves. A year later the League offered the Geneva Protocol which was superior to the Draft because it added a system of compulsory arbitration and criteria for determining an aggressor. The Protocol was slightly less objectionable to the Germans than the previous document because it was to go into effect after the disarmament conference produced a convention.⁵ It met the same fate as the Draft Treaty, however, because the new British Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin opposed additional commitments on the Continent.

⁴"Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, September, 1923," League of Nations, Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (Geneva: Publications Department, 1923), pp. 45-50.

⁵United States, Congress, Senate, Settlement of International Disputes: Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes as Revised by the Drafting Committee and Presented to the League of Nations and there Approved, Oct. 2, 1924, S. Doc. 180, 68th Cong., 2d sess, 1925, pp. 1-8.

Success followed on the heels of failure. The German government, anxious for French forces to leave the Rhineland, proposed in early 1925 a pact guaranteeing the borders of that territory. Several months of negotiations between the German, French and British governments followed the German initiative, resulting in the Locarno Treaties of October 16.⁶ France and Germany renounced aggression against each other, and Britain and Italy agreed to guarantee French and Belgian frontiers with Germany. Although France did not obtain similar border assurances for its allies in Eastern Europe, Germany consented to arbitrate disputes with Poland and Czechoslovakia, and France signed mutual defense pacts with those two countries.⁷ The Locarno Treaties provided Europe with new security and the "spirit of Locarno" that characterized the following few years was conducive for disarmament negotiations. The League, accordingly, established the Preparatory Commission to prepare for the World Disarmament Conference.⁸

⁶France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Pacte de Sécurité: Neuf pièces relatives à la proposition faite 9 février 1925 par le Gouvernement allemand et à la réponse du Gouvernement français (Paris: Imprimerie des Journaux Officiels, 1925).

⁷"Treaty of Mutual Guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy done at Locarno, October 16, 1926," League of Nations, Treaty Series, Publication of Treaties and International Engagements Registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations (Geneva: Publications Department, 1926-1927), LIV, 290-301.

⁸Resolutions of Sept. 25, 1925, by the Sixth Assembly of the League of Nations, League of Nations, Documents of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference,

The Preparatory Commission was convened on May 18, 1926. It included those League members most concerned with the disarmament question as well as non-members Germany, the United States and Russia. The League charged the commission with drawing up a program of work in outline form to guide the conference. To accomplish this task, the commission had to define disarmament, consider means of measuring military power and establish criteria for identifying military weapons. During the four-and-a-half years of the commission, the direction that the British, French and German policies would take at the conference became clear.

The Germans avoided making radical demands at the Preparatory Commission because they did not want to affect adversely their long-range goal of treaty revision.⁹ Count Johann von Bernstorff, former ambassador to Washington and spokesman for the German delegation, simply reminded the delegates that Germany had disarmed and expected the other nations to honor their legally contracted obligations to reduce their armaments.¹⁰

Entrusted with the Preparation for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, 10th ser., annex 19, 1931, pp. 562-63. (Hereinafter referred to as Preparatory Commission); Eleventh Meeting of the Council of the League, December 7, 1925, ibid., 1st ser., 1925, pp. 44-46.

⁹ Gerhard Köpke to Gustav Stresemann, May 11, 1926, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 9126, frames H243826-27. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives.)

¹⁰ Third Meeting, First Session, May 18, 1926, League

French delegates at the Preparatory Commission maintained that a security scheme had to be incorporated in the disarmament convention. The extent to which France received aid in the event of an attack would determine the level of its arms reductions.¹¹ Joseph Paul-Boncour, a Radical-Socialist politician and member of the French delegation, kept the security issue before the commission in order to influence the program for the disarmament conference.

Great Britain's goal throughout the meetings was to keep the commission moving toward a program of work. Viscount Robert Cecil, a leading member of the British delegation and noted exponent of disarmament, carefully avoided lengthy discussions on security and other questions that would complicate the task of the commission.¹² The British hoped to avoid arguments between France and Germany that could result in serious dissension over disarmament before the conference had a chance to meet.

For the first year, the commission made little progress toward drafting a program of work for the conference. Most of the time was consumed by preliminary sub-committee studies.

of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 2d ser., 1926, pp. 13-23.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Major-General Arthur C. Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe (London: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., 1938), p. 68; Third Meeting, First Session, May 18, 1926, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 2d ser., 1926, pp. 13-23.

These technical discussions showed that agreement was possible in broad areas of limiting military personnel, naval tonnage and military budgets. They revealed, however, that there would be serious disagreement over whether or not to consider reserves and colonial forces as part of a nation's total effectives, over the problem of security, and over the method of supervising the disarmament convention.

The commission did not begin to face its responsibility until March 1927, when Britain and France submitted draft conventions to facilitate its work. These drafts, unfortunately, emphasized the differences among the major powers and resulted in several weeks of debates during which time the delegates often departed from their objective of drafting a program of work for the disarmament conference.¹³ The Germans became so impatient with the arguing between the other nations that Count Bernstorff warned, "if this Convention is not such as was contemplated by the Treaty of Versailles, it will be for our government to decide whether or not it wishes to sign it."¹⁴ When the delegates adjourned

¹³Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 58-59; First Meeting, Third Session, March 21, 1927, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 4th Ser., 1927, pp. 8-12; Draft Convention submitted by Viscount Cecil, March 21, 1927, ibid., 4th ser., annex 1, 1927, pp. 358-60; Third Meeting, Third Session, March 23, 1927, ibid., 4th ser., 1927, pp. 20-25; Preliminary Draft Convention for the limitation of armaments submitted by the French delegation, March 23, 1927, ibid., 4th ser., annex 2, 1927, pp. 361-69.

¹⁴Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff to Bernhard von Bülow, March 23, 1927, German Archives, 8890/H218258-61; Thirty-

the third session of the commission at the end of April 1927, they were still unable to agree upon a single text based upon the French and British drafts.

Only two short sessions were held during the following two years. Further preparation for the disarmament conference was interrupted by the abortive 1927 naval negotiations at Geneva and by additional League-sponsored studies the following year for European security. By 1929, therefore, the commission had not yet made appreciable progress toward drafting a program of work.

On April 15, 1929, the Preparatory Commission was ready to reconvene for its final session. The meetings made better progress than the earlier sessions had because the British and Americans agreed to accept the will of the majority if it chose to exclude trained reserves from a country's total military force.¹⁵ The French, who had large reserve forces, were delighted with this concession, but the Germans became alarmed that the program of work would provide loopholes by which the French could avoid serious disarmament discussions at the conference. Consequently, Count Bernstorff, on May 4, disassociated himself from the decisions of the commission

fourth Meeting, Third Session, April 22, 1927, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 4th ser., 1927, pp. 307-10.

¹⁵Sixth Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 1, April 19, 1929, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 8th ser., 1929, pp. 42-43; Eighth Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 1, April 22, 1929, ibid., pp. 56-59; Thirteenth Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 1, April 26, 1929, ibid., pp. 114-15.

and warned that he would not take part in formulating the rest of the draft convention.¹⁶

On that note of disharmony, the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission recessed to await the outcome of the London Naval Conference which was to meet the following year, in 1930. The delegates at Geneva hoped to incorporate the London agreement, along with the 1922 treaties, into the program for the conference. When the naval powers met at London to extend the naval ratios beyond large capital ships, there was less accord among them than there had been at Washington. France objected to limiting cruisers and other light vessels and Italy would accept nothing that failed to give it naval parity with France. As a result, only Britain, Japan and the United States signed the agreement of April 22 to maintain the capital ship ratio set by the Washington Treaty, scrap certain other vessels, and limit submarines.¹⁷ The London Conference could be regarded as a success only in a most limited sense. Nevertheless, it cleared the way for the final session of the Preparatory Commission to resume in November, 1930.

The seventeen-month interval, which had disrupted the last session of the Preparatory Commission, did not change

¹⁶Twenty-First Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 1, May 4, 1929, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 8th ser., 1929, pp. 181-82.

¹⁷Great Britain, Foreign Office, British and Foreign State Papers, 1930, Vol. CXXXII, pt. 1, "International Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armaments, London, April 22, 1930," pp. 603-19.

the disillusionment of Germany with the work at Geneva. Heinrich Brüning's cabinet reaffirmed the position that Bernstorff had taken right before the recess a year and a half earlier by deciding to press for adjournment of the commission and to demand that the conference itself start at once.¹⁸ Accordingly, on November 6, the first day of meetings, Bernstorff dismissed the work of the Preparatory Commission as not having laid a basis for the disarmament conference and called for the commission to adjourn without wasting further time on the draft convention.¹⁹

In spite of German criticism, the Preparatory Commission completed the Draft Convention on December 9, 1930. The Draft, consisting of sixty articles and thirty-six tables, divided the program of work for the conference into six categories: effectives, materiel, budgets, exchange of military information, chemical weapons and miscellaneous provisions. The tables listed the types of weapons or effectives to be limited and left blanks next to them for the conference to fill in. Each article included reservations made by various countries, giving the conference a guide to those points on which there might be a consensus and the problems upon which

¹⁸Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, October 30, 1930, German Archives, 3642/D810816-20.

¹⁹First Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 2, November 6, 1930, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 10th ser., 1931, pp. 14-22; Hugh S. Gibson to Henry L. Stimson, November 6, 1930, United States, Department of the Navy, General Records of the Navy Department, General Correspondence, 1926-1940, National Archives, Container 788, Folder A 19 (8), EM-Geneva (301106).

more work was needed.²⁰ Since the responsibility of the Preparatory Commission was to draft a framework for the conference rather than to settle specific questions, its work was a success even though it took four-and-a-half years to reach its goal.

As the Germans had expected, the Draft favored the French point of view in certain respects. It did not mention trained reserves, but included as military forces police, customs officials and forest guards. It provided separate tables for home and overseas forces, again following the French wishes to exclude their large overseas troops from consideration in calculating the total numbers in their military. Consequently, the German government rejected the Draft Convention. Bernstorff explained that the document allowed France and other armed powers to maintain their armaments and even increase them. He insisted that the conference throw it out and begin on an entirely new basis.²¹ Werner von Rheinbaben, a member of the German delegation to the conference, called the Draft, "a refined sham, . . . a pseudo-solution of the solemn and contractually established obligation of the victor states, to disarm just as they have

²⁰League of Nations, Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, Draft Convention (Geneva: Publications Department, 1930).

²¹Twenty-Seventh Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 2, December 9, 1930, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 10 ser., 1931, pp. 409-10; Analysis of the Draft Convention, November 30, 1930, German Archives, 8890/H220834-46.

disarmed others."²² Another member of the delegation, Karl Schwendemann, added that the armed powers of Europe intentionally stepped away from their obligations in the Treaty of Versailles by drafting a program for the conference that French policy had permeated. Germany had to reject the Draft as the basis for the conference because it would perpetuate Germany's military inferiority.²³

The Germans received support for their position from two members of the British delegation to the Preparatory Commission. Lord Cecil thought that the Draft was a good starting point for the conference, but that it should provide a means to end German inequality. He maintained that the conference had to satisfy Germany's insistence for equal treatment and at the same time recognize that if France was to disarm it had to feel secure from German aggression.²⁴ Brigadier Arthur C. Temperley also sympathized with the rejection of the Draft by Germany and could find no valid contradiction to Bernstorff's arguments.²⁵

²²Baron Werner von Rheinbaben, "Why Germany Must Reject the Draft Disarmament Convention," Illustrierte Zeitung (Leipzig), January 23, 1932, pp. 8-12.

²³Karl Schwendemann, Wirkliche oder scheinbare Abrüstung? Der Konventionsentwurf der Vorbereitenden Abrüstungskommission (Leipzig: Historisch-politischer Verlag, Rudolf Hofstetter, 1931), pp. 6-7, 20-21.

²⁴Viscount Robert Cecil, "Facing the World Disarmament Conference," Foreign Affairs, X (October, 1931), 13-22.

²⁵Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, p. 140.

The French were not pleased with the Draft, even though it reflected their interests, because it failed to provide for a thorough discussion of security. René Massigli, member of the French delegation, reminded the delegates that the League had already determined that disarmament was dependent upon the extent of regional and general security at the time of the conference. France had taken steps toward disarmament and would want to know, when the conference began, the extent to which the other countries were ready to accept an effective security system for Europe.²⁶

French and German dissatisfaction with the Draft Convention foreshadowed trouble for the disarmament conference. The French were determined to raise the security issue and the Germans were equally resolved to insist that their thesis of equality required substantial military reductions by the others. Both countries spent the fourteen months between the Preparatory Commission and the disarmament conference formulating their policies. The British also considered the position they would take as mediator between France and Germany when the conference convened in February 1932.

In France, Moderate and Conservative politicians formulated the government's strategy for the disarmament conference. Pierre Laval, an ex-Socialist-turned-Moderate, led the ministry, but André Tardieu was the most influential

²⁶Twenty-seventh Meeting, Sixth Session, Part 2, December 9, 1930, League of Nations, Preparatory Commission, 10th ser., 1931, pp. 411-12.

politician behind the policy. A Conservative who had assisted Georges Clemenceau at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Tardieu was a well-known advocate of a strong stand against German revisionism. His emergence as the guiding force behind French foreign policy marked a departure from Aristide Briand's efforts at international conciliation which had alienated many Conservatives. Tardieu was determined to make the security issue the focal point of French policy at the disarmament conference.

The change in the direction of French foreign policy reflected a growing distrust of Germany by Frenchmen that had been accelerated by the October 1930 German elections in which the National Socialists had suddenly increased their political strength. It also showed a fear in France that Germany was rearming in violation of the Versailles Treaty.²⁷ The French government had collected evidence that the Germans were manufacturing war materiel in Russia, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands; were carrying out chemical warfare experiments in Russia; were conducting military training in Boy Scouts and similar groups; and were acquiring illegal weapons

²⁷ Military Attaché report on the armament of Germany, January 1932, United States, War Department, General Staff, Military Attaché Reports, National Archives, Record Group 165, Serial 2657-C-254/35; General Maxime Weygand, Memoirs (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1957), II, 338. For accounts of German clandestine rearmament before and during the disarmament conference see: Georges Castellan, Le réarmement clandestin du Reich, 1930-1935 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1954); and Hans Gatzke, Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1954).

such as tanks and stocks of ammunition.²⁸ The Germans also had organizations that were trained and equipped to mobilize for war. Their army was the nucleus of a much larger force, modern and efficiently organized, with every soldier trained to be an officer. These infringements of the treaty limitations did not mean that Germany was an imminent danger to France in 1932. The British General Staff, cognizant of the violations, assessed that Germany was weak militarily and could not defend itself against France.²⁹ Nevertheless, the French believed that their neighbor posed a threat to them and some politicians wanted the conference to investigate German treaty violations as its first item of agenda.³⁰ The French government did not go that far, but it did formulate a bold security policy for the conference.

By July 15, 1931, the Laval ministry had completed the general lines of its policy, which it released to the press

²⁸"Les Armements de l'Allemagne," Revue des Deux Mondes, February 1, 1932.

²⁹Erich Raeder, Mein Leben: Bis zum Flottenabkommen mit England (Tübingen: Verlag Fritz Schlichtmayer, 1956), pp. 261-62; Helmut Klotz, Germany's Secret Armaments (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1934), p. 49; Helmut Klotz, ed., The Berlin Diaries, May 30, 1932-Jan. 30, 1933 (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1934), pp. 194-95; Memorandum by the War Office on Germany's breaches of the Versailles Treaty, March 2, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2, Vol. III (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948), pp. 602-605. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP.)

³⁰Frederick M. Sackett to Stimson, January 13, 1932, United States, Department of State, Decimal File: 1930-1939, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/763. (Hereinafter referred to as Decimal File.)

shortly thereafter. The government contended that the first duty of the conference was to create security through mutual assistance pacts and an international army. France could then consider further armament reductions, but would have to retain sufficient weapons to protect itself from German aggression while waiting for aid to arrive, and enough land forces to compensate for the lack of a natural border with Germany-- a situation which made French resources vulnerable to attack. In addition, France required troops in its colonies and special forces stationed at home for emergency overseas duty.³¹ The memorandum contained no commitment that France would substantially reduce its armaments, even with additional security.

The international army alluded to in the July Memorandum became the cornerstone of French policy at Geneva. Since 1919 French statesmen had often called for strengthening the League by giving it effective peace-keeping power, but the Laval government developed the idea further. By January 1932 the National Defense Council had formed the main characteristics of the scheme. The army, or police force as the council preferred to call it, would be under the control of the League of Nations. If Germany attacked France, or any country was threatened by invasion, the army would come to the aid of the victim. Led by a chief commander under the League's authority, the army would consist of land, naval and air

³¹Le Temps (Paris), July 23, 1931, pp. 3-5.

divisions.³² The French intended to develop their plan further for the disarmament conference and to force a discussion of it when the meetings began in February.³³

French policy represented the opinion of most Frenchmen.³⁴ In the Chamber, the government had support from the Moderates of the center and right and from the Radicals of the left. Opposition came primarily from the Socialist Party whose leader, Leon Blum, disagreed with the government's method of obtaining security. He asserted that France would be safe from invasion only if all countries progressively disarmed, since disarmament would lessen tension in Europe. If France did not reduce its military preponderance on the Continent, Germany would be tempted to throw off the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and ultimately would become a greater danger to European peace. Even Blum, however, agreed with the government that mutual assistance pacts were necessary to strengthen French security.³⁵

³²Report of the National Defense Council, January 8, 1932, France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, Ser. 1, Vol. I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1966), pp. 447-52.

³³Report on statements made by Joseph Paul-Boncour, January 16, 1932, United States, War Department, General Staff, Military Attaché Reports, Record Group 165, Serial 2657-C-254/28.

³⁴Walter Edge to Stimson, December 14, 1931, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/690.

³⁵Léon Blum, Les Problèmes de la paix (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1931), pp. 143-50.

In Germany, Chancellor Heinrich Brüning and his cabinet anxiously awaited the disarmament conference, even though his government had rejected the Draft Convention in 1930. Brüning, a man of high intellect and an authority on economics, had been the Center Party Chancellor since March, 1930.³⁶ His government never enjoyed a strong position because of the political and social instability resulting from the economic depression, and he was forced to rule primarily by emergency decree. As the disarmament conference convened, Brüning maintained an uncertain control over the government in the face of increasing attacks from the Communists and from the extreme nationalists--especially the National Socialists, who had increased their seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107 as a result of the September 1930 elections. Brüning believed that he would strengthen his government's position at home if he could gain a diplomatic victory at Geneva, although he was pessimistic about his chances of convincing the French to reduce their military superiority.³⁷

Because a favorable agreement was vital to the Brüning government, the ministers spent considerable time in 1931 deciding upon the most effective way to present their case

³⁶Gordon A Craig, From Bismarck to Adenauer: Aspects of German Statescraft (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), pp. 83-92; Aubrey Leo Kennedy, Britain Faces Germany (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 60.

³⁷Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, January 13, 1931, German Archives, 3642/D810972-77; Minutes of a conference of Heads of Departments, March 18, 1931, ibid., 3642/D811005-1009.

for Gleichberechtigung at Geneva. Equality of rights ultimately required armament parity with France and the other major powers, Foreign Minister Julius Curtius told his colleagues, but for the purposes of the disarmament conference it had to mean much less than that. They would have to disclaim any intention of obtaining numerical parity, or practical equality, with France. All Germany could argue at the conference was that the armed powers must recognize its right to be equal, that is, to accept theoretical equality.³⁸ Brüning's cabinet believed that, if it argued this moderate interpretation of Gleichberechtigung, the French would more willingly agree to disarm.

Theoretical equality, the ministers agreed, required that German military restrictions be lifted from the Treaty of Versailles and placed in the disarmament convention. Germany would be willing to maintain its present arms level for the time period of the convention, but the other nations in Europe had to reduce theirs substantially.³⁹ Land armaments were the primary concern of the Germans. France had forces totaling more than 358,000 men compared to Germany's limit of 100,000.⁴⁰ The French figure included 68,000

³⁸Memorandum of a Conference of Heads of Departments, July 8, 1931, German Archives, 3642/D811120-22.

³⁹Ibid.; Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, August 28, 1931, ibid., 9097/H222421-30.

⁴⁰All of the following figures comparing the military strength of the countries are found in: League of Nations, Armaments Year-Book, Special Edition, Conference for the

overseas personnel stationed at home and thousands more in close localities, such as Algeria, which could be used to augment the regular army. For that reason the Germans wanted all land forces reduced, those designated as overseas as well as regular effectives. Britain had nearly 300,000 men in its army, half of which were stationed at home. The Germans were not as concerned about British overseas forces as they were French, but were determined to argue that the total effectives of all countries had to be decreased. Air armaments were also important to Germany. France possessed nearly 3,300 military planes and Britain, 1,400. Officials of both countries claimed that the figures were misleading because their equipment was outdated, but the Germans, forbidden an air force by the treaty, were resolved to press for reductions anyway.⁴¹ They were least concerned about naval arms because France was their continental neighbor and because progress in naval disarmament had been made at Washington and London.⁴² Nevertheless, substantial reduction of all

Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, General and Statistical Information in Regard to Land, Naval and Air Armaments (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932). Especially see pp. 105, 110, 114, 117-19, 126, 130, 189, 328, 333, 336, 341, 361. (Hereinafter referred to as Armaments Year-Book.)

⁴¹Pierre Cot, Triumph of Treason (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Pub. Co., 1944), pp. 178-79, 183; Percy Robert C. Groves, Behind the Smoke Screen (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1934), pp. 299-300.

⁴²Britain's total naval tonnage was more than 1,250,000 tons as compared to the French tonnage of 628,600 tons and Germany's 125,780 tons. League of Nations, Armaments Year-Book, pp. 119, 126, 130, 341.

three types of armaments was necessary to satisfy theoretical equality.

Considering an early disarmament settlement necessary for its stability, the German government appealed for British assistance in persuading France to temper its position. If France used the security issue to avoid a discussion of disarmament at the conference, Curtius warned the British, the National Socialists would have more fuel with which to ignite public feeling against the government's moderate foreign policy.⁴³ Later, Albert Frohwein of the German Foreign Office explained that his government could not meet excessive French security demands. Germany could agree to a consultative pact with France, but would sign mutual assistance pacts only if France disarmed significantly. Frohwein noted that Germany had already appeased the French by signing the Locarno Treaties and under no circumstances would his government discuss similar guarantees for Germany's eastern neighbors.⁴⁴ The Germans hoped that Britain could induce France to avoid a policy that would be totally unacceptable to them.

The Germans were apprehensive that France would form a coalition of supporters at Geneva to turn the conference into a forum for security. They were prepared to reply firmly to the French by emphasizing that they too had a right to security,

⁴³Note communicated by Dr. Julius Curtius, July 27, 1931, DBFP, III, 483-86.

⁴⁴Memorandum by Alexander Cadogan, September 23, 1931, ibid., pp. 489-91

which they could never obtain as long as France maintained heavy armaments.⁴⁵ In the January 23rd issue of Illustrierte Zeitung, a series of articles by German statesmen defended this argument. Count Johann von Bernstorff warned in one article that Europe would never live in peace if France maintained its military preponderance over Germany.⁴⁶

Since France and Germany were prepared to argue their respective theses at Geneva, the survival of the conference necessitated successful mediation by the British. The government in Britain was led by an ardent advocate of international cooperation, James Ramsay MacDonald. Born in 1886, MacDonald became involved in the socialist movement as a young man, joined the Independent Labour Party in 1894, and for many years was the spokesman for the Labour Party in Parliament.⁴⁷ He believed that disarmament was the best means to keep peace on the Continent and give Britain needed security.⁴⁸ In 1931,

⁴⁵Cabinet Protocol, January 15, 1932, German Archives, 3598/D789050-56.

⁴⁶Count Johann von Bernstorff, "Germany's Right to Claim General Disarmament and Security," Illustrierte Zeitung (Leipzig), January 23, 1932, pp. 2-7.

⁴⁷For a good account of MacDonald's political life see: Benjamin Sacks, J. Ramsay MacDonald, in Thought and Action: An Architect for a Better World (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1952.)

⁴⁸J. Ramsay MacDonald, The Socialist Movement (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), p. 103; J. Ramsay MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution (New York: Scott & Seltzer, 1920), p. 157; J. Ramsay MacDonald, Address by the Rt. Hon. James Ramsay MacDonald, Prime Minister of Great Britain (New York: Foreign Policy Association, Inc., 1929), p. 14; J. Ramsay MacDonald, The Foreign Policy of the Labour

he expressed his conviction that, "national security under a balance-of-power policy required armaments; national security under the British policy of international cooperation was best attained by disarmament."⁴⁹

MacDonald had been prime minister in two Labour cabinets after the war. The economic crisis contributed to the end of the second government in August 1931, when he was unable to force his party to accept a budget that included reductions in unemployment expenditures.⁵⁰ In what Labourite Clement Attlee termed, "the greatest betrayal in British political history," MacDonald broke with his party to form the National Coalition Government which included members from all three major parties, while the Labour Party became the Opposition.⁵¹ The prime minister depended upon a large bloc of Conservatives and the good will of the Liberals to maintain his position.⁵²

Prime Minister MacDonald was undeniably the driving force in the government behind disarmament because of his

Party (London: Cecil Palmer, 1923), p. 15.

⁴⁹The Times (London), July 29, 1931, p. 12.

⁵⁰Ibid., August 25, 1931, p. 12; ibid., August 26, 1931, p. 12.

⁵¹Clement R. Attlee, As It Happened (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 107.

⁵²Of 615 seats in the House of Commons, the Conservative Party held 471, while the Liberals and Liberal Nationals occupied 68 seats. The Labour Opposition held only 56 seats. Carl F. Brand, The British Labour Party: A Short History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 160.

conviction that it was necessary for peace. He reserved this phase of foreign policy for his personal attention. Conservatives dominated the cabinet, however, and British policy mostly reflected their views. While they supported the disarmament effort, they were somewhat less enthusiastic for it than was the prime minister. MacDonald was unable to persuade his colleagues to adopt as bold a stand on disarmament as he desired.

The groundwork for British policy was laid by the Labour government during the spring of 1931. The Foreign Office, at that time headed by Arthur Henderson, recommended that the government concede to the Germans partial equality by supporting a modest increase in their land armaments in exchange for an agreement to limit their military budget. To alleviate French fear of German aggression, the Foreign Office suggested internationalizing civil aircraft.⁵³ After establishing the National Government, MacDonald attempted to commit all of the parties to a unified position by creating a non-partisan committee to prepare further for the conference. The members of the committee who had the greatest influence on policy were Conservatives Austin Chamberlain and Samuel Hoare, Liberals David Lloyd-George and Herbert Samuel, and Labourite Arthur Henderson.⁵⁴

⁵³Memorandum regarding Germany and the Disarmament Conference, April 8, 1931, Great Britain, Public Record Office, MMS., Foreign Office, General Correspondence, No. 425, C 2531/136/18. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office.)

⁵⁴H. L. S. Samuel, Groves of Change: A Book of Memoirs

After several months of study by the committee, the coalition cabinet, on January 14, set aside the earlier Foreign Office recommendations in favor of a cautious wait-and-see policy at the conference. The cabinet did not draft specific proposals to offer to the French and Germans in February.⁵⁵ Brigadier Arthur Temperley defended the lack of a program on the basis that the government knew, "there would be a good deal of hard bargaining later on and it was prudent to keep something up our sleeve."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the decision to go to Geneva without clear suggestions for a Franco-German compromise was unwise because the security-equality conflict required prompt attention if the conference was to progress. The British should have been prepared to assume immediate leadership at Geneva so that valuable time would not have been lost in aimless negotiations during the early months of meetings.

The British might have adopted a bolder policy at the outset of the conference if they had received support from the United States. They did not feel free to make comprehensive proposals without American backing. Unfortunately, the United States government showed little interest in the conference before it began. Those in a position to sway the

(Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946), p. 319; Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 148-49.

⁵⁵Cabinet Conclusions, January 14, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 588/10/98.

⁵⁶Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, p. 184.

administration and those directly involved with the conference almost universally viewed the disarmament attempt pessimistically because of the Franco-German dispute and considered it a European affair.⁵⁷ The government was also influenced by Chief-of-Staff Douglas MacArthur, who argued against any reduction of the American army because it was, "the final club in the hands of the President in his duty of executing the laws of the land."⁵⁸ Even President Herbert Hoover viewed the conference apathetically and refused a British request to make a public statement encouraging compromise at Geneva.⁵⁹ Thus, the British government found itself alone as it faced the difficult work of mediating the Franco-German problem.

By the time the disarmament conference opened in 1932, France, Germany and Great Britain had formulated the position

⁵⁷ William E. Borah to Margaret L. Sargent, December 23, 1931, United States, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, William E. Borah Papers, Container 331, "Disarmament" folder; Gibson to Stimson, December 4, 1930, United States, Department of the Navy, General Records of the Navy Department, General Correspondence, 1926-1940, National Archives, Container 808, Folder A 19 (8), EM-Geneva, 301204-5; Hugh Robert Wilson to Allen Dulles, May 26, 1931, Hugh Robert Wilson, Disarmament and the Cold War in the Thirties (New York: Vantage Press, 1963), p. 19; Wilson to Stimson, January 8, 1931, United States, Department of State, Records of the General Disarmament Conference, 1932, Telegrams, National Archives, Record Group 43, Container 1, Book I. (Hereinafter referred to as Disarmament Conference, Telegrams.)

⁵⁸ Memorandum of the Office of the Chief of Staff, November 19, 1931, United States, Department of State, Records of the General Disarmament Conference, 1932, Memoranda of Meetings, National Archives, Record Group 43, Container 1, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Stimson to the American Embassy, London, January 7, 1932, United States, Disarmament Conference, Telegrams, Container 1, Book III.

that each would take at Geneva. Their preparation, along with the many years of planning by the League of Nations, indicated to laymen that the conference would make real progress. The task before the diplomats, however, was overwhelming even with the best conditions; and the setting for the conference in 1932 was less than favorable.

The economic depression that shattered Europe's economy during the interval between the Preparatory Commission and the disarmament conference adversely influenced the talks at Geneva. Beginning in America in 1929 with the Wall Street financial crash, the depression spread to Western Europe and then, aided by the failure of the Austrian Credit-Anstalt Bank in 1931, into Central Europe. The economic collapse of Europe carried with it serious repercussions, rupturing the moderately peaceful atmosphere that had characterized the Locarno Era. In Germany, a country deeply in debt, industry and trade declined sharply, causing increased unemployment. Heinrich Brüning fought to stabilize the economy while appeasing the growing political radicalism that appealed to the unemployed. The French government also experienced instability as a result of the depression: five premiers led ministries during the first year of the conference. While the foreign policy of the Third Republic altered little from one ministry to another, the lack of stability had a disruptive effect on Franco-German negotiations. In both countries, politicians were less willing to appear conciliatory at Geneva for fear of adverse reaction at home.

Besides contributing to political instability in Europe, the depression led to a potentially serious confrontation between France and Germany in 1931. After negotiating quietly for several weeks, Germany and Austria announced in March their decision to establish a customs union between them which other nations could join.⁶⁰ Even though the League of Nations had encouraged discussions on economic cooperation early in the year, the proposed agreement between Germany and Austria brought immediate protests from France, the Little Entente, and Italy. Once in effect, the project could increase Germany's economic influence in Austria and, if other small nations in the area participated, throughout Eastern Europe. To the French, such prospects were alarming because of the possible political effects as well as the economic implications. It opened the door to German ascendancy over Austria and any other country involved in the customs union. It also prepared the way for political Anschluss between Austria and Germany, which was forbidden by the war treaties. The war settlement would be undermined and French security in Europe would be threatened if the union was allowed to go into effect. Persistent French condemnation of the agreement, on the basis that it would jeopardize Austrian sovereignty, led to its abandonment in September. Still, the proposals left bitter feelings and suspicions in France toward Germany on the eve of the disarmament conference.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the customs union see: Edward W.

The depression also brought to the foreground the question of reparations, which had been an obstructive force in European harmony throughout the 1920's. In 1924, the Dawes Plan had provided a temporary settlement by reducing Germany's annual payments. The Young Plan of 1929 was supposedly a final solution because it scheduled payments within Germany's capacity to pay, but the depression disrupted the system only a few months later. A crisis was delayed for one year when President Herbert Hoover of the United States proposed, in June 1931, a one-year moratorium on all war debts and reparations payments. Consequently, discussions on the problem were due to begin in June 1932, only four months after the disarmament conference began. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning warned in January 1932 that his country could make no further payments in the foreseeable future and, unless the other governments agreed to cancel reparations, Germany would face political chaos.⁶¹ The French were reluctant to terminate Germany's economic obligations under the Treaty of Versailles, however, because that could set a precedent which would allow Germany to escape its military restrictions as well. The inviolability of the Versailles Treaty and the security of France were at

Bennett, Germany and the Diplomacy of the Financial Crisis, 1931 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 40-81.

⁶¹Horace G. Rumbold to John A. Simon, January 8, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP., III, 12-13.

stake.⁶² Because of the approaching confrontation over reparations, Franco-German relations were strained at the outset of the disarmament conference.

In addition to the depression and the reparations problem, the Far Eastern Crisis disrupted international relations as the conference convened. At the very moment the delegates gathered at Geneva to discuss disarmament, China and Japan were waging an undeclared war. The Japanese had invaded Manchuria in September 1931, conquering much of it by early 1932. Japan's aggression dropped a heavy veil over the entire question of disarmament, and made other nations cautious about reducing their own armaments.

As the delegates assembled at Geneva, the attention of the world focused on the disarmament conference. After so many years of preparation, the conference seemed long overdue; and the recent deterioration of international relations emphasized the urgency of the delegates' task. The French came prepared to argue their thesis of sécurité; and the Germans, their claim to Gleichberechtigung. Their differences would have to be reconciled before progress could be made on a convention.

⁶²Simon to William George Tyrrell, January 11, 1932, ibid., pp. 15-16.

CHAPTER II

THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ ISSUE

Throngs of people filled the main hall of the Salle du Conseil Général on Tuesday afternoon, February 2, 1932, as the long-awaited World Disarmament Conference convened. Two-hundred fifty representatives from sixty states, surrounded by their advisors, occupied the main floor of the hall. Five hundred journalists jammed the galleries, along with "an army of savage-looking women" representing peace organizations.¹ The importance of the occasion was underlined by the presence of top-ranking ministers from the French, German and British governments.

The conference formally opened under the presidency of Arthur Henderson, a noted proponent of disarmament. Henderson had been foreign secretary in the British Labour cabinet of 1929-1931, but when the conference began he held no position in the National Coalition government. He officially launched the meetings with an hour-long speech--read while sitting

¹The Times (London), February 3, 1932, pp. 12, 14; Samuel J. G. Hoare, Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins Pub., 1954), p. 124.

behind a row of loudspeakers that practically hid him from view--in which he impressed upon the delegates the importance of a conference that represented seventeen hundred million people.² Recalling the extensive preparation that preceded the conference, he implored each government to place no obstacle in the way of world disarmament.³

Henderson's opening address was followed by three weeks of speeches, as each of the sixty delegations placed on record its country's approbation of disarmament. Most of these speeches were of little significance for the conference. There were three exceptions: the French, German and British speeches, among the first to be delivered, were anticipated by the governments represented at Geneva which knew that the policies of those countries would set the tone for the negotiations.

Leading the delegation from France was André Tardieu, who had been primarily responsible for formulating French policy for the conference. The fifty-six year old Conservative had entered politics as a young man and had led two ministries in 1929 and 1930.⁴ He was war minister in Pierre

²The Times (London), February 3, 1932, p. 12; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 124-25.

³First Plenary Meeting, February 2, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series A: Verbatim Records of Plenary Meetings (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932), pp. 39-48. (Hereinafter referred to as Plenary Meetings.)

⁴Rudolf Binion, Defeated Leaders: The Political Fate of Caillaux, Jouvenel, and Tardieu (New York: Columbia

Laval's cabinet when the conference convened, but within a few weeks he was to succeed Laval as premier. Ever since the Paris Peace Conference, Tardieu had argued that the main responsibility of the League was to maintain peace in Europe, but that it needed strengthening before it could fulfill that duty.⁵ His views were well-known, and the very presence of Tardieu at Geneva showed that France intended to defend its security interests with resolution.

Tardieu drafted the proposals which the French delegation brought to Geneva, basing them on the government memorandum of July 15, 1931, and on the National Defense Council study of January 1932. Every party backed them, he claimed, except the Socialist.⁶ It disliked the emphasis on security to the exclusion of disarmament. The proposals also reflected the views of the military. General Maxime Weygand, vice-president of the War Council, and Colonel Édouard Réquin, a member of the Military Bureau of the War Ministry, assisted Tardieu in preparing the policy statement and then went to Geneva to help him defend it.⁷

University Press, 1960), pp. 197-213.

⁵ André Tardieu, France in Danger, trans. by Gerald Griffin (London: Denis Archer, 1935), p. 36; André Tardieu, The Truth about the Treaty (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Publishers, 1921), p. 428; Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III République, les lendemains de la victoire, 1919-1934 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), II, 214-15.

⁶ André Tardieu, Devant le pays (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1932), pp. 29-31; Tardieu, France in Danger, pp. 71-72, 85.

