

'IF I HAD TO GO TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE AND THE REVIL



In 1923, Charles Hardinge, the recently retired British ambassador in Paris and former permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, told David Lloyd George that the 1919 Treaties of Versailles and St Germain with Germany and Austria ‘contained provisions which anybody with any knowledge of foreign politics or of European affairs would

have realised as being opposed to every principle of national life and existence’. Hardinge offered the angry former Prime Minister some unspecified examples of their impracticalities. ‘He said nothing for about ten minutes and then remarked in a friendly way, “If I had to go to Paris again I would conclude quite a different treaty.”’¹ By **Alan Sharp**.

PARIS AGAIN ...'

REVISION OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

LLOYD GEORGE HAD thus joined the already considerable ranks of those critical of the First World War settlement. Even before the conference ended there was much disquiet amongst participants that the treaty with Germany was too harsh – as Lord Robert Cecil remarked on 30 May 1919 during the Anglo-American meeting which laid the foundations for the Royal Institute of International Affairs and its American counterpart, the Council on Foreign Relations, ‘There is not a single person in this room who is not disappointed with the terms we have drafted.’ Six months after the treaty was signed, John Maynard Keynes, the British Treasury official who had left Paris in disgust in early June, reinforced that disquiet by publishing *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a polemical attack on the peacemakers and all their works, which gave Britain a bad conscience and which has shaped much of the subsequent debate on the settlement.²

Others thought the treaty too lenient. Marshal Foch, the French commander of Allied forces on the Western Front, predicted, ‘This is not Peace. It is an Armistice for twenty years.’ He was proved wrong – by sixty-seven days – but many later commentators have shared his view that the inadequacies of Versailles created the conditions that made a second world war inevitable and hence also bear some of the responsibility for its consequences and subsequent international turmoil. As more governments opened their archives after the 1960s some, though certainly not all, historians have become

more sympathetic to the enormous task facing the peacemakers after the most devastating war to that date. The settlement remains highly controversial and, as one of its principal authors – something which he could later conveniently forget – the idea of Lloyd George creating an alternative treaty is intriguing.³

Setting to one side the obvious objections that he could neither remake the treaty without the acquiescence of his allies, nor could he alter the German perception that they were undefeated and hence that any settlement based on the premise of Allied victory would be unacceptable, there are various clues to the shape of his ideal peace. These suggest that he sought a stable Europe in which Germany, reconciled to its defeat and recognising the essential fairness of the settlement, would play a positive and beneficial role, retaking its place as a major British trading partner. Britain could then revert to what contemporaries saw as its traditional imperial and colonial themes, leaving Europe to fend for itself – such indeed was the advice offered by both his private secretary, Philip Kerr, and Jan Smuts, the South African defence minister and member of the Imperial War Cabinet. An additional but more remote aspiration would be the reintegration of a reformed Russia into European politics.⁴

Lloyd George’s Fontainebleau memorandum of 25 March 1919, drafted after a weekend’s consultation with close advisers as deadlock threatened the conference, outlined ‘the kind of treaty to which alone we were prepared to append

our signature’. He warned: ‘You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments to a mere police force, and her navy to that of a fifth-rate Power ... [but] if she feels she has been unjustly treated ... she will find means of extracting retribution from her conquerors.’ Yet, as he boasted to his friend Sir George Riddell, the press magnate, on 30 March: ‘The truth is that we have got our way ... The German Navy has been handed over; the German mercantile shipping has been handed over, and the German colonies have been given up.’ The sub-text to French premier Georges Clemenceau’s rejoinder to the memorandum asked what Britain would sacrifice of its own aims (rather than those of others) to convince Germany that the treaty was just, but he provoked no response.⁵

What might the possible alleviations have been? Lloyd George was deeply disappointed when, during his absence from Paris in early April 1919, the American president, Woodrow Wilson, pressured by Clemenceau, conceded a fifteen-year Allied occupation of Western Germany, much longer than he considered necessary or desirable. Later, in the 1930s, the return of Germany’s colonies became part of an appeasement agenda, but in 1919 this crossed no one’s mind – certainly not that of Smuts, fierce critic of the treaty that he was, who had no intention of relinquishing the former German South-West Africa. Five principal areas, however, stand out: reparations; disarmament; the territorial settlement and Germany’s new frontiers; the so-called ‘shame clauses’ of the treaty, relating to the indictment

Left:
The British
Empire
delegation in
June 1919; Lloyd
George behind
desk, centre-left

of the Kaiser and members of the German military and political elite, together with Article 231, the 'war guilt' clause; and finally, Britain's relationship with France, linked to the treaty that Lloyd George made but did not implement.

