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## France and the World Disarmament

### Conference of 1932-34

ABSTRACT: Traditional accounts of the disastrous World Disarmament Conference of 1932-34 have placed the blame for its failure on France. Recent historians have revised this picture by describing the internal and external constraints on French policymakers and by delineating the equally obstructive policies adopted by the Anglo-Saxon countries. This article outlines each of these approaches, but takes the defence of France one step further. By assessing the evolution of French policy at the World Disarmament Conference, the article demonstrates that France was prepared to make greater concessions for the sake of agreement than any other country.

When the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments came to an end in June 1934, there was little doubt in the minds of most Englishmen as to where the blame lay for its failure.<sup>1</sup> In his celebrated account of the Conference, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe*, Major-General Arthur Cecil Temperley declared: 'I do not desire to hunt for scapegoats...but...I cannot acquit France of a fair share of the blame....When one looks back upon what might have been, the blindness of French statesmen is almost incredible.'<sup>2</sup> In defence of their country, French scholars such as Maurice Vaïsse have made extensive efforts to demonstrate the justness of France's obstructive policies.<sup>3</sup> But the defence can be taken much further: of all the great powers present at the World Disarmament Conference, it was France that made the most concessions.

## I. The Traditional Account

From before the World Disarmament Conference had even begun through to its collapse in 1934, the French contribution has been portrayed as consistently obstructive.<sup>4</sup> France was the first major country to announce her policy towards the Conference, in a memorandum released six months before deliberations were due to commence. The memorandum of 21 July 1931 declared that French armaments were at ‘the lowest point consistent with her national security’ and could only be reduced if additional security commitments were forthcoming from the Anglo-Saxon countries.<sup>5</sup> As Temperley stated: ‘If that memorandum was to remain the basis of their policy, there could be no hope of any sort for the Conference.’<sup>6</sup>

When the Conference did finally open in February 1932, it was supposed to begin with the adoption as the basis for discussion of the Draft Convention that had been drawn up over the previous six years by a ‘Preparatory Commission.’ As the contemporary chronicler, John Wheeler-Bennett, stated: ‘In theory the Conference had only to fill in the blanks which had been left whenever figures appeared as to the levels to which the nations of the world were prepared to reduce their navies, armies and air forces.’<sup>7</sup> French War Minister André Tardieu, on the other hand, had different plans. He had devised a proposal of his own for presentation at the Conference and revealed it to the world before the general debate had even started. Its principal features were the internationalisation of civil aviation and an international police force for the purpose of upholding enhanced League of Nations mechanisms for mutual security.<sup>8</sup>

Documents in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry back up Temperley’s assertion that those who devised the Tardieu Plan ‘did not mean to

disarm at all.’<sup>9</sup> One of these men was Louis Aubert, who privately admitted that the central concept of the plan – that of common action against aggressors – was ‘unreal.’ According to Aubert, the proposal was only ‘real as a tactic’ because he believed that ‘the reality of the Conference is not everyday reality, but a demagogic and theatrical reality, determined by manoeuvres made in view of captivating universal public opinion with simple ideas.’<sup>10</sup>

However, the Tardieu Plan failed to captivate public opinion in Britain and the United States, and the isolationist popular sentiment in these countries prevented the adoption of further security commitments.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the Draft Convention was adopted as the basis for discussion, and proceedings quickly stagnated in discussions of how the reductions envisaged in the Convention could be carried out.

Three months into the Conference, it appeared to many that the first real opportunity for agreement arose when US Secretary of State Henry Stimson and British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald visited Geneva in April 1932. Faced with rising support for the Nazis at home, German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning proposed to these men a plan to secure the principal German demand at the Conference – recognition of her equal rights.<sup>12</sup> In place of the arms restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty, he proposed halving the period of Reichswehr service, doubling the number of Reichswehr or militia troops to 200,000, and sticking to the current restrictions on her ‘offensive’ weapons if all other countries did likewise. Both Anglo-Saxon leaders agreed that these proposals could form the basis of a settlement, and Temperley declared: ‘No honest man could deny that they were extremely moderate.’<sup>13</sup>