⁷ Général Édouard Jean Réquin, D'une guerre à l'autre,

France was scheduled to present its proposals on Monday, February 8, after the British delivered the first address of the plenary session. The scheduling placed the French at a disadvantage. They expected the British to exhort the land powers to limit their weapons like the naval powers had done at Washington and London. A speech on French security would have looked out of place following such an appeal to disarm, and would have been less likely to sway the delegates. Undaunted, Tardieu distributed his proposals at the end of the meeting on the preceding Friday.⁸ By publishing the plan three days early, Tardieu gave the delegates the entire weekend to study it and, he hoped, to be influenced by it.

The Tardieu Plan, as the proposals became known, repeated the premise made by Frenchmen many times since the World War: they had to feel secure from attack if they were to reduce their military superiority on the Continent. To establish this sense of safety, the Tardieu Plan detailed an elaborate scheme for security. It centered on the League of Nations and was designed to cure the paralysis of that body which, the French argued, was caused by unyielding national sovereignty in the world.

The League was to possess "executive authority" to keep peace. First of all, land, air and naval weapons that

1919-1939: Souvenirs (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle and Co., 1949), pp. 157-60.

⁸Third Plenary Meeting, February 5, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 51-53.

the disarmament convention outlawed were to be turned over to the League, not destroyed. In order to keep its arsenal modern and superior to all national armies, the League of Nations would also manufacture heavier arms than those retained by the countries. All weapons belonging to the League would be located in the countries which presently possessed them, but under direct international control. After gaining permission, any country threatened by invasion would have the heavy armaments at its disposal to supplement its own military.

Secondly, the League would command an international police force that would occupy any area threatened by war and give immediate aid to a country under attack. The force would consist of contingents from each contracting nation and would have supranational powers to enter any area in which war was imminent. By strengthening the League of Nations in this manner, France and other European countries would feel secure enough to disarm.⁹

The exact relationship of Germany and the other disarmed powers to the security system was obscure, but the Tardieu Plan implied that those countries would occupy a secondary role. Germany would not hold League weapons in trust as would France, since those arms were to remain in

⁹Proposals of the French Delegation, February 5, 1932, League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Conference Documents (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932), I, 113-16. (Hereinafter referred to as Conference Documents.)

the country that had relinquished them. The Germans could not help but regard such a scheme as an attempt to perpetuate their military inferiority on the Continent.

A number of problems were raised by the Tardieu Plan. One was that the League had to determine the aggressor before permitting the use of its weapons or its international police force by the victim. A decision in time to stop a crisis would, on occasion, be difficult if not impossible to reach, and the French gave no guidelines for arriving at a verdict. There was also the chance that a country would use illegally the military power that it held in trust for the League. Theoretically, neither the arsenal nor the army could be employed without approval because there would be separation between the international force and the various national armies. In practice, however, there was little to stop a country, upon being turned down by the League, from utilizing the heavy weapons anyway. A final problem of the proposals was their failure to clarify how far France would go toward disarmament if the other nations adopted its security system. The plan hardly mentioned disarmament, not even indicating which weapons France was willing to turn over to the League.

In his speech on Monday, Tardieu told the delegates that the French proposals provided the necessary basis for reducing weapons. He argued that his country had already disarmed, but was willing to go much further if the plan was

accepted. The French, however, were not naïve enough to think that their security system would win approval in its proposed form. They expected to negotiate on the basis of the scheme, which represented their maximum objectives at Geneva. The Tardieu Plan showed the direction that the conference had to take to be successful. The closer the other powers came to satisfying French security needs, the greater reductions they could expect from France.¹⁰

The Germans delivered their opening address to the conference the day following Tardieu's speech and they submitted proposals later in the month. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning personally led the German delegation. Brüning delivered the German address, but turned most of the subsequent negotiations over to his chief assistant, Rudolf Nadolny. It was a wise decision since Nadolny enjoyed cordial relations with Tardieu and shared the views of Brüning regarding German foreign policy.¹¹ Nadolny and Brüning came to Geneva prepared to defend the position on equality that their government had developed during the previous year.

Brüning's speech, which the German delegation requested should follow the French address, was a carefully worded

¹⁰Fourth Plenary Meeting, February 8, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 54-64.

¹¹Rudolf Nadolny, Germanisierung oder Slavisierung? (Berlin: Otto Stollberg Verlag, 1929), pp. 183-208; Rudolf Nadolny, Mein Beitrag (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), pp. 115-16.

defense of Gleichberechtigung.¹² Only Germany had discharged its obligation to disarm and it was waiting for the other nations to fulfill their duty to reduce substantially their military power. Brüning offered no indication of exact numbers or percentages of arms reductions, saying only that the disarmament convention had to represent a significant step toward eliminating the military inequality of Germany vis-à-vis France. In addition, the convention had to apply equally to all nations, meaning that German military restrictions had to become a part of the convention instead of remaining in the Versailles Treaty.¹³

In his speech, Brüning criticized the Tardieu Plan in guarded terms. Although the chancellor had expected the general lines of the French policy, he had not anticipated such comprehensive security proposals.¹⁴ He admonished the French for ignoring the principle of equality and for trying to perpetuate the wide gulf between their own powerful military forces and Germany's weak forces.¹⁵ A few days later, in an interview with the American National Broadcasting

¹²Bernhard von Bülow to Heinrich Brüning, February 4, 1932, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Micro. T-120, Serial 3642, frames D811487-89. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives.)

¹³Fifth Plenary Meeting, February 9, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 64-70.

¹⁴Franz von Papen, Memoirs, trans. by Brian Connell (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1953), p. 139.

¹⁵Fifth Plenary Meeting, February 9, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 64-70.

Company, the chancellor claimed that his country was the one that needed security. With a military one fiftieth the size of France's, Germany could not protect its borders against aggression. He warned, "the one-sided disarmament of Germany and the insecurity of Germany resulting therefrom must cease."¹⁶ Brüning subdued his criticism of the French security demands because he was trying to impress upon the delegates that his government was willing to cooperate at Geneva.

Later in the month, the Germans submitted specific disarmament proposals to the conference. Weapons outlawed by the disarmament convention had to be destroyed, not set aside for the League. The armed nations had to eliminate capital ships, large submarines, and air materiel. On the most controversial issue with France, land armaments, the Germans required the elimination of all tanks and heavy guns. They also renewed their demand from the Preparatory Commission that France include trained reserves in calculating its military reductions.

While the German proposals included specific suggestions for disarmament, they left the government's position on security vague. Chancellor Brüning and his cabinet were hesitant to specify how far they would go to strengthen French security because they feared criticism at home. They left a door open for negotiations with the French, however, by

¹⁶"Interview Dr. Brünings mit einem Vertreter der National Broadcasting Company," Wolff's Telegraphisches Büro (Berlin), February 14, 1932.

promising to support a system of security that would guarantee the disarmament convention.¹⁷

During the February speeches, the French and Germans each gained support for their arguments. The small nations of Europe generally endorsed the scheme that Tardieu had outlined to the conference. Belgium, which had acted closely with France regarding Germany since the World War, vigorously defended the proposals.¹⁸ The allies of France in Eastern Europe, which felt particularly vulnerable to German aggression, gave equally strong backing to the security system.¹⁹ The Germans, on the other hand, received sympathy for their call for disarmament, but little encouragement for their equality demands. They could count on only a handful of allies at Geneva that would openly advance their cause, in most cases those states also limited by the peace treaties such as Austria. Important support for Germany came from the Italian government, whose Foreign Minister, Dino Grandi, delivered a reasoned argument that every state had to be

¹⁷Thirteenth Plenary Meeting, February 18, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 143-57; Proposals of the German Delegation, February 18, 1932, League of Nations, Conference Documents, I, 119-22.

¹⁸Paul May to Paul Hymans, February 8, 1932, Belgium, Foreign Office, Correspondance politique, Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Micro. T-113, Roll 28, No. 478-104; Seventh Plenary Meeting, February 11, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 79-89.

¹⁹Eighth Plenary Meeting, February 12, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 90-101; Eduard Beneš, La France et la nouvelle Europe (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1932), pp. 81-83.

treated equally in the disarmament convention.²⁰ Although both the French and the Germans received endorsements for their positions, most delegates remained noncommittal to avoid antagonizing either government.

The French and German positions were incompatible, and an acceptable middle ground had to be found by the delegates. The two governments had purposely left open avenues of negotiation, which was an encouraging start for the conference. Great Britain was recognized as the one nation in a position to guide Franco-German negotiations, and its speech of February 8 and proposals of the twenty-second were as anxiously awaited by the delegates as those of France and Germany.

Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald had planned to lead the British delegation, but because he was recovering from an operation he turned the task over to his foreign secretary, John A. Simon.²¹ The fifty-eight year old foreign secretary had studied law at Oxford after which he became a well-known and highly respected lawyer. Simon had joined the Liberal Party as a young man, but he broke with his party in 1931 in support of MacDonald's economic measures and helped form the National Liberal Party.²² As a reward for his

²⁰Sixth Plenary Meeting, February 10, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 70-78.

²¹Charles Vane, the Marquess of Londonderry, Wings of Destiny (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1943), p. 56.

²²John A. Simon, Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Viscount Simon (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1952),

support, MacDonald selected Simon as foreign secretary of the National Coalition Government, a post for which he had little practical experience. He was, nevertheless, a competent diplomat at Geneva, able to grasp quickly the complicated facets of the disarmament issue. Simon later claimed that he shared the prime minister's views on disarmament, but at the conference the foreign secretary showed more concern for the need of improving security in Europe than did MacDonald.²³

As MacDonald's cabinet had decided in January, the British did not bring to Geneva specific proposals for a Franco-German compromise. Instead, Simon introduced a procedure for reducing armaments. The method which he suggested was to decrease weapons qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Quantitative disarmament was easy to explain. Each country was to reduce equally every type of weapon to as low a level as possible without sacrificing its security. Simon suggested a 25 per cent reduction in the total number of armaments that each country possessed. Qualitative disarmament, more difficult to explain, was a British innovation at Geneva. Certain types of weapons that were especially aggressive were to be limited more severely than the general percentage applied to all weapons. The British specified submarines,

pp. 20-23, 164-74. (Hereinafter referred to as Retrospect.)

²³Ray Atherton to Henry L. Stimson, January 23, 1932, United States, Department of State, Decimal File: 1930-1939, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/766. (Hereinafter referred to as Decimal File); Simon, Retrospect, pp. 178-86.

large mobile land guns and chemical warfare as examples of aggressive weapons to be reduced drastically or eliminated.²⁴ Qualitative disarmament, the British argued, was the best way to satisfy Germany's demand for substantial disarmament while not jeopardizing French security.

The British proposals fell short of satisfying either the French or the Germans. The modest 25 per cent overall reduction was not what the Germans considered substantial disarmament. Also, the British ignored Brüning's demand for transferring German military restrictions from the Versailles Treaty to the disarmament convention. They should have brought to Geneva specific proposals that would have appealed to the Germans and thus have provided a better basis for negotiations. Nor did the British pay sufficient attention to the French fear of Germany. Simon hardly mentioned that side of the disarmament question, saying only that arms reductions would result in security. Since the British disliked the Tardieu Plan because it required new commitments on the Continent, they should have come to Geneva with an alternative security suggestion. They did just that later in the conference, but it was less effective then than it would have been in early 1932. Had the British taken these additional initiatives at the outset of the conference, the

²⁴Fourth Plenary Meeting, February 8, 1932, League of Nations, Plenary Meetings, pp. 54-64; Proposals by the United Kingdom Delegation, February 22, 1932, League of Nations, Conference Documents, I, 144.

diplomats would have had a greater chance to move toward a compromise between Gleichberechtigung and sécurité.

The opening speeches continued until February 24. For the next several weeks the conference moved slowly as the delegates established special commissions to consider the technical questions of disarmament. The conference then adjourned for an Easter recess until April 11. But what went on in the conference bodies was never as important as the negotiations behind the scenes. During the lull in the conference in the spring of 1932, the French, German and British governments made their first attempt to discuss privately the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue.

The French and Germans were willing to negotiate, but they were reluctant to move too quickly since each faced elections during the several weeks following the conference's adjournment. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning was preoccupied with the presidential elections of March 13, in which President Paul von Hindenburg was being challenged by the National Socialist leader, Adolf Hitler, and with the state elections which would follow in April. In France, André Tardieu, who succeeded Pierre Laval as premier in February, faced Chamber elections the first of May. Both Brüning and Tardieu were anxious for the talks to lead to a compromise that would be popular at home. Each faced the talks with trepidation, however, fearing that the other would start a public controversy if they progressed unsatisfactorily. The two leaders

were keenly aware that a dispute at Geneva could affect the elections at home.²⁵ Fortunately, the talks did begin, but their potential was limited because of the elections.

Beginning on February 24, the private negotiations continued into March. In Geneva on the twenty-fourth, Tardieu and Nadolny agreed to discuss security and equality and to avoid public arguments.²⁶ Then in Geneva, Paris and Berlin; Nadolny, Tardieu, Simon and several other diplomats secretly took the first step to find a meeting ground between Gleichberechtigung and sécurité. It was a cautious step, but a necessary one if the conference was to draft a convention.

During the negotiations, the Germans indicated a willingness to consider sécurité if the French would make a move toward meeting Gleichberechtigung. State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow told the French that Germany was not opposed to additional security for Europe and Leopold von Hoesch, ambassador in Paris, confirmed that his government would discuss mutual defense pacts. In return, the Germans expected the conference convention to show in detail the amount of French arms that would be reduced during the first disarmament period. They were willing to maintain the military level required by the Versailles Treaty as long as those

²⁵Memorandum by Bülow, February 29, 1932, German Archives, 7360/E534995; Tardieu, France in Danger, p. 31.

²⁶Rudolf Nadolny to Brüning, February 24, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D667091-93; Nadolny to Brüning, February 29, 1932, ibid., 3154/D667112-15.

clauses of the treaty were lifted out and placed in the convention. The Germans suggested, however, that they obtain a selection of the weapons that France retained during this first period as recognition by the French that Germany was equal in theory.²⁷ That was the first mention of sample arms and the Brüning government did not pursue it, but later in the conference the Germans incorporated samples into their list of demands. By the end of the private meetings, the position of the German government was still vague. It had failed to clarify how far it would go to accommodate French security requirements and it had left unexplained exactly what was necessary to satisfy Gleichberechtigung.

The French were equally noncommittal. Tardieu avoided any promise to modify the French security proposals, even though John Simon warned him that both Germany and Great Britain would reject them in their present form. Nor did the French specify the amount of disarmament they would undertake if the others did accept the Tardieu Plan. Nevertheless, the French made some encouraging overtures to Germany. André François-Poncet, ambassador to Germany, while not saying that his government would transfer German military restrictions from the Versailles Treaty to the disarmament convention, did suggest that France might agree to revise parts of the

²⁷Memorandum by Bülow, February 25, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811614-20; Leopold von Hoesch to Bülow, March 1, 1932, ibid., 3642/D811954-57.

treaty.²⁸ Tardieu also mentioned that France might allow Germany additional weapons as long as they were at the disposal of the international army that he had proposed.²⁹

Although these initial talks failed to explore the equality-security issue in detail, they served a purpose. They showed that the French and Germans were willing to negotiate: more willing than their public statements implied. Neither rejected the other's thesis. Even though both were preoccupied with elections, they agreed to discuss their differences and Tardieu and Nadolny promised to continue the private talks at Geneva while the conference was in session.³⁰

When the delegates reassembled in mid-April, after the Easter recess, they were ready to begin the practical work of drafting a convention. The first item for consideration was whether the conference would follow the British suggestion to limit armaments qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Several countries, the most important being the United States, supported Great Britain's proposals, including its selection of offensive weapons. American delegate Hugh Gibson agreed

²⁸Memorandum by John Simon, February 24, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1949), III, 507-510; memorandum by Bülow, February 25, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811614-20.

²⁹Hoesch to Bülow, March 1, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811954-57.

³⁰Nadolny to Foreign Ministry, March 17, 1932, ibid., 3154/D667151-53.

that heavy artillery, tanks, gas and submarines were offensive weapons.³¹ But André Tardieu attacked the British and American selection of aggressive weapons, especially since those two naval powers exempted battleships from the offensive list. Tardieu exposed the fundamental weakness in the British proposal: any country could interpret which weapons were aggressive according to its own needs. Without intending to, the premier substantiated his point by defending heavy artillery as necessary for defense.³² Tardieu was upset that the British proposals ignored French security needs. Ultimately the British overcame French resistance by agreeing to an amendment which stated that qualitative disarmament did not preclude discussion of the Tardieu Plan. With the French mollified, the delegates accepted, on April 22, the British idea of limiting offensive weapons.³³ Their agreement improved the atmosphere at Geneva, but they still had to determine which weapons were aggressive. The delegates turned that responsibility over to the military experts in the technical committees.

³¹Eighth Meeting, April 11, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932), I, 35-46. (Hereinafter referred to as General Commission.)

³²Ninth Meeting, April 12, 1932, ibid., I, 46-55.

³³Hugh S. Gibson to William R. Castle, April 21, 1932, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1932 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), I, 99-100. (Hereinafter referred to as FRUS, 1932); Sixteenth Meeting, April 22,

For several weeks, military experts from each of the major countries attempted to classify weapons into defensive and offensive categories. In nearly every case they confirmed Tardieu's assessment that a weapon which one country considered defensive, another condemned as aggressive. The experts were unable to determine the point at which artillery ceased to be defensive and became offensive.³⁴ They had no more success with tanks. Britain, which needed light tanks to supplement its manpower, claimed that those under twenty-five tons were defensive and France contended that seventy-ton tanks were necessary for protection. That argument prompted Ernst von Weizsäcker, the German delegate, to note that the Allies had no trouble deciding in 1919 to abolish Germany's tanks.³⁵ The military delegates also failed to set guidelines to determine when an aircraft became offensive, since all, including civilian planes, could carry bombs.³⁶ Regarding naval vessels, the experts were divided into three

1932, League of Nations, General Commission, I, 110-16.

³⁴Thirteenth Meeting, May 23, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series D, Vol. I: Minutes of the Land Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1935), pp. 51-55.

³⁵Fifteenth Meeting, May 31, 1932, ibid., pp. 62-72.

³⁶Eighth Meeting, May 19, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series D, Vol. III: Minutes of the Air Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1936), pp. 24-30; Ninth Meeting, May 20, 1933, ibid., pp. 30-40; Report of the Air Commission, June 8, 1932, ibid., pp. 299-316.

groups, with the British and Americans defending large capital ships and condemning submarines, the French and Japanese taking the opposite stand, and the Germans and Italians arguing that both capital ships and submarines were offensive.³⁷ Every area studied by the military experts amplified the technical problems involved in determining which weapons were aggressive.

Qualitative disarmament, whether discussed by the military experts in technical committees or by the politicians in the General Commission, was not what the conference needed. The discussion of Britain's proposal tied the meetings up with theoretical arguments that wasted valuable time during the early months of meetings. The first priority was to bring the Germans and French together because no progress toward a convention could have been made without an agreement between those two countries on land armaments. The second priority was for the delegates to consider specific disarmament figures. Although not a guarantee of success, such discussion would have shown the possibility of success at Geneva. It was fortunate then that nearly three months after the conference convened, the British finally assumed leadership. In late April, Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald intervened personally to conduct private talks and shortly

³⁷Report of the Naval Commission, May 28, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series D., Vol. II: Minutes of the Naval Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1937), pp. 126-37.

afterwards Conservative leader and Lord President of the Council, Stanley Baldwin, drafted a disarmament plan.

Prime Minister MacDonald came to Geneva in April to inaugurate private talks with Premier André Tardieu, Chancellor Heinrich Brüning and American Secretary of State Henry Stimson. This was the first of several attempts by the British prime minister personally to aid the work of the conference. Late April was not an ideal time to conduct talks. Tardieu still faced national elections and Brüning, state elections. But the earlier Franco-German contacts had shown that private diplomacy was advantageous and MacDonald did not want to delay since time was slipping away at Geneva while the delegates accomplished nothing.

The prime minister had hoped to begin the talks on April 21, but he found Tardieu and Brüning preoccupied with their respective elections and he could accomplish little. Tardieu and Brüning had time only for a short meeting on the twenty-first because the French premier's political campaign forced him to return to France for several days.³⁸ Since Brüning also had to return home to vote in the Prussian elections, MacDonald had to postpone his four-power talks until Tuesday, April 26.

During the interval, MacDonald conscripted Henry Stimson's aid to place pressure upon Tardieu to modify his

³⁸Bülow to Foreign Ministry, April 21, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811910-11.

security demands. The prime minister believed that otherwise there would be no chance to find a meeting ground with Brüning. MacDonald hoped to induce Tardieu to accept some disarmament on the basis of the existing security provided by the Locarno Treaties of 1925, even though the Frenchman had already made it clear in February that partial disarmament required additional security measures.³⁹ MacDonald and Stimson did not draw up specific proposals for the four-power talks, however, since the prime minister arranged the meetings primarily to explore the chances of an accommodation between France and Germany.

The private meetings finally began on April 26 in the informal atmosphere of Bessinge, a villa overlooking Geneva that Stimson had leased. But on that Tuesday, MacDonald was disappointed once more; Tardieu was still in Paris, supposedly because of last-minute commitments due to his election campaign.⁴⁰ Chancellor Brüning arrived with state secretary Bernhard von Bülow, both men expecting to build upon the talks that they had started with the French in February. MacDonald decided against a further delay in the talks, and he and Stimson began the Bessinge meetings with the Germans.

The British prime minister found Chancellor Brüning in

³⁹Meeting of British and American representatives, April 23, 1932, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, W 4758/1466/98. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office.)

⁴⁰Memorandum by Alexander Cadogan, April 26, 1932, ibid., No. 112, W 4949/10/98.

a conciliatory mood, anxious to explain his government's requirements for equality and willing to discuss the French security thesis. Brüning brought to the villa a memorandum, prepared by his Foreign Office, that compared the positions of France and Germany and showed the areas of potential agreement. The memorandum stressed that Germany's military restrictions had to be taken out of the Versailles Treaty and placed in the disarmament convention. In return, the German government would accept the same limitations that were stipulated in the treaty.⁴¹ Chancellor Brüning said nothing about obtaining a selection of weapons during the first convention as the Germans had suggested to the French in February.

Prime Minister MacDonald sympathized with Brüning's request to transfer German military restrictions to the new convention. He suggested that the convention last ten years, after which further disarmament would take place.⁴² MacDonald expressed his personal opinion rather than official British position, since the meetings were strictly exploratory. In fact, he considered the talks informal and did not bother keeping a record of the conversations. Unfortunately, the Germans took the talks more seriously. Brüning and Bülow were elated, thinking that they had won powerful support for

⁴¹Unsigned memorandum, April, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811917-19.

⁴²Meeting of German, British and American representatives, April 26, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1033 1/2.

their position on equality. Recording his account of the Bessinge discussion afterwards, Bülow wrote that both the British and the Americans had accepted Brüning's interpretation of Gleichberechtigung.⁴³ Four months after the meetings, the Germans claimed that an agreement had been made at Bessinge, sparking a bitter dispute with the British and Americans.

MacDonald's private talks at Bessinge seemed to be the start of real progress at Geneva. Brüning was anxious to negotiate a treaty that would exchange the removal of Germany's military restrictions from the Versailles Treaty for the assurance to France that German arms would remain at the existing level for ten years. That discussion, along with talks on sécurité, offered the best chance to date to clear away the primary obstacle facing the disarmament convention. Tardieu, by promising to come to Geneva in the midst of his heavy campaign schedule, indicated that he too was willing to negotiate. A tragic setback for the talks occurred, however, the next day. Tardieu announced from Paris that he was cancelling his planned trip to Geneva, as well as his political speeches, because of laryngitis.⁴⁴ Since the purpose of the Bessinge meetings was to bring Tardieu and Brüning together, there was no way for the talks to continue.

⁴³Memorandum by Bülow, April 26, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811914-16.

⁴⁴New York Times, April 28, 1932, p. 11.

Tardieu's sudden illness sounded suspiciously like an excuse to escape the meetings with MacDonald, Stimson and Brüning. Newspapers in Germany took up the cry that the sickness was nothing more than a "diplomatic illness" because Tardieu was unwilling to negotiate with the Germans.⁴⁵ There was, in fact, some evidence that the French premier feared that MacDonald and Stimson intended him to make extensive concessions to the Germans without consideration of French sécurité needs. The American ambassador in Paris, Walter E. Edge, later confirmed that Tardieu had been nervous about the Bessinge talks.⁴⁶

Even Brüning believed that the story of Tardieu's sickness was fabricated. According to Franz von Papen, Brüning thought that Kurt von Schleicher, head of the Political Division of the Reichswehr Ministry, was behind Tardieu's decision to stay in Paris. The chancellor felt that Schleicher, who was trying to bring the downfall of the ministry, feared that a German victory at Bessinge would make it more difficult to remove Brüning. Schleicher supposedly told the French ambassador in Berlin, André François-Poncet, that there was no point in Tardieu making concessions to Brüning because he was about to fall anyway.⁴⁷ Papen's

⁴⁵New York Times, April 28, 1932, p. 11.

⁴⁶Gibson to Castle, April 25, 1932, United States, FRUS, 1932, I, 106-108; Walter Evans Edge, A Jerseyman's Journal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 216.

⁴⁷Papen, Memoirs, p. 140.

explanation for the failure of Tardieu to come to Bessinge was plausible because Schleicher, who was a powerful figure behind the scenes in Berlin, was hoping to replace the Brüning government with one more appealing to his own views and to the growing Nazi forces in Germany. Nevertheless, no evidence exists that Schleicher met with François-Poncet and hence was responsible for the failure of the four-power talks. Even if the meeting took place, the contention that Tardieu suffered a diplomatic illness was unfounded. A New York Times correspondent met with the premier that day and reported that Tardieu was "unable to talk above a whisper."⁴⁸ Edge, after meeting with the premier in his sick room, confirmed that Tardieu had not fabricated the story to escape the top-level meeting at Geneva.⁴⁹

The French premier's sickness destroyed the opportunity that MacDonald had to bring Tardieu and Brüning together to discuss Gleichberechtigung and sécurité. Tardieu's government fell after the French elections. Brüning, who returned home unable to tell his cabinet that he had initiated a rapprochement with the French, fell a few weeks later.⁵⁰ The prime minister left Geneva after his first attempt to resolve Franco-German differences disintegrated just as it

⁴⁸ New York Times, April 28, 1932, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Edge, A Jerseyman's Journal, p. 216.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, May 2, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811890-93.

showed signs of aiding the conference.⁵¹ He would have to start his efforts of mediation over again with new French and German leaders.

MacDonald assumed no further initiative immediately after his abortive Bessinge conversations, because of the political changes in France and Germany, but his Conservative colleague in the National Government, Stanley Baldwin, did. After a meeting with the American delegates Hugh Gibson and Norman Davis on the state of the conference, Baldwin drafted a disarmament plan that held the attention of MacDonald's cabinet for the next few weeks.⁵²

Baldwin's sudden intervention into the disarmament question on the heels of the Bessinge meetings looked as though the Conservatives were usurping the pre-eminence of MacDonald in the disarmament negotiations. After all, Baldwin was influential in the National Government as leader of the Conservatives which dominated it, and he had drafted the plan without consulting the prime minister. The plan did not reflect a split in the government, however, because it represented the personal effort of Baldwin rather than of the Conservative Party which had helped formulate British policy for the conference.⁵³ At the most, it reaffirmed that

⁵¹Gibson to Castle and Herbert Hoover, April 29, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1009 1/2.

⁵²Gibson to Stimson, May 10, 1932, ibid., 500. A 15 A 4/1021.

⁵³Andrew W. Mellon to Castle, May 13, 1932, United

MacDonald lacked a free hand in conducting Britain's disarmament policy.

The plan that Baldwin presented to the cabinet on May 12 was radical to such an extent that it never got beyond the British and Americans to the Germans, who would have welcomed its extensive disarmament proposals. Baldwin recommended the abolition of all military aviation, most land forces, heavy guns and tanks. Great Britain and the United States would set the example for the French and other land powers by destroying all naval vessels over 10,000 tons.⁵⁴ His suggestion to eliminate capital ships brought immediate opposition from the United States and had little chance of finding sympathy in the British Admiralty. Ultimately, in spite of support from Simon for parts of the plan, the cabinet shelved it.⁵⁵ The decision to quietly drop the Baldwin Plan confirmed the government's policy of placing priority on private talks instead of introducing a dramatic disarmament proposal to the conference.

When the MacDonald cabinet abandoned the Baldwin plan, the conference was four months old. Once France and Germany

States, FRUS, 1932, I, 121-25; Gibson to Stimson, May 17, 1932, ibid., I, 130-31; Stimson to Mellon, May 13, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1031.

⁵⁴Mellon to Castle, May 13, 1932, United States, FRUS, 1932, I, 121-25.

⁵⁵Stimson to Mellon, May 13, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1031; Stimson to Gibson, June 7, 1932, United States, FRUS, 1932, I, 153-57.

had presented their proposals to the delegates in February, the gulf that separated their policies was evident. Little progress had been made, however, toward reconciling the French requirement for sécurité and the German demand for Gleichberechtigung. The conference could have been aided by the private talks at Bessinge. Arranging four-power meetings was a wise decision by MacDonald since a public argument over security and equality at Geneva would have aroused emotional reaction in France and Germany. It was a tragedy that the talks failed to materialize because they offered the best means of removing the obstructions to a convention. During the time that remained of the first phase of meetings, priority would have to be placed upon resolving the Franco-German differences.

CHAPTER III

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE CONFERENCE: MAY-JULY 1932

Two months remained of the first phase of the conference when the British set aside the Baldwin Plan in May 1932. The future of the disarmament negotiations was uncertain. By the end of May, André Tardieu's cabinet in France and Heinrich Brüning's ministry in Germany had fallen. There was no assurance that the new governments would cooperate at Geneva. In addition, a confrontation between France and Germany over reparations was anticipated at Lausanne in late June. The change in the French and German governments and the impending crisis over reparations jeopardized the disarmament negotiations.

In France, Tardieu's government fell as a result of the May elections which had been fought over the electoral reform proposals and financial policies of the Conservative premier. These elections ended the coalition which Raymond Poincaré had formed in 1926 and which had moved to the Right Center after 1928. Leadership transferred to the Radicals in May 1932, and Édouard Herriot succeeded Tardieu. Herriot, a highly-educated politician of the Radical-Socialist party, had led

two previous ministries. During his first in 1924, he had negotiated the Geneva Protocol with British Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald. Herriot's views toward Germany and toward French security needs were essentially the same as most Center Right politicians: the League of Nations had to establish a strong security system before France disarmed. The key to European peace, he believed, was arbitration, disarmament and security.¹

Four weeks elapsed following the May elections before Herriot formed his cabinet. During those weeks, he appeared to be more willing to compromise with the Germans than Tardieu had been.² In a private meeting at Lyons with the American delegates Hugh Wilson and Norman Davis, Herriot promised that he would go beyond Tardieu's position to reach a solution to the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung issue. He indicated that he would reduce substantially the military budget of France, and even said he did not oppose altering the war treaties, "including the Treaty of Versailles, providing such changes came about by peaceful and legitimate means." He also promised that, as soon as his cabinet obtained a vote of

¹Édouard Herriot, The United States of Europe, trans. by Reginald J. Dingle (New York: The Viking Press, 1930), pp. 311-12, 314-15; Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III République, les lendemains de la victory, 1919-1934 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), II, 215.

²Memorandum by Leopold von Hoesch, May 9, 1932, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 7360, frames E535251-62. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives.)

confidence, he would participate in top-level talks.³

Herriot's willingness to negotiate privately the items that MacDonald had discussed with Chancellor Brüning at Bessinge suggested that the conference had a good chance to progress before the first phase of meetings adjourned in July.

Herriot's conciliatory mood was short-lived. After the new French premier formed his cabinet, MacDonald suggested reviving top-level talks, but Herriot was reluctant to participate. He contended that negotiations with the Germans had to take place within the conference machinery. The premier preferred the safety of the General Commission, where he could rely on support from the allies of France, to the smaller private meetings, where he would be isolated. Also, in direct contradiction to his statement at Lyons, Herriot rejected modification of the Versailles Treaty. Equality of rights was a political question, and he did not want the German government to return to Berlin with a political victory. Herriot warned MacDonald that he would protest if the Germans forced their demand for equality of treatment into the open.⁴

³Meeting of Édouard Herriot, Norman H. Davis and Hugh R. Wilson, May 22, 1932, United States, Department of State, Decimal File: 1930-1932, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/1149. (Hereinafter referred to as Decimal File); Édouard Herriot, Jadis: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1952), II, 293. (Hereinafter referred to as Jadis.)

⁴Meeting of British and French representatives, June 14, 1932, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS., Foreign Office, General Correspondence, W6976/1466/98. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office.)

Later, explaining his stand, he claimed that he had suspected Germany's demand for equality was really an attempt to obtain immediate military parity with France.⁵ Herriot's statements showed that French policy toward the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue had not really altered with the change from Conservative to Radical leadership in France.

The change in Herriot's attitude is easily explained. At Lyons he had not yet assumed the responsibility of office. After he became premier, he had to have a foreign policy that would win sufficient political support for his government, and he adopted a more realistic position. In part, Herriot altered his views abruptly because he was alarmed over the development of German politics at the end of May.⁶

In Germany, Heinrich Brüning's government fell on May 30. The chancellor had been facing mounting opposition to his austere deflationary financial policy. In an attempt to stabilize the economy of the Republic, he had increased taxes and reduced government spending, but German revenues had continued to fall during 1932 while unemployment rose. On May 29, Brüning sought President Paul von Hindenburg's approval for new emergency economic measures to alleviate unemployment and decrease the budgetary deficit.⁷ The president, however, had already been convinced that Brüning must

⁵Herriot, Jadis, II, 314.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk, Es geschah in Deutschland: Menschenbilder unseres Jahrhunderts (Tübingen: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, Hermann Leins, 1951), pp. 131-32.

go. East German land owners had warned Hindenburg that Brüning's scheme to partition insolvent estates into small farm settlements for the unemployed was a dangerous policy of agrarian Bolshevism. Ruhr industrialists had railed against the chancellor's price control attempts and labour policies. And then there were individuals close to the president who were undermining his confidence in the chancellor. General Kurt von Schleicher and others wanted to replace the ministry with one further to the right politically that would win approval from the National Socialists, hoping in that way to control and exploit the Nazis. The general, who already had a replacement cabinet in mind, argued that Brüning had lost support from the public and military, and that he lacked the strength to handle the political and economic crisis in Germany. By the end of May, Hindenburg was ready to accept the idea of a cabinet that was more national and conservative than the existing one. When Brüning met with him on May 29, he charged that Bolshevistic forces were behind the chancellor's land reform proposals and demanded a reorganization of the cabinet.⁸ Brüning, who had relied upon presidential

⁸Heinrich Brüning, "Ein Brief," Deutsche Rundschau, LXXX (July, 1947), 10; John Elliott, "How Brüning was Overthrown," The Nation, CXXXIV (June, 1932), 720-22; Sidney B. Fay, "The Dismissal of Bruening," Current History: A Monthly Magazine, July, 1932, pp. 490-93; Helmut Klotz, ed., The Berlin Diaries, May 30, 1932-January 30, 1933 (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1934), pp. 51-53. (Hereinafter referred to as Berlin Diaries); Alan Bullock, Hitler, a Study in Tyranny (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 206-10.

confidence for his own authority, refused to be a part of a new government, and submitted his resignation on the thirtieth.

Heinrich Brüning had counted on a victory at Geneva to strengthen his government.⁹ His fall came before he could achieve his objective. In speculating whether an agreement at the conference would have saved Brüning's ministry, one must keep in mind the financial crisis, the mounting opposition from the Nazis, and the intrigue of Schleicher behind the scenes. It is not likely that Brüning would have survived long as chancellor even if he had been able to claim that he was on the road to success at Geneva.

Franz von Papen replaced Brüning as chancellor. Papen, a Prussian aristocrat and member of the conservative faction of the Center Party, formed a ministry which he hoped would obtain both popular support and the cooperation of the National Socialists.¹⁰ Two members of his cabinet directly affected German strategy at the disarmament conference. Defense Minister Kurt von Schleicher, who had been primarily responsible for Papen's appointment, continually exerted pressure upon the government to adopt an unyielding position at Geneva. The French considered Schleicher's appointment

⁹Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, January 13, 1931, German Archives, 3642/D810972-77; Minutes of a conference of Heads of Departments, March 18, 1931, ibid., 3642/D811005-1009.

¹⁰Franz von Papen, Memoirs, trans. by Brian Connell (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1953), pp. 151-54, 162.

an indication of increased Reichswehr influence on German policy and of a more aggressive German stand toward the disarmament problem.¹¹ Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath also affected the government's policy. He had been ambassador to London and he was acquainted with MacDonald and British Foreign Secretary John Simon. Neurath was a moderating influence, counterbalancing the radical elements of the ministry such as Schleicher, as Papen later admitted.¹² Neurath told Simon that Papen had promised him complete responsibility in conducting German policy for the disarmament conference, and said that he intended to continue the cooperative course that Brüning had initiated.¹³ Subsequent events, though, revealed that he did not have as much freedom as he had anticipated because of Schleicher's interference in policy formulation.