Reparations

One candidate for revision is pre-eminent: 'The subject of reparations' declared Thomas Lamont, the American banker acting as an expert in Paris, 'caused more trouble, contention, hard feeling, and delay at the Paris Peace Conference than any other point of the Treaty.'⁶ Resolving Germany's responsibility to compensate Allied war-time losses then held centre stage at numerous Anglo-French, inter-Allied and international conferences in the early years of treaty execution, sowing discord amongst the victors and offering Germany an opportunity to steal the moral high ground. Everyone, including the Germans, accepted that there was a bill to pay, but the bases of that reckoning, the amounts to be paid and the distribution of the receipts amongst the Allies, were all beset by controversy.

Traditionally losers offset victors' costs – after 1870–71 France paid Germany 5,000 million gold francs – but in 1918 Lloyd George and Wilson ruled out war costs, demanding only that Germany restore the invaded territories.⁷ The restoration of such civilian damage may conveniently be defined as reparations and any additional demand for full or partial war costs as an indemnity. Germany's request for an armistice in October 1918, seeking to make Wilson's 1918 speeches the basis of the eventual peace, necessitated their precise definition. Lloyd George took great pains with this section of the Allied response, sent on 5 November by the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, which formed the pre-Armistice agreement with Germany. Restoration meant 'that compensation will be made by Germany for all the damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air'. His final touch changed the original wording of 'invasion' to 'aggression' to safeguard British and imperial claims. This clearly

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ruled out an indemnity, as Lloyd George acknowledged, though Professor Antony Lentin suggests that, from the beginning, he had no intention of foregoing war costs and that the wording was a mere *ruse de guerre*.⁸

During the 1918 election, facing an unknown electorate and seeking to revitalise a lacklustre campaign, Lloyd George played to the popular gallery in Newcastle on 29 November, declaring that 'Germany must pay the costs of the war'. He included an escape clause – 'up to the limit of her capacity' – but in Bristol on 11 December he stated, 'We propose to demand the whole cost of the war', and hinted that Germany's capacity was substantial. He won the election – though dependent upon a massive Tory majority. Public and parliamentarians heard what they wanted to hear and expected him to deliver.⁹

It is easy to see why. The British Treasury estimated that victory cost the Allies £24,000 million in 1914 gold values. Great swathes of Belgium and France lay ravaged by four years of industrialised warfare and required restoration. Additionally the Allies had borrowed heavily from the United States, which expected repayment. Meanwhile Germany, suffering only minimal damage to its industrial base and with no foreign war debts, posed the threat of future trade competition, unimpeded by the costs faced by the Allies. The alternative, that Allied taxpayers must foot the bill, made it almost mandatory for British or French politicians to promise the maximum payments possible from Germany. Lloyd George's problem was that he had already contracted not to do so.¹⁰

Yet, in Paris, he and Clemenceau claimed their full war costs from Germany. Wilson resisted vigorously. The ensuing crisis was 'solved' by Article 231, which asserted Germany's moral responsibility to cover all Allied war expenditure but, did not, as the Germans chose to believe, assign sole responsibility for the war to Germany. It was mitigated by Article 232, limiting actual compensation to Allied civilian damage. Lloyd George then persuaded Smuts to convince Wilson that pensions paid to injured soldiers or their widows and orphans constituted a legitimate claim because

soldiers were merely civilians in uniform. Accepting this was not logical, Wilson conceded because he believed the Allies would compromise on a fixed sum – not the complete bill but an amount to discharge all Germany's liabilities. Hence his decision would not affect what Germany paid but could allow Britain, which had suffered little physical destruction, to receive greater compensation. No final sum was agreed; on 5 April 1919 the decision was postponed for a Reparation Commission to determine in 1921.¹¹

In his Fontainebleau memorandum Lloyd George suggested that reparations should disappear with the generation that waged war. Yet he refused to specify any time limit on German payments or name a total sum. He claimed he was thwarted by the excessive demands of his financial advisers, Lords Cunliffe and Sumner, respectively a former governor of the Bank of England and a Lord of Appeal – irreverently dubbed the 'Heavenly Twins' by British delegation colleagues because they were always together and sought astronomical sums from Germany. Cunliffe maintained that £24,000 million was a realistic prospect. Lloyd George dismissed this as 'a wild and fantastic chimera' and mocked Cunliffe's 'strange lapse into megalomania', suggesting that Sumner 'himself caught the infection'.¹² These two men, he implied, prevented a reasonable settlement. Lentin argues such was not the case; instead, Lloyd George insisted on maintaining the maximum demands, yet blamed the Twins so persuasively that even Keynes believed him.¹³