As Wheeler-Bennett noted: ‘Almost it seemed as if the chief barrier to the success of the Conference had been removed and that the peace of Europe had

received a fresh guarantee.’<sup>14</sup> However, André Tardieu is credited with having ‘conspicuously failed to take advantage’ of Bruening’s plan.<sup>15</sup> Rather than going to Geneva to discuss the proposal on 29 April, Tardieu sent a note the day before stating that he was unable to come because of an attack of laryngitis. ‘With this refusal,’ Wheeler-Bennett claimed, ‘the hopes of success for the Conference became moribund...Dr. Bruening returned empty-handed to Berlin to face the inevitable, and on 30 May was dismissed by President Hindenburg...Herr von Papen succeeded the Chancellorship and the curtain rang up on the “Prelude to Hitler”.’<sup>16</sup>

More optimistic authors claim that even after this ‘April Tragedy,’ there were a number of additional chances for success. The British assistant to the President of the Disarmament Conference, Philip Noel-Baker, for instance, points out the opportunity that arose two months later when the US President, Herbert Hoover, introduced a grand scheme for general disarmament on 22 June.<sup>17</sup> Hoover hoped to secure agreement to cut global arms expenditure by a third and abolish ‘offensive’ weapons such as bombing aircraft, tanks, heavy guns and chemical and biological weapons. The German, Soviet and Italian delegations all agreed with Hoover’s plan, but the French delegate, Joseph Paul-Boncour, could not because – in Temperley’s words – it ‘committed the deadly sin of not mentioning “security” at all.’<sup>18</sup> Even though Paul-Boncour represented a new centre-left coalition government led by Edouard Herriot, he appeared to be continuing the policy of his right-wing predecessors.<sup>19</sup> The first phase of the Disarmament Conference therefore came to an end on 23 July with the German delegation walking out because of the failure to recognise her equal rights.

Without a German delegation present, no progress could be made. It was the British government that took the lead in the negotiations that resulted in Germany’s

return to the Conference.<sup>20</sup> This took place after Britain, the US, and France had signed a declaration on 11 December 1932 stating that the Conference's goals should include the recognition of 'equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations.'<sup>21</sup> By the time the Conference reconvened on 31 January 1933, however, Hitler had been appointed German Chancellor. In consequence, authors such as the British historian of the League of Nations, F. P. Walters, claim that the Conference was now doomed: 'The fleeting opportunities which might have led to its success had been missed, and they were not destined to return.'<sup>22</sup>

Temperley's account is less pessimistic, arguing that there was one last 'psychological moment for saving the Conference,' when the British Prime Minister proposed a complete Draft Convention in March 1933.<sup>23</sup> French security concerns were dealt with in the first part of the MacDonald Plan, which provided for consultation whenever the Kellogg-Briand Pact was threatened or violated. Further reassurances were given in the form of supervisory arrangements through the establishment of a permanent disarmament commission. As for the disarmament measures outlined in Part II, all countries but Russia were to be allowed 200,000-strong land armies, and mobile guns were to be limited by calibre (four inches) and tanks by weight (sixteen tons). The measures of the Treaty of London were to be used for naval armaments, while aerial bombardment was to be abolished except for 'policing' purposes. To satisfy German interests, the draft convention was to replace the Versailles disarmament obligations, Germany could substitute a short-service army for the Reichswehr, and could gain actual equality of land effectives and armaments within five years. In Wheeler-Bennett's eyes, 'The draft Convention was a genuinely honest attempt to translate into practical terms the Agreement of 11 December, both in regard to German equality and also to French security.'<sup>24</sup>

However, Temperley observed that Paul-Boncour ‘spoke bitterly of our plan’ and that although the new Prime Minister, Edouard Daladier, officially ‘gave it a warm welcome,’ he was ‘horrified at the idea of Germany being automatically released from the clauses of the Versailles Treaty.’<sup>25</sup>

The following June, the French government insisted on modifying the MacDonald Plan by requesting that its supervisory apparatus be given a four-year ‘trial’ period. Faced with pressure from the United States, Britain agreed to the modifications on 22 September 1933. It was this decision, according to Wheeler-Bennett, that ‘was destined to wreck the Conference.’<sup>26</sup> Temperley explains why: ‘It was hardly possible that Germany, just emerging from a revolution, conscious of a returning self-respect and increasing strength would accept the proposal of a “trial” period. The very word made the proposal hopeless from the beginning; it seemed just like releasing a convict on ticket-of-leave.’<sup>27</sup> Germany therefore walked out of the Disarmament Conference for the second and final time on 14 October 1933. Hitler was also provided with the excuse he needed to leave the League of Nations and begin openly rearming.