One of the first acts by the new ministry was a complete re-evaluation of German objectives for the disarmament negotiations. Neurath warned his colleagues against demanding too much at Geneva. To ask for military equality with France through increases of German arms alone was impractical, since

¹¹Rudolf Nadolny, Mein Beitrag (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), p. 121; "Report on French opinion regarding the political situation in Germany," June 3, 1932, United States, War Department, General Staff, Military Attaché Reports, National Archives, Record Group 165, 2657-C-259/6.

¹²United States, Department of State, Special Interrogation Mission to Germany in 1945-1946 headed by DeWitt C. Poole, National Archives, "Balancing the Accounts," p. 6.

¹³John Simon to Basil C. Newton, June 6, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 628 C4545/29/62.

"during the next years we will actually not be able to carry out any appreciable rearmament due to our financial position."¹⁴ The foreign minister generally favored continuing Brüning's moderate interpretation of Gleichberechtigung, but he suggested two additions to the German demands. He specified a limit of five years for the first convention, during which time France had to reduce substantially its arms. A second convention would provide for gradual equalization of Franco-German armaments. In addition, Germany would have to acquire, during the first convention, samples of all weapons that the armed powers retained.¹⁵ How many weapons, the foreign minister did not say, but he implied limited numbers. This was the first time that the acquisition of arms became a necessary part of the equality thesis. Brüning had mentioned samples during the private talks with the French in late February, but he had not pressed for them. On June 4, the cabinet accepted Neurath's recommendations as the basis for its policy at the conference. It decided to delay publishing the new requirements for equality, however, to await the outcome of the first phase of meetings at Geneva.¹⁶

¹⁴Instructions for the disarmament question at Lausanne, [June 4, 1932], German Archives, 3642/D811859-63.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, June 4, 1932, ibid., 3642/D811886-89.

Schleicher subsequently tried to persuade the government to abandon Neurath's recommendations. He drafted a counter-memorandum that called for military parity with France by the end of five years. While France disarmed during the first convention, Germany would build up its weapons. If the other powers rejected his terms, he advised that Germany should leave the conference and obtain practical military equality without an agreement.¹⁷ Schleicher's memorandum exposed the split in the government over its disarmament policy. Fortunately for the conference, the defense minister was unable to overrule the moderate policy of the foreign minister. For the time being, the government continued to follow Neurath's advice for caution.¹⁸

The uncertainty at Geneva that resulted from the governmental changes in France and Germany was compounded by an impending crisis over reparations. A confrontation between France and Germany had been anticipated since the beginning of the disarmament conference. The Hoover moratorium was due to expire and the Lausanne Conference on reparations was scheduled to begin in June. Both reparations and disarmament were political issues and a rupture between France and Germany at Lausanne would undermine the disarmament effort.

¹⁷Memorandum by Kurt von Schleicher, June 14, 1932, ibid., 7360/E535898-901.

¹⁸Bernhard von Bülow to Schleicher, June 16, 1932, ibid., 7360/E535907-908; Bülow to Schleicher, June 16, 1932, ibid., 7360/E535929-32.

The German government placed the same value on cancellation of reparations as it did on a favorable settlement of the disarmament question. It needed a victory in those two disputes, both of which arose from the Versailles Treaty, because the Nazis were exploiting the hatred in Germany for the war settlement of 1919 to gain popular support. Papen's goal at Lausanne was total cancellation of reparations. He also wanted a statement approving the idea of German military equality of rights included in the reparations agreement.¹⁹ If Papen had obtained both reparations cancellation and acknowledgement of German equality at Lausanne, his government would have gained a great foreign policy victory. To achieve his objectives, Papen told Herriot that he was willing to discuss France's sécurité thesis.²⁰ The chancellor promised to sign a consultative pact with the French and to offer economic aid and trade agreements to the allies of France in Eastern Europe.²¹ He did not explain to Herriot what security

¹⁹Instructions for the disarmament question at Lausanne, [June 4, 1932], ibid., 3642/D811859-63.

²⁰Conversation of André Lefebvre de Laboulaye and Bülow, June 18, 1932, France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, Ser. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1964), I, 70-72. (Hereinafter referred to as Documents diplomatiques); Conversation of Laboulaye and Bülow, June 20, 1932, ibid., I, 72-73; Constantin von Neurath to Acting Secretary of State, June 20, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D667399; Papen, Memoirs, p. 176.

²¹Speech drafted by Franz von Papen, June 27, 1932, German Archives, 7360/E535591-96; Meeting of British, French, and German representatives, June 28, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-

arrangements for the Continent he would accept, however, not even mentioning mutual security pacts which Brüning had offered in the private talks of February.

The French went to Lausanne determined to resist any attempt to cancel reparations. Cancellation would set a precedent for Germany to escape its other obligations in the Versailles Treaty. A formal acknowledgement by France that payments were at an end would bring immediate condemnation from the French public for permitting Germany such a victory. The Herriot government was ready, therefore, to insist upon a continuation of reparations, even though it might be forced to make substantial concessions on the amount. As Pierre Cot, Herriot's Radical colleague, later explained, the government had to retain a reparations figure as a "'dope' for public opinion."²² Because the reparations clash had the potential to stir up criticism in France against the government, Herriot could not risk the additional embarrassment of discussing disarmament with the Germans at Lausanne. He anticipated that the Papen government would try to broaden the Lausanne agreement to include a statement on settling disarmament and on granting German equality, and he was prepared to oppose any such move by Germany.

1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, ser. 2 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948), III, 275-81. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP); Herriot, Jadis, II, 346-47.

²²Memorandum by Ralph F. Wigram, November 19, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 12789/1466/98.

During the course of the Lausanne meetings, Prime Minister MacDonald, who was president of the conference, and British Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain sought to mediate a compromise between France and Germany. The French premier demanded a reparations settlement of six billion Reichsmarks, while the German chancellor asked for total cancellation. Under pressure from Chamberlain and MacDonald, Herriot lowered his demand to four billion, while Papen offered to settle for two.²³ MacDonald then proposed a compromise of three billion Reichsmarks. As the diplomats attempted to reach an agreement, Papen raised the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue as a bartering point. The chancellor said he would accept a higher reparations figure if Herriot included a statement in the Lausanne text affirming that he was willing to discuss equality of rights at the disarmament conference. Herriot maintained his opposition to any mention of the disarmament problem. Instead, he promised to discuss Gleichberechtigung after the Lausanne Conference if Papen concurred with the French reparations figure.

MacDonald intervened. To persuade the Germans to accept the British compromise figure, the prime minister agreed to include a reference to disarmament in the final Lausanne treaty. He suggested a formula that stopped short of mentioning equality of rights, stating only that the

²³Meeting of the Bureau, June 29, 1932, DBFP, III, 299-303; Meeting of British and German representatives, July 3, 1932, ibid., pp. 340-50.

disarmament conference would conclude in a manner "equitable" for each country. Papen balked at the vague wording and insisted on a specific statement that the disarmament convention would provide equal rights for each country.²⁴ Herriot was also dissatisfied. An accord was not thrashed out until the final days of the conference.

The final settlement of the disarmament issue at Lausanne was a compromise. Herriot drafted a statement which made no mention of the disarmament conference and affirmed that the Lausanne agreement contained nothing of a political nature. Avoiding even MacDonald's word "equitable," Herriot promised only to solve all problems in a spirit of cooperation and to work toward a new understanding in Europe.²⁵ The Germans could interpret "problems" to mean Gleichberechtigung if they wanted to. Papen accepted Herriot's text because it was the best statement he could get linking reparations and disarmament in the Lausanne agreement. The settlement of the

²⁴Meeting of British and German representatives, July 5, 1932, ibid., pp. 375-78; Meeting of French and German representatives, July 7, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 107-108.

²⁵The text of Herriot's draft that Papen accepted was: "Les accords de Lausanne ne comportent aucun élément politique, mais les états présents à la conférence s'efforceront de résoudre les problèmes actuellement posés ou qui se poseront ultérieurement dans le même esprit de collaboration et d'entente qui a inspiré ces accords, et qui doit permettre d'en accroître les effets pour créer en Europe une situation nouvelle et y rétablir définitivement des sentiments de confiance et d'estime réciproques," France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 108.

disarmament issue led to the agreement on a reparations figure when France and Germany met at the British compromise of three billion Reichsmarks.²⁶

Although both France and Germany had gained something at Lausanne, neither government was satisfied with the agreement. The conference is usually considered a victory for German policy because, for practical purposes, it ended reparations. Not only was the reparations figure substantially reduced, Germany was allowed to postpone payments for three years. During the following twelve years, Germany was required to pay only if its economy was sufficiently strong.²⁷ But Papen considered the agreement a defeat because it did not formally abolish reparations and did not include a statement affirming German equality.²⁸ France, too, could claim victory at Lausanne. It had resisted German efforts to link disarmament to reparations and had prevented the Germans from escaping their financial obligations. Nevertheless, Herriot was unhappy with the compromise reparations figure and with the reality that Germany was unlikely to make further payments. The reparations negotiations, besides distracting attention from the disarmament conference, increased tension

²⁶Meeting of British and German representatives, July 8, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, III, 420-23.

²⁷Great Britain, Foreign Office, British and Foreign State Papers, 1932, Vol. CXXXVI, "Final Act of the Reparations and Economic Conference-Lausanne, July 9, 1932," pp. 904-906.

²⁸Papen, Memoirs, p. 193.

in Europe. France and Germany returned to the Geneva meetings discontented.

In late June, while the reparations negotiations were still underway at Lausanne, President Herbert Hoover of the United States suddenly introduced a disarmament plan. His unexpected intervention into the disarmament negotiations was, according to his later claim, intended to stimulate the delegates at Geneva who had "engaged in oratorical futilities for more than four months."²⁹ With the American presidential elections only four months away, Hoover's sincerity in aiding the conference was suspect, especially since he had refused to make a public statement in support of the disarmament negotiations at the beginning of the year. A disarmament plan that purported to reduce military budgets and relax international tension was a popular move that could have aided the president in his re-election bid.

Hoover had worked on his plan for a month before publishing it on June 22. He drafted the proposals personally, changing them only in the face of objections from Secretary of State Stimson that some were unacceptable to either America or Britain.³⁰ Hoover failed to take into consideration

²⁹ Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 354. (Hereinafter referred to as Memoirs.)

³⁰ Herbert Hoover to Henry L. Stimson, May 24, 1932, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1932 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), I, 180-82. (Hereinafter

previous discussion at Geneva and did not consult with the British, French or Germans. In fact, the Germans lacked any knowledge of the plan ahead of time and the French learned about it only two days before the president introduced it.³¹ The British alone were informed of the details of the American scheme, but only the day before Hoover published it.³²

When the British learned of the Hoover Plan, they found themselves in an awkward position. The MacDonald cabinet, having abandoned Baldwin's radical scheme of May, was in the process of developing disarmament proposals of its own.³³ MacDonald and Simon implored the Americans to give them a chance to compare the positions of the two governments before publishing the Hoover Plan.³⁴ Davis, in relating his conversations with the British leaders, told Stimson, "I never saw anyone more upset than Simon was. He was extremely upset and

referred to as FRUS, 1932); Memorandum by Stimson, May 25, 1932, ibid., pp. 182-85.

³¹Herriot, Jadis, II, 329-30; Telephone conversation between Stimson, Hugh Gibson and Davis, June 21, 1932, United States, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Norman H. Davis Papers, 1918-1942, Container 20. (Hereinafter referred to as Davis Papers.)

³²Simon to Robert G. Vansittart, June 22, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, III, 554-55.

³³Meeting of British Dominion delegates, June 19, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 198, W 7308/10/98; Telephone conversation between Stimson and Davis, July 6, 1932, United States, Davis Papers, Container 20.

³⁴Telephone conversation between Hoover, Gibson and Davis, June 21, 1932, United States, Davis Papers, Container 20.

almost takes it as an insult."³⁵ The Americans refused to delay and the British, unable to escape from their embarrassing position, reluctantly promised to give Hoover's proposals a "general blessing."³⁶

The Hoover Plan was simple, yet comprehensive. The president proposed reducing the total strength of battleships by one-third and the number of lighter vessels by one-fourth. To win the support of small naval powers and of France, he suggested, instead of abolishing submarines, reducing them by one-third and setting their maximum tonnage at 35,000. Like Baldwin, Hoover wanted to outlaw bombers, not taking into consideration that the technical committees had shown that civilian planes could be used in their place. Also like Baldwin's plan, Hoover proposed abolishing tanks and large mobile land guns. To meet German criticism of the large French army, the president suggested reducing all land forces to small defensive and police components.³⁷

Hoover later evaluated his plan as the "most practicable and far-reaching before or since that time."³⁸ Indeed,

³⁵Telephone conversation between Stimson and Davis, June 21, 1932, ibid.

³⁶Telephone conversation between Stimson, Gibson and Davis, June 21, 1932, ibid; Telephone conversation between Stimson and Davis, June 22, 1932, ibid.

³⁷Statement issued by the White House, June 22, 1932, James W. Gantenbein, ed., Documentary Background of World War II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), pp. 47-49.

³⁸Hoover, Memoirs, p. 354.

it was far-reaching in that it called for major reductions of land, air and naval weapons. At first sight, the plan appeared practicable as well. The Germans had maintained since February that Gleichberechtigung required substantial disarmament by the armed powers. Hoover proposed just that. On the other hand, the plan ignored the other questions that Gleichberechtigung raised, such as transferring Germany's military obligations from the Versailles Treaty to the disarmament convention. Hoover's concession to the French--allowing them to keep submarines--also appeared generous, but that hardly met French demands at Geneva for sécurité. He made no provision for increasing French security or for guaranteeing the observance of the convention. Hoover's call for additional naval reductions beyond the Washington and London treaties may have seemed realistic, but it forced the British to abandon their role as impartial mediators and take a stand on issues that were not at that time the most important at Geneva. The Hoover Plan was unfeasible because it raised new problems for the conference without dealing adequately with the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue.

Although Hoover's proposals attracted immediate attention, they did not generate widespread support at the conference. Some of the small countries and Italy accepted them, but most governments awaited the reaction of Germany, France and Great Britain. The response of those three countries would determine the fate of the Hoover Plan

The Germans displayed little enthusiasm for the plan. Rudolf Nadolny, spokesman for the delegation, admitted that Hoover's proposals attempted to satisfy the German demand for equality, but he questioned their practicability. The American disarmament scheme was too vague. Nadolny warned that only substantial and specific reductions would correct German inequality. Once more he reminded the diplomats at Geneva that recognition of German equality of rights was "one of the essential conditions for the Conference's success."³⁹ Except for Nadolny's statements to the conference, the Papen government for the most part ignored the American proposals.

French criticism of the Hoover Plan was more vocal. Joseph Paul-Boncour, vice-president of France's delegation, condemned the Americans for disregarding security measures. He warned the delegates that, if they discussed the Hoover proposals, they had to consider the Tardieu Plan along with them. Reaction in the French press ranged from outright condemnation to cautious approval. The Socialist papers alone supported the disarmament scheme. The Radical press remained silent or avoided taking a stand. Conservative and Moderate papers were most critical with the Echo de Paris charging

³⁹ Nineteenth Meeting, June 22, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932), I, 121-32. (Hereinafter referred to as General Commission); Telephone conversation between Hoover, Stimson, Gibson and Davis, June 22, 1932, United States, Davis Papers, Container 20.

that the plan represented an "insolent ultimatum" to France.⁴⁰ French reaction was to be expected, since Hoover had offered France nothing in exchange for reducing its military power.

Neither the French nor the Germans replied in detail to the Hoover Plan, placing most of the responsibility for its fate on the British. When the proposals were published on June 22, Foreign Secretary Simon was noncommittal. Speaking to the General Commission, he contended that his government needed time to study the plan.⁴¹ The British worked on a reply during the next two weeks.

James Ramsay MacDonald, who told Hugh Gibson and Norman Davis that he favored the proposals, had little influence on the British reply, which Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin, John Simon and others in the cabinet drafted while the prime minister was in Switzerland. Simon had returned to London after his speech to the General Commission, telling MacDonald that he had to take care of business in his office. Once in London, he and Baldwin convened the cabinet on Friday, June 24, to discuss a response to the Hoover Plan that the foreign secretary had drafted. MacDonald knew nothing of the cabinet's activities until Sunday, when Simon sent him a copy of the draft, announcing that it was the result of "much

⁴⁰Norman Armour to Stimson, June 23, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1153.

⁴¹Nineteenth Meeting, June 22, 1932, League of Nations, General Commission, I, 121-32.

collaboration." The foreign secretary told MacDonald that the service departments had tentatively accepted the reply and that the cabinet was meeting Monday to approve it.⁴² MacDonald was angry that the meetings had been scheduled while he was obligated at Lausanne instead of on the weekend when he could have returned to London. He found himself isolated since the military departments, the Foreign Office and the majority of his cabinet rejected the Hoover Plan. The strongest opposition came, not so much from the Conservatives as from the Liberals including Simon.⁴³ MacDonald, therefore, was unable to affect Britain's response to the American proposals.

The cabinet accepted the reply that Simon had drafted, and the Foreign Office developed it during the last week of June. The British primarily criticized Hoover's naval proposals. As Under Secretary of State Robert Vansittart noted, the net naval reduction by Britain under the Hoover Plan was almost double that by the United States. The Americans were offering to give up naval tonnage that consisted of "phantom vessels sailing on the seas of fancy," but the British were required to scrap real ships vital to their communication lines.⁴⁴ The reply stated that Great Britain was unable to

⁴²Simon to James Ramsay MacDonald, June 26, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 11, W 7453/10/98.

⁴³Gibson to Stimson, June 26, 1932, United States, FRUS, 1932, I, 237-40.

⁴⁴Vansittart to Simon, June 29, 1932, Great Britain,

decrease its navy beyond the London agreements unless the other naval powers destroyed submarines. Then Britain would reduce by one-third the size and total tonnage of both battleships and destroyers.⁴⁵ Criticism of the American air and land proposals was less extensive. Britain would limit the size and number of bombers, but refused to abolish them because they were required for certain naval and military operations.⁴⁶ Large mobile guns could be scraped, but light tanks were indispensable to Britain's small enlisted army.⁴⁷ By the end of the month, the Foreign Office had the response to the Hoover Plan completed.

The government delayed publishing its reply for an additional week because MacDonald disagreed with the cabinet majority. Rumors of dissension in the government circulated and Baldwin had to refute them to the House of Commons.⁴⁸ No split materialized, however, because MacDonald, who was ready to accept greater amounts of disarmament than his

Foreign Office, No. 419, W 7470/10/98.

⁴⁵Draft reply to Hoover's naval proposals, June 27, 1932, ibid., No. 13, W 7453/10/98.

⁴⁶Charles Vane, The Marquess of Londonderry, Wings of Destiny (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1943), pp. 58-60; Draft reply to Hoover's air proposals, June 26, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 15, W 7453/10/98; Draft by Herbert Samuel, June 28, 1932, ibid., No. 418, W 7454/10/98.

⁴⁷Draft reply to Hoover's land proposals, June 27, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 14, W 7453/10/98.

⁴⁸Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., Vol. 267, cols. 1778-82.

colleagues were, yielded to the majority. On July 6 the prime minister told Gibson and Davis that he too opposed Hoover's naval proposals.⁴⁹ By the seventh, when Conservative Stanley Baldwin delivered the response to Parliament, the cabinet publically was unanimous in its opposition to the Hoover Plan.⁵⁰

Although criticism from Great Britain destroyed any impact that the American proposals might have had on the conference, their demise was not entirely the fault of the British. There was no widespread demand to discuss the Hoover Plan at Geneva. It was too vague to appeal to the Germans and provided nothing to attract the French. It alienated the British over naval questions that did not have to be raised at that time. Hoover's proposals, which reflected a lack of understanding of the problems that stood in the way of a convention, died because they dealt inadequately with the real issues at the conference.

Since the Hoover Plan failed to give the conference a practical program for discussion, the delegates quickly turned their attention from it to the July Resolution. The purpose of that communiqué, which was to be released when the first phase of meetings adjourned on July 23, was to

⁴⁹Telephone conversation between Stimson and Davis, July 6, 1932, United States, Davis Papers, Container 20.

⁵⁰Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Vol. 268, cols. 626-31.

summarize the progress which had been made during the previous six months. Designed for public consumption, the resolution was not intrinsically important. Its significance was that it brought into focus the Franco-German conflict.

The Germans had more at stake in the July Resolution than did the French. Since the conference was going to adjourn without taking a significant step toward disarmament, the French did not have to press for recognition of their sécurité thesis. Conversely, the lack of progress at Geneva was a diplomatic defeat for Germany. The delegates had neglected consideration of Gleichberechtigung, and Papen's government could not allow the conference to adjourn without an acknowledgement of German equality. German public opinion would consider such an event a sign of weakness in the ministry, and the National Socialists would take advantage of the reaction to undermine confidence in the government. The July Resolution was Germany's last chance to force a discussion of its thesis during the first phase.

During the two weeks preceding adjournment, Papen's ministry debated the position that it would take toward the July Resolution. Again, the split between Kurt von Schleicher and the Foreign ministry appeared. The defense minister advocated an unyielding stand. In an attempt to influence policy, without cabinet approval he told General Werner von Blomberg, military advisor to the delegation, to reject the resolution if it failed to acknowledge the German claim for

equality. Germany would then obtain complete equality apart from the conference. Schleicher underlined "volle," which to him meant practical military parity with France.⁵¹ In contrast to Schleicher, Neurath urged caution. He warned that rejection of the July Resolution would result in a premature crisis at Geneva.⁵² He also advised Schleicher that it was dangerous to threaten withdrawal from the conference.⁵³ An intransigent stand could drive Britain and other countries to become more sympathetic toward France. The foreign minister, however, did not advocate passivity. As a minimum he required that the French and British assert in the July Resolution their intention to discuss the equality thesis when the conference resumed.⁵⁴ Neurath's policy differed from Schleicher's only in that the foreign minister was unwilling to press German demands so far as to risk isolating Germany at Geneva.

The cautious policy that Neurath advocated received a setback on July 13, when the British and French governments announced that they had signed a consultative pact. The idea

⁵¹Schleicher to Werner von Blomberg, [July 8, 1932], German Archives, 3642/D811819.

⁵²Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, July 11, 1932, ibid., 3598/D790360-75.

⁵³Neurath to Schleicher, July 14, 1932, ibid., 3154/ D667463-64.

⁵⁴André François-Poncet to Herriot, July 13, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 28-29; René Massigli to Herriot, July 13, 1932, ibid., p. 29.

behind the pact was that France and Britain would adopt similar policies toward German demands at the disarmament conference. The two governments agreed to keep each other informed of any talks that either had with the Germans. They also promised to settle the disarmament question in a manner equitable to all powers, but Herriot added an annex which affirmed that the word "equitable" did not imply French acceptance of German equality.⁵⁵ The agreement angered Papen because Herriot had rejected his offer at the Lausanne Conference for a consultative pact.⁵⁶ The Germans viewed the accord as a French-sponsored attempt to isolate them at Geneva. Publication of the pact in Paris and London right before the conference adjourned was a mistake because it strengthened Schleicher's arguments for a hard line toward the July Resolution.

German policy stiffened considerably after France and Britain announced the consultative pact. Neurath was forced to move toward the uncompromising position urged by Schleicher. The foreign minister acquiesced to reject the July Resolution if it excluded a statement recognizing equality. He also agreed that Germany would refuse to participate in the conference until the other powers offered a satisfactory solution

⁵⁵Communique proposal, July 12, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 31-32; Herriot to William G. Tyrrell, July 13, 1932, ibid., I, 30; Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Vol. 268, cols. 1374-76.

⁵⁶Papen, Memoirs, p. 186.

to Gleichberechtigung.⁵⁷ Neurath's concessions were a compromise with Schleicher's demands. While the Germans intended to force the other powers to recognize equality before the second session began, they were not threatening rearmament or withdrawal from the conference as Schleicher wanted.

The showdown at Geneva over the July Resolution came when the delegates discussed it on the twenty-second and twenty-third. The draft statement, prepared by John Simon and Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Eduard Beneš, contained no reference to the German demand for equality. John Simon tried to dissuade the Germans from opposing the resolution, suggesting that their claim might be considered during the second phase. He was unsuccessful. Nadolny told the delegates that he would vote against the communiqué and would boycott the meetings when the conference resumed. Ultimately, he reminded them, the disarmament convention had to be based on the principle of equality, and Germany would not collaborate further until the armed powers recognized that principle to its satisfaction. The French delegation approved the resolution, although Herriot noted that it fell short of satisfying France's demands for security.⁵⁸ Premier Herriot,

⁵⁷Neurath to Schleicher, July 20, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D667493-95.

⁵⁸Twenty-sixth Meeting, July 22, 1932, League of Nations, General Commission, I, 185-99; Nadolny, Mein Beitrag, pp. 114, 116-17.

of course, did not risk a diplomatic defeat by voting in favor of the July Resolution as Chancellor Papen did.

The July Resolution was a well-written attempt to show that the conference had made progress during the first phase.⁵⁹ Since the document was not offensive to a majority of the delegations, most approved it on the twenty-third. Only Germany and Russia voted against it.⁶⁰ After the resolution was accepted, the conference adjourned for six months. It was as far from a disarmament convention as it had been in February.

By the time the first phase of the conference adjourned on July 23, the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue had emerged as the primary obstacle to the disarmament negotiations. That is not to imply that either the equality or the security thesis was clear. Neither the Germans nor the French had thoroughly defined their position during the first six months of meetings.

The French thesis of sécurité had remained consistent throughout the first phase of the conference, notwithstanding the change from Conservative to Radical leadership in the

⁵⁹ Twenty-third Meeting, July 20, 1932, League of Nations, General Commission, I, 153-63; Resolution adopted by the General Commission, July 23, 1932, League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Conference Documents (Geneva: Publications Department, 1932-1935), I, 268-71.

⁶⁰ Rudolf Nadolny to the Foreign Ministry, July 23, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D667511-12; Twenty-seventh Meeting, July 23, 1932, League of Nations, General Commission, I, 200-205.

government. Disarmament required sécurité. The ideal means of obtaining security was for the League to establish an international army upon which the French could rely in case of a German attack. The Tardieu Plan, presented in the opening sessions of the conference, suggested such an army. France promised to reduce its arms if the plan was implemented. Tardieu's proposals, however, represented the maximum objective of the French government. It expected to barter. No one offered the French a reasonable alternative so they were never under pressure to alter their position during the first phase of meetings.

France's policy toward the German demand for Gleichberechtigung was less consistent than its argument for security. Although they never indicated how far they would disarm, the French had promised at the outset of the conference that they would narrow the military gap between their country and Germany if an effective security system was established. In the private talks of late February, Premier Tardieu even mentioned allowing Germany additional weapons as long as they were at the disposal of the international army that he had proposed. At the same time, the French ambassador in Berlin hinted that his government might agree to revise parts of the Versailles Treaty. Édouard Herriot, before he became premier, was more specific, telling the Americans at Lyons that he was willing to alter the treaty. Yet after becoming premier, Herriot rejected modification of

the treaty, primarily because he was reacting to political changes in Germany. He became reluctant to discuss equality because he did not want the new Franz von Papen government to gain a political victory. At Lausanne, Herriot confirmed this attitude by resisting German efforts to attach a statement regarding equality to the reparations agreement. As the first phase of the disarmament conference ended, therefore, the French showed less willingness to discuss Gleichberechtigung than they had earlier in the conference.

The German thesis of Gleichberechtigung required substantial disarmament, especially by France. Exactly what substantial disarmament entailed, the Germans left unclarified because they were waiting to learn the maximum that the French would offer them. In addition to disarmament, the armed powers had to recognize Germany's right to be equal, that is, to acknowledge the principle of equality. Finally, German military limitations had to be transferred from the Versailles Treaty to the disarmament convention, thus placing the restrictions of every country in the same document. The new Papen government also decided to insist upon receiving samples of each weapon that the French retained, but it did not introduce that demand at the conference. Instead, as the first phase of meetings drew to a close, the Germans asked only for their minimum objective: that the armed powers recognize the principle of equality in the July Resolution.

Germany altered its position toward the French sécurité

thesis during the six months of meetings at Geneva. At the outset of the negotiations, the Germans consented to a security system that would guarantee the observance of the disarmament convention. Privately the Brüning government even agreed to consultative pacts and to mutual security pacts as long as the French disarmed significantly. It also promised that German arms would remain at the level prescribed by the Treaty of Versailles during the first convention, giving France a feeling of security for approximately ten years. Those offers fell short of the international army that Tardieu had proposed, but the Germans, like the French, expected to negotiate. Unfortunately, Papen's government was less generous than Brüning's. Although Papen mentioned at Lausanne that he would make concessions to the security needs of France, he suggested only a consultative pact, not mutual security agreements. His government also decided in early June that the first disarmament convention had to be limited to five years. In July, the Germans were less inclined than when the conference had begun to accommodate demands by France for sécurité, just as the French were more reluctant to negotiate Gleichberechtigung.

The British were the mediators of the Franco-German dispute; they had accepted that role and the other governments had acknowledged their leadership. They did not guide the conference during the first phase, however, as much as they did during the subsequent stages of meetings. The

National Government, dominated by Conservatives, made no specific offers to appease German demands for equality. It also avoided discussions of sécurité out of fear that the French proposals would lead to Great Britain assuming additional commitments on the Continent. The British wanted France to accept some arms reductions on the basis of existing security agreements, hoping that limited French disarmament would satisfy the Germans. After the French and Germans showed a willingness to negotiate in late February, MacDonald sponsored private four-power meetings at Bessinge in April. The Bessinge talks marked the first direct British mediation of the security-equality issue. While the informal discussions were the best method of dealing with the security-equality obstacle at the conference, they failed because the French and Germans were preoccupied with elections and because Tardieu became ill and was unable to attend. Further top-level talks never materialized because the governments in France and Germany suddenly changed and the Lausanne Conference distracted attention from the disarmament negotiations. Although MacDonald did attempt to mediate the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung issue, the British government did not press for an agreement during the first phase of meetings as urgently as it should have.

The first phase of the conference offered the best opportunity for a rapprochement between France and Germany. German policy was more moderate during that period than at

any later time. Brüning's terms for an agreement, especially, were temperate compared to those of the three chancellors that followed him. Also, the French were less skeptical of German intentions and were more disposed to negotiate during the early months than they became later in the conference. Unfortunately, outside of the limited private talks, there were no constructive attempts to find a meeting ground between the French and German positions. The British suggestion of qualitative disarmament only wasted valuable time in theoretical discussions. Baldwin's proposals were too radical and the British government decided against introducing them at Geneva. The Hoover Plan was impractical because it raised controversial questions of naval disarmament while ignoring the more important Franco-German differences. When the conference adjourned in July, therefore, a solution to the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung problem had not been found.

With Germany's rejection of the July Resolution and warning that it would not participate in future meetings until the other powers accepted the principle of equality, the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité issue entered a new phase. The dramatic move by Germany in July 1932 showed that the Franco-German controversy was the primary obstacle to progress at Geneva. During the months between the first and second phase of meetings, the armed powers were forced to take cognizance of the German demand for equality.

CHAPTER IV

THE ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ

CONTROVERSY: JULY-DECEMBER 1932

The disarmament conference adjourned for six months following the conclusion of the first phase of meetings in July 1932. Germany's rejection of the July Resolution had forced the equality-security issue into the open. Negotiations after July 23 centered exclusively around the German and French theses of Gleichberechtigung and sécurité. The German threat to boycott future meetings at Geneva lent urgency to the task of resolving the controversy. An agreement acceptable to both countries had to be reached before the conference reconvened in January 1933 to avert the collapse of the disarmament effort.

Before the conference had adjourned on the twenty-third, France and Germany had unofficially agreed to discuss in private their conflicting policies of sécurité and Gleichberechtigung during the autumn.¹ In August, the Germans

¹Rudolf Nadolny to the Foreign Ministry, July 23, 1932, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 3154, frames D667511-12. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives); Memorandum by Constantin von Neurath, July 27, 1932, ibid., 3154/D667519-20.

indicated what they expected an agreement on equality to include, in anticipation of the discussions with France. That was the first time the Papen government explained its position in detail to the French and British, although the general lines of its policy had been formulated in early June. There were three principal changes from the policy that Germany had followed during the first phase of the conference.

For the first time the Germans demanded samples of weapons, but exactly what they meant by "samples" was unclear. Chancellor Franz von Papen assured French Ambassador André François-Poncet that his government was not asking for large numbers of arms, but Defense Minister Kurt von Schleicher strongly suggested that Germany expected substantial amounts. Schleicher wanted submarines, bombers, artillery, tanks, and any other weapon that the Allies refused to give up.² Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath interpreted these apparently conflicting policy statements to the French at the end of August. Samples meant that Germany would expect to have "in principle" any weapon that the other nations kept after the disarmament conference concluded. He implied only a few arms of each type. This was necessary to demonstrate that Germany was equal with the other great

²André François-Poncet to Édouard Herriot, July 28, 1932, France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, Ser. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1964), I, 117. (Hereinafter referred to as Documents diplomatiques); New York Times, August 8, 1932, pp. 1, 8.

powers, at least theoretically.³ Still, the meaning of "samples" remained vague because Neurath failed to specify exact numbers.

In another policy change, the German government set a five-year time limit on the first disarmament convention.⁴ During the five years, the armed powers would partially disarm while Germany maintained its existing levels as prescribed by the Versailles Treaty, with the exception of the sample weapons. The Germans, of course, were already beyond the treaty limits, but they had consistently denied such violations. A second convention would provide for additional reductions by the armed powers, resulting in further equalization of weapons between them and Germany.⁵ The Germans did not suggest that they would start rearming during or at the end of the second convention. It was likely, however, that they expected to begin increasing their arms to the level of France in the not-too-distant future, because their ultimate goal since before the conference had been military parity with France.⁶

³Memorandum from Neurath to François-Poncet, August 29, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 234-36.

⁴Meeting of James Ramsay MacDonald and Franz von Papen, August 31, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D672258-59.

⁵Memorandum from Neurath to François-Poncet, August 29, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 234-36.

⁶Memorandum of a conference of Heads of Departments, July 8, 1931, German Archives, 3642/D811120-22.

A third addition to German policy was a proposal to reorganize the Reichswehr. The Papen government wanted to shorten the twelve-year enlistment period in the military and to begin a short-term compulsory training program. Those men in the compulsory program would not remain in the Reichswehr after their training, but would return to civilian life. Neurath claimed that such a system would provide personnel for a police militia to be used to bolster defenses along the coast and frontiers.⁷ Those changes in the Reichswehr were indispensable for the country's security, according to Schleicher, and Germany would make them with or without an agreement. He warned, "I wish to leave no doubt that we will take this course if full security and equality of rights are further withheld from us."⁸ French Premier Édouard Herriot, not intimidated by Schleicher's threats, rejected short-term military training because it would virtually create a large regular army in Germany. He told the Germans that they could obtain equality more quickly by cooperating with France in establishing a system of security for Europe.⁹

The Germans assured the French that they would discuss security along with equality. They were ready to improve the

⁷Memorandum from Neurath to François-Poncet, August 29, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 234-36.

⁸Address by Kurt von Schleicher, July 26, 1932, John W. Wheeler-Bennett, ed., Documents on International Affairs, 1932 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 184-85.

⁹Herriot to François-Poncet, August 25, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 211-12.

existing security system for Europe and to establish a control commission to watch over armaments.¹⁰ Neurath said that Germany would accept any obligation as long as it applied equally to France.¹¹ Although some of these promises had been made to the French before, and Herriot's government may have doubted German sincerity, the Germans showed a determination to negotiate by offering to consider increasing European security.

The Papen government was anxious to meet with the French before the Bureau convened on September 21.¹² The Bureau, which was the executive steering body of the conference, was to prepare a program for the second phase of meetings at that time. If the Germans were unable to reach an agreement with the French before the twenty-first, they would be forced to carry out their threat to boycott the conference. Accordingly, in late August, Foreign Minister Neurath asked that the two governments begin private negotiations in order to settle their differences over security and equality prior to the Bureau meetings.¹³

¹⁰ François-Poncet to Herriot, August 24, 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 203-205; André François-Poncet, The Fateful Years: Memoirs of a French Ambassador in Berlin, 1931-1938, trans. by Jacques Leclercq (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949), pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Memorandum from Neurath to François-Poncet, August 29, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 234-36.

¹² François-Poncet to Herriot, August 24, 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 203-205.

¹³ Memorandum from Neurath to François-Poncet, August 29, 1932, *ibid.*, pp. 234-36.

While attempting to promote private talks with the French, the Papen ministry inadvertently sparked a controversy with the British and Americans. The Germans told the French that the other principal governments had approved Gleichberechtigung, implying that France was the only country standing in the way of a settlement. When the British and Americans learned of the German contention, they vehemently denied that they had endorsed Germany's interpretation of equality of rights. The dispute, which continued through September, disrupted the disarmament negotiations.

The controversy emerged on August 24. State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow, while trying to persuade the French to begin the private talks, told François-Poncet that no other great power opposed the general idea of Gleichberechtigung. The French alone still resisted it. France and Germany, therefore, needed to draft an agreement without involving the British, Americans or Italians. Bülow based his contention on the Bessinge meeting of April 26, at which Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, James Ramsay MacDonald and Henry L. Stimson had discussed equality. The state secretary asserted that neither MacDonald nor Stimson had raised objections at Bessinge to the demand for equality.¹⁴ Shortly afterwards, the

¹⁴John Simon to Ronald H. Campbell, August 27, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2, Vol. IV (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), pp. 106-108. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP.)