Further opportunities for revision arose when, on 30 May and 1 June 1919, the British Empire delegation, including additional British ministers, discussed the draft treaty and favoured making concessions to Germany. Smuts, the most vociferous critic of the terms, proposed a fixed sum, possibly £5,000 million. Some ministers supported him, others favoured £11,000 million. Lloyd George thought the answer might lie somewhere between but rejected as inadequate a recent German offer to pay £5,000 million (admittedly based on unacceptable conditions). The delegation authorised him to specify a fixed sum in

the treaty. When he returned to the Council of Four, however, he resisted Wilson's attempt to do so and, according to Robert Cecil, was 'curiously reluctant to make any changes' to the reparations clauses.¹⁴

For the next three years Lloyd George portrayed himself as seeking a workable settlement rather than an attractive, but impossibly inflated, bill. Yet his words have to be set against the figures for the various proposals. Once the prime mover to establish a Reparation Commission, he now attempted to circumvent it, believing that the absence of the intended American chairman would leave Britain permanently outvoted in a Commission of four members, in which he expected France and Belgium to make maximum demands. Even if Britain persuaded Italy to oppose them, the casting vote lay with the French chairman – the first was the implacable Lorrainer and former President of the Republic, Raymond Poincaré. Lloyd George instead tackled reparations in direct negotiations with various French prime ministers at inter-Allied conferences held in 1920 and early 1921. In July 1920, at Boulogne, Anglo-French ministers considered a settlement based on German annuities spread over forty-two years, totalling £13,450 million. In January 1921 in Paris they debated a proposal for forty-two annuities totalling £11,300 million together with a variable annuity amounting to 12 per cent of Germany's exports. Lloyd George was trying to coax France and coerce Germany to accept the Paris plan when he learned that, contrary to expectations, the Reparation Commission's bill would be much lower. He reversed course and awaited its report.¹⁵

In May 1921 the Commission established Germany's liability at £6,600 million, of which pensions and other allowances represented nearly half. Under the terms of the A, B and C bonds Germany was to deliver, payment beyond £2,500 million was never anticipated. Most experts agreed that this represented Germany's capacity to pay but accepted that this would need to be disguised to meet Anglo-French public expectations. Hence the C bonds, worth £4,000 million, were 'phoney money', designed

to artificially inflate the bill – as Belgian premier Georges Theunis joked, they could be stuck 'in a drawer without bothering to lock up, for no thief would be tempted to steal them'.¹⁶ At the ensuing London conference Lloyd George claimed a triumph: the Commission, rather than he or Aristide Briand, the French premier, had reduced Germany's bill, thus disarming disappointed Anglo-French die-hards; Germany accepted the payments schedule; and he had forestalled the French from occupying the Ruhr basin – their preferred method to enforce the treaty or punish transgressions.

The respite proved temporary; the following year Germany sought a payments moratorium. Meanwhile the complicating factor of inter-Allied debts became urgent as the Americans pressed for repayment, over twenty-five years at 4.5 per cent interest, of the £800 million that Britain had borrowed to finance the Allied war effort. Britain was owed twice this amount by its allies, and Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, consistently advocated the unilateral renunciation of Britain's European debts, but Lloyd George and others were reluctant to forego either the potential, however unlikely, of repayment, or of whatever political leverage the debts might offer. America resisted the Anglo-French contention that its loans constituted part of an inter-Allied war effort to which some had contributed money and others blood. President Calvin Coolidge's dismissal of their proposal of all-round cancellation was typically succinct: 'They hired the money, didn't they?'

Lloyd George might have fixed Germany's liability in the treaty and waived Britain's European debts. There is little indication that either course appealed to him. The Americans would have compromised on a final sum around £6,000 million; French estimates of an acceptable figure tended to be higher, but, at their lower end, not significantly so, and the Germans did offer (with contentious provisos) £5,000 million.¹⁷ Lloyd George suggested in June 1919 that something between £5,000 million and £11,000 million would be reasonable, but his earlier reaction to the £6,000 million proposed by an

unofficial committee of experts and politicians was significant – Louis Loucheur, French minister for the devastated regions, observed 'Lloyd George protests at these low figures'. He clearly expected more and preferred to postpone the issue.¹⁸