Even after this event, chances for a disarmament settlement looked possible. Hitler made a number of proposals for supervision of Germany’s rearmament, such as limiting the Reichswehr to 300,000 and an air force half the size of France’s, all watched over by an International Commission. Temperley claimed: ‘No one could say that his terms were not moderate and even generous.’<sup>28</sup> Britain made proposals that attempted to reconcile the existing positions, but the new French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou, declared that German defence estimates made impossible any further negotiations in a note to the British ambassador to Paris of 17 April 1934. This note, according to Temperley, ‘was a staggering blow to the Conference. It was left to M.

Barthou to administer the “knock-out” at the meeting of the General Commission [of the Conference] on May 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>29</sup> His vituperative speech at the Commission was followed by the Conference’s final adjournment on 11 June 1934.

## II. Defence of the French Position

In response to this damning account, French historians have sought to defend the position taken by their country by outlining the constraining circumstances in which French statesmen had to operate. This is one of the principal purposes of the substantial volume on French policy at the Disarmament Conference, *Sécurité d’abord*, by eminent historian Maurice Vaïsse. ‘How could it have been otherwise?’, he asks, given the vulnerability of France vis-à-vis Germany, which had invaded her twice since 1870.<sup>30</sup> Lacking the natural defence provided by the sea, the French had good reason to require significantly greater armaments than Britain and America.

Furthermore, intelligence sources indicated that Germany was already breaching the Versailles restrictions on her armed forces long before the Conference began. It was clear from the German budget that her military expenditure was disproportionately high, and the French *Deuxième Bureau* was also aware that Germany had too many non-commanding officers, was having air pilots trained in the Soviet Union, and was secretly rearming with forbidden weapons. All of these breaches were contained in a ‘dossier,’ the contents of which the French delegation threatened on several occasions to reveal.<sup>31</sup>

Faced with this threat from a rearming Germany, France had to fall back on her own military resources, given the isolationist positions being adopted by Britain and America at the time. Of crucial importance is the failure of the Anglo-Saxon



countries to provide the security guarantees they promised to France in exchange for her concessions in the 1919 Paris peace settlement. At the Paris Peace Conference, the French delegates had hoped to ensure their security against repeated German attack by permanently occupying the Rhineland. Because of Anglo-American opposition, this was rescinded in exchange for an undertaking by Great Britain and the USA to support France in the event of unprovoked aggression by Germany. This was embodied in a Treaty of Assistance signed on the same day as the Versailles Treaty. On 19 March 1920, however, the United States Senate failed to ratify both the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Assistance. Without US participation, Britain also repudiated the Assistance Treaty and France was left to defend herself with her own resources alone.

In addition to facing a threatening international situation, French statesmen had to contend with a difficult domestic scene. In the interwar period, French governments were rarely secure, lasting an average of just nine months.<sup>32</sup> Although the Third Republic never faced serious revolutionary challenges, there were a number of extreme-right organisations to contend with, such as Colonel de la Rocque's *Croix de Feu*. Furthermore, the rightist press from moderate right to staunch conservative to far right was deeply hostile to the reduction of French armaments, as can be seen in the pages of such journals as *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, *L'Action Française*, *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, *Le Journal*, *Le Matin*, *L'Ami du Peuple* and *L'Echo de Paris*. As for the political parties, the overwhelming majority promoted disarmament only if accompanied by further security guarantees and the Socialist and Communist Parties were alone in promoting unconditional arms limitation.

A good example highlighting the tensions generated by the disarmament issue within France is the pro-disarmament demonstration organised by the international

peace movement in the Trocadéro in Paris in November 1931. The public meeting was infiltrated by 700 members of the nationalistic ex-servicemen's group, the *Croix de Feu*, which proceeded to shout down the speakers, start fights with the pacifist delegates 'in almost every section of the great auditorium,' raid the platform, assault all the foreign dignitaries sat upon it, and force an early closure.<sup>33</sup> The police refused to intervene until the very end: as Colonel de la Roque later remarked, 'when we took one step forward the police took two steps back.'<sup>34</sup> Since the tumult had been broadcast internationally and involved the physical assault of many foreign dignitaries, the government was forced to defend the police's handling of the event in a debate held in the Chamber of Deputies on 8 December, which the government made a matter of confidence and won only by a narrow majority.<sup>35</sup>