Germans added that MacDonald had actually approved Gleichberechtigung at Bessinge, including short-term training in the Reichswehr and sample weapons. According to Bülow, the prime minister had reaffirmed to Franz von Papen on July 5 at the Lausanne Conference that he had reached an agreement on equality with Papen's predecessor, Heinrich Brüning.¹⁵

Brüning was not involved in the controversy in September, but in his memoirs, written two years later and published in 1970, he upheld the Papen government's claim of 1932. He did not assert absolute acceptance of Gleichberechtigung by MacDonald and Stimson, but said that they had given him firm support for it.¹⁶ In a letter to the Deutsche Rundschau in 1947, however, Brüning wrote that the British, Americans and Italians had privately accepted his formula for Gleichberechtigung at Bessinge on April 26, 1932.¹⁷ Heinrich Brüning offered no

¹⁵Horace G. Rumbold to Simon, September 23, 1932, ibid., pp. 195-96.

¹⁶Heinrich Brüning, Memoiren, 1918-1934 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), pp. 559-62. (Hereinafter referred to as Memoiren.) Although Brüning's memoirs were published in 1970, after his death, he wrote the material relating to the disarmament conference and the Gleichberechtigung question in 1934 and 1935 while the events were relatively fresh in his mind. Brüning claimed that his information was based, for the most part, on a detailed calendar that his Staatssekretär, Hermann Pünder, kept and on government documents that he had obtained from various sources when writing his memoirs. He also asserted that he verified his information with MacDonald, Stimson, Hugh Gibson, American Ambassador Frederick Sackett, and British Ambassador Horace Rumbold.

¹⁷Heinrich Brüning, "Ein Brief," Deutsche Rundschau, Vol. LXX (July, 1947), 10.

evidence except his own recollection, but he insisted that his statements were accurate.

German claims in August and September 1932 brought angry denials from the British and Americans. British Foreign Secretary John Simon contended that the discussion at Bessinge had been informal and had not meant British approval of the German claim for Gleichberechtigung.¹⁸ Henry Stimson, in whose home the Bessinge talks had taken place, assured the French that neither he nor MacDonald had sanctioned Brüning's view of equality of rights, certainly not an increase in German arms.¹⁹ MacDonald had kept no records of the Bessinge talks, but he noted on a copy of a statement similar to the one Stimson gave to the French that he agreed with the secretary's account of the conversation.²⁰

When Brüning in 1947 defended the Papen government's statements of 1932, he introduced a surprising element into the controversy. He claimed that Édouard Herriot, shortly before he became premier, had also approved the formula that MacDonald and Brüning had drafted at Bessinge a month earlier. Brüning referred to the meeting between Herriot and the

¹⁸Simon to Rumbold, August 29, 1932, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, No. 921, C7392/211/18. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office); Aimé Joseph de Fleuriau to Herriot, September 3, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 263-65.

¹⁹Jules Henry to Herriot, September 8, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 282-83.

²⁰Great Britain, DBFP, Vol. IV, p. 219, footnote no. 2.

American delegate Norman Davis at Lyons on May 22, 1932, at which they discussed the disarmament conference. The ex-chancellor insisted that on May 31, the morning after his government fell, American Ambassador Frederick Sackett came to him with the news that Herriot, at Lyons, had accepted in principle the German idea of Gleichberechtigung.²¹ Brüning made some minor changes to the story in his memoirs. He altered the date of the Sackett visit to the morning of May 30, the day of his resignation. He also added that Herriot had recognized the need to strengthen Brüning's position in Germany in the interest of European stability, implying that this was the reason for the willingness of the Frenchman to make a concession on equality. The rest of the account was essentially the same as that of 1947.²²

Were the German contentions regarding the Bessinge, Lausanne and Lyons meetings valid? In no case did Papen's government or Brüning offer indisputable proof to back up their claims. Unfortunately, there are no complete records of the Bessinge and Lyons meetings because of their informal nature.²³ Only at the Lausanne meeting of July 5 were minutes

²¹Brüning wrote, "Von Stunde zu Stunde erwartete ich die Nachricht vom amerikanischen Botschafter, dass M. Herriot im Prinzip die Abrüstungsformel angenommen hätte. Sie traf am Morgen des 31 Mai, am Tage nach dem Rücktritt des Kabinetts, ein." Heinrich Brüning, "Ein Brief," p. 10.

²²Brüning, Memoiren, p. 601.

²³There were no formal minutes taken at either the Bessinge or Lyons meetings. The only records existing for

kept. On the basis of the incomplete records and related events, however, the validity of the German claims can be determined with reasonable accuracy.

At the Bessinge meetings, the prime minister, and apparently Stimson also, had sympathized with Brüning's desire to transfer the military clauses from the Versailles Treaty to the disarmament convention as a means of giving Germany equal treatment without increasing its arms level. A memorandum of the meeting by Bülow stated that the prime minister "agreed" to that request.²⁴ Gleichberechtigung, however, involved other demands which MacDonald and Stimson had never approved. MacDonald's support for including German military restrictions in the disarmament convention did justify the claim by the Papen government that it was picking up the thread of talks from Bessinge. His support did not justify the German contention that the British and Americans approved Gleichberechtigung, including samples of arms and reorganization of the Reichswehr.

Subsequent events further demonstrate that no agreement

the Bessinge meetings are American and German accounts which in both cases were compiled from notes written down during the talks, and Brüning's later Memoiren. At Lyons, only American records made at the meeting exist, along with Herriot's later account in his Jadis.

²⁴ Meeting of German, British and American representatives, April 26, 1932, United States, Department of State, Decimal File: 1930-1939, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/1033 1/2. (Hereinafter referred to as Decimal File); Memorandum by Bernhard von Bülow, April 26, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811914-16.

had been reached at Bessinge. On May 11, 1932, Brüning spoke to the Reichstag about the disarmament negotiations and noted only that the Allies were increasingly appreciative of German demands.²⁵ Less than a week before his fall, he briefed the Foreign Committee of the Reichstag on the conference, again saying nothing about an agreement.²⁶ Because the chancellor desperately needed a political victory at that time, he would have revealed it if MacDonald and Stimson had accepted the German concept of equality. The Germans also failed to announce that the British and Americans endorsed their position during the debate over the July Resolution at Geneva. Instead, they waited until August to raise the issue when they were discussing equality confidentially with the French.

The records of the July 5 Lausanne meeting also substantiate the British and American argument that they had conceded nothing to the Germans. At that meeting the prime minister was trying to satisfy Papen's request to include in the reparations convention a statement that the disarmament convention would provide equal rights for all signatories.²⁷

²⁵Brüning's speech to the Reichstag, May 11, 1932, Wilhelm Vernekohl, ed., Heinrich Brüning: Reden und Aufsätze eines deutschen Staatsmanns (Minster: Verlag Regensburg, 1968), pp. 127-64.

²⁶Brüning's speech to the Auswärtigen Ausschuss des Reichstages, May 24, 1932, ibid., pp. 166-88.

²⁷Meeting of British and German representatives, July 5, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, III, 375-78.

According to British minutes, MacDonald said that he had made an agreement on equality with Brüning on April 26, and he wanted to use the same wording for the statement at Lausanne. MacDonald was mistaken. Later that day Neurath checked the German records of the Bessinge conversation and reported that MacDonald had not concurred with Brüning on any particular formula for Gleichberechtigung.²⁸ Both the German and British records, therefore, contradict the German contention of August 1932 that the Lausanne meeting of July 5 confirmed an accord at Bessinge.

The additional part of the controversy that Brüning raised in 1947 about the Lyons meeting lacks tenable support. His argument that Herriot had accepted equality was based on his own recollections of what the Americans had relayed to him through their ambassador in Berlin. Brüning claimed to have read a letter that described the Lyons meeting, and even quoted from it, but there is no proof that he had the letter in front of him when he wrote in 1934. Oddly, Brüning chose not to quote any statement of Herriot's alleged agreement, offering his own words as the only evidence for his contention.²⁹ It is true that Herriot had said that he envisioned changing the Treaty of Versailles, which was an astonishing comment for any Frenchman to make, but it could

²⁸Meeting of British and German representatives, July 5, 1932, ibid., pp. 378-81.

²⁹Brüning, Memoiren, p. 601.

hardly be construed as an acceptance of the principle of German equality.³⁰ On May 30, the day that Brüning resigned as chancellor, the German delegate Rudolf Nadolny sent Bülow an account of a conversation that he had just had with Hugh Gibson about the Lyons meeting. He said nothing that would support the later claim of Brüning.³¹ In fact, Bülow was obviously ignorant of any approval of equality by Herriot since he told François-Poncet on August 24 that the French alone were still resisting the general idea of Gleichberechtigung.³² There is no evidence, then, to support Brüning's assertion.

Claims by Germany of support for its thesis of Gleichberechtigung in 1932 were partly the result of a misunderstanding and partly an exaggeration. The Germans took statements by MacDonald of sympathy for transferring Part V of the treaty to the convention to mean a firm agreement because Bülow used the word "agree" in his memorandum of the Bessinge meeting. They exaggerated, however, when they implied that MacDonald and Stimson had endorsed samples of

³⁰ Meeting of Herriot, Norman Davis and Hugh Wilson, May 22, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500 A 15 A 4/1149; Édouard Herriot, Jadis: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1952), II, 293. (Hereinafter referred to as Jadis.)

³¹ Nadolny to Bülow, May 30, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D667292-94.

³² Simon to Campbell, August 27, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 106-108.

weapons for Germany and had supported changes in the Reichswehr. The misuse of MacDonald's Lausanne statement was a deliberate effort by the Papen government to bolster its contention. Foreign Minister Neurath could not have forgotten that at Lausanne he had checked the Bessinge records and had reported that no formula on equality had been worked out between the prime minister and Brüning in April. The argument of Brüning in 1947 and in his Memoiren that Herriot had approved equality was hardly a misunderstanding. The ex-chancellor had intentionally misconstrued Herriot's comments at Lyons in order to show that he was on the brink of a great foreign policy victory for Germany when his ministry fell in May 1932.

Although the Germans did not pursue their claim in the face of Anglo-American denials, the controversy nullified their efforts to hold private talks with the French. The French became suspicious and were no longer agreeable to two-power talks. They preferred to bring the British, Italians and Americans into any discussions concerning equality.³³ Accordingly, ten days before the Bureau met, Herriot sent a terse note to Neurath rejecting any talks with the Germans at that time.³⁴

³³ Henry to Herriot, September 1, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 248-50; Herriot to Fleuriau, September 5, 1932, ibid., 267-74.

³⁴ Note delivered by François-Poncet to Neurath, September 11, 1932, ibid., I, 305-10.

The French refusal to discuss equality led directly to the decision by Germany to boycott the Bureau session. Since July, the Germans had been warning that they would stay away from the conference until their demand for equality was acknowledged, but they had never formally announced if they would be present when the Bureau met on the twenty-first. MacDonald realized, with the Franco-German talks collapsing, that the Papen government would carry out its threat. To forestall a German boycott, which he knew would cripple the disarmament conference, the prime minister suggested postponing the Bureau to give the British, French, Italians and Americans time to formulate an agreement.³⁵ Herriot, with support from the allies of France, balked at that suggestion because it would mean a victory for the Germans.³⁶ The response from Germany came quickly. When Papen's cabinet saw that no immediate talks would be held, it decided on September 12 not to attend the Bureau.³⁷

When the Germans refused to participate in drawing up the agenda for the second phase of meetings, they doomed the

³⁵Fleuriau to Herriot, September 9, 1932, ibid., pp. 293-94.

³⁶Herriot to Fleuriau, September 10, 1932, ibid., pp. 295-96; Émile Naggiar to Herriot, September 4, 1932, ibid., p. 266; Jules Laroche to Herriot, September 5, 1932, ibid., p. 267.

³⁷Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, September 12, 1932, German Archives, 3642/D811760; Neurath to Arthur Henderson, September 14, 1932, ibid., 3154/D672300-302; Franz von Papen, Memoirs, trans. by Brian Connell (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1953), pp. 203-204.

work of the Bureau. It held only a few sessions, and adjourned without preparing a complete program.³⁸ The unproductive sessions were a forecast of the fate of the conference when it reconvened in 1933. By disrupting the conference, Germany had effectively forced its demand for equality before the other governments.

The British recognized that the disarmament conference could not function without the Germans. Accordingly, at the end of September Simon and MacDonald asked representatives from the German, French and Italian governments to discuss with them a compromise that would bring the Germans back to Geneva.³⁹ This initiative by the National Government marked the beginning of increased attempts on the part of the British to remove the obstacles at Geneva and to guide the conference toward a convention. The British realized by then that the growing tension between France and Germany over security and equality would eventually ruin the disarmament attempt. As they responded to the deteriorating Franco-German relationship during the next year-and-a-half, their record of mediation was much more commendable than it had been during the early months of the conference.

³⁸Seventeenth Meeting, September 22, 1932, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series C: Minutes of the Bureau (Geneva: Publications Department, 1935), I, 18-21. (Hereinafter referred to as Bureau.)

³⁹Simon to the British representatives in Paris, Berlin and Rome, September 30, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 204-205.

As soon as MacDonald and Simon suggested that four-power meetings he held in London, they found themselves in the center of a dispute over the location of the talks.⁴⁰ Herriot refused to discuss the disarmament question outside of Geneva because that would appear to the French public that he was submitting to German pressure. He feared jeopardizing his career by meeting the Germans in London.⁴¹ Franz von Papen opposed talks at Geneva because that would give the impression that his government was returning to the conference before the French acknowledged equality of rights. Papen did not want to risk criticism at home with Reichstag elections due on November 6. Count Albrecht von Bernstorff, German attaché in London, entreated his government to seize the opportunity for top-level discussions on equality even if it meant meeting in Geneva. Still, the Germans rejected Geneva as the site for the meetings as firmly as the French rejected any other location.⁴²

MacDonald tried to dissuade the French premier from

⁴⁰Ferdinand Mayer, "Diary of Conversations and Events at Geneva," unpublished diary, 4 parts, United States National Archives, Decimal File, No. 500. A 15 A 4/1469 1/2, Part I, Daily Report No. 12, October 10, 1932.

⁴¹Simon to William G. Tyrrell, October 5, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 217-18; Herriot to MacDonald, October 6, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 415-16.

⁴²Neurath to Bülow, October 6, 1932, German Archives, 3650/D812814; Memorandum by Bülow, October 11, 1932, ibid., 7474/H185184-85; Pierre Arnal to Herriot, October 12, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 430-32.

stopping the proposed meetings over, what the prime minister regarded, a minor issue of location. He cautioned that they had to consider the German demand for equality because the consequences of not reaching an agreement were too serious for France and Europe. He wrote:

I do not believe that any of us can rigidly resist the German claim that the Treaty of Versailles must in some respects be reconsidered. Supposing you were to continue to repeat 'No' to those claims, and Germany said 'Then as we are not to be released by agreement we shall appeal to the sense of fair play of the whole world and release ourselves reasonably,' what would you do? That would put you in a very serious dilemma, and would be a heavy blow to treaty observance and to European stability.⁴³

MacDonald argued that the four powers could reach a compromise and remove the suspicions between them that stood in the way of an agreement. He told Herriot, "You may shake your shaggy head at this, but it is the idealism which has carried us through thus far, and which neither you nor I nor our countries dare abandon at this moment."⁴⁴ The plea from MacDonald had no influence on Herriot, who steadfastly refused to meet with the Germans outside of Geneva. The French premier did agree, however, to meet the prime minister alone in London.⁴⁵ That meeting on October 13, in which MacDonald

⁴³MacDonald to Herriot, October 10, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 423-25.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Tyrrell to Simon, October 8, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 227.

warned again of the need to make a concession to Germany, did not change the French premier's position.⁴⁶

The futile attempt to bring the French and Germans together was not without benefit to the disarmament negotiations. MacDonald and Herriot had agreed in their meeting at London that they needed a better understanding of the German demands. As a result, MacDonald prompted Arthur Henderson, president of the disarmament conference, to ask both the German and the French governments to explain their positions more fully.⁴⁷ Henderson did so on October 18. Neurath answered within a week, but added nothing to previous German statements, saying only that "Germany had made no secret of her wishes, either with regard to the principle or with regard to its practical application."⁴⁸ The French, however, proceeded at once to draft a new comprehensive policy statement.

The French had begun to reassess their position toward the disarmament conference before Henderson sent his request to Paris and Berlin. They had received little support for the security proposals that Tardieu had introduced in February, except from the small European nations that felt

⁴⁶Conversation between MacDonald and Herriot, October 13, 1932, ibid., pp. 229-31.

⁴⁷Henderson to Neurath, October 18, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D672337-38.

⁴⁸Neurath to Henderson, October 24, 1932, ibid., 3154/D672339-42.

threatened by Germany. The British, especially, had opposed the Tardieu Plan which had obligated them to assume new commitments on the Continent. Mostly because of British coolness toward the Tardieu proposals, Herriot had created a Special Commission to study the possibility of revising the requirements for security.

At the first meeting of the Special Commission on October 18, War Minister Paul-Boncour and General Maxime Weygand brought an appraisal of the policy that France had been following at the disarmament conference. They reminded their colleagues that the Tardieu Plan represented the maximum objectives which France could hope to obtain at Geneva and advised the government to consider what concessions it could make in its sécurité thesis to facilitate an agreement.⁴⁹ During the last two weeks of October, the Special Commission gathered suggestions for the minimum terms that France required in a disarmament convention from the military and from the various governmental departments.⁵⁰ The commission organized the suggestions and turned them over to the National Defense Council.

⁴⁹Report drafted by Joseph Paul-Boncour, October 14, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 439-62; First Session of the Special Commission, October 18, 1932, ibid., pp. 476-91.

⁵⁰Memorandum by General Chabert, October 20, 1932, ibid., pp. 509-16; Memorandum by General Gamelin, October 20, 1932, ibid., pp. 516-25; Memorandum by Georges Leygues, October 21, 1932, ibid., pp. 532-41.

On October 28, the Defense Council drafted new guidelines for French policy at Geneva, based on the report of the Special Commission. Attending the meeting, besides the military leaders, were President Albert Lebrun, Premier Herriot, Paul-Boncour, and Édouard Daladier who a few months later became premier. For the most part, the requirements for security were similar to those determined by André Tardieu's ministry before the conference had convened. France still insisted that Germany fulfill its military obligations. The government still wanted effective international control, mutual assistance pacts, and consultative agreements. Departing from previous French policy, the council agreed that countries outside of Europe had less responsibility in a security system than others. It added, though, that the United States had to honor any sanctions taken against an aggressor in Europe. The French also decided that the Reichswehr had to be changed from a professional to a short-service, conscript army like that in France. A German professional army was regarded by the French military as having a greater potential for aggression and expansion because it would be better trained than a conscript army of similar size.⁵¹

Immediately after the Defense Council meeting, Premier

⁵¹Minutes of the Supreme Council of National Defense, October 28, 1932, ibid., pp. 614-30; Memorandum on the preparation for the second phase of the Disarmament Conference, October 28, 1932, ibid., pp. 631-41.

Herriot explained the general lines of the government's policy to the Chamber of Deputies. Although the premier faced criticism from some members who rejected all negotiations with the Germans and from the Socialist Party which warned that continued emphasis upon security would drive the Germans to adopt a more aggressive policy, the Chamber gave the government a vote of confidence.⁵² With the assurance of sufficient political support, Herriot and Paul-Boncour drafted the details of the policy which the latter explained to a special session of the Bureau on November 4 and formally published on the fourteenth. The November proposals, known as the Herriot Plan, were a far more detailed treatise of the French sécurité thesis than had previously been presented at Geneva.⁵³

The Herriot Plan provided for a security system in which all nations fell into one of three concentric circles. The signatories of the disarmament convention would assume responsibilities for guaranteeing security that varied depending upon the circle to which each belonged. Nations in the outer circle--all countries represented at the conference--would break off economic relations with the aggressor in the event

⁵²France, Chambre des Députés, Journal officiel de la République française, débats parlementaires, 1919-1939, 15th Legislature, October 28, 1932, pp. 2916-20, 2935-36.

⁵³Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III République, les lendemains de la victoire, 1919-1934 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), II, 215.

of war, but would not be obligated to assist the victim. Members of the League of Nations constituted the middle circle. They would assume no new commitments to guarantee security, but would agree to fulfill rigidly their obligations in the League Covenant, the Locarno Treaties, and similar international agreements that had been signed since the World War ended. The inner circle included only those states of continental Europe which felt particularly in need of security. That group of states would have the most specific obligations and would form an organization for mutual military assistance.

Each of the continental nations in the inner circle would retain a limited national army. The armies would be organized uniformly as conscript and short-service forces, unlike the German professional, long-term Reichswehr.⁵⁴ The French did not specify the size of the national armies; they probably had no figure in mind. A few weeks later Herriot told the Socialist Party leader, Léon Blum, that the French army would be reduced by two divisions, but Paul-Boncour claimed only a one-division reduction. They concurred, however, that the term of service would be six months.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Memorandum by the French delegation, November 14, 1932, League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Conference Documents (Geneva: Publications Department, 1935), II, 435-39. (Hereinafter referred to as Conference Documents); Twentieth Meeting, November 4, 1932, League of Nations, Bureau, I, 32-38.

⁵⁵Memorandum of a meeting of Léon Blum and Theodore

In addition to the national armies, the inner circle of states would maintain small specialized forces controlled by the League of Nations. This part of the French proposals was similar to the security scheme that Tardieu had devised earlier, except that in Herriot's plan, participation was limited to the continental states. Land forces that belonged to the League in each country would be professional, long-service armies of one or two divisions and would maintain heavier weapons than the national armies. The League of Nations would obtain all weapons that the disarmament convention outlawed, and would become an arsenal from which threatened countries could draw needed war materiel. Air forces of the same nations would be structured similarly to land armies, the League's air units maintaining more powerful planes and bombers than what the nations possessed. A scheme was not included in the Herriot Plan for navies because they were of less concern to the continental nations. The purpose of the League-controlled international army was the same as that proposed by Tardieu in February: to come to the aid of a threatened nation.

To provide additional European security, the French insisted upon automatic supervision. Even the manufacture of military equipment would be uniform and rigidly controlled. Herriot wanted the League to conduct investigations of each

country at least once a year to guarantee that every state honored its commitments.⁵⁶

The new French proposals for security were more realistic than the Tardieu Plan. By designating three spheres of obligations, they placed the primary burden of maintaining peace upon the continental nations and attempted to meet the objection of Great Britain to committing its military on the Continent beyond the obligations in the League Covenant and Locarno Pact. Being excluded from the inner circle, Britain would not be a party to the mutual assistance agreements. It would be obligated only to renew its determination to execute all existing commitments undertaken since 1919.

The proposals, however, had defects which reduced their merit, especially as they related to Germany. They stated that the conference would ultimately discuss Gleichberechtigung, but omitted any promise to recognize the principle of equality before the second phase of meetings began as Papen's government demanded. The Herriot Plan also warned that rearmament by the Germans was out of the question, which was an obvious veto of their request for samples and was a hint that they would not be allowed to keep heavy weapons in trust for the League as would France. The French excluded overseas forces from consideration in calculating total

⁵⁶Memorandum by the French delegation, November 14, 1932, League of Nations, Conference Documents, II, 435-39; Memorandum of a meeting of Blum and Marriner, November 21, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1651.

military personnel, as they had throughout the conference. They ignored the German insistence that forces designated for colonial use, but stationed inside France, be considered as part of the total military effectives of France. Herriot's proposal to shorten the length of service for national armies was the only real concession to the Germans, but that was coupled with changing the Reichswehr from a professional to a conscript force. A final defect of the Herriot Plan was its failure to clarify either the size of weapons or the number of effectives that France would turn over to the League. Regardless of their defects, the French proposals represented the first practical basis for negotiating the security issue. If they had been combined with a clear agreement on the principle of equality, they could have given the disarmament effort the impetus that it needed although they would have required considerable modification. The French intended to introduce their new security scheme at the conference when it reconvened in February 1933.

Reaction in France to the Herriot Plan was for the most part favorable. A majority of the parties supported the proposals. Even the Socialists, who had criticized Herriot's speech on October 28, approved the plan after reading its details in November. Blum told Theodore Marriner, a member of the American delegation, that the proposals marked a revolution in French policy and offered the best chance for

genuine arms reduction.⁵⁷ Criticism came from the premier's Conservative predecessor, André Tardieu, who charged Herriot with revising the Treaty of Versailles and with departing from the foreign policy that France had followed since 1919. Tardieu claimed that the new plan failed to maintain the necessary inferiority of German military power on the Continent.⁵⁸ He later wrote that his own government had considered such a plan in February, but had unanimously rejected it.⁵⁹ Tardieu, however, exaggerated the differences between the two security schemes, whose main dissimilarity was the extent of a commitment by Great Britain on the Continent. The Herriot Plan also was designed to preserve the position of Germany as established in the Versailles Treaty.

Early reaction in Germany to Herriot's proposals was encouraging. François-Poncet surveyed initial press reports reflecting official views and found only moderate criticism.⁶⁰ Chancellor Papen, speaking to foreign journalists, sounded optimistic that the proposals provided a basis for negotiations as long as the equality principle was also

⁵⁷Memorandum of a meeting of Blum and Marriner, November 21, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/1651.

⁵⁸Letter of November 15, 1932 by André Tardieu to the editor, Echo de Paris, November 17, 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁹André Tardieu, France in Danger, trans. by Gerald Griffin (London: Denis Archer, 1935), pp. 31, 36.

⁶⁰François-Poncet to Herriot, November 3, 1932, France, Documents diplomatiques, I, 652-55.

recognized.⁶¹ Even in the Reichswehr there was some support for the Herriot Plan, the French ambassador learned.⁶² German response became more critical, however, after the French published the complete plan on the fourteenth. Many officials in Berlin complained that the printed proposals differed from the more general oral explanation of French policy.⁶³ Still, the Foreign Office did not reject the Herriot Plan which provided a bargaining point to obtain German goals for the disarmament convention, such as sample weapons and a time limit on German military restrictions.⁶⁴

The new French statement on sécurité had a direct impact upon British policy. Although the security proposals were less onerous to Great Britain than those introduced in February, the British believed that the Herriot Plan placed insufficient emphasis upon disarmament itself. The French persistence in stressing security at the expense of disarmament made remote the chance of Germany returning to the conference prior to a recognition of equality. MacDonald's government, therefore, decided that it had to intervene

⁶¹François-Poncet to Herriot, November 9, 1932, ibid., pp. 679-80.

⁶²François-Poncet to Herriot, November 10, 1932, ibid., pp. 682-83.

⁶³Rumbold to Simon, November 16, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 286-87.

⁶⁴Foreign Office directive, November 17, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D672412-22.

at once--on November 10 it suddenly announced that it accepted the German principle of equality of rights.

The British Foreign Office had begun to reconsider its position on Gleichberechtigung soon after the Germans had announced that they would not attend the Bureau.⁶⁵ The Foreign Office had felt there was no urgency to alter Britain's position, however, as long as the possibility existed that Germany would return to the conference without a formal agreement on equality. That likelihood vanished when Simon learned during the last week of October that the Herriot ministry was working on new security proposals. On October 26, two days before Herriot explained his policy to the French Chamber, Simon warned the cabinet that it was urgent to accept the principle of Gleichberechtigung. The cabinet concurred and the foreign secretary, along with Permanent Under-Secretary Robert Vansittart and Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden, formulated the policy. The three completed their work on November 3.⁶⁶ A week later Simon explained the new governmental position regarding equality to the House of Commons, and on the seventeenth he presented the policy to the Bureau.

⁶⁵Memorandum by Alexander W. Leeper, October 4, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 45 (32), W 10837/10/98.

⁶⁶Cabinet conclusions, October 26, 1932, ibid., No. 55 (32), W 11879/1466/98; Note by Leeper, November 2, 1932, ibid., W 11976/10/98; Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. II, Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 26.

Agreeing that the same rules and methods of limiting weapons should be applicable to all major countries including Germany, the British government recognized the principle of equality of rights. It concurred on two key points that the Germans had maintained since the beginning of the conference: the disarmament convention would replace Part V of the Versailles Treaty, and German military restrictions would have the same time limit as those of the Allies. The British also agreed to the more recent demand that Germany obtain samples of each type of arms retained by the other powers during the convention. Simon implied that Germany ultimately would obtain practical equality, although he avoided using the word "parity" and placed that goal at an indefinite period in the future. The Germans could anticipate the day of full equality as long as they cooperated by maintaining their limitations and by guaranteeing security in Europe.

To meet French security needs, the British proposed a series of disarmament steps, the length of which the conference would determine. The armed powers would reduce their weapons superiority by stages. They would proceed to a new stage only when they believed that their previous disarmament had not jeopardized their security. As each phase of disarmament proved successful, another would follow at once.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., Vol. 270, cols. 539-47; Twenty-ninth meeting, November 17, 1932, League of Nations, Bureau, I, 89-97.

The French would supposedly gain a sense of security when they saw that supervision of the convention was working and were satisfied that the Germans were abiding by their restrictions.

The British proposals left some questions unanswered. They did not state how far the armed powers would reduce their weapons to meet the German demand for "substantial disarmament." They neither specified the number of sample weapons that Germany would be allowed during the disarmament convention nor clarified whether that country eventually would be totally free to rearm. The British proposals also fell short of French security requirements, but they were not intended to be a security scheme. They were, in fact, compatible with Herriot's plan of maintaining security by means of the three circles of responsibility.

Together, the British and French proposals represented a promising basis for the disarmament negotiations. Alone, the British proposals saved the conference from an early collapse since they led to an agreement in December that paved the way for Germany to return to Geneva. Had the British changed their position in July, instead of waiting until events forced them to alter their stand, Germany might not have boycotted the conference. Constantin von Neurath, asserting that Great Britain would have aided the conference by accepting equality earlier, complained to a reporter from The Times, "You English are always rather late."⁶⁸

⁶⁸Aubrey Leo Kennedy, Britain Faces Germany (London:

After the British announced their acceptance of equality, the fate of the conference was in the hands of Herriot's government. Early French reaction to the British statements was unfavorable, but opposition quickly subsided. Paul-Boncour and the Foreign Ministry even persuaded the press to adopt a moderate position.⁶⁹ The Herriot ministry saw that, of the major governments, it now would likely be the only one opposing the idea of equality. It would have to acquiesce to the German demand or else face criticism abroad for preventing the conference from continuing. Although the French did not concur with the British position, they avoided official condemnation, thus showing that they were willing to discuss a formula that would acknowledge the principle of equality.

The British took the hint that Herriot was agreeable to negotiate in order to find a way to save the conference. MacDonald's government quietly began arranging five-power meetings for early December, which would include Italy and the United States as well as Britain, France and Germany. The prime minister intended to lead them personally. The location for the talks was no longer a problem because the Germans conceded to meet in Geneva. They did not have to worry about press criticism at home as they had in October,

Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 79-80.

⁶⁹Memorandum by Ralph F. Wigram, November 19, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 12789/1466/98; Patteson to Robert G. Vansittart, November 22, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 300-301.

because Constantin von Neurath planned to go to Geneva ostensibly for League of Nations activities scheduled for that time. The British, therefore, were able to bring the five powers together to discuss the question of German equality.

Before the five-power meetings began on December 6, Foreign Secretary Simon and Prime Minister MacDonald held preliminary talks with Neurath and Herriot separately to work out the general lines of an agreement. From November 21 through the twenty-fifth, Simon met with the foreign minister. Neurath promised that, if the French accepted the principle of equality, the Germans would meet sécurité part way. Germany would sign with France a declaration to renounce force, would change the Reichswehr to a conscript army providing its term of service was shortened as the French had promised, and would maintain the present size of the Reichswehr for five years.⁷⁰ Neurath warned that an agreement among the five powers would not guarantee that Germany would remain indefinitely at Geneva. Unless the armed powers settled on the terms of a disarmament convention by July 1, 1933, or at least were close to one by then, Germany would consider the conference a failure and would expect freedom from its military obligations.⁷¹

⁷⁰Neurath to Bülow, November 21, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D668262-63; Neurath to Bülow, November 22, 1932, ibid., 3154/D672437-39.

⁷¹Memorandum of conversation between Neurath and Norman H. Davis, November 21, 1932, United States, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Norman H. Davis Papers, 1918-1942, Container 17. (Hereinafter referred to as Davis Papers.)

Realizing that Neurath's specific demands would be unacceptable to France, Simon drafted a text, based on the British statement issued earlier in the month, which recognized only the principle of equality.⁷² After some persuasion, Neurath approved it and, before he left for Berlin on the twenty-fifth, he promised that he would return to negotiate a formal agreement if Herriot would assent to one along the same lines.⁷³ Herriot did not accept the draft at that time, but sent word to Simon from Paris that he would go to Geneva early in December to discuss the equality issue on the basis of the draft. His requirement for a five-power declaration was that it include a statement recognizing sécurité as well as Gleichberechtigung.⁷⁴

Several days after the Simon-Neurath talks, MacDonald met with Herriot in Geneva. The prime minister reminded the French premier that the five powers had to accept Gleichberechtigung or Germany would not return to the conference.⁷⁵

⁷²Simon to Vansittart, November 22, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 417 L.N., W 12976/1466/98; Simon to Vansittart, November 22, 1932, ibid., No. 418 L.N., W 12977/1466/98.

⁷³Patteson to Vansittart, November 22, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 299; Memorandum by Simon, November 22, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 331, W 13075/1466/98.

⁷⁴Memorandum of a conversation between Simon and Paul-Boncour, November 22, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 332, W 13076/1466/98; Aide-mémoire from Fleuriau, [November 24, 1932], ibid., W 13112/1466/98; Tyrrell to Simon, December 1, 1932, ibid., No. 128, W 13206/1466/98.

⁷⁵Meeting of British and French representatives, December 3, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 314-17.

After several discussions, Herriot agreed to recognize equality. The premier drafted a document on December 5 in which he promised that, as long as provision for French security was made, the final disarmament convention would acknowledge German equality.⁷⁶ Herriot's concession cleared the way for formal meetings to begin the following day.

Five-power talks began on Tuesday, December 6, when Neurath returned to Geneva from Berlin. He brought with him a new delegate to the conference, Ernst von Weizsäcker, who later served Adolf Hitler as state secretary for foreign affairs. Leading the small delegations of two or three each were MacDonald, Herriot, Neurath, Norman Davis of the United States, and Pompeo Aloisi of Italy. The talks took place around an ornate wood table with gilded armchairs in the elaborate salon of the Hotel Beau-Rivage in Geneva.⁷⁷ For five days the diplomats worked on the text of an agreement that would allow the conference to resume.

Early in the first meeting, Herriot assured Neurath that he was ready to sign a disarmament convention that provided Germany full equality with the other nations. If France acknowledged Gleichberechtigung, however, Germany had to recognize that sécurité was equally important. The Premier

⁷⁶Meeting of British, French, American and Italian representatives, December 5, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 323-28.

⁷⁷Hugh R. Wilson, Diplomat Between Wars (New York: Longman's Green and Co., 1941), pp. 274-75.

read the statement which he had prepared the previous day:

France admits that equality of rights should be granted to Germany and the other Powers disarmed by the treaty within a regime which will imply security for all the nations, as well as for France herself.⁷⁸

Neurath was elated when he reported to State Secretary Bülow that the French had finally accepted equality of rights.⁷⁹

For the Germans, Herriot's demand for sécurité introduced a new element into the discussion. Neurath had agreed to negotiate on the basis of the draft that Simon had prepared, which recognized equality but said nothing of security. He was not prepared to sign an agreement that included both sécurité and Gleichberechtigung and had to return to Berlin to consult with Kurt von Schleicher, who had become chancellor a few days previously, and with Bülow. Neurath sent word on the seventh to Weizsäcker in Geneva that Germany would accept a declaration that recognized security and equality, but that the cabinet could not make a final decision on the French text without further study.⁸⁰

Norman Davis had anticipated that Herriot would introduce the security question into the meetings and had brought with him an American plan that he claimed would meet both

⁷⁸Five-Power meeting, December 6, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 328-34; Summary of the Five-Power meetings, December 6-11, 1932, German Archives, 7474/H186177-83.

⁷⁹Neurath to Bülow, December 6, 1932, German Archives, 7474/H185932.

⁸⁰Neurath to the German delegation, December 7, 1932, ibid., 3154/D672507.

French and German needs. Davis suggested an interim disarmament convention that would last through 1936 and that would include those points on which the major powers were agreed. Since the convention would not provide for a significant amount of disarmament, there would be no need to develop a security system except for supervision, or to reach an agreement on specific German demands. The interim convention would include broad ideas, such as an agreement on the principle of equality. The details of the final convention, including an exact formula to implement equality, would be worked out during the interim period.⁸¹

The American plan provided time to work on a solution to the Franco-German question, but in doing so it postponed the first step of disarmament until 1937. A delay in arms reduction may have appealed to the French, but it would have found little support in Germany or Britain. John Simon wrote in a Foreign Office memo, "The essence of Mr. Davis' plan-- if so vague a collection of suggestions can be called a plan-- is to try to open a lot of points in general terms. . . . The plan is not likely to be successful or to work if it was: is any plan?"⁸² Davis' proposals were impractical because they

⁸¹Conversation between Herriot and Davis, November 28, 1932, United States, Davis Papers, Container 17; Memorandum of a conversation between Paul-Boncour and Davis, November 28, 1932, *ibid*; Five-Power meeting, December 6, 1932, Great Britain, *DBFP*, IV, 328-34.