He later castigated French ministers for deceiving their public about Germany's capacity to pay, yet he was never willing to disabuse the British people. Apart from the obvious political risk involved, he was perhaps unsure himself of what would constitute a fair settlement. Historians sympathetic to Lloyd George suggest that the 1918 election promises, his association with Cunliffe and Sumner, and the inclusion of pensions, were aberrations, disguising his real aim of a reasonable settlement, and they praise his success in negotiating the 1921 London schedule of payments. Others question whether his moderation always came second to his wish to achieve the best outcome for Britain by whatever means, however dubious, and ask whether his refusal to recognise the need for radical revision of all war debts, in the interests of wider European recovery, missed the broader picture. It would also be wise not to discount Lloyd George's moral conscience, idiosyncratic as it might be, which suggested a need for retribution as well as forgiveness. 'It was not vengeance but justice ... whether we ought not to consider lashing her [Germany] as she had lashed France', he told his Cabinet colleagues, adding on another occasion, 'Those who ought to pay were those who caused the loss.'¹⁹

Disarmament

Lloyd George's political ideology also played an important role in German disarmament, another subject that dominated Anglo-French discussions in the early post-1919 years. The Allied military advisers in Paris disagreed on the size and recruitment of Germany's post-war army – Foch, for France, recommended 100,000 men, with long-term volunteer officers and non-commissioned officers, and other ranks conscripted for one year; Haig, for Britain, believed Germany needed 200,000 or 250,000 men for internal order and international defence; Bliss, for the United States, suggested 400,000.

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They compromised on an army of 200,000, with volunteer officers and conscripted other ranks.²⁰

Lloyd George believed that peacetime conscription institutionalised militarism. It was, he declared in October 1920, 'the basic cause of the late war'. He agreed with Sir Edward Grey, Britain's Foreign Secretary in 1914, that 'great armaments lead inevitably to war'. Hence he championed German disarmament as the prelude to wider international armaments reduction, but, at the same time, he did not wish to leave Germany so weak that it succumbed to Bolshevism. Nor, though this could not be so openly professed, did he wish to leave France unchallenged on the continent. His counter-proposal in Paris was for a volunteer army of 200,000. Clemenceau, warning that the Germans would use such a professional army as a cadre for a much larger force (as indeed they did), conceded the voluntary principle but insisted on a limit of 100,000, which Lloyd George accepted. Germany had to reach this target by April 1920 and disband its general staff. Its air force was banned and its once formidable navy, stripped of dreadnoughts and submarines, reduced to 15,000 men. Equipment and manufacturing resources surplus to the requirements of these curtailed forces were to be destroyed.²¹

Unsurprisingly the German government was not an eager participant in dismantling its military might and did its best to obstruct or obfuscate but, by 1922, most of its air and naval equipment had been destroyed or surrendered. Reducing its land forces and dismantling its weapons industry were more problematic. The British War Office thought Germany needed an army of 150,000 to 200,000 to ensure internal security and defend its frontiers and was more prepared than the French to tolerate various German paramilitary forces, totalling some 600,000, which it did not consider an international threat but thought important to preserving order. Lloyd George did negotiate extra time for German force reduction but here, as elsewhere, the question of whether Germany could not, or would not execute the treaty divided Britain from France. Britain tended to see inability, France a lack of will.

By January 1921 the War Office considered that most weapons, apart from those held by the paramilitaries, were being destroyed, that the German army, manned by volunteers, had reached treaty levels and that 'Germany has ceased to be a military danger to the Allies for a considerable period of time'. The French continued to stress legal uncertainties about recruitment, the inadequate disarmament of civilians and paramilitaries, and concluded that the 'German Government ... has put itself in opposition both to the spirit and letter of the Treaty.' This was a typical divergence of views: the British concentrated on the destruction of war material and the reduction of forces and the French pursued the less tangible objectives of breaking Germany's 'military spirit' and achieving 'moral disarmament'.²² Lloyd George perhaps regretted not achieving a larger army for Germany but, beyond that, it is difficult to see where, or why, he would have sought major changes. Although more sympathetic to German difficulties, he was equally as committed as the French to unilateral German disarmament as a first step to the wider international armaments limitation he deemed essential for peace.