Faced with such substantial external and internal constraints, the French government clearly had good reason to impede many of the proposals that arose during the course of the Disarmament Conference. The Bruening proposals of April 1932, for instance, were particularly unfair. Not only was no reference made to French security needs, Germany would have doubled her army's strength while France would have had to lose all her heavy weapons. A similar lack of reference to French security needs was present in the Hoover Plan of June 1932, while Hitler's proposals after he had pulled out of the Conference demanded even greater German rearmament than Bruening had advocated.

### **III. Reinterpretation of the Anglo-Saxon Position**

Recent British historians of the Disarmament Conference have sought to redress the balance in a different way: by indicating the equally inflexible policies that were

pursued by the other Western countries. Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching, for instance, have made efforts to display the inadequacies of the British government's position, despite the fact that this country worked harder than any other to ensure that the Conference took place at all.<sup>36</sup> Claiming that the National Government 'wanted to use the conference to legitimise British rearmament,' Richardson and Kitching argue: 'The reality is that Britain must bear a much larger responsibility for the failure of the Disarmament Conference than has hitherto been assumed.'<sup>37</sup>

Richardson and Kitching point out British obstructiveness in both the technical and the political aspects of disarmament.<sup>38</sup> On the technical side, for example, Richardson claims the 'great majority of powers favoured the abolition of both bombing aircraft and of aerial bombardment,' but the British persistently requested that exemption should be made for 'police bombing,' making them 'the laughing stock of Geneva.'<sup>39</sup> As for the political side, he and Kitching argue the British government 'based its policy on the premise of no security guarantees in Europe additional to those given at Locarno. But this premise, firmly embedded in the Cabinet decision of 15 December 1931, effectively killed the conference before it had started.'<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that on both these points Temperley also criticises the British government, although he claims that 'these were not the rocks upon which the Conference was shipwrecked.'<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, if one compares the initial British position at the Conference with that adopted subsequently, it is evident that little was conceded. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald summed up the original British position thus: 'The Delegation ought to emphasise the fact that we had not waited for the Disarmament Conference to begin disarming, and to describe the situation which had been reached as a result of our efforts. In this respect we had a magnificent case. Whether other nations believed

us or not was not very material, provided that the whole case were put and reached our own public.<sup>42</sup> Subsequent policies reflected this indifference.

Throughout the first year of the Disarmament Conference, the British government failed to seize any of the initiatives presented to the Conference. The Tardieu Plan was simply ignored, and all authors on British disarmament policy agree that more could have been done to persuade Tardieu to discuss the Bruening proposals.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, when President Hoover proposed his scheme for disarmament, it was not French opposition that was crucial to its failure; it was the hostility of the British delegation. As Noel-Baker argued, Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon effectively 'killed the Hoover Plan' with a statement on 7 July 1932 that was 'a flat rejection of almost everything that Hoover had proposed.'<sup>44</sup> He outlined his opposition to the complete abolition of both tanks and aerial bombardment, as well as his objection to all the naval reductions envisaged in the plan. The same policies were ultimately incorporated into the MacDonald Plan the following year, a scheme which Foreign Office officials pointed out was 'simply a demonstration for internal consumption' rather than a serious attempt to save the Conference.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the praise that the Hoover Plan has traditionally been accorded, one can also argue that the US policy at the World Disarmament Conference was as inflexible as that of Great Britain. Hoover's initial instruction to his delegation was similar to MacDonald's: 'our role at the forthcoming conference would naturally have to be an inactive one, since the Navy, which was our principal arm, was already strictly limited and our Army was on the lowest possible terms, even for the maintenance of internal order.'<sup>46</sup> His plan of June 1932, despite appearing to promote drastic reductions, in fact envisaged only limited concessions by the United States itself. Although committed to reducing its materiel in the same way as any other