⁸²Note by Simon, December 7, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 13789/1466/98.

went beyond what the diplomats were trying to accomplish at the five-power talks. His scheme for accepting equality was more general than the British proposals, however, and along with the drafts by Simon and Herriot, it became the basis for the talks.

The meetings continued for the next few days, while the diplomats awaited the reply to the French text from Berlin. On Friday the ninth MacDonald, impatient with the Germans for not responding, prepared a new text based on the proposals by Herriot, Simon and Davis. Neurath was pleased with the wording, and the prime minister appointed a small committee to formalize it.⁸³ The result was a simple resolution which proposed that:

. . . one of the principles that should guide the Conference on Disarmament should be the grant to Germany and to the other disarmed Powers, of equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations, and that this principle should find itself embodied in the convention containing the conclusions of the Disarmament Conference.

It added that this agreement implied a single convention for all of the states at the conference.⁸⁴ By Sunday morning, December 11, Neurath and Paul-Boncour had approval from their governments to sign the Five-Power Declaration.

⁸³Five-Power meeting, December 9, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 359-62; Neurath to the Foreign Ministry, December 10, 1932, German Archives, 7474/H185972-74.

⁸⁴Five-Power meeting, December 10, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 362-72; Simon to Robert Vansittart, December 11, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 372 W 13651/1466/98.

The final text was sufficiently general to satisfy both the French and the Germans. It recognized in principle the two governments' claims for sécurité and Gleichberechtigung. By specifying a single convention, however, the resolution raised the question--without resolving it--of transferring German military restrictions from the Versailles Treaty to the final disarmament agreement. The British had made that concession to Germany in November, but the French had not. The wording of the resolution was a diluted version of the British policy statement of November, which had been unacceptable to France. It left the entire point purposely vague, failing to specify if German military restrictions would be contained in the Versailles Treaty as well as the disarmament convention, or if they would be removed from the treaty to the convention as the Germans wanted.

Even though the Germans received little practical advantage by signing the Five-Power Declaration, they considered it a victory for their policy at Geneva. As Weizsäcker later reflected, "an important stage in the diplomatic struggle has been reached."⁸⁵ The government at once publicized its achievement, interrupting radio broadcasts across Germany to assert that it had obtained a fundamental goal at the conference. It argued that the status of Germany in Europe was enhanced when the major powers accepted for them

⁸⁵ Ernst von Weizsäcker, The Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker, trans. by John Andrews (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951), p. 85.

and for all states the thesis of equality. The German press reflected the government's position and, except for the Nazi and Nationalist organs, cautiously approved the declaration.⁸⁶ Satisfaction in Germany that the other governments had finally acknowledged equality was tempered by the realization that the agreement met none of the specific requirements of Gleichberechtigung, with the exception of the provision for a single convention. Recognizing that deficiency, Foreign Minister Neurath warned in an interview with Le Temps that Germany would withdraw from the conference if the armed powers failed to implement equality practically.⁸⁷

The French were less enthusiastic than the Germans about the Five-Power Declaration, even though it reaffirmed the need to connect disarmament to security. Herriot's Radical-Socialist colleague, Édouard Daladier, confided to "Pertinax," the diplomatic correspondent for Echo de Paris, that France received nothing from Germany in exchange for accepting equality. According to "Pertinax," Daladier related, "I must confess that the Cabinet ratified this declaration without being aware of what it implied."⁸⁸ Other leaders charged

⁸⁶Frederick M. Sackett to Henry L. Stimson, December 13, 1932, United States, Decimal File, 500.A 15 A 4/1675; Rumbold to Simon, December 14, 1932, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 378-82; Werner F. Von Rheinbaben, Viermal Deutschland (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1954), pp. 271-72.

⁸⁷Interview with Constantin von Neurath, Le Temps, December 14, 1932, p. 1.

⁸⁸Pertinax [André Géraud], The Gravediggers of France (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), p. 89.

that the government had appeased the Germans. André Tardieu was especially critical of the government for departing from his policy, for ignoring the allies of France on the Continent, and for sanctioning treaty revision.⁸⁹ Herriot later defended his acquiescence to the agreement, asserting that he had not sanctioned practical measures to implement equality.⁹⁰ To distract attention at home from its political concession to Germany, the French government stressed the references in the declaration to security. It also warned the Bureau on December 14, that in return for signing the Five-Power Declaration the conference had to place priority on the Herriot Plan when it resumed meeting in February.⁹¹

Although the Five-Power Declaration only marginally benefited France and Germany, it was a victory for British policy which had been to persuade the Germans to return to Geneva in order that the second phase of meetings could begin. The British had recognized that the conference would have collapsed if the Germans were absent, and had initiated the private talks to save it. The declaration gave the disarmament conference several months of life which it otherwise would not have had.

The Five-Power Declaration paved the way for the

⁸⁹Tardieu, France in Danger, pp. 31-32.

⁹⁰Herriot, Jadis, II, 314.

⁹¹Thirty-second meeting, December 13, 1932, League of Nations, Bureau, I, 110-13.

disarmament conference to reconvene in 1933. By that time the negotiations were nearly a year old, and they had made only slight progress toward a convention. Whether the conference could proceed more effectively in 1933 than it had in 1932 remained to be seen. During the first phase of meetings it had become evident that the primary obstacle at Geneva was the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung controversy. Little attempt to deal with that problem had been made, however, until after the conference had adjourned in July, and then solely because the Germans refused to take part in future meetings. The entire six-month interval between sessions of the conference had been devoted to discussion of the controversy. The product of the negotiations, the Five-Power Declaration, supposedly resolved the security-equality issue, but it did not offer an effectual basis for settling the dispute between France and Germany. In fact, the vagueness of the agreement and the subsequent statements by the French and Germans gave reason to doubt that they could concur on any practical measures. The second phase of the conference would be a test of the practicability of the December 11 agreement.

CHAPTER V

THE REOPENING OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE MACDONALD PLAN: FEBRUARY-MARCH 1933

On February 2, 1933, the second phase of the World Disarmament Conference began. As the delegates assembled in Geneva a year after the conference had opened, the optimistic enthusiasm that had been evident in 1932 was missing. There were no demonstrations offering public support for the disarmament effort, no eloquent speeches painting pictures of vast destruction of weapons, no masses of spectators crowding into the galleries to watch the proceedings. Although the Five-Power Declaration had offered some hope that the delegates could turn their attention to the practical task of arms reduction, the world situation dampened that anticipation. Every problem that had clouded prospects for disarmament in 1932 remained as an ominous sign for the future. The economic crisis, the Far Eastern War, and the political instability in France and Germany created an unfavorable setting for the second phase of meetings.

The economic crisis and the Far Eastern War continued indirectly to disturb the conference in 1933 as they had in 1932. When the delegates returned to Geneva, the three-year-

old economic depression was deeply entrenched in Europe. It remained a disruptive force, both in international relations and in European domestic politics. The war in Manchuria also persisted in 1933 in spite of League efforts to persuade Japan to cease its military conquests. Japanese aggression became even more disconcerting for the diplomats at Geneva when Japan announced during the second phase of meetings that it was withdrawing from the League of Nations.¹

Recent political instability in France and Germany affected the conference directly because the disarmament question revolved around those countries. In France, Édouard Herriot had fallen as premier on December 14 as a result of opposition in the Chamber to his determination to pay the war debt installment due the United States. Herriot's Radical colleague, Joseph Paul-Boncour followed with a short-lived government, but he resigned on January 28 over budget disputes. By the time the conference began, Édouard Daladier, also a Radical-Socialist, was the new French premier. Similar changes had taken place in Germany. Chancellor Franz von Papen had been forced to resign on November 17 following the Reichstag elections, and on December 2 General Kurt von Schleicher formed a new cabinet. Schleicher was unable to conciliate the political elements in the Reichstag, and in

¹Preliminary notice of Japan's withdrawal from the League, March 27, 1933, League of Nations, The Monthly Summary of the League of Nations, March, 1933 (Geneva: Publications Department, 1933), Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 84.

less than two months he was replaced by Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist Party. The changes of governments in France and Germany preceding the reopening of the conference made the policies that those two countries would follow at Geneva uncertain.

Adolf Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship and the rapid consolidation of Nazi power in Germany was by far the most important single development in Europe that affected the disarmament conference. The Nazi leader became chancellor on January 30 because of a political bargain made with Papen behind the back of Kurt von Schleicher.² Papen, who expected to counterbalance the influence of Hitler in the government, became vice-chancellor. Twelve years later Papen defended his intrigue which contributed to Hitler's success, claiming that "under democratic procedure . . . no other outcome would have been possible."³ Hitler rapidly established control over the government. In his first cabinet meeting, the Nazi leader announced his intention to suppress the Communist Party and to obtain the Enabling Act that would, for four years, transfer most legislative power into the hands of the

²Paul Joseph Goebbels, Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei: Vom 1 Januar 1932 bis zum 1 Mai 1933 (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1938), p. 235, 246-55.

³United States, Department of State, Special Interrogation Mission to Germany in 1945-1946, headed by DeWitt C. Poole, National Archives, "Papen-Franz von, 1932/1933," Container 2, p. 2. (Hereinafter referred to as Special Interrogation Mission.)

chancellor.⁴ With the help of the Center Party and the Nationalists, Hitler gained the Enabling Act on March 23. In just two months, he had acquired dictatorial powers for himself. By the time the conference adjourned in June, the process of coordinating all German institutions under Nazi control was moving into high gear. The domestic changes in Germany during the second phase of meetings were viewed by Frenchmen as disastrous developments for their own security and for European peace. The National Socialist revolution undermined the disarmament effort, therefore, as it drove France to an increasingly defensive and unyielding position during 1933.

French, German and British policies toward the disarmament conference in 1933 were of utmost importance for the fate of the meetings. Because of the recent political changes in France and Germany, the approaches that those two governments would take were particularly awaited at Geneva. In view of the recent leadership that the British government had displayed in accepting German equality and in promoting the Five-Power Declaration in December, there was also interest in the position that it would adopt.

Of the three governments, the policy that Germany intended to follow in 1933 was the least certain when the conference reopened on February 2. The Schleicher ministry

⁴Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, January 30, 1933, United States, Department of State, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), III, 272-75.

had been responsible for negotiating the Five-Power Declaration in December and for agreeing to return to the conference. In January it decided that during the second phase of meetings the demand for Gleichberechtigung would remain unaltered from that formulated by the Franz von Papen government.⁵ With the transition from Schleicher to Hitler, however, the direction of German policy toward foreign affairs generally and toward the disarmament effort specifically became unclear to the other European powers. It was reasonably certain that there would be changes with the advent of National Socialist leadership in Germany, but the extent of the changes was considered by foreign observers to be a matter for speculation. Some hoped that the responsibility of office would temper the aggressive stand which Hitler had taken on the arms question before becoming chancellor.

There was little indication during the early weeks of meetings at Geneva whether Germany, under Nazi leadership, would cooperate or would suddenly attempt to throw off the shackles remaining from the World War settlement and begin to rearm openly. During those weeks the new chancellor was preoccupied with domestic concerns and the establishment of his own authoritarian rule. He made few public statements on foreign policy. Nevertheless, there were signs that German

⁵Memorandum by Constantin von Neurath, January 14, 1933, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 3154, frames D668400-401. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives.)

policy for the conference would remain substantially what it had been in 1932. Hitler took a moderate stand in some of his speeches, making a point of proclaiming his concern for world disarmament. He emphasized that all he really wanted was to end German inequality, which was perpetuated by the war victors remaining heavily armed. Hitler promised that his government would support the conference fully to help it draft a disarmament convention that was fair for every nation.⁶

Another sign that German policy would remain unchanged was that Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath, State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow, and chief of the delegation Rudolf Nadolny continued at their posts.⁷ Leaving the Foreign Ministry leadership intact was a clever move by Hitler because it gave the appearance of a continuity in foreign policy and was a means of allaying fear abroad of an impending radical revolution in German diplomacy. Neurath had had a distinguished career for several years as a diplomat before becoming foreign minister under Franz von Papen in 1932. His retention symbolized a reasonable approach to international relations. Indeed, Vice-Chancellor Papen later reflected that Neurath was a moderating force behind German strategy as long as he "was still

⁶Speech by Adolf Hitler to the Reichstag, March 23, 1933, Fritz Berber, ed., Deutschland-England, 1933-1939: Die Dokumente des deutschen Friedenswillen, Veröffentlichungen des deutschen Instituts für Aussenpolitische Forschung (Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1940), VII, pp. 15-17. (Hereinafter referred to as Dokumente.)

⁷Rudolf Nadolny, Mein Beitrag (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), pp. 131-32.

pulling the strings of the foreign policy."⁸ Neurath himself assured British ambassador to Berlin Horace Rumbold, that there would be no changes in the position of Germany at Geneva.⁹ It cannot be denied that Neurath did have some influence upon German policy early in 1933, but he "pulled the strings" only as long as Adolf Hitler permitted him to, and he gradually became nothing more than the spokesman for the Nazi leader.

German policy in 1933 regarding disarmament must be considered in light of Hitler's views on international relations which were already well-known. In his numerous speeches and in such works as Mein Kampf he had expressed his lack of faith in the League of Nations as a valid international body.¹⁰ The Nazi leader had outlined in Mein Kampf his objective of gaining new land for Germany. He had contended that France was the primary obstacle to German goals and would always be the enemy of the German people.¹¹ Such a policy, of course, would inevitably lead to war and would at once require escaping from the military restrictions that the 1919 settlement imposed

⁸United States, Special Interrogation Mission, "Papen-Franz von, 1932/1933," Container 2, p. 6.

⁹Horace G. Rumbold to John A. Simon, February 4, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2, Vol. IV (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), p. 494. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP.)

¹⁰Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (Munich: F. Eher Nachfolger, 1930), p. 265; Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Secret Book, trans. by Salvator Attanasio (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 112, 121.

¹¹Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 263-68, 299.

upon Germany. If Hitler, as chancellor, adhered to his previous statements, the chance for a rapprochement with France over the disarmament question would be remote.

Adolf Hitler intended to rearm Germany. Public assertions by the new German chancellor of support for the disarmament effort must be weighed against this goal.¹²

Rearmament of Germany was necessary if Hitler was to fulfill any of his other objectives. Without arms, he could never regain the lost prestige and power of the country. Neither would he acquire new territory in Europe, alter the borders set by the Versailles Treaty, or escape from any of the other onerous terms of the war settlement. Hitler openly announced to the National Socialist Party Congress early in 1933 that he planned to re-create the armed forces of the country.¹³

Rebuilding the military was more than a simple question of foreign policy; it was an inseparable topic from domestic concerns, especially economic. In one of the earliest cabinet meetings, on February 8, the discussion was supposedly focused upon budgetary problems, but it automatically turned to military questions. Hitler used the occasion to inform those

¹²For a good study on Hitler's rearmament policy during the 1930's, see: Gerhard Meinck, Hitler und die deutsche Aufrüstung, 1933-1937 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1959); see also, Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

¹³Speech by Adolf Hitler at the National-Socialist Party Congress, Richard Mönning, ed., Adolf Hitler from Speeches, 1933-1938 (Berlin: Terramore Office, 1938), p. 15.

present that every effort of the state would focus upon rebuilding the military, and the budget had to be channeled in that direction. Within five years Germany had to attain practical military equality with the armed powers. The chancellor argued that such a program would not only put Germans back to work, it would alter the position of Germany in the world.¹⁴ From the beginning, therefore, Adolf Hitler was gearing the energies of the state to an active program of rearmament.

Hitler's intention to rearm Germany as quickly as possible determined his attitude toward the disarmament conference. In the first place, he inherited the conference and had to adjust his plans accordingly. He could not pull out of the negotiations immediately after his predecessor had agreed to return. To do so would arouse world-wide condemnation, which was unwise while Germany was still relatively weak in Europe. He wanted to avoid offering others any excuse for intervention into Germany. But the conference could actually work to his advantage. It was a forum to argue that Germany sincerely wanted an equitable disarmament convention. The chancellor could make such assertions, at least for several months while the machinery for expanding the military was in a formative stage, and while it was still possible to conceal much of the illegal arms constructions. Concealment

¹⁴Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, February 8, 1933, German Archives, 3598/D791667-78.

was not possible indefinitely, and a break with the armed powers was inevitable, but until then Hitler could encourage the conference to continue, while trying to avoid proposals that were counter to his own interests and while attempting to escape charges of destroying the disarmament effort. He could even negotiate an agreement as long as it was one that totally fit into his plans of rearmament.

An acceptable agreement had to allow Germany sufficient numbers of arms to equal the amount of weapons that the country could produce during the following few years; it could not tie the country down for a long period of time. There is no evidence that Hitler expected or even desired the Allies to reduce their weapons. If they did meet German terms to disarm substantially--which only the most optimistic person could envision in 1933--that would be incompatible with the goals of Hitler since he would then have no excuse to rearm. He could accept nothing that failed to give him weapons. As long as there was a chance, however, for Hitler to gain a convention that legalized what he was doing, there was no reason for him to leave Geneva. If he did not obtain such an agreement, he still lost nothing because he could give the appearance of cooperating for several months which would distract attention from his activities at home.

French policy toward the disarmament effort when the conference reopened in February 1933 was more certain than the German position. The changes in government--Daladier's

ministry was the fourth since the conference had opened a year earlier--had produced little alteration in the French position toward disarmament. Paul-Boncour, Herriot and Daladier, the premiers of the last three governments, were all Radical-Socialists; and Paul-Boncour and Daladier served in each of those ministries. French policy maintained a consistency throughout all of the governments, including André Tardieu's Conservative ministry: an insistence upon increased French security as a necessary counterpart to disarmament. The only major change in the method of obtaining security was the proposals that Herriot and Paul-Boncour had introduced in November. The Herriot Plan, which placed all countries into one of three concentric circles and which delegated most of the obligation to maintain security upon the inner circle of continental powers, represented a more moderate position than Tardieu's earlier proposals. The Daladier government, only two days old when the conference reconvened, gave no indication that it would modify the Herriot Plan. In fact, it kept the same policy for five months while it was evaluating the new situation inside Germany. As it observed German political developments with growing alarm, however, the French government became reluctant to make any concessions to the National Socialist regime.

British policy for the second phase of the conference was noticeably bolder than it had been during the first phase of meetings. The National Coalition Government placed

its full attention toward obtaining an agreement at the conference in 1933, at a time when the prospects for a disarmament convention were becoming dimmer. Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald was responsible for the new British efforts to guide the conference, although the Conservatives and Liberals in his cabinet concurred on the need for better direction at Geneva. He had determined after the conclusion of the December 11 agreement that Great Britain alone was able to prevent the conference from degenerating into a Franco-German dispute over security and equality.

The first necessity was to appoint an active chairman to the delegation. MacDonald believed that Britain had devoted insufficient attention to the conference during the first phase. Foreign Secretary John Simon, who was responsible for executing the government's policy at Geneva, had too many other tasks to allocate adequate time to the conference. Accordingly, after MacDonald discussed the need for a permanent chairman with Simon; Anthony Eden, the Conservative undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, was selected.¹⁵ With Eden present at Geneva at all times, the British government would be able to maintain a greater influence upon the negotiations.

¹⁵Cabinet conclusions, December 13, 1932, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, 1931-1934, No. 66 (1), W 13767/1466/98. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office); Note by Simon, December 30, 1932, ibid., No. 66 (1), W 13767/1466/98; Note by Robert G. Vansittart, January 2, 1933, ibid., W 14239/1466/98.

The second necessity, according to MacDonald, was for the British to steer the conference toward the task of reducing weapons. He hoped that some progress would be possible because the Five-Power Declaration had recognized the French requirement of sécurité and the German thesis of Gleichberechtigung. In order to channel the Geneva negotiations in the right direction, the Foreign Office prepared a program of work for the conference, something that the Bureau had been unable to accomplish in September when Germany was absent. Alexander Cadogan, Foreign Office advisor on League affairs, spearheaded drafting the program in order to direct the delegates away from an exclusive discussion of the Herriot Plan. Cadogan argued, "if we bring the Germans back merely to discuss the French Plan, we may not enjoy their company for long."¹⁶ He recognized, however, that it was impractical for the program to provide only for disarmament topics to the exclusion of security proposals because the French would certainly rebel. After considerable discussion in the Foreign Office, Cadogan's colleagues concurred with his reasoning.¹⁷ In its final

¹⁶Memorandum by Alexander Cadogan, December 29, 1932, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 14239/1466/98.

¹⁷Memorandum by Maurice A. Hankey, January 9, 1933, ibid., W 583/40/98; Hankey to Vansittart, January 10, 1933, ibid., W 583/40/98; Note by Alexander Leeper, January 11, 1933, ibid., W 583/40/98; Note by Howard Smith, January 11, 1933, ibid., W 583/40/98; Memorandum by Simon, January 12,

form, the program of work organized the discussions around the three major topics of disarmament, equality and security. It became the basis for negotiations when the conference reopened.¹⁸

On February 2, President Arthur Henderson reconvened the disarmament conference. The second phase of meetings, which lasted until June 29, consisted mostly of formal sessions of the General Commission. During the first five weeks, the delegates considered only two topics: the Herriot Plan, which the French successfully argued to be the first item on the agenda; and military effectives, which was the first subject in the British program of work. The discussion of those two points at once revived the Franco-German conflict. The antagonism between France and Germany over sécurité and Gleichberechtigung became progressively more evident in February and March, confirming the shallowness of the December 11 Five-Power Declaration.

For the first week of meetings, the delegates debated the Herriot Plan in the General Commission. Then they turned the security question over to the smaller Political Committee. The discussions quickly led to a rift between the French and

1933, ibid., W 619/40/98; Vansittart to Hankey, January 18, 1933, ibid., W 583/40/98.

¹⁸Proposals of the British delegation, January 30, 1933, League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Conference Documents (Geneva: Publications Department, 1935), II, 472-74. (Hereinafter referred to as Conference Documents.)

German delegations. Germany was much less receptive to the Herriot Plan than the Papen government had been in November. Rudolf Nadolny condemned the French proposals, contending that they failed to lay a basis for disarmament. Furthermore, the French suggestion to organize all countries into three concentric circles would divide the world into camps just as the alliance system had done before the World War.¹⁹ Nadolny challenged the practicability of the security scheme because, in order for it to go into effect, the nations had to agree on which country was the aggressor.²⁰ Paul-Boncour countered that the French proposals were not only practical; they also satisfied the German demand for equality because they made it possible for France to disarm substantially.²¹ Both the French and the Germans received support for their arguments. Allies of France on the Continent enthusiastically endorsed the security scheme, while the Italians and Russians backed the German stand.²² The British remained neutral during the

¹⁹Twenty-ninth meeting, February 2, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1933), II, 215-22. (Hereinafter referred to as General Commission.)

²⁰Sixth meeting, March 4, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series D, Vol. V: Minutes of the Political Commission (Geneva: Publication Department, 1936), pp. 31-38.

²¹Thirty-third meeting, February 8, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 251-62.

²²Emil Ludwig, Talks with Mussolini, trans. by Eden Paul

arguments, hoping that the French government ultimately would modify its proposals without their insistence. The debate over the proposals was inconclusive as no vote was taken, but it demonstrated the gulf between the French and German positions over the question of security.

The rift between France and Germany widened when the delegates turned their attention to military effectives. A broad topic, effectives involved the composition, size and nature of military forces. The sécurité-Gleichberechtigung controversy focused upon standardization of continental land armies and determination of what types of forces to include in calculating the size of armies.

Standardization of the continental forces was a recent addition to the French sécurité thesis at Geneva, having been proposed in the Herriot Plan. The French wanted the German Reichswehr converted from a long-service professional army to a short-service conscript force. They expected the term to be less than one year, but were willing for Germany to convert to the new system over a period of time.²³ In 1932 the Germans had not rejected altering the Reichswehr to a conscript army, and at Bessinge in April they had proposed shortening the term of service. In late November Neurath had

and Ceden Paul (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1933), p. 144; Twenty-ninth meeting, February 2, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 215-22.

²³Thirty-fifth meeting, February 16, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 271-78.

told Simon that Germany would accept the change to a conscript army on the condition that the enlistment period was short.²⁴

Subsequent to Neurath's promise, however, Hitler had become chancellor. In February 1933 Nadolny refused to support the change, reminding the French that Germany had already converted its army in 1919 from a short-term to a long-term enlistment.²⁵ The French defended their position on the basis that a professional army was intrinsically aggressive because it was always prepared for war and could plan an offensive attack secretly. A conscript army could neither prepare for war stealthily nor go on the offensive quickly because of the length of time it took to mobilize.²⁶ Nadolny countered that an army, regardless of its type of training or length of service, was aggressive as long as it maintained large offensive weapons such as the French military had.²⁷ The new German stand made standardization a major obstacle at the conference.

The problem of determining which forces to include in

²⁴Neurath to Bernhard von Bülow, November 21, 1932, German Archives, 3154/D668262-63; Neurath to Bülow, November 22, 1932, ibid., 3154/D672437-39.

²⁵Thirty-fifth meeting, February 16, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 271-78.

²⁶Thirty-sixth meeting, February 17, 1933, ibid., pp. 278-88.

²⁷Thirty-seventh meeting, February 22, 1933, ibid., pp. 288-97.

calculating the size of armies had been raised during the first phase of the conference, so it was not entirely new. Adding to the German demand of a year earlier that the French had to consider their trained reserves as part of their total military, Nadolny insisted that colonial troops also had to be included.²⁸ He observed that two thirds of those colonial forces were either in France or close enough by that they could be used in its regular army.²⁹ While the French adamantly opposed the German requirements, French Air Minister Pierre Cot demanded that Nazi Stormtroops and other German organizations that received military training be considered part of Germany's armed forces.³⁰ Nadolny concurred that groups which received military training had to be regarded as part of the regular army, but he did not admit that German police and Nazi organizations fit that classification.³¹ The issue, therefore, remained unsettled.

By the second week of March, French and German arguments brought the conference to a standstill. Five weeks of debates had shown that, in spite of the British program of work, there would be little progress at Geneva. The bleak

²⁸Thirty-fifth meeting, February 16, 1933, ibid., pp. 271-78; Thirty-seventh meeting, February 22, 1933, ibid., pp. 288-97.

²⁹Thirty-ninth meeting, February 27, 1933, ibid., pp. 303-13.

³⁰Thirty-sixth meeting, February 17, 1933, ibid., pp. 278-88.

³¹Forty-second meeting, March 3, 1933, ibid., pp. 327-38.

outlook for a convention concerned the MacDonald government which hoped for some kind of arms agreement in 1933 even with the deteriorating political situation in Europe.

Anthony Eden had been advising his government that the conference was certain to collapse without British intervention. His warnings prompted the MacDonald cabinet to decide that the crisis required a bold new approach. It hoped to save the disarmament negotiations by drafting a detailed convention that contained, for each country, specific figures for effectives and for most categories of weapons. A complete disarmament plan, the British felt, would turn the attention of France and Germany away from the political questions surrounding sécurité and Gleichberechtigung and toward disarmament, which their program of work had failed to do.³² An agreement acceptable to France and Germany might then be within the realm of possibility.

What kind of a settlement did the British government seek in 1933? No longer one that provided only for disarmament by the armed powers, which had been its objective throughout the previous year. With the political changes in Germany there would be little possibility of gaining an agreement without making a concession to German demands. The British feared that Germany would rearm without controls if an agreement was not concluded at Geneva, using as its

³²Simon to Stanley Baldwin, March 12, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 180, W 2738/40/98.

justification that the others had broken their promise of December 1932 to grant Germany equality. A "political appeasement" with the Hitler regime was necessary.³³

Specifically, the MacDonald cabinet was prepared to offer the Germans a modest increase in their military forces in exchange for a limit on their rearmament. For its part, Germany had to abolish the Reichswehr in favor of a short-term conscript army and it had to place its signature on a new promise to remain within its present limits of land and air weapons. The British assumed that a German signature could be trusted for at least five years because world opinion would mobilize against Germany if it broke an agreement. The physical weakness of the country would keep it from violating a convention and risking international condemnation.³⁴ An agreement which temporarily controlled German rearmament was better than none at all.

The disarmament proposals were the product of a thorough study during February by the military service departments and by the Foreign Office. The service departments selected figures for military weapons and effectives which they considered compromises between the French and German positions.³⁵

³³Aide-mémoire [March 1933], ibid., W 3130/40/98.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. II: Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 31. (Hereinafter referred to as Facing the Dictators); Major-General Arthur C. Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of

Since land forces of the continental countries were the primary source of dispute between France and Germany, the proposals were the most specific in that area. To appease Germany, its new conscript army was to be 200,000 men, twice the number allowed in the Versailles Treaty for the Reichswehr. The French army eventually would be the same size. Germany would increase its army to that level while France decreased its during a five-year period. The British, however, allowed France an additional colonial force of 200,000, disregarding Germany's insistence that the French calculate colonial troops stationed in or near the homeland as part of their army. All continental armies would be standardized, following the Herriot Plan, with terms of eight months.³⁶ The British excluded themselves from the tables for land forces because the size of their army was not an issue at the conference.

Limits were also placed on the size of weapons allowed the armed powers. Those arms above the limits would be destroyed, not turned over to the League as the French wanted. Land guns would be restricted to 105 mm., but the French could retain existing guns up to 155 mm. Tanks larger than sixteen

Europe (London: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., 1938), pp. 235-39; Charles Vane, the Marquess of Londonderry, Wings of Destiny (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1943), pp. 74-75.

³⁶Draft Convention submitted by the British delegation, March 16, 1933, League of Nations, Conference Documents, II, 476-94.

tons would be prohibited, a proposal that reflected British reluctance to abolish small tanks.³⁷ Foreign Secretary Simon wanted a five-year holiday on tank construction to make the draft more palatable to the Germans, but while he and MacDonald were in Geneva the rest of the cabinet rejected that idea, arguing that it was not worth risking British military defense on the improbable chance of making a contribution at Geneva.³⁸

Naval and air portions of the British plan were less detailed than the land section. The naval proposals provided for France and Italy to accede to the terms of the London Naval Treaty by the end of 1936. The British assumed that they and the other naval powers had reduced as far as practical. The draft also followed the established position of Great Britain by favoring retention of capital ships and outlawing of submarines. Military aviation was to be abolished. During the first five years, France, Britain, Italy and the United States would reduce their military aircraft to 500 each and subsequently they would decrease their aircraft further. Bombing would be illegal except in colonial areas where it might be needed to maintain order.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Simon to Baldwin, March 12, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 180, W 2738/40/98; Baldwin to Simon, March 13, 1933, ibid., No. 171, W 2738/40/98.

³⁹ Draft Convention submitted by the British delegation, March 16, 1933, League of Nations, Conference Documents, II, 476-94.

The British disarmament plan was designed to be a compromise between sécurité and Gleichberechtigung. For Germany, the disarmament convention would recognize the principle of equality as set forth in the Five-Power Declaration. Repeating Britain's November statement, the plan affirmed that the disarmament convention would replace the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty. It promised Germany a substantial step toward practical equality by doubling its land forces and decreasing the size of weapons retained by the other powers. To meet French sécurité needs, the League would be responsible for investigating breeches of the disarmament convention. Some states, such as France and Germany, could also voluntarily agree to conduct periodic inspections in order to satisfy themselves that neither was violating the terms of the agreements. In addition, a Permanent Disarmament Commission would study new measures that would lead to greater security for Europe.⁴⁰ While the plan represented the furthest distance that the British had gone to date in support of additional European security, it fell short of French demands for mutual assistance. The disarmament plan did not fully satisfy either France or Germany, but the British Foreign Office hoped that those countries would realize that the proposals would ultimately fulfill their demands.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Eden, Facing the Dictators, p. 39.

In early March, the cabinet approved the disarmament proposals, but it did not submit them to the conference at that time.⁴² Prime Minister MacDonald and Foreign Secretary Simon wanted to assess the state of the conference before deciding whether to publish the plan at once or to organize top-level private talks first.⁴³ Accordingly, during the second week of March they went to Paris and then to Geneva.

MacDonald and Simon learned that the impasse at the conference was as serious as Eden had described it. The Germans and the French showed less inclination to negotiate than they had in 1932. The French did not want to take part in private talks with the new Hitler government.⁴⁴ Daladier told the prime minister that he could see no way to break the deadlock at Geneva and warned that, instead of disarmament, there was a possibility of a Franco-German arms race.⁴⁵ The Germans offered no more encouragement to the prime minister than the French had. While MacDonald was assessing the state of the conference, Hermann Göring, Nazi minister without portfolio, dismissed the disarmament meetings as an attempt by the armed powers to sabotage Germany's efforts to restore its air

⁴²Ibid., p. 31.

⁴³Cabinet conclusions, March 8, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 15, W 2705/40/98.

⁴⁴Simon to William Tyrrell, March 3, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 500.

⁴⁵Meeting of British and French representatives, March 10, 1933, ibid., pp. 502-507.

force.⁴⁶ At Geneva, Rudolf Nadolny informed MacDonald that he saw little prospect for further progress at the conference. He was reluctant to hold private talks, fearing that the British would try to force his government to modify its demand for equality.⁴⁷ There was no evidence that either France or Germany would go out of its way to end the stalemate at Geneva.

The conversations that MacDonald held in Paris and Geneva convinced him that there was no chance to arrange new five-power talks. The only avenue remaining to break the impasse at the conference was to offer the draft that his government had prepared. The prime minister, though, confided in a reporter from the London Times that he held out little hope that the plan would be accepted.⁴⁸ Because he lacked confidence that the proposals would break the stalemate at Geneva, MacDonald hesitated to submit them until the morning of his scheduled speech. It was ironic that MacDonald, the leading advocate in the British government for world disarmament, presented the draft only after much persuasion from Eden; Cadogan; and Arthur Temperley, the War Office advisor to the delegation.⁴⁹

⁴⁶The Times (London), March 13, 1933, p. 14

⁴⁷Patteson to Simon, March 6, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, IV, 500-501; Meeting of British and German representatives, March 11, 1933, ibid., pp. 515-17.

⁴⁸Aubrey Leo Kennedy, Britain Faces Germany (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 84.

⁴⁹Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, p. 240.

On March 16, the prime minister submitted to the conference the British disarmament draft, which became known as the MacDonald Plan. For an hour and a half he spoke to the General Commission, impressing upon the delegates the urgency of drafting a disarmament convention.⁵⁰ He argued that the British proposals were designed to prevent the conference from failing. "If there were failure," he warned, "the stream of events would drive with increasing swiftness to catastrophe."⁵¹ The prime minister's speech was forceful, even though he was personally skeptical that the plan would save the conference from imminent collapse.

While the British government awaited the response to its plan from Paris and Berlin, MacDonald defended it to the House of Commons on March 23. The most violent attack on the proposals came from Winston Churchill, a Conservative member of Parliament, who charged that the draft was merely another plan to be added to the many existing ones. "I understand that already . . . there are 56 disarmament plans. Perhaps the Prime Minister has the right figure. It may be more now, because he has been two or three days away from Geneva." The Labour Opposition also attacked the government, but for not moving more quickly to appease Germany. To Labour, MacDonald retorted that the disarmament plan took the first concrete

⁵⁰Eden, Facing the Dictators, p. 34.

⁵¹Forty-fifth meeting, March 16, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 357.

step that would lead to German equality.⁵² Even though a number of members criticized specific parts of the draft, the House of Commons generally supported the government's new disarmament policy.

Response in France to the MacDonald Plan was not as hostile as the prime minister had expected. To be sure, there was criticism. The press, almost without exception, denounced the proposals for being contrary to the French conception of sécurité. Official reaction, however, was more moderate. Daladier's government studied the British draft carefully before replying. On March 27 the spokesman for the delegation, René Massigli, told the General Commission that France might be willing to use the draft as a basis for discussion at the conference. He criticized the inadequate treatment of security, however, and warned that France planned extensive alterations of the draft.⁵³

Daladier told the Chamber of Deputies on April 6 that he was satisfied that MacDonald's proposals met some of the fundamental principles of sécurité. Most important, it linked disarmament to security and acknowledged the French view of suppressing professional armies and of controlling quasi-military organizations in Germany. France needed further assurance, however, that Germany would not rearm. The

⁵²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., Vol. 276, cols. 511-20, 539, 543.

⁵³Fiftieth meeting, March 27, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 385-403.

premier wanted to strengthen the British proposals by including a system of permanent control over military budgets and guarantees that no country could manufacture arms illegally. He promised that France would disarm after receiving those assurances.⁵⁴ Daladier did not say how far France would reduce its arms if it did obtain such concessions, but with reaction to the Hitler regime growing in France, reductions even approaching the British figures were unlikely. Nevertheless, his willingness to discuss the MacDonald Plan helped to break the impasse at Geneva.

The German government was also more receptive to the proposals than MacDonald had expected. Nadolny told the British that his government would agree to reach practical equality by stages. The Germans, though, made it clear that they expected major alterations of the MacDonald Plan, leading to greater equality.⁵⁵ When Hitler spoke to the Reichstag on March 23, he commended the prime minister for the proposals, but implied that they fell short of German demands.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ France, Chambre des Députés, Journal officiel de la République française, débats parlementaires, 1919-1939, 15th Legislature, April 6, 1933, pp. 1929-30.