National self-determination

If Lloyd George blamed militarism for the last war, he believed denial of national self-determination – a phrase he used before Wilson – could cause the next. In 1871 Germany seized the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, creating a lingering grievance in European international relations, righted only by their return in 1918. Throughout the conference Lloyd George warned of the dangers of creating Alsace-Lorraines in reverse: 'I cannot conceive,' he wrote, 'of any greater cause of future war than that the German people ... should be surrounded by a number of small States ... each of them containing large numbers of Germans clamouring for reunion with their native land.' He fought very hard to prevent this, whether on Germany's western borders in the Rhineland, or, more particularly, in the east, where the new frontiers with Poland were especially contentious.²³

To encourage Clemenceau to abandon plans to increase French security by detaching the Rhineland from Germany he offered, with apparent sincerity, a British guarantee of assistance in the event of future German aggression, and the promise of a Channel tunnel to speed British troops to France's aid. In the east he used all his wiles to persuade Wilson that making Danzig a free city, rather than consigning its German population to Poland, was the President's own idea. More directly he challenged a reluctant Wilson to agree that the plebiscite on the fate of Upper Silesia, on which Lloyd George insisted, was simply putting the President's principles into practice. He may have regretted this success because Britain's military forces became overstretched and, embarrassingly, had to be withdrawn from plebiscitary protection duties, occasioning further inter-Allied dissension when Britain accused French troops of favouring the Polish cause. The interpretation of the 1921 plebiscite results then led to bitter Anglo-French disagreement which could only be resolved by involving the League.²⁴

Lloyd George supported an independent Poland but fiercely opposed what he deemed its excessive territorial demands, telling the Unionist leader, Andrew Bonar Law, 'I have never cared for the handing over of two or three million Germans to Polish rule ... The Germans would never accept permanently this transference.' His successful amendment of the original Polish Commission's recommendations achieved plebiscites resulting in Germany's retention of Marienwerder, Allenstein and a substantial part of Upper Silesia. Germans still regarded the loss of territory to the Poles as unacceptable, terming their new border 'the bleeding frontier', but it is hard to see what further concessions Lloyd George might have won.²⁵

In the west he was perhaps too easily persuaded that Germany should forfeit the Saar region to compensate France for the coal production lost by German sabotage of its mines. This may well have involved an element of double jeopardy, since Germany was also required to make other reparation coal deliveries to France, but, in general, his record on national

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self-determination was good. As a Welshman he was sympathetic to the aspirations of small nations, though he tempered this with careful pragmatism. He sought borders that would alienate as few people as possible and, by providing minority rights for unfortunate populations finding themselves on the wrong side of revised frontiers, he hoped to minimise their resentment. Given the constraints under which the conference operated, particularly in the east, it is very difficult to envisage what different territorial settlement in Europe he might have negotiated.²⁶

War crimes

Articles 227 to 231 of the Treaty, the so-called 'shame clauses', caused deep offence to Germany. In June 1919 the hastily assembled German government unsuccessfully tried to make their omission a condition of its signature of the treaty, whilst later attempts to implement them threatened the survival of the Weimar regime. Although it was conventional, as in Article 228, to indict persons accused of breaching 'the laws and customs of war', it became clear that the intention went beyond the prosecution of operational crimes, requiring Germany to surrender unspecified political and military leaders for trial. Lloyd George was strongly committed to this idea, particularly where it concerned the former emperor, Wilhelm II. During the British election campaign there were calls to hang Wilhelm and, although Lloyd George did not endorse this popular idea, he did privately suggest shooting him, publicly calling for his indictment to deter future leaders from waging war. It required all his remarkable powers of persuasion to convince his Cabinet and international colleagues to abandon their strongly held objections to trying a head of state. Article 227 arraigned Wilhelm 'for a supreme offence against international morality and the sanctity of treaties', to be tried by an international criminal court of five Allied judges.

Perhaps fortunately for the Allies, and certainly for Wilhelm, the Netherlands, to which he fled, refused to surrender him – though Lloyd George was still pursuing this as late as March 1920 – but the

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emotive issue of trying other German leaders remained. The initial Allied lists named over 3,000 potential defendants, including the former Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, Admiral von Tirpitz, Field Marshal von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff. Even when this was reduced to 835 men and one woman, Lloyd George, despite his earlier commitment, stated that, placed in a parallel situation, Britain and France would not comply. He now advised seeking 'the surrender of the most important offenders and let[ting] the rest go'. Finally, when Germany tried forty-five people, none prominent, and the Leipzig court produced acquittals or lenient sentences, he turned a blind eye. With hindsight he may have regretted his passionate and enduring belief in prosecuting Germany's leaders, but these clauses, and the parallel provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres with the Ottomans, established an important precedent for the post-Second World War trials in Nuremberg and Tokyo and the establishment, in 2002, of the International Criminal Court.²⁷