country, the US army was comparatively unaffected. The Hoover Plan envisaged a one-third reduction only to the 'defence' component of armies, while the forces necessary for domestic policing were to be left alone. As a result, only countries with large 'defence' components – such as France – had to make substantial reductions under the scheme. It is also possible to argue that the Hoover Plan was more an attempt to divert attention from America's obdurate policy on war debts at the Lausanne Conference rather than a sincere attempt to bring the Disarmament Conference to a successful conclusion.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, the US delegation was as unprepared to provide any additional security commitments to continental Europe as the British. The starting position of both Anglo-Saxon delegations was to offer no more than agreement to consult in the event of threatened or actual violation of the terms of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, a policy that they had already shown a willingness to undertake in response to Japanese military activities in Manchuria. Subsequent statements by each delegation shrouded their failure to move from this original position. The most notable example is that of chief US delegate Norman Davis' speech to the Conference on 22 May 1933, when he presented American agreement not to impede European sanctions against aggressor countries as a substantial concession to France.<sup>48</sup>

#### **IV. 'Despite our proposals and our efforts at conciliation...'<sup>49</sup>**

Although some authors have shown Britain and America to be equally obstructive, and despite Maurice Vaïsse's defence of the French position, the claim that France pursued an inflexible policy of '*juridisme, immobilisme et suivisme*' has been left largely unchallenged.<sup>50</sup> However, if a comparison is made between the original

French policy at the Conference and the proposals that France was prepared to accept in September 1933, it is clear that she conceded far more to the Anglo-Saxon position than Britain and America were prepared to grant to France.

The original French policy, as outlined in the July 1931 memorandum and the February 1932 Tardieu Plan, had three principal features. The first was insistence that no French disarmament was possible without additional security guarantees from Britain and America. The second was that demands for disarmament should be met through the transfer of military resources to the League of Nations for the enforcement of the Covenant. The third was insistence on the permanent continuation of Versailles restrictions on German armaments. As the Conference progressed, the French abandoned all of these demands.

The policy of the July memorandum and the Tardieu Plan reflected the outlook of the right-wing governments led by Pierre Laval and André Tardieu from January 1931. Their replacement by Prime and Foreign Minister Edouard Herriot and War Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour in June 1932 made a fundamental difference to French disarmament policy. Representing a broad centre-left coalition, they had to take into account the demands of the Socialist coalition members led by Léon Blum, who promoted arms limitation without the need for any additional security arrangements.

Furthermore, both Herriot and Paul-Boncour had an internationalist track-record. When Prime Minister in 1924, for instance, Herriot conceded so much at the London Reparations Conference that some have claimed the outcome was ‘the end of French predominance in Europe.’<sup>51</sup> As for disarmament, Herriot led the Radical Socialist Party, which promoted the simultaneous pursuit of disarmament, arbitration and security measures: a policy he put forward in a speech to the Trocadéro

Conference in November 1931.<sup>52</sup> Joseph Paul-Boncour, leader of the *Union Socialiste Républicaine* and long-term advocate of the League of Nations, also gave a speech to this Conference emphasising the need for arms control within the framework of a strengthened League. Described by the pro-disarmer Salvador de Madariaga as a ‘loyal, straight, courageous’ man who ‘liked the English,’ Paul-Boncour played a crucial role in the first set of French concessions at the Conference.<sup>53</sup>

It has to be noted that, in rejecting the Hoover Plan, the initial policy of the Herriot government was little different from that of its predecessor.<sup>54</sup> In October 1932, however, the lack of progress at the Conference, the possibility of German rearmament after her withdrawal in July 1932, and Léon Blum’s persistent appeals for arms limitation began to worry Paul-Boncour.<sup>55</sup> In a note dated 4 October 1932, concern was expressed about ‘the political isolation of France’ because of her refusal to accept German demands for equal rights. In consequence, ‘if we do not put forward a plan for progressive and controlled disarmament, international public opinion will hold us responsible for the failure of the Conference....[and the resultant] German rearmament would drive us fatally to catastrophe.’<sup>56</sup> A new plan was therefore devised, and presented to the world on 14 November 1932.<sup>57</sup>

Paul-Boncour’s ‘Constructive Plan’ made substantial concessions on each of the three aspects of the original French policy. Demands for additional security arrangements were greatly diluted. All that was asked of Britain and America was agreement to consult in the event of violation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact – a policy that both countries had already indicated they were prepared to accept. In the ‘Constructive Plan’ the only countries that were asked to participate in a mutual assistance pact beyond the commitments already entailed by Article 16 of the League’s Covenant were those of continental Europe. The plea for greater security

commitments from the Anglo-Saxons that had dominated French foreign policy since the end of the First World War was thus effectively abandoned.