⁵⁵ Conversation between James Ramsay MacDonald, Simon and Benito Mussolini, March 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 70-76; Conversation between Commander G. D. Belden and Admiral von Freyberg, March 23, 1933, ibid., pp. 116-17; Rudolf Nadolny to Neurath, March 20, 1933, United States, Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C: The Third Reich, First Phase (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), I, 186-89.

⁵⁶ Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, March 23, 1933, Berber, Dokumente, VII, 15-17.

Still, the Germans did not reject the plan. Hitler wanted to avoid risking a rupture at Geneva as long as possible because he was still preoccupied with establishing Nazi rule in Germany. Nadolny announced to the General Commission on the twenty-seventh that his government was willing for the conference to proceed on the basis of the British draft.⁵⁷

The British draft disarmament convention saved the conference from collapse, contrary to MacDonald's expectation. The impasse was broken and the General Commission voted unanimously to proceed on the basis of the draft.⁵⁸ The conference then was able to adjourn on a note of optimism for a month-long Easter recess until April 25. Eden later claimed that he and Temperley had felt that the delegates might have accepted the draft had they not recessed.⁵⁹ Any optimism at that time was premature, however, because both the French and German governments had warned that they expected to revise the proposals to reflect their own demands of sécurité and Gleichberechtigung. Simon viewed the situation more realistically when he wrote that agreement remained out of sight.⁶⁰ The disputes which had prompted the British to propose their

⁵⁷ Fiftieth meeting, March 27, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 385-403.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Eden, Facing the Dictators, pp. 35, 40.

⁶⁰ John Simon, Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Viscount Simon (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p. 186.

disarmament plan could emerge as soon as the French and Germans began discussing it in April.

CHAPTER VI

THE FOUR-POWER PACT AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND PHASE OF MEETINGS: MARCH-JUNE 1933

Right after the British introduced their proposals on March 16, a second attempt to remove the obstacles to an agreement at Geneva was made--this one outside of the conference machinery. The uncertain future of the disarmament negotiations prompted Italian Premier Benito Mussolini to offer a new scheme to resolve the differences among the major powers. He envisioned a general settlement of all European problems, including the arms controversy, by Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany. Mussolini's intervention was unexpected since he had not been personally involved in the conference, but it was welcomed by British Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald because among Europe's leaders, the Italian premier was in the best position to mediate with German Chancellor Adolf Hitler.

Mussolini's motive for coming forward with a proposal to solve the outstanding problems in Europe can be found in his revisionist policies toward the World War settlement. Italy was dissatisfied with the territorial status quo that had been created in 1919. The chances of bringing about

changes in Europe favorable to Italy through the League of Nations were limited because of the size and structure of that organization and because of the influence that the small nations had in it. The hands of the great powers were tied in the League. Alterations in the status quo would best be initiated outside of the League, as a result of an agreement among Italy, Germany, Great Britain and France. By that arrangement Mussolini would have the greatest opportunity to fulfill his own foreign policy goal of treaty revision.

His revisionist policy gave Mussolini something in common with the Germans, who also wanted to alter the status quo in Europe. It was to Mussolini's advantage to support German arguments for territorial changes and a satisfactory arms settlement because that would open the door to other changes beneficial to Italy. The Italians backed demands by Germany at Geneva for Allied disarmament and for increases in German arms. Their support grew more active in 1933 after Adolf Hitler became chancellor and Germany's revisionist intentions came more out in the open.¹ Italy was willing to allow increases in the military strength of Germany because that would reduce the relative power of France and its allies on the Continent and would, consequently, raise the status of Italy in European politics and enhance the value

¹Konstanty Skirmunt to Josef Beck, March 9, 1933, Józef Lipski, Diplomat in Berlin, 1933-1939, edited by Wacław Jędrzejewicz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 60-62.

of Italian mediation from the view of the French and British. The Italians did not approve uncontrolled German rearmament, which could jeopardize their own security and goals for the future. Never during the conference did they advocate releasing Germany from all military restrictions.

Mussolini wanted to appease Hitler's demands, but also to place limits upon German arms acquisitions. This attitude made him appear at times as a champion of German interests and at other times as a mediator. His plan for the four powers to cooperate in solving European problems looked like a sincere attempt at mediation to preserve peace in Europe, while in fact it was a scheme that would be mutually beneficial for German and Italian revisionist policies.

To gain British support for his scheme, the Italian premier invited Prime Minister MacDonald to Italy in March. After MacDonald presented the British disarmament proposals to the conference, therefore, he and Foreign Secretary John Simon journeyed to Rome on the eighteenth.² There, Mussolini handed the prime minister a draft of the Four-Power Pact to be signed by France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy.³

²Conversation between James Ramsay MacDonald, John A. Simon and Baron Pompeo Aloisi, March 14, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2, Vol. IV (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), pp. 526-30. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP); Conversation between MacDonald, Simon and Aloisi, March 14, 1933, ibid., pp. 430-33.

³For a discussion of the negotiations leading to the

Mussolini proposed that those four western nations coordinate their policies to guarantee peace in Europe and, if necessary, to persuade other European countries to follow their policy. The four powers would recognize the principle of treaty revision and would reconsider those parts of the war treaties that had a potential to lead to conflicts between states. They would adopt a common stand on all European and non-European questions, including colonial issues. To settle the immediate problem of the disarmament negotiations, Mussolini suggested that, if the conference failed to produce a satisfactory convention, the four powers would allow Germany and the other disarmed powers to obtain practical military equality through a series of successive, regulated stages.⁴

The pact had far-reaching implications for Europe. It joined the four western powers into a small league of nations that would solve the disputes left over from the war. The idea of creating a directorate in Europe was not novel: the Holy Alliance of 1815 had been a similar cooperative effort by a few great powers to influence European events, although their purpose had been to maintain the status quo instead of to change it. The idea was within the realm of possibility

pact see: Konrad Hugo Jarausch, The Four Power Pact, 1933 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1965).

⁴Political Agreement of Understanding and Co-operation between the Four Western Powers, March 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 67.

for the 1930's also, since only five years later leaders of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany met at Munich to solve the Czech crisis.

Mussolini's Four-Power Pact provided for revision of the Versailles Treaty, the fundamental issue between Germany and France. Mussolini did not mention specific revision other than allowing Germany to rearm if the conference failed, but he certainly envisioned territorial adjustments in Eastern Europe as well as colonial changes. His draft, then, opened the way for altering the status quo and for settling the disarmament problem among the four governments. The main beneficiaries of the pact would be the revisionist powers, Italy and Germany; the main loser would be France which held to the inviolability of the war treaties. The allies of France, Russia, and the League of Nations would be delegated secondary roles in European decision making.

MacDonald liked the pact. Its approach to European problems was similar to the prime minister's attempts to resolve differences among the four powers in private, top-level talks. There is evidence that MacDonald had even mentioned at Geneva creating a council of the four powers that would facilitate change in Europe by steering proposals through the cumbersome machinery of the League of Nations.⁵ The pact

⁵Memorandum by Jay Pierrepont Moffat, March 24, 1933, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1933 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), I, 396-98. (Hereinafter referred to as FRUS, 1933.)

also appealed to the prime minister because it had little potential to harm British interests. In fact, an arrangement among the four powers which might make it easier to settle the primary problems in Europe would serve British policy of maintaining stability on the Continent.

British interest in the Four-Power Pact sheds light on the general attitude of the government toward the war settlement, the League of Nations and the position of Germany in European affairs. It shows that the British were agreeable to revisions in the treaties and doubted that such changes would come through the League of Nations. MacDonald and the Conservatives were not opposed to the four Western European powers developing a close relationship in order to resolve the differences between France and Germany that remained from 1919. Great Britain and Italy would be the mediators of a settlement. While the pact never led to a meaningful association of the four governments, the negotiations surrounding it showed the path that British policy would follow in future years, and foreshadowed the meeting of those same countries at the 1938 Munich Conference.

Since the idea behind the Four-Power Pact was revision of the war settlement, which would mainly benefit Germany and Italy, British attraction to Mussolini's scheme displayed a tendency toward appeasement. Their favorable response to the pact showed that the British were ready to consider concessions to the Germans as long as Hitler would give some

assurance of a reasonable foreign policy.⁶ This attitude had already emerged with the MacDonald Plan of March 16, which offered Germany a modest increase in military effectives. It became more evident later in the conference, when the British were willing to make extensive concessions to Hitler in order to assure peace in Europe.

Even though the prime minister supported Mussolini's draft, he recognized that it had to be altered. Hitler had approved the pact, but MacDonald believed that Daladier's ministry would not accept it.⁷ He and Simon revised it to be more appealing to the French government by adding a statement in which the signatories of the pact affirmed their respect for treaty obligations.⁸ With that change, MacDonald and Simon proceeded to obtain French approval, while Mussolini tried to persuade the Germans to accept the revision.

⁶Arthur H. Furnia, The Diplomacy of Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations and the Prelude to the World War II, 1931-1938 (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of Washington, 1960), pp. 80-84; William J. Newman, The Balance of Power in the Interwar Years, 1919-1939 (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 170-72; Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between the Wars: Conflicting Strategies of Peace since Versailles (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 262-63, 317-19; see also the interesting chapter, "The Birth of Appeasement: 1933," in Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), pp. 3-24.

⁷Conversation between MacDonald, Simon and Benito Mussolini, March 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 70-76.

⁸Revise containing suggestions provisionally made at a conversation at the British Embassy, March 19, 1933, ibid., pp. 68-69.

The new pact received a cool reception in Berlin and Paris. Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath complained to the Italians that the revision made the draft lose its meaning. Nevertheless, the Germans were agreeable to a statement on the inviolability of treaties as long as there was an equally strong statement that approved the principle of treaty revision.⁹

Hostility in France to the pact was greater than in Germany. Premier Édouard Daladier and Joseph Paul-Boncour told the British that they would not consider proposals which sanctioned treaty revision and which allowed Germany freedom to rearm if the conference failed.¹⁰ France was influenced by its allies--the Little Entente, Poland and Belgium--who feared that the scheme would create a directorate of the great powers which would make territorial changes in Europe at the expense of the small nations.¹¹ On April 6, Daladier

⁹Constantin von Neurath to Ulrich von Hassall, March 24, 1933, United States, Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C: The Third Reich, First Phase (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), I, 211-17.

¹⁰Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III République, les lendemains de la victory, 1919-1934 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), II, 340; Meeting of British and French representatives, March 21, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 86-98.

¹¹Émile Cartier to Paul Hymans, April 5, 1933, Belgium, Académie royale de Belgique, Commission royale d'histoire, Documents diplomatiques belges, 1920-1940, la politique de sécurité extérieure (Brussels: De Visscher and Vanlangenhove, pubs., 1964), III, 97-99; Eduard Beneš, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš: From Munich to New War and New Victory, trans. by Godfrey Lias (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954), p. 2.

assured his country's allies as well as skeptical delegates in the Chamber that he would sign nothing that resembled a "Holy Alliance" which would alter borders without regard to other countries.¹² Instead of rejecting the pact, however, he preferred to eliminate the parts of it that were unacceptable to France and its allies. Daladier and Paul-Boncour explained that the government was willing to negotiate the pact because it provided a basis for continued collaboration among the four powers.¹³ With assurances from the ministry that it intended to alter the Mussolini-MacDonald draft to the benefit of France, the Chamber, dominated by Radicals, Socialists and moderate Left groups, voted four to one in support of Daladier's policy.¹⁴ Neither the Germans nor the French, therefore, planned to sign the pact without changing it to meet their own needs.

Arriving at a text suitable to the French and Germans was arduous. Several drafts and revisions passed between the four capitals during March and April, with MacDonald and Mussolini interceding between Paris and Berlin. Each change took the text a step away from the original draft. For the most part, the pact reached its final form by the time the

¹²France, Chambre des Députés, Journal officiel de la République française, débats parlementaires, 1919-1939, 15th Legislature, April 6, 1933, pp. 1929-30. (Hereinafter referred to as Débats Parlementaires.)

¹³Ibid., pp. 1947-50.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1956.

conference reconvened at the end of April, although minor changes followed before all four governments were willing to initial it in early June.

The final text of the Four-Power Pact reflected skillful French diplomacy. Daladier kept his promise to the Chamber that he would eliminate the unacceptable parts of the original draft. The four powers agreed to cooperate to maintain peace, but to do so within the framework of the League. They removed the statement on colonial questions. They eliminated direct reference to the principle of treaty revision, affirming only that they would examine problems which related to the war treaties. Mussolini's proposal to grant Germany practical equality if the conference failed was also unrecognizable. The final draft declared only that the four powers would maintain the right to re-examine questions that remained unsolved after the conference terminated.¹⁵ Instead of recognizing the principle of revision, therefore, the pact confirmed the French policy of maintaining the status quo in Europe.

The Four-Power Pact, which would have had considerable impact on the conference in its original draft, had little influence in its final form. In the end, the German and French governments recognized that the pact was worthless to

¹⁵Four-Power Pact, June 7, 1933, John W. Wheeler-Bennett, ed., Documents on International Affairs, 1933 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 240-49.

their objectives and they never implemented it.¹⁶ The significance of the pact for the purpose of the conference was not so much in what it stated, but in what it did not say. The diplomats had removed all of the controversial statements from Mussolini's draft until it was empty of meaning. Only then were they able to initial it. The pact was in reality a portent for the future of the conference; it demonstrated the improbability of a Franco-German agreement over the disarmament dispute.

While the four powers were still negotiating the pact, the General Commission resumed meeting on April 25. The delegates at Geneva proceeded with the first reading of the MacDonald Plan, considering each article in succession. They submitted numerous amendments, prompting Anthony Eden, leader of the British delegation, to observe, "This job is like trying to force a bill through an international House of Commons with no whips and no government majority."¹⁷ Most of the amendments came from the Germans and French, who had warned as they returned to Geneva that they would insist upon major changes in the British draft.¹⁸ When the delegates

¹⁶Ronald William Graham to Simon, June 19, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 358-73; France, Débats parlementaires (Chambre), 15th Legislature, June 9, 1933, pp. 2823-26.

¹⁷Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. II: Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 37.

¹⁸Article by Rudolf Nadolny, Wolff's Telegraphisches Büro (Berlin), April 19, 1933; Memorandum by Maurice A.

began discussing military effectives and standardization of the continental armies on April 28, the conference became hopelessly mired within a few days. It was evident that the British disarmament proposals had not enabled the conference to hurdle the Gleichberechtigung-sécurité dispute. The same disagreements that had caused the impasse in March and had prompted MacDonald to introduce the British proposals on March 16 halted the conference again.

German intransigence made the impasse in May more serious than the one in March. Delegation leader Rudolf Nadolny openly obstructed the conference by suddenly stiffening German demands. He wanted to eliminate the section in the British draft on standardization of armies, claiming that Germany intended to decide for itself what type of army it required. If Germany did accept standardization, it would have to include all countries instead of just the continental European nations.¹⁹ His statement was tantamount to rejecting standardization because it was unnecessary and impractical to require uniform armies throughout the world. Nadolny also

Hankey, April 15, 1933, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, 1931-1934, W 4051/40/98. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office); Note by Simon, April 16, 1933, ibid., W 4051/40/98; Victor Wellesley to Aimé Joseph de Fleuriau, April 17, 1933, ibid., W 4051/40/98.

¹⁹Fifty-fifth meeting, May 3, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1933), II, 440-52. (Hereinafter referred to as General Commission.)

told Eden that Germany expected full military parity with France at the end of five years and would increase its armaments to the French level at that time. The British proposals had made a concession toward equality, but had not promised parity. Nadolny's statements were bolstered from Berlin by Reichswehr Minister Werner von Blomberg, and by Foreign Minister Neurath who threatened that if the conference accepted the British disarmament plan Germany would construct an air force, build large guns and enlarge the Reichswehr.²⁰ The Germans had never made such bold demands in the past; it was clear that the Hitler government was expanding the thesis of Gleichberechtigung.

Threats by the German government and obstructionist tactics by its delegation at Geneva cost Germany the support that it had enjoyed previously at the conference. Eden observed that the German position was wrecking the conference and making the other delegates apprehensive.²¹ Prompted by Eden's reports, the cabinet on May 10 instructed Simon to caution Hitler that he had lost British sympathy.²² Secretary

²⁰Interview with Werner von Blomberg, Wolff's Telegraphisches Büro (Berlin), May 8, 1933; Constantin von Neurath, "Deutschlands Politik auf der Abrüstungskonferenz," Illustrierte Zeitung (Leipzig), May 11, 1933.

²¹Patteson to Simon, May 10, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 189-90; Patteson to Simon, May 9, 1933, ibid., pp. 209-210; Patteson to Simon, ibid., pp. 210-11.

²²Cabinet conclusions, May 10, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 34, W 5303/40/98; Simon to Horace G. Rumbold, May 10, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 212-13.

of War Douglas Hailsham threatened that the Germans would face sanctions if they rearmed.²³ At the same time, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a personal message to Adolf Hitler telling him to stop his delegation from obstructing the conference.²⁴ Even the Italian government, which had generally defended the German position in the past, did not support the new demands. The Germans found themselves isolated at Geneva.²⁵

By mid-May 1933 the conference was a shambles. In less than three weeks the disarmament negotiations had reached a new stalemate, again over the conflicting theses of sécurité and Gleichberechtigung. This time, however, the British could not rescue it because of the totally unreasonable stand of the German government. The Germans had to make the next move: they either had to make concessions at Geneva or break with the armed powers by withdrawing from the conference. Hitler, therefore, faced one of his first important foreign policy decisions between May 12 and 17 over the disarmament conference.

²³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), 5th ser., Vol. 87, Col. 898.

²⁴Franklin D. Roosevelt to Cordell Hull, May 6, 1933, United States, Department of State, Decimal File, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/1848.

²⁵Nadolny to Foreign Ministry, May 5, 1933, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 3154, frames D668965-67. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives); Rudolf Nadolny, Mein Beitrag (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), p. 134.

On Friday the twelfth, Hitler's cabinet met to plan its strategy. Neurath presented a gloomy picture of the Geneva proceedings. He warned that a vote on standardization was imminent and that the delegation would find itself alone, without even Italian support. Germany had to determine which course it would follow before the vote was taken. The response of Hitler was to ridicule the conference, which he said would never resolve the disarmament question. He claimed that the meetings at Geneva were being used by the others to break up the Reichswehr, or, if Germany failed to comply, to charge the Germans with destroying the disarmament effort. The chancellor, however, did not advise pulling out of the conference yet. He preferred to present a public ultimatum to the armed powers: if they refused to reduce their weapons Germany would consider that the meetings had failed and would proceed to rearm. Hitler wanted to threaten that Germany would leave the League of Nations if the conference collapsed. If the other governments imposed sanctions, he would consider that tantamount to tearing up the Versailles Treaty. Both Blomberg and Neurath advised that the delegation remain at Geneva, but no longer participate in the meetings. The burden of drafting the disarmament convention would then be upon the other nations. Neurath suspected that the united front of the Allies would vanish when they began to argue over the terms of the convention.

The cabinet concurred to remain at the conference, but

to make no concessions. It agreed to call the Reichstag into special session on the following Wednesday in which its sole agenda would be to accept a declaration that Hitler would present and to vote confidence in the government's position.²⁶ There was no discussion on the exact content of the address.

News that Hitler would address the Reichstag on the seventeenth caused speculation around the world that he would torpedo the conference. During the intervening days, the Nazi leader faced considerable pressure to moderate his position at Geneva. Premier Mussolini sent several telegrams and personal messages urging that Hitler use restraint in determining his position at Geneva.²⁷ President Roosevelt, responding to appeals from his own delegation and from Prime Minister MacDonald, delivered an address on the sixteenth in which he warned against any country rearming and appealed for the acceptance of the British disarmament proposals.²⁸ The purpose of the president's message was not so much to urge acceptance of the draft, but was to persuade the Germans to stop obstructing the conference. The American delegation at Geneva privately told the Germans that Roosevelt only wanted

²⁶Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, May 12, 1933, German Archives, 3598/D792586-91.

²⁷Alexander C. Kirk, May 18, 1933, United States, Decimal File, 500. A 15 A 4/2090.

²⁸Roosevelt to various Chiefs of State, May 16, 1933, United States, FRUS, 1933, I, 143-45.

Hitler to show forbearance when he delivered his speech the next day.²⁹ Accordingly, Nadolny, from Geneva, advised that his government reduce its demands to avoid receiving the blame for the collapse of the conference.³⁰ The restraining influences upon the government prompted Foreign Minister Neurath to change his position. He suggested to Hitler that the Reichstag speech be temperate, emphasizing that Germany wanted equality of rights only for the purpose of defending itself.³¹ Hitler made his final decision the very day of his speech. In the end, he yielded to the pressures and based part of his speech upon a moderately written draft that Neurath had hurriedly prepared the morning of the seventeenth.³²

Hitler's address to the Reichstag was uncustomarily dispassionate. He read from a manuscript for fifty minutes, speaking calmly to an audience composed almost entirely of men in Nazi uniforms.³³ Arguing that the German right to Gleichberechtigung had to be met by one means or another, he

²⁹Ferdinand Mayer, "Diary of Conversations and Events at Geneva," unpublished diary, 4 parts, United States, National Archives, Decimal File, No. 500. A 15 A 4/1469 1/2, Part II, Report No. 10, May 20, 1933.

³⁰Nadolny, Mein Beitrag, p. 134; Memorandum by Nadolny, May 16, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E536746-48.

³¹Neurath to Adolf Hitler, May 16, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D669134-35.

³²Memorandum by Neurath, May 17, 1933, ibid., 3154/D669344-45.

³³George A. Gordon to Hull, May 17, 1933, United States, FRUS, 1933, I, 149-50; Rumbold to Simon, May 17, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 250-52.

promised to cooperate fully at the conference to make it easier for the armed powers to agree on a convention. The chancellor unexpectedly consented to standardization of armies, removing the obstacle which had caused the impasse at Geneva. Further, he accepted the MacDonald Plan as the basis for the disarmament convention.

Hitler placed stipulations upon his concessions. French colonial forces had to be included as part of France's total effectives, rather than figured separately as in the MacDonald Plan. The SS and SA, on the other hand, had to be regarded as separate from the German army, but they could be supervised in order to guarantee their non-military character. Hitler insisted upon a five-year convention, during which time the armed powers would gradually reduce their weapons while Germany progressively altered its Reichswehr to the new system. He retreated from Nadolny's requirement at the conference for military parity by the end of the convention, but demanded "qualitative equality" at the conclusion of the five-year period. Qualitative equality was borrowed from the earlier request for samples of weapons which the Franz von Papen government had introduced in August. To assure the French of Germany's peaceful intentions, the chancellor offered to join additional security schemes.³⁴ He did not

³⁴Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, May 17, 1933, Adolf Hitler, My New Order, edited by Raoul de Roussy de Sales (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), pp. 173-84.

elucidate, but Neurath told Nadolny afterwards that the government would sign non-aggression pacts with France and other nations.³⁵ Hitler closed his address with an ominous warning to the other nations at Geneva: their unyielding stand could force Germany to withdraw, not only from the conference, but from the League of Nations as well.³⁶

The Reichstag address was a masterful stroke of diplomacy. It sounded conciliatory, but did not represent a departure from the known German policy. In fact, Hitler was insincere, taking into consideration his determination to rearm Germany and his scorn for the conference displayed at the cabinet meeting five days earlier. Even his unexpected concession of accepting standardized armies was less than an honest reflection of his views. At the cabinet meeting, the chancellor had told his ministers that it was unthinkable to consider changing the Reichswehr unless the other governments granted Germany heavy weapons, which no country had yet shown a willingness to do. The address was a shrewd maneuver in which Hitler retreated from the intransigent position followed at Geneva during the previous three weeks in the hope that he could alleviate the fears of France and other continental countries of an aggressive Germany. He wanted to

³⁵Instructions to the German Delegation, May 19, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E536819-23.

³⁶Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, May 17, 1933, Hitler, My New Order, pp. 173-84.

appear cooperative because he was not yet ready to risk world reaction by destroying the disarmament effort.

The speech accomplished Hitler's immediate objective of breaking the impasse at Geneva and of escaping the charge of wrecking the conference. Enthusiastic endorsement of the address came from the Italians. Il Giornale D'Italia, reflecting official opinion in the Foreign Office, devoted much of its issue the following day to laudatory editorials that emphasized the peaceful intentions and conciliatory foreign policy of the National Socialist Government.³⁷ French, British and American leaders, although showing less optimism than the Italians for the future of the negotiations, also recognized that Hitler had rescued the conference.³⁸ The speech, therefore, averted the failure of the disarmament negotiations in May.

Hitler's address enabled the conference to proceed smoothly during the remainder of the second phase. On Neurath's instructions, Nadolny withdrew his opposition to standardization and accepted the MacDonald Plan as the basis for the disarmament convention.³⁹ Nadolny confided to Eden

³⁷La Stampa (Turin), May 17, 1933, p. 1; Lavoro Fascista (Rome), May 18, 1933, p. 1; Il Giornale D'Italia (Rome), May 18, 1933, pp. 1, 7.

³⁸Roland Köster to Bernhard von Bülow, May 21, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E536877-79; Patteson to Simon, May 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 262; Gordon to Hull, May 20, 1933, United States, FRUS, 1933, I, 159-64.

³⁹Instructions to the German delegation, May 19, 1933,

that his government would also accept publication of military budgets as the French wanted and international supervision of manufacture and trade in arms.⁴⁰ The French privately promised the British that they, too, would make concessions at Geneva. Daladier's government would abandon its requirement that heavy weapons be retained by the League; it would agree to destroy them as the MacDonald Plan proposed, after a period of four years.⁴¹ A new spirit of cooperation seemed to be emerging in the Franco-German dispute.

On May 22 the Americans also aided the conference by helping to resolve the security problem. Norman Davis, chairman of the delegation, elaborated on a statement that he had made on April 26 promising harmonization of American efforts with those in Europe. He explained that his country was ready to sign consultative pacts and to honor sanctions taken by the European nations against an aggressor, as long as the United States concurred on which nation was the offender.⁴²

German Archives, 7360/E536819-23; Sixty-first meeting, May 22, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 473-80.

⁴⁰Nadolny to Foreign Ministry, June 3, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E536914-17.

⁴¹Anthony Eden to Foreign Office, May 19, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 245. L. N., W 5606/40/98.

⁴²Sixty-first meeting, May 22, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 473-80; Hugh R. Wilson, Diplomat between Wars (New York: Longman's, Green and Co., 1941), p. 285.

The American offer had a direct effect upon British policy. Great Britain had been reluctant to participate in new security measures for the Continent because of the possibility of an Anglo-American clash. The British had to have assurance from the United States that it would honor sanctions imposed upon an aggressor in Europe before they could take part in such measures. Since the American concession eliminated the possibility of a conflict, the British had less reason to oppose French demands for sécurité. As a result of the American statement, they strengthened the security section of the MacDonald Plan by providing for consultation among the signatories of the convention, including non-members of the League, to prohibit aggression and to restore peace.⁴³

With the tension between France and Germany relaxed, the delegates were able to move quickly through the first reading of the draft during the last three weeks of meetings. Although many of the old differences began to appear, the delegations did not try to force a decision on specific problems. Instead, they submitted amendments to the MacDonald Plan without debates, postponing arguments until the third phase of the conference.

The result of the cooperation at Geneva came on June 7 and 8. On the seventh, Germany, France, Italy and Great Britain initialed the Four-Power Pact which they had set aside

⁴³ Sixty-third meeting, May 24, 1933, League of Nations, General Commission, II, 494-502.

during the May crisis. While the pact was of no value for solving the problems at Geneva, it appeared to the layman to be a step toward a rapprochement between France and Germany. On the following day, the delegates in the General Commission registered a further sign of progress when they unanimously accepted the MacDonald Plan as the basis for the disarmament convention.⁴⁴ The second phase of the disarmament conference, therefore, adjourned in June on a more optimistic note than the first phase had a year earlier.

Optimism for the disarmament negotiations in June 1933 was unjustified, even though some progress had seemingly been made during the last weeks of meetings. Every time the delegates had discussed disarmament during the second phase of meetings, Franco-German differences led to an impasse. British mediation, which was far greater than during the first phase, had little effect in 1933. The British program of work that was designed to facilitate the discussions at Geneva, and the MacDonald Plan of March 16 had not enabled the delegates to overcome the security-equality hurdle. Even after Hitler's speech, the delegates were able to complete the first reading of the British draft only by delaying discussion of their disagreements. The Four-Power Pact, which had been stripped of all controversial points, confirmed the unlikelihood of France and Germany signing an agreement that

⁴⁴Seventy-seventh meeting, June 8, 1933, ibid., pp. 621-33.

would lead to a rapprochement. Acceptance of the MacDonald Plan on June 8 as the basis for the future convention may have revived expectations for a successful conference, but the numerous amendments offered little tangible evidence that there would be real progress in the next phase of meetings.

The four months of meetings in 1933 reflected the dramatic changes that were underway in Europe. Most important for the disarmament negotiations was the establishment of Nazi power in Germany, which was nearing fulfillment by the time the second phase of the conference adjourned in June. Persecution in Germany against Jews and political parties were having a disquieting effect upon the other nations involved in the disarmament attempt. Rumors of German rearmament, coupled with threats from Hitler and his minister of launching out on an independent policy of military build-up, were too serious to be cloaked entirely by the chancellor's conciliatory speech of May 17. By observing German policy during those months, the impression that one gains is that Hitler intended to cooperate at Geneva only as long as he needed the conference to divert attention from his military activities.

Effects of the developments in Germany upon British, Italian and French policies were beginning to appear during the second phase of meetings. The British and Italians, while apprehensive about Hitler's intentions, were willing to make some concessions to the Nazi leader. Mussolini was

accommodating partly because of his own interest in treaty revision, but also because he wanted limits upon German rearmament which were not possible without an agreement. He showed no intention to accede fully to Hitler's demands. The British were motivated by a desire to find some basis for an agreement with Hitler which would assure that he would follow a reasonable foreign policy. They hoped that such an accord would preserve peace in Europe. Italy and Great Britain were moving toward a policy of appeasement, although in the case of the British, at least, it was still appeasement of a most limited nature.

Inevitably, the German situation would bring changes in French policy toward the conference. Since January, the French had showed growing alarm toward Germany, but publically they held to their position adopted in the previous November by the Édouard Herriot ministry. The French were carefully evaluating the developments in Germany and were nearing the point of making a thorough reassessment of their own strategy. The route they chose, whether to accommodate German demands or to increase their own security requirements, would have a great impact upon future disarmament negotiations.

CHAPTER VII

THE CULMINATION OF THE GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG-SÉCURITÉ CONTROVERSY AND GERMANY'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CONFERENCE: JUNE-OCTOBER 1933

There was a five-month delay between the second and third phases of the disarmament conference. President Arthur Henderson postponed the General Commission meetings from June until October to provide time for negotiations, recognizing that the conference would make little progress without prior agreements among the major nations.¹ Just as the talks following the first phase had cleared the way for the meetings of 1933, he expected top-level diplomacy to prepare for the third session.

The private talks during the summer and autumn of 1933 focused exclusively on the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung controversy. That dispute between France and Germany, which had nearly ruined the conference during the second phase, no longer centered upon standardization of armies. Instead, it

¹Forty-sixth meeting, June 27, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series C: Minutes of the Bureau (Geneva: Publications Department, 1935), I, 175-78. (Hereinafter referred to as Bureau.)

revolved around whether or not Germany would be allowed samples of weapons which the armed powers refused to relinquish. French and German policies polarized over the issue of samples, leading to a serious rupture in the disarmament negotiations when Germany finally withdrew from the conference.

German policy during the interval was dictated by Chancellor Adolf Hitler's total commitment to rearm his country. Rearmament of Germany may have been limited during the summer of 1933, as Defense Minister Werner von Blomberg later contended, but it was more accelerated than it had been previously and was becoming increasingly difficult to conceal.² There was evidence of extensive military and industrial mobilization. The British air attaché in Berlin learned from official sources that Hitler was deeply engaged in building an air force.³ There were similar reports of naval expansion, later confirmed by Admiral Erich Raeder, who added that the navy was undergoing personnel and structural changes that

²United States, Department of State, Special Interrogation Mission to Germany in 1945-1946, headed by DeWitt C. Poole, National Archives, Container 1, "A Report by Former Reichswehrminister Marshall von Blomberg,: September 14, 1945, pp. 2, 7. (Hereinafter referred to as Special Interrogation Mission); United States, Department of State, Nuremberg Interrogation Records, National Archives, Interrogation of Werner von Blomberg, October 12, 1945, p. 2; *ibid.*, November 17, 1945, pp. 16-17.

³Memorandum by Robert Vansittart, July 14, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser. 2, Vol. V (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), pp. 421-28. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP); Horace Rumbold to John Simon, June 27, 1933, *ibid.*, pp. 377-81.

would allow it to increase in size at a moment's notice.⁴ Military training in schools and in police forces was common. Factories were turning out large quantities of war materiel, including gas.⁵ An American businessman discovered a typewriter company in Erfurt that was manufacturing military parts, and a large arms factory in Sweden that was working three shifts a day producing machine gun parts which it sent to Germany and Japan. He observed that Nazi troops were noticeably better equipped than they had been a few months earlier.⁶ These reports were only a small portion of the accounts of German treaty violations gathered by the governments involved in the disarmament negotiations, but they showed that the Nazi government intended to reach a state of equality with the other nations with or without a disarmament convention.

Hitler, however, would not have spurned a disarmament convention as long as it was entirely compatible with his goal of gaining practical military equality for Germany on the Continent. Since Germany was already rearming, an agreement that provided only for disarmament of the armed powers

⁴Erich Raeder, Mein Leben: Bis zum Flottenabkommen mit England (Tübingen: Verlag Fritz Schlichtmayer, 1956), pp. 273-74.

⁵Memorandum by Vansittart, July 14, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 421-28.

⁶Report by Jacob W. S. Wuest, September 27, 1933, United States, War Department, General Staff, Military Attaché Reports, National Archives, Record Group 165, 2724-B-100/2.

was inadequate as was one that allowed Germany only limited numbers of sample arms.⁷ Hitler continued to use the term "samples," but he meant that Germany had to have weapons in sufficient quantity to equal the country's existing illegal arms as well as those planned for the immediate future.⁸ If he accepted a convention, it would have to be a short-term agreement which legalized German rearmament. Hitler was opportunistic enough to value such a convention which would have allowed him to escape, for a time, world recrimination for violating the Versailles Treaty restrictions. A convention that placed long-term military restrictions upon Germany was unacceptable because it would cripple his later goals. On the other hand, the chancellor had already shown his lack

⁷ Constantin von Neurath to Foreign Ministry, June 15, 1933, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 7360, frame E536974. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives); Seventy-ninth meeting, June 29, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1933), II, 637-43; Memorandum by Neurath, September 30, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D669946.

⁸ Gerhard Weinberg refers to an account from the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz of a confidential press briefing by Rudolf Nadolny for some German journalists in April, 1933. Nadolny related that the government was building an army to 600,000 men and hoped to gain an agreement at Geneva that would legalize it. See: Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 161. Nadolny's figure was clearly a long-range goal. German military projections for the following five years were closer to 300,000 because of the practical limitations of equipping and training an army. See: Esmonde M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939 (New York: The Citadel Press, 1967), pp. 17-21, 28-34.

of conviction that the conference would settle the arms question and he was fully prepared to break with the armed powers when it was no longer possible either to conceal his rearmament or to maintain an appearance of cooperation at Geneva.⁹

The French had been assessing Hitler's policy since the first of the year. Premier Édouard Daladier saw little possibility of a rapprochement with the Germans and did not expect an agreement to result from the conference as long as Hitler remained as chancellor. French fear of German rearmament was expressed by the premier in June, when he warned the British that France would increase its own military strength to maintain superiority on the Continent if Germany continued its arms build-up.¹⁰ Reacting to what they considered the growing threat from Germany, the French made a fundamental change in their policy of sécurité. This change resulted in new security proposals, published in July.

Previously, the underlying theme of France's sécurité thesis had been mutual assistance. The French had promised that they would reduce their arms, providing they obtained a formal agreement at the conference that they would receive assistance in the event of aggression from Germany. Both the Tardieu Plan of February 1932 and the Herriot Plan of the

⁹Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, May 13, 1933, German Archives, 3598/D792586-91.

¹⁰Meeting of the British, French and American representatives, June 8, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 336-43.

following November had stressed this theme. The new proposals of July 1933 de-emphasized mutual assistance in order to make the French demands more compatible with the MacDonald Plan which provided only for consultation by the signatories of the convention in the event of aggression. France still expected the signatories to sever economic and diplomatic relations with an aggressor and to use force if necessary to keep peace, but dropped its idea of concentric circles of responsibility and of an international army.¹¹ By minimizing mutual assistance, the French could claim to have moderated their demands for security.¹²

In reality the July proposals of the Daladier ministry represented, not a moderation of the sécurité thesis, but a stiffening of French demands. De-emphasis of mutual assistance was completely overshadowed by a new stress upon supervision. The immediate concern of the French was no longer to gain aid once they reduced their arms, but to stop the current rearmament of Germany, evidence of which they had been collecting in massive amounts. Thus, they shifted their security demands to require, before beginning to disarm, guarantees that Germany was abiding by the Versailles Treaty restrictions. The Germans had never rejected the idea of

¹¹For a discussion of the international army in the Tardieu Plan see above, pp. 51-52 and of the division of nations into three concentric circles of responsibility as outlined in the Herriot Plan see above, pp. 131-33.