Rebuilding Europe

In his last major initiative to revise the treaties, re-energise the European economies and revive the flagging fortunes of his coalition government, Lloyd George proposed a major economic and political conference at Genoa in April 1922. The plan was characteristic of Lloyd George both in the breath-taking scope of its vision and the inadequacy of its detailed preparation. He believed that if Russia was opened to world trade and offered lucrative reconstruction contracts, this would enable Germany to prosper and pay reparations to Britain and France, who could then repay their American debts. Germany's reconciliation to the new order would abate France's security fears, thus relieving Britain of its most pressing European responsibilities. Bolshevism would wither as Russian prosperity increased and Russia could be restored to the European comity of nations, filling the void left by its absence at the peace conference. Unemployment in Britain would fall and the coalition would triumph at the next election.

In an ideal world, he suggested to Louis Barthou, the French justice minister, America would forego its claims on Britain and Europe; Britain would cancel all debts owed by its European allies and, together with France, abandon its pension claims against Germany. France would recoup only the costs of restoring its devastated regions. With typical insouciance Lloyd George admitted Keynes's contention that the pension claim was fraudulent, stating, 'If this plan were adopted, the position would be that ... the claims against Germany would be confined to reparation.' Unfortunately America refused to participate, 'If she had,' he reflected in 1934, '... we stood a good chance of clearing up all our difficulties – War Debts, Reparations, Armaments ...'. Poincaré, who had replaced Briand as premier in January 1922, would brook no discussion of reparations. When the conference met, the two pariahs of Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union, signed a separate treaty at Rapallo which effectively scuppered proceedings, even though the talks continued into May.²⁸

Faced with the failure of his grand plan Lloyd George set Arthur Balfour, acting as Foreign Secretary during George Curzon's illness, to explain Britain's situation to its European debtors. Blaming America for requiring reimbursement from Britain, the note regretted seeking repayments from Europe, which would be limited to covering the American debts. Despite serious misgivings from senior colleagues, the Balfour Note, which Lloyd George claimed as his own, was despatched on 1 August 1922. Although excellently drafted and with obvious political attractions, it was an international disaster. Pillorying the Americans left them little room for manoeuvre over the debts; any reduction in German reparations meant French taxpayers contributing more to discharge their British debts; it wrecked any slim chance of a successful reparations conference in London that month. The implications for Britain's prestige were alarming. Sir Edward Grigg, Lloyd George's private secretary, was aghast: 'How can we demean ourselves so much as to range ourselves with the pitiful European bankrupts and to declare our credit dependent on

theirs?' Two months later the Tory rank and file revolted, the coalition collapsed and Lloyd George left office for ever.²⁹

The art of the possible

Politics, international or domestic, is the art of the possible. Lloyd George had to make peace as part of two victorious coalitions, whose constituents both limited his freedom. He was the most sympathetic of the peacemakers to reaching an agreement with Russia, even if that meant dealing with the Bolsheviks, but Clemenceau in Paris, and the Tory die-hards, abetted by his Liberal colleague Winston Churchill at Westminster, precluded anything but the most tentative of approaches to Lenin and his comrades. Lloyd George's later attempts to engage with the Bolsheviks produced, despite deep mutual suspicion, an Anglo-Soviet trade treaty, but his more ambitious plans for Genoa were again thwarted by a combination of international and domestic reluctance.³⁰

Clemenceau had witnessed two German invasions of France and was determined to avert a third. His policies – the detachment of the Rhineland and Saar from Germany, the over-generous transfer of territory to Poland, and the over-zealous prosecution of minor issues – often clashed with Lloyd George's vision. France was also an imperial competitor, and the settlement reflected the need for compromises, not just in Europe but worldwide. There were the added complications of the aspirations of the Japanese and the Italians, which were often at variance with the interests of the other great powers and with Wilson's philosophy.