¹²Conversation between French and British representatives, September 22, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 612-21.

supervision and had even told the British in June that they would accept some international regulation.¹³ The Daladier government, however, had in mind strong measures of direct international control, including automatic inspection and supervision and publication of defense expenditures.¹⁴ This new approach to sécurité, which was Daladier's answer to controlling German rearmament, became the cornerstone of French policy for the remainder of the conference.

To execute the July proposals, Daladier's government required an eight-year convention. The first four years would be a trial period in which the supervision system would be implemented and tested for effectiveness. Germany would transform the Reichswehr into a short-term, conscript army, as Hitler had promised in May. There would be no disarmament during that time. France agreed only to halt manufacture of artillery over 155 mm., large tanks, and other heavy weapons.¹⁵ If the system of supervision was functioning adequately--which to Daladier meant effective control of German military production--France would begin to disarm during the second four years. Even then disarmament would be nominal, involving only the largest tanks and artillery greater than

¹³Rudolf Nadolny to Foreign Ministry, June 3, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E536914-17.

¹⁴French Memorandum, July 12, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 417-20.

¹⁵Ibid.

220 mm. The figure for artillery was greater than that allowed by the MacDonald Plan which had restricted France to its existing guns of 155 mm. and had forbade new construction larger than 105 mm. The French compensated for the higher figure by agreeing to destroy the outlawed weapons instead of turning them over to the League of Nations as the Tardieu and Herriot plans had required. Daladier promised further reductions, but they would take place after the eight-year convention and then only if France felt secure from the threat of German military aggression.¹⁶

Nominally, the French government conceded to the German demand for sample arms. It promised that Germany could obtain specimens of each classification of weapons that the armed powers intended to keep. Gleichberechtigung would be met theoretically because the Germans would gain complete equality in types of armaments. The French, however, sanctioned samples for Germany only after the trial period of four years and then only a single prototype of each classification. Would the Germans ever obtain practical military equality with France? Daladier affirmed that eventually they would; not by German rearmament, but by the disarmament of the armed powers to Germany's level. The premier, asserting that he was offering his last concession, told British Foreign Secretary John Simon that he was appeasing German

¹⁶Conversation between French and British representatives, September 22, 1933, ibid., pp. 612-21.

demands for equality more than was politically safe for his government to do.¹⁷

Daladier knew that Hitler would never accede to a scheme which delayed rearmament, while at the same time imposed direct supervision on the German military. Since Hitler was already rearming Germany, he required a convention to legalize that policy. The immediate implementation of supervision and inspection would reveal Germany's illegal military expansion and give France an excuse not to proceed with the second phase of the convention. The French had created an advantageous position for themselves. They could claim a conciliatory policy while actually moving in the opposite direction, and could escape blame for the failure of the disarmament effort. Their plan showed that the French did not expect an agreement on disarmament or security to come out of the conference.

For two months after Daladier published his plan it appeared that the scheme would have little impact upon the disarmament negotiations. It elicited no response from London or Rome. The British, recognizing that the French and German governments were drawing further apart, were content to remain silent as long as the Italians did out of fear of sparking a fresh crisis.¹⁸ Hitler gave the French

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Memorandum of a meeting of John Simon, Alexander Cadogan, Norman Davis and Hugh Wilson, September 6, 1933,

proposals only passing attention. He calmly rejected the two-period convention late in July, not because it delayed disarmament, but because it postponed sample weapons for Germany until the second period.¹⁹ He had no reason to attack the Daladier Plan openly, however, since it had failed to receive general support from the other capitals.

Italian Premier Benito Mussolini changed the situation abruptly on September 16 after it was clear that negotiations were at a standstill. His policy since the first of the year had been to promote an agreement that would meet some of Hitler's revisionist demands, but also would place limits upon German rearmament. The two-month lull in the disarmament talks showed that the possibility of a convention that would sanction treaty revision and control German rearmament was slipping rapidly. On the sixteenth, therefore, in order to revive the negotiations, the premier unexpectedly accepted Daladier's two-period plan. Mussolini approved the four-year trial period including postponement of disarmament, automatic supervision and immediate transformation of the Reichswehr into a short-term, conscript army. To appease Hitler, he proposed that Germany be allowed samples of defensive weapons

United States, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division,
Norman H. Davis Papers, 1918-1942, Container 22.

¹⁹Memorandum by Neurath, July 22, 1933, United States, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C: The Third Reich, First Phase (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), I, 686-87. (Hereinafter referred to as DGFP.)

during the trial period. Without specifying numbers, Mussolini implied large quotas of arms which the Germans would obtain through a series of successive stages.²⁰ Several days later the Italian government added that it would also be willing to divide the trial period in half, postponing sample weapons for Germany until the second two years if that was necessary to win French approval for German arms.²¹

Mussolini's compromise proposals prompted the British government to reveal its position on the Daladier Plan. The British did not want to alienate France by agreeing to allow Germany sample weapons during the trial period. Public opinion would not tolerate such a policy, according to John Simon.²² On September 22, Simon and Stanley Baldwin, the leading Conservative in the cabinet, went to Paris to assure Daladier that their government supported his proposals, including his refusal to grant Germany arms until after a supervision system had proven effective. They affirmed that Great Britain would consider the promise to disarm during the

²⁰Murray to Simon, September 16, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 592-93.

²¹Baron Pompeo Aloisi, Journal: 25 juillet 1932-14 juin 1936, trans. by Maurice Vaussard (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), pp. 146-47; Conversation between Simon, Fulvio Suvich and Pompeo Aloisi, September 25, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 635-36.

²²Neurath to Foreign Ministry, September 24, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E537424; Conversation between Simon and Neurath, September 23, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 632-35; Conversation between Simon and Aloisi, September 23, 1933, ibid., pp. 627-29.

second stage nullified if the supervision disclosed that Germany was rearming. The government was willing to modify the MacDonald Plan accordingly.²³ This support for France showed that Britain, for the time being, had reached the limits of its ability to appease German demands.

The British realized that their acceptance of the French two-period plan would antagonize Hitler. Hoping to placate the Germans, Simon went to Geneva during the last week of September to meet with Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath. The meetings were fruitless. Germany would accept nothing short of obtaining sample weapons from the beginning of the convention, although Neurath was unable to specify how many were required. He said only that his government wanted, during the first period, limited numbers of those arms that the other powers refused to relinquish. During the second phase Germany had to have an "adequate" supply of arms, the exact number depending upon how many the other European countries retained.²⁴ It was clear when the statesmen parted that the Germans expected the disarmament convention to allow them substantial arms, many more than they had implied when they had first asked for samples more than a year earlier.

²³Conversation between French and British representatives, September 22, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 612-21.

²⁴Conversation between Simon and Neurath, September 23, 1933, ibid 632-35; Neurath to Foreign Ministry, September 24, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E537424; Memorandum by Neurath, September 29, 1933, ibid., 3154/D669930.

By the end of September, therefore, the positions of the four countries were clearly discernible. They concurred on the idea of a trial period, but not on when to allow Germany sample weapons or on how many to permit. France opposed samples during the trial period of four years and would grant Germany only single prototypes during the second phase. The British agreed, but were willing to reduce the first phase of the convention to three years. Germany wanted, from the beginning of the convention, an unspecified number of those weapons retained by the other powers. Although Mussolini sympathized with the Germans, he expected them to wait until the second two years of the trial period to receive sample arms.

On September 30, Neurath reported to Hitler on his talks with Simon at Geneva. In spite of Anglo-French opposition to allowing Germany samples during the trial period, Hitler did not want to break off the negotiations yet. He believed that a favorable agreement was still possible and contended that a disarmament convention would be valuable for Germany even if it did not entirely satisfy his ultimate goal of military parity. A convention that provided a sufficient number of sample weapons to legalize German rearmament during the following few years was to be desired. By "samples" the chancellor meant as many weapons as Germany was technically and economically able to produce during the convention period.²⁵

²⁵Memorandum by Neurath, September 30, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D669946.

Hitler's statements confirmed that, for practical purposes, he wanted a free hand to rearm.

Hitler thought that there was a chance to gain an agreement which allowed Germany substantial arms because he underestimated British support for France. He was surprised, therefore, when Prince Otto von Bismarck, Chargé d'Affairs in London, reported on October 4 that the British were considering a revision of the MacDonald Plan to reflect Daladier's two-period convention. A source close to Simon had given Bismarck the information. If the British did change the MacDonald Plan, they would go to the conference and request a formal rejection of Germany's demand for sample weapons during the trial period.²⁶ Although Simon had told Daladier two weeks earlier in Paris that the cabinet was willing to make that change, he had not informed Neurath.²⁷ The Germans were unprepared for the news.

Hitler hastily called Blomberg, Neurath and State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow out of a cabinet meeting on October 4 to discuss Bismarck's report. The chancellor recognized that a vote on samples at Geneva would isolate Germany. He anticipated that the other governments would present the altered MacDonald Plan as an ultimatum. If the Germans rejected it, they would receive the blame for the

²⁶Prince Otto von Bismarck to Foreign Ministry, October 4, 1933, ibid., 7360/E537577-78.

²⁷Conversation between French and British representatives, September 22, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 612-21.

collapse of the conference, a charge that Hitler wanted to avoid. The chancellor decided, therefore, to announce at once that Germany would not negotiate a revised MacDonald Plan and would leave the conference and the League of Nations if the revisions were submitted to the conference. He hoped that a firm stand would dissuade the British from sponsoring the French proposals at Geneva.

In addition, the chancellor decided to insist that the delegates return to the original task of the conference: the disarmament of the armed powers. Acknowledging, however, that there would be no significant disarmament, Hitler devised alternate terms for a convention that would still satisfy Gleichberechtigung.²⁸ If the others both rejected his terms and postponed disarmament by accepting the French two-period convention, Hitler could charge them with destroying the conference

The German chancellor sent his new conditions for a convention to the British and Italian governments on October 6. He would accept a convention of only five years, three years less than the other powers had offered, and he rejected supervision during the trial period. The convention could be divided, but only to allow for a two-year delay in disarmament by the armed powers, not to test a supervision

²⁸Memorandum by Bernhard von Bülow, October 4, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D669975-76; Instructions for the German delegation, October 6, 1933, ibid., 7360/E537591-92.

system. Germany wanted freedom to manufacture weapons in the same amounts as the other countries did. If those countries refused to place limits on certain weapons, Germany had to have liberty to produce them as well. By the end of the five years, Hitler wanted complete equality, meaning military parity.²⁹ These demands would satisfy Gleichberechtigung, which the chancellor now defined as full liberty to possess weapons on an equal basis with the rest of the major governments. Anything less than that, even doubling the figures in the Versailles Treaty, would not satisfy Hitler's view of Gleichberechtigung.³⁰

The British and Italian governments refused to meet Hitler's terms. Mussolini had supported Germany in the past and had gone along with the trial period only as a practical measure to win French approval for increases in German arms. The new demands of Hitler, that amounted to complete freedom to rearm, alarmed the Italian premier. Nevertheless, Mussolini still wanted to avoid a breakdown of the conference in order to keep open the possibility of a convention which placed limits upon German rearmament. He told British Ambassador Ronald Graham:

²⁹Memorandum by Bernhard von Bülow, October 4, 1933 ibid., 3154/D669975-76; Bülow to Ernst von Weizsäcker, October 4, 1933, ibid., 7360/E537562-65.

³⁰Instructions for the German delegation, October 6, 1933, ibid., 7360/E537591-92; "Deutschlands Anspruch auf Gleichberechtigung," October 7, 1933, ibid., 3154/D670011-13.

. . . we must regard it from a realistic point of view. German policy was at the moment in the hands of two men, Hitler and Göring, one a dreamer, the other an ex-inmate of a lunatic asylum, neither of them conspicuous for reason or logic and both suffering from an inferiority complex and a bitter sense of injustice. They would not be intimidated by a consensus of opinion against them and if the Four Powers simply refused to entertain the communication they would break off negotiations and would continue to re-arm Germany without control being possible.³¹

Without consulting the British and French, Mussolini made an eleventh-hour attempt to find a point at which Hitler would sign an agreement short of his October 6 terms. The premier sent new proposals to Berlin which allowed Germany to double its weapons during the first year of the convention.³² This generous offer, which showed how far he was ready to go to appease Hitler, brought no response from the German government. Since he failed to move the Nazi leader to a reasonable position, Mussolini dropped his efforts and publically maintained his support for the French and British insistence upon a trial period.

British opposition to German policy became more determined after Hitler revealed his demands. Norman Davis, the American delegation chairman, observed that "the British had become incredibly hard and set. As a matter of fact, it was they who were taking the lead away from France, somewhat to

³¹Ronald W. Graham to Victor Wellesley, October 11, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 674-75.

³²Memorandum by Neurath, October 12, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D670058-59.

the latter's apprehension."³³ Foreign Secretary Simon angrily chided the Germans for misinterpreting the Five-Power Declaration of the previous December, reminding them that the agreement had provided for security as well as for equality.³⁴ The cabinet rejected the new German terms on October 9.³⁵ The following day Simon went to Geneva where he relayed the decision to French Foreign Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour and obtained assurances from Davis of American concurrence with the British and French position.³⁶ On October 12, the foreign secretary told Rudolf Nadolny, head of the German delegation, that the British government was resolved to back France regarding the trial period.³⁷

Since the British showed no signs of retreating from support of France, Hitler had to determine whether or not to carry out his threat to withdraw from the disarmament conference and from the League of Nations. His decision had to come before Saturday, the fourteenth, when he expected Simon to submit the revised MacDonald Plan to the Bureau session

³³Ferdinand Mayer, "Diary of Conversations and Events at Geneva," unpublished diary, 4 parts, United States, National Archives, Decimal File, No. 500. A 15 A 4/1469 1/2, Part II, Report No. 22, October 15, 1933.

³⁴Simon to Eric Phipps, October 6, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 662-64.

³⁵Simon to Phipps, October 10, 1933, ibid., pp. 671-73.

³⁶Patteson to Wellesley, October 11, 1933, ibid., pp. 675-76.

³⁷Nadolny to Foreign Ministry, October 12, 1933, United States, DGFP, I, 912-13.

scheduled for then. When faced with the same decision the previous May, Hitler had conceded to standardization of armies, but he could not give in to the other powers on the question of samples because his rearmament program would be jeopardized. In October, he could no longer delay withdrawal.

Withdrawal involved an element of risk because of Germany's military inferiority on the Continent. A break with the war-time Allies would signify, at least to the French, that Germany intended to rearm openly in violation of the Versailles Treaty. That would give the French an excuse to intervene if they chose to do so. Although intervention and international sanctions against Germany may have been only remotely possible if Hitler left the conference and the League, they were possibilities he could not ignore. If Germany successfully avoided repercussions from leaving Geneva, however, the gamble would be a step toward dismantling the military restrictions that remained from the war. Hitler faced the most important foreign policy decision of his administration to date.

Hitler was totally preoccupied with the disarmament crisis on October 12 and 13. He summoned Nadolny from Geneva on Thursday the twelfth to report on the final British position and spent most of the following day in conference with his ministers.³⁸ Hitler personally determined the policy,

³⁸Neurath to Nadolny, October 12, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E537799; Nadolny to Neurath, October 12, 1933, ibid.,

though, and called a special meeting of his cabinet Friday evening to announce his decision. The government would not back down from its demands of October 6. If the British submitted the new security proposals the following day, Hitler would announce after the Bureau meeting that the armed powers had destroyed the conference by their refusal to disarm and had forced Germany to withdraw both from the conference and from the League of Nations. Regarding the possibility of sanctions against Germany by the armed powers, the chancellor said, "it was only a matter of keeping cool and remaining true to one's principles." He told his ministers that President Paul von Hindenburg approved his decision. Hitler intended to show the world that the German people also supported the withdrawal by afterwards holding a plebiscite on the "peace policy" of the government.³⁹ The chancellor was outwardly confident as he announced his resolution to leave Geneva.

There was no open dissent in the government to Hitler's decision to quit the conference and the League. Those who attended the meeting on Friday evening supported it. Neurath, later at Nuremberg, maintained that there was no reason for

7360/E537762-65; Neurath to Nadolny, October 12, 1933, ibid., 7360/E537774; Rudolf Nadolny, Mein Beitrag (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), pp. 139-40; Phipps to Orme G. Sargent, October 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 694-95.

³⁹Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, October 13-14, 1933, German Archives, 3598/D793999-4007.

Germany to remain at Geneva since France refused to compromise its security demands.⁴⁰ He argued, no doubt to whitewash German foreign policy of which he was the spokesman, "Hitler honestly sought some kind of adjustment with France on a numerical basis. Hitler felt it to be nonsensical for France and Germany to be enemies."⁴¹ Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen also later defended Hitler, but he claimed that he had disapproved leaving the League, an opinion which he did not express at the October 13 cabinet meeting.⁴² The only criticism came from some of the members of the delegation at Geneva such as Admiral Freyberg, Werner von Rheinbaben and Rudolf Nadolny.⁴³ According to Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Eduard Beneš, Nadolny said that Hitler's decision was "madness and the beginning of a terrible fresh tragedy and another dreadful disaster for Germany."⁴⁴ The validity of Beneš' statement cannot be verified in Nadolny's memoirs, but there is evidence

⁴⁰United States, Nuremberg Interrogation Records, Interrogation of Konstantin von Neurath, November 14, 1945, pp. 3-7.

⁴¹United States, Special Interrogation Mission, Container 2, "Minister of Foreign Office, 1932-1938," p. 3.

⁴²Franz von Papen, Memoirs, Trans. by Brian Connell (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1953), pp. 297-98.

⁴³Werner Freiherr von Rheinbaben, Viermal Deutschland (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1954), pp. 279-80; Wolfgang zu Putlitz, The Putlitz Dossier (London: Allen Wingate, Ltd., 1957), p. 88.

⁴⁴Eduard Beneš, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš: From Munich to New War and New Victory, trans. by Godfrey Lias (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954), p. 15.

that the delegation leader wanted to continue the negotiations at Geneva.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, no one openly challenged Hitler's decision to withdraw from the conference and the League.

When the Bureau met on Saturday morning, Simon, as expected, proposed revising the MacDonald Plan along the lines of the French two-period scheme. He maintained that the deterioration of European security in recent months necessitated the additional security measures. The foreign secretary suggested an eight-year convention with a trial period of three or four years, during which time Germany would be forbidden arms and a supervision system would be instated. The French, American and Italian delegations approved the changes in the MacDonald Plan, and the Bureau voted to submit them to the General Commission for debate and a final decision.⁴⁶

A few hours after the Bureau meeting, Hitler withdrew his delegation from the disarmament conference. Five days later he took Germany out of the League of Nations.⁴⁷ Hitler followed the withdrawal with a public proclamation affirming

⁴⁵Nadolny, Mein Beitrag, pp. 139-40; Nadolny to Neurath, October 12, 1933, German Archives, 7360/E537762-65; Phipps to Sargent, October 18, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 694-95.

⁴⁶Forty-eighth meeting, October 14, 1933, League of Nations, Bureau, III, 181-85.

⁴⁷Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, October 13-14, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D793999-4007; Neurath to Arthur Henderson, October 14, 1933, League of Nations, Bureau, III, 185-86; Neurath to Avenol, October 19, 1933, German Archives, 8692/E607636.

his peaceful intentions and expressing regret that the armed powers had forced him to leave the conference.⁴⁸ That evening, in a personal radio address to the German people, he made a convincing appeal for peace, disarmament and international cooperation. The Germans, he maintained, wanted a rapprochement with France; they envisioned no conflicts between the two nations. "Only a madman would consider the possibility of war between the two States, for which, from our point of view, there is no rational or moral ground." Hitler asserted that Germany would disarm entirely if the other nations did too. "If the world decides that all weapons are to be abolished down to the last machine-gun, we are ready at once to join in such a convention."⁴⁹ His statements were propaganda, designed to subdue adverse international reaction to the withdrawal and to insure widespread support at home for his policy: they did not express his actual intention to rearm Germany.

There was general approval in Germany for leaving the conference and the League. The press universally reflected the government's view that the other powers had destroyed the

⁴⁸ "Proclamation of the Reich Government to the German People," Wolff's Telegraphisches Büro (Berlin), October 14, 1933; "The Proclamation of the Chancellor to the German People," ibid., October 14, 1933.

⁴⁹ "Hitler's Radio Message," ibid., October 14, 1933. For the official government translation into English see: Adolf Hitler, Germany Declares for Peace: Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler Addressing the German Nation on October 14, 1933, (Berlin: Liebheit ant Thiesen, 1933).

conference by refusing to disarm, and that British obstruction at Geneva during recent weeks was specifically responsible for the German withdrawal.⁵⁰ There was also popular support for Hitler's decision. The American Consul-General in Berlin, George Messersmith, observed two weeks later, "I have not heard a single German, even among those who are directly opposed to the National-Socialist Party, who does not approve of the action of the Government."⁵¹ On November 12 the government asked the people in a plebiscite:

Do you, German man or woman, approve the policy of your government, and are you prepared to declare it to be the expression of your own conception and your own will and solemnly acknowledge it as yours?⁵²

The ballot did not mention the conference or the League and gave the people the simple choice of acceptance or rejection. More than ninety-five percent of the valid votes were affirmative, substantiating Hitler's claim that the German public endorsed his policy.⁵³

⁵⁰Phipps to Wellesley, October 14, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 680; Phipps to Wellesley, October 15, 1933, ibid., p. 686.

⁵¹George S. Messersmith to Cordell Hull, November 3, 1933, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1933 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), I, 301-306. (Hereinafter referred to as FRUS, 1933.)

⁵²News Chronicle (London), October 20, 1933, p. 3.

⁵³Of those who voted, those who approved totaled 40,609,147, those who opposed numbered 2,101,004, and 790,000 votes were declared invalid: The Times (London), November 14, 1933, p. 14.

The French, Italians and Americans took the news of Germany's withdrawal calmly. Mussolini, who wanted to avoid a permanent rift with Germany, said little and advised the British to show restraint also.⁵⁴ The Americans closed their eyes to the entire crisis. Secretary of State Cordell Hull reminded his delegation that the political problems of Europe were of no concern to the United States.⁵⁵ In France, where reaction should have been greatest, the government hardly took cognizance of the withdrawal. It was involved in a serious political dispute with the Socialist Party over financial policies which led to its fall nine days later.⁵⁶ Premier Daladier diverted his attention from the domestic crisis just long enough to charge that Hitler was leaving the conference solely to rearm Germany.⁵⁷ Reaction of the French government confirmed that it was resigned to the inevitability of failure at the disarmament conference. Daladier's ministry, which lacked confidence that it would gain additional security measures at Geneva or that Hitler would observe a disarmament convention once signed, showed little surprise at the rupture. The French, therefore, were too

⁵⁴Graham to Wellesley, October 15, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 684-85.

⁵⁵Hull to Davis, October 16, 1933, United States, FRUS, 1933, I, 277.

⁵⁶France, Chambre des Députés, Journal officiel de la République française, débats parlementaires, 1919-1939, 15th Legislature, October 23, 1933, pp. 3956-57.

⁵⁷Ibid., October 17, 1933, p. 3757.

preoccupied with internal affairs to make an issue of German withdrawal, and the Italians and Americans had no inclination to do so.

Only in Great Britain was initial response to German withdrawal unusually vocal. Official reaction was extremely critical of Germany, mainly because the Germans blamed the British government for sabotaging the conference by repudiating the MacDonald Plan.⁵⁸ Simon angrily countered in a radio broadcast on the seventeenth that Hitler was solely responsible for destroying the disarmament effort and for creating the tension in Europe. The foreign secretary threatened to publish documents which showed that the Germans had increased their demands during recent weeks.⁵⁹ Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald also condemned Hitler, primarily for his refusal to help guarantee European security. MacDonald even contemplated reaching the German people to counterbalance Nazi propaganda about the rupture at Geneva.⁶⁰

There was, however, a divergence of opinion among British leaders regarding the disarmament crisis. The government's arguments were backed by some respected politicians, including Austin Chamberlain, foreign secretary

⁵⁸Phipps-Wellesley, October 14, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 681-82; The Times (London), October 17, 1933, p. 14.

⁵⁹The Times (London), October 18, 1933, p. 9.

⁶⁰Bingham to Hull, October 16, 1933, United States, FRUS, 1933, I, 272-73; The Times (London), October 24, 1933, p. 16.

during the Locarno Era. Chamberlain suggested that the purpose of Hitler in leaving the conference was to have an excuse for "rearmament which in due time would enable the German Government once more to use war as an instrument of policy and to repeat the crime of 1914."⁶¹ Labour and other sources advised against adopting a reactionary policy.⁶² Air Secretary Lord Londonderry believed that Britain's first task was to appease the Germans and bring them back to Geneva.⁶³ There were other leaders--the most well-known being David Lloyd-George, the British prime minister who had negotiated the Versailles Treaty--who defended the Germans and contended that their position was morally justified.⁶⁴ Lloyd-George asked, "did we promise to disarm when Germany set the example? Has Germany done so? If she has disarmed then have we carried out our pledge?" He laid the responsibility for the current crisis directly upon MacDonald and Simon.⁶⁵ With British

⁶¹Austin Chamberlain, Speeches on Germany (Paris: Centre D'Informations Documentaries, 1933), p. 2.

⁶²The Times (London), October 18, 1933, p. 14; Daily Herald (London), October 16, 1933, p. 7; Daily Telegraph (London), October 16, 1933, p. 4; Morning Post (London), October 16, 1933, p. 7.

⁶³Charles Vane, The Marquess of Londonderry, Ourselves and Germany (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1938), pp. 16-18, 46, 62-64.

⁶⁴The Manchester Guardian, October 16, 1933, p. 5.

⁶⁵David Lloyd-George, "Broken Pledges," News Chronicle (London), October 18, 1933, p. 3.

opinion thus divided, it was unlikely that the government would maintain its harsh stand against Germany for long.

Hitler's gamble of taking Germany out of the conference and the League of Nations was successful. He escaped the blame for disrupting the conference, at least in his mind and in the mind of the German people. The chancellor received nothing more than protests from the other governments. After a few days he confidently told his ministers:

Germany could now let events take their course. No step by Germany was necessary. Germany was finding herself in the pleasant situation of being able to watch how the conflicts between the other powers turned out. The critical moment had probably passed. The excitement will presumably subside by itself within a short time. The other side will look for a way to get in contact with us again.⁶⁶

Hitler recognized that, if the others wanted a convention, they would have to entice him back to Geneva by accepting his terms and approving a large measure of German rearmament.

The German withdrawal from Geneva in October 1933 was the culmination of the steadily widening gulf between France and Germany over the sécurité-Gleichberechtigung issue. The two-period convention which Daladier had proposed in July reflected a growing distrust in France of the Hitler regime. His plan appeared to be a concession to the Germans because it allowed them eventually to acquire prototypes of arms. Actually, it was a step away from an agreement since it postponed disarmament and subjected Germany to four years of

⁶⁶Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, October 17, 1933, United States, DGFP, II, 11-12.

supervision without permitting sample weapons during that period. The British recognized that the Daladier Plan reduced the possibility of an accommodation between France and Germany, but they were unwilling to risk an open break with France by supporting a convention that legalized even a small measure of German rearmament during the first phase. Their support, along with Mussolini's, of the two-period plan prompted Hitler to retaliate with his counter-proposals of October 6. Those new demands, which redefined Gleichberechtigung as the right of Germany to manufacture weapons limited only by its capacity to produce them, further widened the gulf between France and Germany. The policies of both countries had become inflexible by October 1933, leaving no basis for compromise.

After Hitler revealed his new terms for a convention, German withdrawal from the conference was inevitable. The British and Italians refused to support the claim to Gleichberechtigung as Hitler defined it in October, leaving Germany without an ally at the conference. If the two-period proposal had come up for a vote at Geneva, the Germans would have had to reject it formally and face the accusation that their intransigence ruined the disarmament effort. Rather than risk that charge, Hitler left Geneva on the rationale that the armed powers had destroyed the disarmament conference by refusing to disarm and by repudiating Germany's rightful claim to equality. The German withdrawal, while not causing

the immediate demise of the conference, laid the basis for its collapse several months later.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COLLAPSE OF THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

The disarmament conference lasted six months after Germany left Geneva in October 1933. Responsibility for keeping the meetings alive thereafter rested primarily with Great Britain and France, who could have abandoned the work at Geneva and allowed the charge to remain that Germany had subverted their years of toil. The conference did not collapse at once because the French and British governments were unwilling to forsake it and admit publicly that the disarmament effort had failed.

France wanted to convene the third phase of the conference as scheduled, but showed no inclination to entice the Germans back to Geneva by moderating its position.¹ Radical Premier Albert Sarraut, who replaced Édouard Daladier on October 27, was under considerable public and political pressure to concede nothing to Germany. The French public would not tolerate a convention that legalized German

¹Fiftieth Meeting, October 25, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series C: Minutes of the Bureau (Geneva: Publications Department, 1936), II, 187-89. (Hereinafter referred to as Bureau.)

rearmament, Ambassador André François-Poncet told the Nazi government.² Most politicians in the Chamber also opposed modifying the government's policy and Premier Sarraut assured them that he would make no new offers to Germany.³ Accordingly, Sarraut refused to abandon the demand for a two-period convention that his predecessor had introduced in July, and he called for the General Commission to resume meeting in order to draft a convention based on the Daladier Plan.⁴

The French knew, of course, that Germany would not return to Geneva without prior assurances of its demands being met, and that a convention would never be concluded without a German signature. Why, then, did they want to keep the conference alive? By proceeding with the third

²Memorandum by Gerhard Köpke, November 11, 1933, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy T-120, Serial 3154, frames D670250-57. (Hereinafter referred to as German Archives); memorandum by Constantin von Neurath, November 10, 1933, ibid., 3154/D670245-48.

³France, Chambre des Députés, Journal officiel de la République française, débats parlementaires, 1919-1939, 15th Legislature, November 9, 1933, pp. 4037-43. (Hereinafter referred to as Débats parlementaires); ibid., November 14, 1933, pp. 4100-4106, 4113-19, 4123-30, 4143; William G. Tyrrell to Robert G. Vansittart, December 31, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, edited by Earnest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, Ser 2, Vol. VI (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), pp. 228-30. (Hereinafter referred to as DBFP.)

⁴Memorandum on disarmament policy, November 15, 1933, France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Négociations relatives à la réduction et à la limitation des armements, 14 octobre 1933-17 avril 1934 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1934), pp. 9-11. (Hereinafter referred to as Négociations); memorandum by Anthony Eden, October 31, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, V, 737-38.

phase of meetings, they could demonstrate to the world that they actually desired to disarm and that the failure at Geneva was due to the absence of Germany. This attitude toward the conference remained unchanged during the remainder of the Radical-dominated ministries which lasted into February of the following year.

The British were also determined that the conference continue, but they wanted Germany to return to Geneva before the third phase of meetings began. They were unwilling to proceed with drafting a convention as France wished because that would only confirm the German refusal to negotiate. Instead, the British government began to consider a further accommodation of Germany by retreating from support of the French two-period proposals and by revising the MacDonald Plan in order to make it more appealing to Adolf Hitler.⁵ Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald, without success, even invited the German chancellor to discuss a disarmament settlement with him in London.⁶ Britain's resolve that Hitler

⁵Memorandum by John Simon, October 20, 1933, Great Britain, Public Record Office MMS, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, No. C.P. 240 (33) W 12072/40/98. (Hereinafter referred to as Foreign Office); Cabinet conclusions, November 8, 1933, ibid., No. 61/33 W 12864/40/98; Eighty-first meeting, October 26, 1933, League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Series B: Minutes of the General Commission (Geneva: Publications Department, 1936), III, 648-52. (Hereinafter referred to as General Commission.)

⁶Leopold von Hoesch to Neurath, November 10, 1933, United States, Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C: The Third Reich,

return to the negotiations, therefore, was leading the government toward a reversal of its earlier policy of support for France.

Since Britain did not support the French desire to continue work on a convention in Germany's absence, there was no reason to convene the third phase of meetings. As a result, the Bureau and General Commission met only intermittently during the following weeks and the third phase of the conference was postponed indefinitely.⁷

Hitler had been observing the attitudes of the British and French governments toward the disarmament conference. Seeing that the British were intent upon Germany returning to Geneva, he decided that there was still a chance to gain their support for a convention on his terms. Accordingly, in an interview with Le Matin of Paris in late November 1933, he revealed an interest in reopening the disarmament question with the other major powers.⁸ Hoping to break down French resistance to negotiations, the chancellor afterwards told

First Phase (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), II, 103-105. (Hereinafter referred to as DGFP); Neurath to Hoesch, November 11, 1933, ibid., p. 106.

⁷Fifty-third meeting, November 11, 1933, League of Nations, Bureau, II, 196-200; Fifty-fourth meeting, November 22, 1933, ibid., p. 200; Communication by Arthur Henderson, November 15, 1933, League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Conference Documents (Geneva: Publications Department, 1936), III, 867. (Hereinafter referred to as Conference Documents.)

⁸Interview with Adolf Hitler, Le Matin (Paris), November 22, 1933, p. 2.

François-Poncet that he was willing to conclude an agreement which involved no French disarmament at all. France could maintain its existing arms as long as Germany was allowed a moderate increase of its own weapons.⁹

The overture by Hitler to reopen private talks elicited no response from the Sarraut ministry, which was in its last days of existence, but it brought immediate reaction from London. MacDonald urged that the Foreign Office and service departments re-evaluate British policy on German rearmament so that the government would be ready with a clear statement in the event that France and Germany resumed negotiations.¹⁰ The Ministerial Committee, composed of MacDonald, Foreign Secretary John Simon and other members of the cabinet studying the disarmament question, agreed to investigate Hitler's suggestion for talks, although only on the ambassadorial level so as to avoid publicity.¹¹

Ambassador Eric Phipps met with Hitler during the first week of December to hear the chancellor's terms for returning

⁹Édouard Herriot, Jadis: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1952), II, 406-407. (Hereinafter referred to as Jadis); Tyrrell to Simon, November 27, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 127-28.

¹⁰Ministerial Committee conclusions, November 23, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. D.C. (M) (32), C 10395/245/18; note by Alexander Leeper, November 24, 1933, ibid., No. D.C. (M) (32), C10395/245/18; Note by Orme G. Sargent, November 24, 1933, ibid., No. D.C. (M) (32), C 10395/245/18.

¹¹Simon to Tyrrell, November 24, 1933, Great Britain, Foreign Office, C 10395/245/18; Simon to Eric Phipps, November [24], 1933, ibid., C 10395/245/18.

to the conference. Hitler said that he had to have an army of 300,000 men, which he estimated as 25 per cent of the combined forces of France, Czechoslovakia and Poland.¹² As in the past, Hitler adamantly refused to include the S.A. and S.S. as part of the German army, arguing that those organizations, which lacked military characteristics, "might be compared to the Salvation Army." He also refused to specify the number of weapons that the enlarged Reichswehr required. Hitler wanted an air force that was 20 per cent the size of the total French, Polish and Czech forces. He assured the British that he had no intention of creating a large navy, although after 1935 he expected "a few ('ein paar') big ships." The only concession that the chancellor made was acceptance of automatic and periodic supervision of the convention, on the condition that it applied equally to France.¹³ His terms, while more specific than in October, did not represent a significant modification of the position that he had held before leaving the conference. He still would have accepted only an agreement that sanctioned the

¹²A 300,000-man army was a practical estimate of what Germany might be able to equip and train in the next five years. See: Esmond M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939 (New York: The Citadel Press, 1967), pp. 17-21, 28-34.

¹³Phipps to Simon, December 5, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 151-54; Phipps to Simon, December 8, 1933, ibid., pp. 173-74; memorandum by Neurath, December 5, 1933, German Archives, 3154/D670358-59; reply of the German government to the French Aide-mémoire, December 18, 1933, ibid., 7467/H179422-29.

military increases which Germany expected to make in the next few years.

While Hitler waited for an offer from the British, he tested French response to his proposals by drafting them into a formal statement and sending them to the new Camille Chautemps government on December 11. The French, spotting immediately that the note omitted specific numbers of weapons for the new Reichswehr, demanded a clarification on that point.¹⁴ They received only vague assurance from Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath that the army required a "normal" amount of weapons. He advised them to face the situation in Europe realistically: since French disarmament was no longer possible, German rearmament was the only alternative.¹⁵

Without receiving a satisfactory clarification from Berlin, the Chautemps ministry answered Hitler's note on January 1, 1934. At first sight the reply appeared conciliatory. France was willing to begin reducing the number of men in its regular army when the convention went into effect instead of waiting until after the trial period. In

¹⁴Aide-mémoire sent from André François-Poncet to Neurath, December 13, 1933, France, Négociations, pp. 13-14; Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III République, les lendemains de la victoire, 1919-1934 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), II, 389. (Hereinafter referred to as Entre deux guerres.)