In Paris Wilson was a considerable presence, contributing to a treaty very different to one that the European powers might have created. Wilson's high-minded aspirations made it easy for those seeking hypocrisy to discover it in the inevitable compromises reached after principles met realities or unshakeable positions, but like Clemenceau's commitment to French security, Italian and Japanese expansionist ambitions, and the demands of his Dominion partners, they were facts of Lloyd George's life. America's subsequent abnegation of its international

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responsibilities for enforcing the treaty was greeted with ambivalence by British ministers. They were disappointed to lose a potential partner in moderating the settlement, but not sorry to see this retreat beyond the Atlantic of a rival hegemon.³¹

America's withdrawal highlighted the centrality of the Anglo-French relationship to the new international order. In Paris Lloyd George had carefully made his guarantee offer to France dependent on America honouring its parallel obligation. When America reneged, Britain was left with only a moral commitment, and had to decide whether, and on what terms, to provide a substitute. The question divided the British establishment. Advocates of a pact suggested that a greater sense of security would encourage French generosity in their treatment of Germany. Opponents argued that, confident of British support, France would be more, not less, intransigent. Most of the Cabinet were undecided, sharing Curzon's sentiment: 'I earnestly hope', he wrote in December 1921, 'it will not be proposed to give the guarantee for nothing'. Yet, in the same paper, he admitted 'As a result of the war there remain only two really great powers in Europe – France and ourselves ... a definite and publicly announced agreement between the two countries to stand by one another in case either were attacked would offer a guarantee of peace of the strongest kind.'³²

It is here that Lloyd George needed to rethink his policies. An Anglo-French consensus was essential to either executing or amending the Versailles settlement. When they worked together, as at the Spa conference in June 1920, Germany complied, but, too often, was able to play the victors against each other. There were various moments when an Anglo-French alliance seemed possible, but both suggested that the pact was of greater value to the other and hence each sought the maximum price for its support. For Britain some points were negotiable – an alliance rather than a unilateral guarantee, the duration of the pact – while others, like the extension of the treaty to cover eastern Europe, where the French believed the first German assaults on the treaty boundaries would occur, were not. In the end there

was no agreement, just a reluctant recognition that they were bound in a rather sad partnership where each did just enough to thwart the other's policies.³³

Lloyd George might have promoted a stronger Anglo-French relationship, had he chosen to do so, but he could have had little influence on Wilson's ill-health and political ineptitude, the consequences of which caused America to withdraw from treaty enforcement. The key question, however, is whether any adjustments to the treaty that Lloyd George might have made, even had he wished and been able to do so, would have substantially altered Germany's attitude to a settlement that it believed had been imposed by trickery and false pretences. Probably not: naming £6,000 million as the reparations bill; allowing Germany to retain conscription and a larger army and navy; further minor alterations to the Polish frontier; the retention of the Saar and a shorter occupation of the Rhineland; the abandonment of the 'shame clauses'; even the return of some of its colonies, would still mean, in German perceptions, a treaty predicated on an unacceptable Allied presumption of German defeat. Such a premise would be fundamental to any treaty negotiated in 1919. So, even if he had gone to Paris again ...

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- 1 Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy* (John Murray, 1947) p. 240. I would like to thank Professors Tom Fraser, Antony Lentin and Sally Marks for their comments and encouragement and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.
- 2 Cecil quoted by Antony Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace: From Versailles to Hitler* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) p. 69; See also Lentin, 'The Worm in the Bud: "Appeasement" at the Peace Conference' *ibid.*, pp. 67–88. John Maynard Keynes, *The*

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- Economic Consequences of the Peace* (Macmillan, 1919).
- 3 Alan Sharp, 'The Versailles Settlement: The Start of the Road to the Second World War?' in Frank McDonough (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective* (Continuum, 2011), pp. 15–33. On his convenient memory see Stella Rudman, *Lloyd George and the Appeasement of Germany, 1919–1945* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) p. 210.
- 4 For example his war aims speech, 5.12.18; the Fontainebleau memorandum, 25.3.19; the British Empire Delegation meetings, 30.5 and 1.6.19; his Cannes memorandum 4.1.22; the plans for the 1922 Genoa conference. Kerr to Lloyd George, 2.9.20, F/90/1/18, Lloyd George Papers [LGP] in the Parliamentary Archives, London; Smuts, 24.6.21, at the Imperial Conference, E6 in CAB 32/2 in The National Archive, Kew [TNA].
- 5 David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* (2 vols. Gollancz, 1938), Vol. I, p. 404; *Papers respecting negotiations for an Anglo-French pact 1919–1923* (Cmd 2169, HMSO, 1924), p. 79 and pp. 90–93; John McEwen (ed.), *The Riddell Diaries 1908–1923* (Athlone Press, 1986), entry 30.3.19, p. 263.
- 6 Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (John Murray, 2001), p. 191.
- 7 'There is no demand for a war indemnity such as that imposed on France by Germany in 1871.' Lloyd George, 5.1.18, Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (2 vol. edition, Odhams, 1938), Vol. 2 p. 1513; 'There shall be no ... contributions, no punitive damages ...' Wilson, 11.2.18, H. W. V. Temperley (ed.), *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris* (6 vols. Oxford, 1920–1924), Vol. I p. 437.
- 8 Minutes, Imperial War Cabinet, 6.11.18, CAB23/44/12 TNA; Lloyd George, *Peace Treaties* Vol. I, p. 490. Lentin, *Lost Peace* p. 20.
- 9 Coalition Unionists won 335 seats, Lloyd George's Coalition Liberals 133. David Butler and Jennie Freeman *British Political Facts 1900–1967* (second ed., Papermac, 1968), p. 141. Walter Long, the Tory First Lord of the Admiralty, remarked, 'George thinks he won the election. Well, he didn't. It was the Tories that won the election, and he will soon begin to find that out.' Diary entry 5.3.19., F. Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary* (ed. A. J. P. Taylor) (Hutchinson, 1971), p. 169. See John Vincent (ed.), *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871–1940 during the years 1892 to 1940* (Manchester, 1984), entry for 28.12.18, p. 399. Speeches reported in *The Times* on 30.11.18 and 12.12.18. The Treasury suggested Germany could pay £3,000 million; a committee headed by the Australian premier, William Hughes, estimated, on grounds that its members admitted to be hazy, £24,000 million. Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking after the First World War, 1918–1923* (Palgrave Macmillan, second ed., 2008), p. 86.
- 10 See the comment by Sally Marks that, in such circumstances '... German economic dominance would be tantamount to victory. Reparations would both deny Germany that victory and spread the pain of undoing the damage done.' in 'Smoke and Mirrors: In Smoke-Filled Rooms in the Galerie des Glaces' in Manfred Boemeke, Gerald Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 338.
- 11 Sharp, *Versailles Settlement* pp. 90–98.
- 12 Lloyd George, *Peace Treaties* Vol. I, p. 461 and p. 474.
- 13 Lentin, *Lost Peace* pp. 23–46; Keynes wrote to the *Sunday Times* 30.10. 38, 'I can confirm his claim that he never honestly believed in the advice given him by Lord Cunliffe, Lord Sumner and Mr Hughes ...'.
- 14 British Empire Delegation Meetings 32, (30.5.19) 33, and 34 (1.6.19) in Michael Dockrill (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919* [BDEFA] (6 vols., University Press of America, 1989) Vol. 4, pp. 91–116; Cecil quoted by Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles: Lloyd George and the Pre-History of Appeasement* (Methuen, 1985) p. 96
- 15 Etienne Weill-Raynal, *Les Réparations Allemandes et la France* (3 vols. Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1947) vol. I, pp. 547–60 and pp. 593–600. Marc Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Diplomacy, 1916–1923* (Columbia, 1980) pp. 136–44; Bruce Kent, *The Spoils of War: The Politics, Economics and Diplomacy of Reparations 1918–1923* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 374–75; Leonard Gomes, *German Reparations, 1919–1932: A Historical Survey* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) pp. 47–71.
- 16 Stephen Schuker, *American 'Reparations' to Germany, 1919–1933: Implications for the Third World Debt Crisis* (Princeton, 1988), p. 46.
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- 19 Kenneth Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918–1922* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979), pp. 139–42; Martin Pugh, *Lloyd George* (Longman, 1988), pp. 132–34 and p. 138; Trachtenberg, *Reparation* pp. 46–48; Michael Fry, *And Fortune Fled: David Lloyd George, the First Democratic Statesman, 1916–1922* (Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 354–93; Lentin, *Lost Peace* pp. 39–43; Sharp, 'Lloyd George and Foreign Policy 1918–1922. The 'And yet ...' Factor' in Judith Loades (ed.), *The Life and Times of David Lloyd George* (Headstart History, 1991), pp. 129–42; Cabinet 491B, 26.10.18 in CAB.23/14, TNA; BDEFA Vol. 4, p. 111.
- 20 Seth P. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Princeton, 1961) pp. 166–75.
- 21 David Stevenson, 'Britain, France and the Origins of German Disarmament, 1916–1919', *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2006), pp. 195–224; Sharp, 'Mission Accomplished? Britain and the Disarmament of Germany, 1918–1923' in K. Hamilton and E. Johnson (eds.) *Arms and Disarmament in Diplomacy* (Valentine Mitchell: 2007), pp. 73–90; Fry *And Fortune Fled* pp. 82–83.
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- 23 Cmd 2169, p. 79.
- 24 Lentin, *Lost Peace* p. 6 and pp. 47–64.
- 25 Sharp, *Versailles Settlement* pp. 127–31.
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