¹⁵Reply of the German government to the French aide-mémoire, December 18, 1933, German Archives, 7467/H179422-29; Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres, II, 389.

addition, it would cut the size of its air force by 50 per cent during the first stage of the convention if the British concurred. But these counter proposals were not really concessions. The French neither approved an increase in the Reichswehr nor indicated how far they would reduce their own military personnel. Most important, the Chautemps ministry maintained the same position as previous governments that a supervision and inspection system had to be carried out over a four-year trial period while French weapons remained intact and Germany continued bound to Part V of the Versailles Treaty.¹⁶ Since the Germans had left the conference over that very issue, the French reply to Hitler did not concede on the most important point of the dispute.¹⁷

The exchange of notes between the French and German governments only prolonged the quarreling over their demands for security and equality. Legalizing German rearmament was at the center of the disagreement, and on that fundamental issue the positions of the two governments were irreconcilable. Hitler had no room to maneuver since he was already rebuilding the military power of Germany and intended to continue. The French had a choice only between legal and illegal German rearmament.

¹⁶ Aide-mémoire sent to the German government, January 1, 1934, France, Négociations, pp. 19-23.

¹⁷ Reply of the German government to the French government's aide-mémoire of January 1, January 19, 1934, League of Nations, Conference Documents, III, 764-68.

France did not give itself the option of unilaterally stopping the German build-up before it became too late. Political and military leaders believed that sanctions against Germany or reoccupation of its territory would have to be an international effort. At least the British and Belgians would have to participate with France, according to General Mayrand of the French War Ministry. Even then, it was hoped that economic and financial sanctions alone would be sufficient to stop Germany from becoming too threatening because stronger measures could lead to war.¹⁸ The British military attaché in Paris, observing that France would make no moves apart from Great Britain, wrote that the French had "no wish to repeat the experience of the Ruhr." He also assessed that, because of the possible consequences, there would be opposition in France if the military began to mobilize against Germany.¹⁹ Due to concern over public opinion, fear of attempting to stop Germany apart from the British, and worry about the risk of war, therefore, the French maintained a policy of inaction.

Between the two choices of legalizing German rearmament with the hope of controlling it, or allowing it to continue illegally, the French preferred the latter. No French

¹⁸Colonel T. G. G. Heywood to Tyrrell, May 16, 1933, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 260-61.

¹⁹Heywood to Tyrrell, May 15, 1933, ibid., pp. 259-60; Tyrrell to Simon, May 17, 1933, ibid., pp. 247-48.

government could risk sanctioning the German military increases because of the adverse political reaction which would inevitably ensue. As Chautemp's successor, Gaston Doumergue, commented several weeks later, "while it might be possible to wink at German rearmament, it was quite another thing to agree to it."²⁰ Doumergue's statement summed up French attitude toward the disarmament effort in 1934 and, along with Hitler's determination to rearm Germany, explained why there was no chance for the differences between the two countries to be resolved.

Even though the exchange of notes between France and Germany gave no indication that either country would modify its position, the British government was not to be dissuaded from working for a disarmament agreement. There was still general support in Britain for a convention, although some military leaders and cabinet members favored a realistic recognition that the conference had failed and called for an increase of British military strength. Prime Minister MacDonald and the Foreign Office hoped to come up with a compromise that would avert an otherwise certain collapse of the conference. Their solution was an agreement that went a great distance to meet the German demand for weapons.²¹

²⁰Tyrrell to Simon, March 1, 1934, Great Britain, ibid., pp. 491-92.

²¹Ray Atherton to William Philipps, January 2, 1934, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1934 (Washington, D.C.:

By early 1934, Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain was emerging as one of the most important critics of the Government's disarmament policy. Like most Conservatives, Chamberlain wanted a convention concluded at Geneva, but he thought that Britain was paying insufficient attention to the need of increasing European security generally and British defenses particularly. Although he later reversed his position, Chamberlain in 1934 favored British cooperation in a modest collective security system similar to the French idea of an international force. While the cabinet did not concur to promote collective security, Chamberlain had a considerable influence in the government, persuading it to lower its goals for disarmament in view of the threat which the National Socialists in Germany posed for European peace.²²

The disarmament policy that the British government developed reflected the views of Chamberlain as well as of MacDonald and the Foreign Office. It provided for less disarmament by the armed powers than Britain had previously wanted, but accommodated German demands for weapons, a

Government Printing Office, 1951), I, 1-4. (Hereinafter referred to as FRUS, 1934); Atherton to Philipps, January 12, 1934, ibid., 6-7; memorandum by Leeper, January 20, 1934, Great Britain, Foreign Office, W 695/1/98; note by Vansittart, January 20, 1934, ibid., No. 24, W 695/1/98.

²²William R. Rock, Neville Chamberlain (New York: Twane Publishers, Inc., 1969), pp. 92-94; Keith G. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1946), p. 251.

reversal of the government's previous opposition to immediate German rearmament.

The British disarmament plan of January 29, 1934, sanctioned substantial German arms, not simply sample weapons. It went far beyond previous attempts by the Coalition Government to meet Hitler's demand for equality. In most cases Germany would reach military parity with the armed powers within ten years through a process of controlled rearmament. The trial period that France and Britain had earlier insisted upon, and which had led to the German withdrawal from the conference, was eliminated in favor of allowing Hitler to obtain weapons from the beginning of the convention.

While the Germans increased their weapons, the armed powers were to reduce theirs to levels specified in the convention. Disarmament would begin at once instead of after a trial period. To compensate France for eliminating the four-year delay, reductions were spread over ten years, twice as long as the MacDonald Plan of March 1933 suggested and two years longer than provided for in the Daladier Plan of July 1933. The amount of disarmament which the new proposals provided for by the end of ten years was less than in the MacDonald Plan, but more than what the French had envisioned at the conclusion of their eight-year convention.

The proposals were limited to land and air armaments. In ten years, the size of the German, French, Italian and Polish regular armies would be equalized at a compromise

level between the previous British figure of 200,000 and Hitler's recent demand for 300,000 men. France, however, would have a larger number of men in arms since its colonial forces were excluded from the limit.

Destruction of land war materiels would be executed in stages, beginning with the heaviest weapons. By the end of the seventh year, all guns larger than 155 mm. would be prohibited. Germany could build guns up to that figure, the size that Hitler had insisted the new Reichswehr required. The Germans would not reach parity in tanks during the convention period as in the case of guns. They were limited to tanks no larger than six tons, while the other powers retained theirs to sixteen tons, giving France a clear superiority for ten years. A later convention would equalize tank sizes.

The British delayed for two years any change in air materiels, which were a greater threat to their own security. The delay was to provide additional time for the powers to agree on total abolition of military aviation. If a decision was not reached within a two-year period, Germany would obtain parity with the other powers before the convention expired.

Great Britain's new disarmament plan gave Germany a high level of armaments within ten years. It showed the extent to which the British government was willing to appease Hitler's demands for military equality in order to persuade the chancellor to return to Geneva.

To soften the impact that their support for German

rearmament would have on France, the British offered new security measures. They had already strengthened the MacDonald Plan in May 1933 to provide for consultation in the event of aggression in Europe. They now approved permanent and automatic supervision of the convention to guarantee that each country observed its terms fully, nominally meeting the minimum French requirement for security contained in the Daladier Plan.²³ The crux of the Daladier Plan, however, was a trial period during which time Germany's adherence to its Versailles Treaty restrictions would be guaranteed by supervision. Since the British were abandoning the trial period and sanctioning substantial numbers of arms for Germany from the outset of the convention, their acquiescence to additional security was of limited value for France.

The British disarmament plan of January 1934 was a compromise between the French and German positions which, if accepted by all of the European powers, had the potential to avert an uncontrolled arms race. It approved immediate German rearmament while at the same time limited and controlled it. It provided France with a certain amount of security through automatic supervision of the convention. Unfortunately, neither the French nor the Germans intended to compromise. The proposals, therefore, although a bold

²³Memorandum from the British government to the governments represented at the disarmament conference, January 29, 1934, League of Nations, Conference Documents, III, 748-54.

attempt to rescue the conference, stood no chance of bridging the gulf between France and Germany.

Even though the British proposals fell short of German requirements, Hitler readily accepted them as the basis for negotiating with France.²⁴ It was an astute political move, aimed at demonstrating his willingness to cooperate with the other powers in finding a solution to the armaments problem. He had no reason to reject the plan, since through it he was gaining official support from Great Britain for German rearmament. Nevertheless, the German government made it clear that the proposals, in their present form, were unacceptable and had to go much further to satisfy practical equality of rights. As State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow explained, they were "90 per cent in favour of French security and 10 per cent in favour of German 'Gleichberechtigung'".²⁵ Their primary defect, according to Hitler, was the two-year delay in allowing Germany planes. The chancellor warned that he would sign nothing that did not permit him to build all types of weapons from the beginning of the convention in sufficient quantity for a 300,000-man army.

²⁴Text of Adolf Hitler's speech of January 30, 1934 to the Reichstag, German Association for League of Nations Questions, Völkerbund (Geneva: German Association for League of Nations Questions, February 2, 1934); Phipps to Simon, February 1, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 367; meeting of German and British representatives, February 20, 1934, ibid., pp. 452-57; meeting of German and British representatives, February 20, 1934, ibid., pp. 457-62.

²⁵Phipps to Orme Garton Sargent, February 1, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 368-69.

If he was given the right to build all kinds of weapons at once and to enlarge the Reichswehr to 300,000 men, Hitler promised a concession in return. The other powers could postpone disarmament for five years as the French wanted and Germany would accept international control of Nazi political organizations to guarantee that they did not receive military training or arms.²⁶ While the latter offer was valid, the one to delay disarmament was insincere since Hitler did not believe that France would reduce its weapons anyway. Also, the prerequisite for his making the concession was acceptance of all of his demands for rearmament so his reply to Britain precluded any serious negotiations.

Satisfied with the German response to their disarmament plan, the British sought support from the Americans and Italians. The United States, which had concurred with the British and French view of the trial period during October, reversed its policy in February because it considered itself unaffected by either alternative. Its only complaint was that the proposals allowed for insufficient disarmament.²⁷ The Italian premier, Benito Mussolini, liked the British plan because it followed the broad lines of his previous suggestions

²⁶Meeting of German and British representatives, February 21, 1934, ibid., pp. 463-68; Meeting of German and British representatives, February 22, 1934, ibid., pp. 468-69.

²⁷Aide-mémoire communicated by Cordell Hull to Ronald Lindsay, February 19, 1934, League of Nations, Conference Documents, III, 770-71.

to legalize and control German rearmament. Still, he wanted to change it to reflect Hitler's demand to build all types of weapons, including air arms, from the beginning of the convention. Mussolini, whose primary goal was to reach a settlement with the chancellor, argued that Hitler would negotiate on no other terms.²⁸ While not in complete agreement with the British proposals, therefore, both countries generally supported them.

By the end of February the British, Italians and Americans were all prepared to allow Germany substantial numbers of weapons from the moment a convention went into effect. This was a great victory for Hitler, even if a formal international agreement to that effect was never concluded. He now had informal approval for rearming Germany.

With the other major powers supporting German rearmament, the French found themselves isolated in the disarmament negotiations, just as Germany had been in October when Hitler left the conference. The French had to make the same decision that Hitler had faced earlier. They either had to concede or maintain their present position, knowing that the latter decision would bring about the collapse of the conference.

France did not reply to the British memorandum at first. One reason for this delay was that the Third Republic was in

²⁸ Meeting of Italian and British representatives, February 26, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 486-91; Count Dino Grandi to Henderson, February 7, 1934, League of Nations, Conference Documents, III, 745-48; Breckinridge Long to Hull, March 1, 1934, United States, FRUS, 1934, I, 27.

the midst of a political crisis. A scandal, involving the questionable financial schemes of Serge Stavisky, broke in December. Stavisky's suicide when he was about to be arrested gave the enemies of the government an opportunity to charge that he had been shot to prevent him from implicating Radical politicians. The growing reaction against the government reached a climax with the February 6 revolt that prompted the resignation of the last of the Radical ministries which had led France since June 1932.²⁹ As a result, a new coalition was formed, composed of Radicals, Moderates and Conservatives and led by ex-president Gaston Doumergue, a Radical-Socialist. Former premier Édouard Herriot, who had become increasingly hostile toward Germany in recent months, was in the government. Others were André Tardieu, Henri Philippe Pétain, and Louis Barthou, all of whom were suspicious of German intentions and leading proponents of a strong nationalistic foreign policy. The composition of the new cabinet, which resulted from the February 6 upheaval, assured a determined stand by the government in defense of French claims.

A second reason that France delayed answering the British proposals was that the Doumergue cabinet, although at one in rejecting them, did not immediately agree on the exact nature of its response. There were two distinct

²⁹Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres, II, 292-300; Herriot, Jadis, II, 374.

opinions among the ministers. Conservative André Tardieu and Radical Édouard Herriot wanted to reject the plan at once and to break off disarmament negotiations with the other powers, even though France would be blamed for sabotaging the last effort to save the conference. Foreign Minister Barthou, on the other hand, opposed suddenly terminating the negotiations. While he acknowledged that the failure of the conference was inevitable, he was conscious of the effect that a rash act would have on foreign opinion. He preferred, therefore, to take no stand on the British disarmament proposals and to withdraw support from the conference gradually until it collapsed on its own.³⁰

For two months, the position of Barthou prevailed. In response to the British request for a reply to their proposals, the government simply reiterated previous French statements and warned Germany that it could not expect to be accommodated.³¹ On February 17, after listening to War Minister Pétain claim that Germany possessed an army of 840,000 men and Air Minister Victor Dénain warn that the German air

³⁰Ferdinand Mayer, "Diary of Conversations and Events at Geneva," Unpublished diary, 4 parts, United States, National Archives, Decimal File, No. 500. A 15 A 4/1469 1/2, Part III, Report No. 43, March 14, 1934. (Hereinafter referred to as "Diary"); Jesse I. Straus to Hull, March 12, 1934, United States, Department of State, Decimal File: 1930-1939, National Archives, 500. A 15 A 4/2444.

³¹Louis Barthou to Henderson, February 10, 1934, France, Négociations, pp. 48-49; François-Poncet to Neurath, February 14, 1934, ibid., pp. 50-51; note from the French government to the British government, March 19, 1934, ibid., pp. 59-62; Herriot, Jadis, II, 385, 407, 409.

force would equal France's within three months, the cabinet confirmed its intentions to neither concede on any point nor answer the British proposals.³²

Then on March 26, the German government published in the official Reichsgesetzblatt an account of its military budget for 1934-1935. The budget showed substantial increases over the previous year in all three branches of the military with an especially large 250 per cent rise in air spending.³³ Although the Germans tried to explain away the additional money by saying that it was intended for modernization of military equipment rather than for expansion, the French were shocked by the increases.³⁴ The publication led directly to a decision by Doumergue's government to cut off the disarmament negotiations.

The German budget weakened arguments by Barthou for maintaining a noncommittal policy and strengthened the position of Tardieu and Herriot. Recognizing that a decision one way or the other was inevitable, Barthou asked that the cabinet study the British memorandum and Hitler's revisions of it. The foreign minister attempted to sway his colleagues toward moderation by reminding them that Hitler had suggested delaying French disarmament for five years, which would allow

³²Herriot, Jadis, II, 385-86, 408.

³³The Times (London), March 28, 1934, p. 12.

³⁴Simon to Phipps, April 10, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 614.

time for supervision. When the cabinet appointed a committee to formulate a policy, however, it selected as co-chairmen Tardieu and Herriot. Those ministers, both without portfolio, had considerable influence in determining the government's position and the committee report followed their views. The report advised, on the basis that no practical agreement among the powers was possible, that France break off all negotiations on the British proposals.³⁵

On April 17, the committee brought its recommendation to the cabinet for a vote. Tardieu and Herriot, who had always had the backing of General Maxime Weygand, strengthened their position the night before by winning over Pétain and Doumergue. Barthou, supported by Minister of Public Works Pierre Flandin, opposed the committee report. The foreign minister offered a counter proposal which advised sending a circumspect reply to Great Britain that would permit the talks to continue. He was unable to sway the majority of the ministers. Eventually Tardieu demanded, "lets have an end to this business and stop shilly-shallying, and cut the knot." Barthou yielded to the majority and in the end he even helped draft the note that broke off negotiations on German equality claims.³⁶

³⁵Herriot, Jadis, II, 404-405, 410, 414-18; Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres, II, 389-93; Mayer, "Diary," Part III, Report No. 50, April 20, 1934; Ronald H. Campbell to Simon, April 30, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 674-83.

³⁶Herriot, Jadis, II, 409-21; Campbell to Simon,

The note, released immediately after the cabinet meeting, rejected Britain's compromise disarmament proposals of January 29, thus formally refusing to legalize German rearmament. The French conclusively ended the negotiations, arguing that the German budget had disclosed the insincerity of Hitler and had made further discussions on equality impossible. Finally, in an empty petition to show that France was not abandoning the disarmament conference, the government called for the delegations to return to Geneva and resume their work of drafting a convention.³⁷

In France, the April 17 note brought enthusiastic approval from nearly every direction. American Ambassador in Paris, Jesse Straus, reported that the government had the "full support of the parliamentary, press and public opinion." Only the Socialists and young radical groups were critical of breaking off the talks.³⁸ Le Temps noted that the British would now be forced to draw back from their attempts to court

April 17, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 630-31; Campbell to Simon, April 30, 1934, ibid., 674-83; André François-Poncet, The Fateful Years: Memoirs of a French Ambassador in Berlin, 1931-1938, trans. by Jacques Leclercq (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949), pp. 125-27; Mayer, "Diary," Part III, Report No. 50, April 20, 1934; Paul Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight, 1930-1945, trans. by James D. Lambert (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), pp. 98-99.

³⁷ Barthou to Campbell, April 17, 1934, France Négociations, pp. 72-73.

³⁸ Straus to Hull, April 20, 1934, United States, FRUS, 1934, I, 52-53.

Hitler, and to modify their present policy in favor of French security needs.³⁹

Outside of France there was surprise, but acquiescence to the situation. In Germany, the government had not expected its budget to promote the sudden termination of talks by France. According to information gleaned by British Ambassador Eric Phipps, Hitler and his ministers felt "chastened" that they had given France the opportunity to make a public issue over the German budget by breaking off negotiations because of it.⁴⁰

The British also had not anticipated the April 17 note and were angered that the Doumergue ministry had ended the talks without warning. Foreign Secretary Simon was noticeably irritated when he warned French Ambassador Charles Corbin that the Doumergue government, by rejecting an agreement, was precluding the possibility of limiting and supervising German rearmament.⁴¹ Anthony Eden, who had spent the past few months visiting the capitals in Europe to gain

³⁹"Bulletin du Jour: La Réponse française et l'Opinion britannique," Le Temps (Paris), April 20, 1934, p. 1.

⁴⁰Erich Kordt, Nicht aus den Akten: Die Wilhelmstrasse in Frieden und Krieg, Erlebnisse, Begegnungen und Eindrücke, 1928-1945 (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1950), p. 69; Phipps to Simon, April 25, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 648; Phipps to Simon, April 25, 1934, ibid., pp. 657-58.

⁴¹Conversation of Henderson, Simon and Anthony Eden, April 19, 1934, Great Britain, DBFP, VI, 638-40; Simon to Campbell, April 26, 1934, ibid., pp. 658-60.

approval for the British compromise plan, told the Foreign Office that he had felt for some time that Doumergue's cabinet had no intention of signing any agreement to which the Germans or British could concur.⁴² Nevertheless, the British were resigned to the failure of their attempt to save the conference and planned no new initiatives.⁴³ Simon reflected the attitude of the government when he concluded, "I see no alternative but to acknowledge that the disarmament negotiations are at an end."⁴⁴

Although no statesman could avoid recognizing the collapse of the disarmament conference after April 17, 1934, none was willing to admit its demise. Consequently, the conference was never formally adjourned. The Bureau and the General Commission assembled only a few more times, and in June the delegates established four committees to carry on their work.⁴⁵ Those committees met irregularly for several

⁴²Note by Eden, April 20, 1934, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 104, W 3654/1/98; Herriot later wrote that the French government learned that Eden approved the April 17 note. There is nothing to substantiate this claim although Eden had thought that if his government had gone further to accommodate the security needs of France, the French would not have broken off the talks. See: Herriot, Jadis, II, p. 432; Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. II: Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), pp. 98-99.

⁴³Unsigned memorandum [Joachim von Ribbentrop], May 10, 1934, United States, DGFP, II, pp. 805-806.

⁴⁴Note by Simon, April 21, 1934, Great Britain, Foreign Office, No. 104, W 3654/1/98.

⁴⁵Eighty-fifth meeting, June 8, 1934, League of

months, drafting lengthy reports. They served no useful purpose except to enable the governments to avoid admitting that, after two-and-a-half years of negotiations, the disarmament effort had failed.

Nations, General Commission, III, 679-88; Eighty-sixth meeting, June 11, 1934, ibid., pp. 688-93; Resolution adopted by the General Commission, June 8, 1934, League of Nations, Conference Documents, III, 884-85.

CONCLUSION

The failure of the World Disarmament Conference in 1934 was a tragedy because it helped to undermine European stability and peace during the 1930's. A successful convention would have aided amity on the Continent by removing one of the critical problems remaining from the World War. The chances for success, however, were remote from the outset. Certainly, a general disarmament agreement was never a practical objective, even though the League of Nations had charged the conference with reaching that goal. No one in a responsible position ever expected more than a modest step toward reducing land and air weapons. But the conference broke up over conflicting French and German demands without drafting even a limited accord that would have helped preserve peaceful relations in Europe.

The conference grew out of the war settlement, in which the Allies had asserted that German disarmament would make possible general reductions by all nations. Since Germany was mostly concerned with the superior military power of France, the problem centered upon the differences of those two countries. Broadly speaking, their differences, which had to be resolved before a convention could be concluded,

were their competing policies of security and equality. France had to feel secure before it disarmed and Germany claimed the right to be regarded as an equal in Europe.

The Versailles Treaty and League Covenant had planted the seed of Franco-German discord when they failed to specify when Allied disarmament would begin, to what extent reductions would go, and whether or not Germany would remain disarmed permanently if the other powers refused to decrease their weapons. To solve the problems inherent in the 1919 agreements, cooperation was mandatory. Prospects for cooperation, however, were dim in 1932 because the economic depression was entrenched in Europe and the reparations problem was straining Franco-German relations. A better time to have discussed arms reductions would have been several years earlier, during the Locarno Era, which was a period of relative harmony in Europe. Even then there is no assurance that success would have been achieved. The Preparatory Commission, which met during the Locarno Era, revealed that serious conflicts between France and Germany would trouble any disarmament conference.

What was necessary before a limited agreement could be concluded in the early 1930's? Since disarmament meant, first of all, reductions of land arms by the French, a convention was impossible unless they agreed to disarm. Germany would never have been satisfied with a convention that exempted France from arms reductions. If the French had had

confidence that Germany would never turn against them once they disarmed, a convention would have been a reality. But they did not trust Germany. They believed that they had been the victims of aggression in 1870 and 1914, and that Germany had the potential for further belligerence. This view was bolstered by Germany's determination to revise the military, territorial and reparations terms of the Versailles Treaty. The French considered German revisionist goals a threat to their security, especially since Germany had a greater industrial potential and a larger population than France. They were fearful for their own future security and their actions at the conference were dictated by this fear.

In order for France to feel secure, the status quo created by the military provisions of the Versailles Treaty had to be preserved. The disarmament conference, therefore, posed a threat to the French because it called for reductions in their weapons, which would have weakened their power relative to the potential strength of Germany. France could not lower its military strength below the level that existed in 1932 without new tangible measures to compensate for its reductions. To counterbalance the change in the status quo that disarmament would bring, the French intended to obligate the other powers to adhere to some type of international security scheme. Their ideal was to strengthen the League of Nations to become an effective peace-keeping organization, as they had argued since its foundation. The specific security

schemes introduced by France at the conference related to that idea in one way or another.

The French never expected to gain everything that they asked for at Geneva, and after 1932 they showed little confidence of acquiring new security measures through the conference. Nevertheless, since they were armed, the French had a bargaining point. They would reduce their weapons only to the extent that they received new security measures to compensate for those reductions. In effect, they placed the burden for a successful conference upon Great Britain and other large powers, who would have to satisfy French security requirements before there could be a disarmament agreement.

Opinion in France, both public and political, did not allow the government leaders to stray far from the position of maintaining security and rejecting arms increases by Germany. Each ministry, from André Tardieu's in 1932 to Gaston Doumergue's coalition in 1934, was plagued with economic and political problems and could ill afford losing what support it had by accommodating the Germans too much. Public pressure, therefore, confined French policy within relatively narrow limits. Not everyone in France approved such a course. Criticism consistently came from the Socialist Party, which argued for French arms reductions and for less emphasis upon security. Still, the policy which France followed during the negotiations reflected the majority opinion in the country.

Although the French maintained their requirement for security throughout the conference, their tactics changed. The Tardieu Plan of February 1932 was a clear presentation of their ideal goal of turning the League into an effective peace-keeping body. By placing all outlawed arms under League control and by creating an international army, the French claimed they would gain sufficient security to sign a disarmament convention. They avoided specifying how far they would disarm, though, even if their terms were met. In the Herriot Plan of November 1932 they modified their security demands to win support from Great Britain. They still maintained that mutual assistance was necessary, but substantially reduced their requirements by limiting the international army and the assistance pact to the continental countries. By lowering their security requirements, the French adopted their most conciliatory stand at the conference, but still left the important question of the extent of their disarmament unanswered. As a result, the Herriot Plan, while more acceptable to the British, fell far short of satisfying Germany.

The disarmament strategy that the French assumed after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany must be viewed in light of their growing apprehension over German foreign policy. While still claiming a willingness to disarm, they showed less evidence than in the previous year that they intended to do so. This disinclination was confirmed by the Daladier Plan of July 1933, which would have placed controls on German

military production before France gave up a single weapon. A trial period would have exposed illegal German rearmament and given the French an excuse to delay their own arms reductions. The French knew that Germany would never accept the Daladier Plan, but they did not expect to reach a rapprochement with Hitler on the arms question anyway. They showed little surprise when Germany left Geneva in October 1933. Subsequently, their primary goal was to maintain an appearance of being willing to disarm in order to escape blame for the failure of the disarmament conference.

Throughout the conference France was never willing to depart from the position that it had followed since 1919. The Versailles Treaty was inviolable. Germany had to remain bound to the military restrictions of the treaty, and thus would continue in an inferior position on the Continent. Even when the French agreed in December 1932 to include Germany's military restrictions in the disarmament convention, they intended those limitations to remain in the Versailles Treaty as well and to continue unchanged from the treaty. Most important, the arms reductions that the French envisioned, although never clearly specified, were not substantial at any time during the conference. It is questionable that they would ever have disarmed far enough to satisfy Germany.

While France resisted at the conference any change in its relative military strength with Germany, the Germans went to Geneva hoping to alter the status quo which the war

treaties had established. This revisionist attitude had characterized German policy since 1919 as evidenced by the treaty violations that had been occurring throughout those years. The ultimate goal of all the chancellors during the conference, from Heinrich Brüning to Adolf Hitler, was to free Germany from the military restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. Shortly before the meetings began, the Brüning government had even discussed its intention to obtain military parity with France and the other armed powers eventually. The immediate objective for the duration of the disarmament convention, however, changed from one government to the next. Brüning's ministry was willing to accept much less for the short term than those which followed, while Hitler's demands for the convention went far beyond any of his predecessors.

Like the French ministries, the German governments of 1932 were limited by political and public pressures to maintain an unyielding position. Hatred for the Versailles Treaty, especially the military restrictions, had been engrained in German thought since 1919. The pre-Hitler governments had to keep this public attitude in mind, and because of it they could not yield too much to the French without courting political disaster. The primary political threat came from the National Socialists--the largest single party in 1932--which played upon the mood of the people for its own political gain. Brüning was especially aware of the feelings at home, and had counted on strengthening his

position by gaining a settlement at Geneva that would be popular with the German people.

On the other hand, the Germans in 1932 needed support from the major powers, especially Great Britain. Without the sympathy of these governments, they could never conclude a convention that embodied their views. German policy, then, was one of trying to extract the greatest amount of concessions from the other governments to appeal to German public opinion, while not going so far as to drive away those in Britain and elsewhere who might back some of their demands.

The Germans in 1932 viewed the conference, not as a final solution of the arms question, but as a step toward reaching military equality in Europe. During Brüning's ministry, they were willing to maintain their existing arms level for eight or ten years, as long as France disarmed substantially. They had to have some assurance that the other powers were not discriminating against them, though, and for that reason they required a recognition that Germany was theoretically equal with the war-time Allies. To meet this need, the military restrictions of Germany had to be lifted out of Part V of the Versailles Treaty and placed into the disarmament convention in order that its arms limitations would be contained in the same document as those of all nations. This point was fundamental and was never resolved at the conference. Papen's government added to the idea of equality the demand for samples of arms which the other

governments refused to relinquish. By obtaining samples, Germany would have undermined the Versailles Treaty and moved closer to its goal of practical equality.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, German conditions for an agreement changed dramatically, causing the slim chances of a Franco-German rapprochement on the arms question to vanish. His total commitment to rearm Germany as quickly as possible, in contrast to the more cautious approach of Brüning and Papen, determined the fate of the conference. Hitler intended to sign nothing that gave him less than he expected to gain anyway. In essence, he demanded the right to disregard the military restrictions imposed upon Germany by the 1919 treaties. The only limitations upon his goal for arms were the economic conditions in Germany. But Hitler still remained at the conference for several months. He had two reasons: it was to his advantage to gain an agreement, even an informal one, that legalized German arms increases; and the conference gave him the opportunity to uphold an appearance of cooperation while actually proceeding with his rearmament program. Hitler left the conference only when the other powers, by accepting France's two period plan, removed all reason for him to continue his appearance of cooperation.

It must be remembered that Hitler's decision to leave Geneva was extremely popular in Germany. The only risk that he took, and that was not too serious, was that there might be retaliation from France and other countries for his

actions. Since nothing more than verbal condemnations came, Hitler's gamble paid off. He had taken an important step toward dismantling the Versailles Treaty.

Of the war-time Allies, the British had been the leaders in promoting a general disarmament agreement while the Preparatory Commission was in session and were instrumental in keeping the disarmament conference alive for two-and-a-half years. They had already set the example for disarmament and sought an agreement among the continental nations to disarm, arguing that the armed powers had a moral obligation to reduce their weapons. The British motive was that a Franco-German entente on the arms question could preserve peace in Europe and help rectify the imbalance of military power that existed on the Continent.

There was popular support for disarmament in Great Britain prior to and during most of the conference. Although enthusiasm waned during the last months of meetings, the British never did reject the idea of an arms settlement, and the government's efforts to gain one received sufficient backing even during the last months of meetings in 1934.

Although the British wanted an agreement, they were limited in their efforts to promote one by a reluctance to extend their military commitments beyond the existing obligations in the Versailles Treaty, League Covenant and Locarno Treaty. They were especially against any security proposal, like the first French Plan introduced at Geneva in 1932, that

automatically obligated them to intervene on the Continent. Their opposition to additional commitments was in keeping with the position that Great Britain had followed since the World War, and reflected the attitude of the majority of the British people.

Because of public and political opposition to further commitments in Europe, the National Coalition Government hoped to persuade France, without receiving new security measures, to disarm far enough to satisfy Germany. The British were caught between two extreme positions: Germany demanded extensive disarmament by France, and the French insisted that they had to have additional security before they would disarm at all. At first, the British offered France nothing new, arguing that the existing treaties provided adequate security for some disarmament. Eventually, in 1934, Great Britain agreed to greater measures of security than it had approved early in the conference, but by then the French and Germans had increased their demands beyond any hope of a rapprochement.

As the British saw the chances slipping away that France would disarm far enough to satisfy Germany, they began to make concessions to the Germans. This policy was completely in line with the attitude of the British since the Paris Peace Conference. They had never shown the same concern as France to uphold fully the Versailles Treaty, as evidenced by their refusal to condone the Ruhr invasion of 1923 and by their

willingness to re-negotiate the reparations issue. At Geneva in 1932, statements by James Ramsay MacDonald and others in the government showed that the British were not totally dedicated to the inviolability of the war treaties. Their acceptance of German equality of rights late in the year further confirmed their willingness to accommodate the Germans.

Beyond the approval of Gleichberechtigung, however, Great Britain was hesitant to sanction German demands during the first year of the conference, partly because it hoped for an agreement without having to do so, and partly because it did not want to risk antagonizing the French.

After Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany and the prospects for disarmament were rapidly diminishing, the British government made greater concessions to the Germans in order to find some basis for an agreement with them. This was the purpose of the MacDonald Plan, which allowed a doubling of the military personnel in the Reichswehr. The disarmament plan of January 1934 went further, giving Hitler extensive amounts of arms. In effect, it unofficially sanctioned the current illegal rearmament of Germany. The British adopted the plan at the risk of alienating France--which broke off the disarmament negotiations a few months later--because they felt it to be the only way to gain an agreement with Hitler that would provide some assurance of the chancellor conducting a reasonable foreign policy. From their point of view, since disarmament was unlikely in 1934, the alternative was

to meet Hitler's demands for arms with the hope of at least temporarily controlling German rearmament. At what point the concessions to Germany became appeasement is difficult to discern. One could argue that the British had been appeasing Germany right along, even before the conference began. In any case, they were pursuing a path of appeasement by the end of the conference.

Looking back on the two-and-a-half years of meetings at Geneva, it is clear that they were, for the most part, futile. Certainly, no agreement to reduce arms on a large scale was ever attainable because it was unlikely that all the major powers in the 1930's could have concurred on the types and numbers of weapons that they would relinquish. A convention which brought moderate reductions of European land and air arms was only slightly possible in 1932 and became more remote as the conference progressed. Once Hitler came to power, the chance for any accord at the disarmament conference quickly vanished.

The reason for the collapse of the conference becomes strikingly evident in analyzing the problems surrounding the disarmament effort. It did not collapse over technical questions or because the three-score governments that participated were unable to agree on the extent of reductions or on which weapons to eliminate. The negotiations never progressed far enough to deal thoroughly with those issues. The conference failed because it could not escape the conflicting demands of

French security and German equality of rights, which required a political solution before progress on a convention could be made. In spite of British mediation, the point of compromise between French and German demands was never found during the conference. A solution to the armaments problem would have to come through power politics, not diplomacy.

The disarmament conference left a legacy for the 1930's. The inability of the diplomats to resolve the arms problem drove France and Germany further apart, damaged the prestige of the League of Nations which had sponsored the disarmament effort, and led to an increase of arms in Europe. Most important, the conference showed the direction that the policies of Germany, France and Great Britain would move during the following years.

German policy for the remainder of the 1930's had emerged before the end of the conference, but the failure of the meetings brought Hitler's rearmament program into the open even more. By leaving Geneva, the German leader had taken the first of several gambles in Europe. When the British responded several months later by legalizing German rearmament, Hitler knew that his move was successful. It was only a matter of time before he cast off the Treaty of Versailles. He repudiated it in March 1935, less than a year after the conference ended. Using as his excuse increases in the French army, Hitler renounced the military restrictions, concurrently announcing universal military service and an

enlarging of the Reichswehr to thirty-six divisions. His repudiation marked the logical culmination of the rearmament policy which he had followed since early 1933. Hitler had unilaterally resolved the arms controversy and was ready to bring about other changes in Europe. Subsequently, he pursued an ever more daring policy of dismantling the war settlement and altering the status quo on the Continent.

The future course of French policy was also set by the end of the conference. Lacking confidence that Hitler would abide by an agreement and fearing public reaction to legalizing German arms, the government did not yet show signs of appeasing Germany. Neither did it display a determination to stop Germany from rearming. Instead it responded to the increases by trying to maintain a strong military position on the Continent. The French began to build up their arms at once, and they soon enlarged their military by lengthening the term of service and lowering the age of enlistment. Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, in 1934, sought mutual assistance agreements which would guarantee the status quo on the Continent. His scheme--already dealt a blow when Germany signed a nonaggression pact with Poland early in the year--failed to materialize. After Germany repudiated the Versailles Treaty in 1935, however, the French concluded an assistance pact with Russia which the two governments had been discussing for many months. Beyond these attempts to improve their security, the French closed their eyes to German rearmament.

Great Britain had displayed a tendency to appease the Germans before the conference collapsed, and afterwards this policy accelerated. Even though Britain, in April 1935, joined Italy and France at Stresa in condemning Hitler's repudiation of the Versailles Treaty, the British quickly returned to the policy that they had been pursuing during the latter months of the disarmament conference. In June 1935 they signed an agreement which gave Germany the right to construct a navy 35 per cent the size of their own and submarines of equal strength with Great Britain's. By this accord the British hoped to place limits on the German navy, as they had tried to do with land and air arms at Geneva in 1934. Their concessions, which came only a few months after Hitler had repudiated the treaty, shows that the British still thought they could negotiate with the German leader to gain assurance of his maintaining a peaceful foreign policy.

The failure of the World Disarmament Conference indicated that the international system created at Paris in 1919 was breaking up. The disarmament conference focused upon the Franco-German dispute over the arms question and it failed to achieve any tangible results because of the irreconcilability of the French demand for security and the German claim for equality. Its failure signaled the opening of an era of heightened international tension leading eventually into the holocaust of another world war.

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