The initial policy of refusing to disarm or recognise German equality was also weakened in Paul-Boncour's plan. He advocated "replacing permanent national forces with organically international forces," each state keeping only a militia at its disposal.<sup>58</sup> As with the mutual assistance pact, this would apply only to continental European countries. The national militias were not to be allowed any 'offensive' weapons, but such weapons would be retained for the use of the international armed forces in the country of origin under the control of an international commission. Although this part of the proposal entailed the retention of far greater military resources within French territory compared to Germany, the proposal paid more than lip-service to German equality in its allowance of merely a militia for each continental European country.

The sincerity of the 'Constructive Plan' is demonstrated by the reaction it received in the meetings of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*. The military chiefs, in particular General Maxime Weygand, severely criticised the militia idea for leaving France defenceless.<sup>59</sup> However, Paul-Boncour pressed ahead with his plan despite Weygand's opposition, and from then until the return of a right-wing political leadership in 1934 the French government pursued disarmament policies without the approval of the military establishment.<sup>60</sup> Weygand was left powerless to prevent what he called the 'salon bolshevism' of the 'Destructive Plan' in the pages of the *Journal des Débats*, while Tardieu sent a similarly vitriolic letter to *L'Echo de Paris* criticising the new proposal for abandoning the essential features of his February scheme.<sup>61</sup>



Despite the significant concessions of the Paul-Boncour Plan, it failed to have its intended impact. One problem was timing: Germany was absent from the Disarmament Conference at the time of the plan's presentation, and discussion of it could therefore not begin until the following year. Another, as some of the more perceptive members of the Anglo-Saxon delegations noted, was the failure of the British and American governments to realise the 'real significance' of the new French proposal. Theodore Marriner's comment that the proposal 'seemed somewhat obscure' summed up the mainstream Anglo-Saxon reaction and the opportunity to force the plan on Germany was missed.<sup>62</sup>

In place of the Paul-Boncour proposal, the British delegation presented the Conference with the MacDonald Plan in March 1933. This plan ignored Paul-Boncour's continental security arrangements, and simply proposed equality of armaments for France and Germany by allowing the Reichswehr to double in size and by forcing France to cut back to German levels. By this time, Edouard Daladier had become French Prime Minister. Unlike Paul-Boncour, who had devoted much of his political career to promoting mutual assistance, Daladier was influenced by the ideas of politicians such as his Air Minister Pierre Cot, who advocated strict supervision procedures as an alternative mechanism for keeping France secure.<sup>63</sup> In June 1933, therefore, a plan was drawn up which essentially agreed to the provisions of MacDonald's proposal on the sole condition that the supervisory apparatus be tested for four years before any reductions took place.<sup>64</sup> As the French delegation pointed out, this was a reasonable request given the German evasion of the Versailles restrictions over the previous decade.<sup>65</sup> The British and American delegations therefore agreed to the amendment in September.

Despite the traditional description of the revised plan as the cause of the failure of the Disarmament Conference, the French historian Jacques Néré has pointed out that it in fact signified ‘the great retreat of France.’<sup>66</sup> All three of the original features of the French approach to the Disarmament Conference were abandoned in this scheme. Rather than insisting on greater security guarantees, all that was requested was a ‘trial period’ for the supervision of armaments. In place of the insistence that disarmament should be effected by the transfer of weapons to an international army, France agreed to start destroying all her heavy weapons and reduce her armed forces to 200,000 after the trial period had expired. Finally, the refusal to recognise German equality was abandoned subject to the four-year breathing-space.

Daladier’s revised plan represented the maximum concessions possible for France given the fears of the French population at the time about Nazi Germany. Even the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Tyrrell, recognised that Daladier was ‘bound by the whole force of French parliamentary and public opinion,’ which ‘requires him either to produce a stormproof disarmament convention or to take steps to maintain French superiority in arms. For French opinion there is no via media between these two courses.’<sup>67</sup> In the eyes of Weygand and the traditional military establishment, Daladier definitely chose the wrong course.<sup>68</sup>

Although the scale of French concessions at the World Disarmament Conference was considerable, it may be argued that they were too little too late. For instance, it is likely that after the fall of the Bruening government, the possibility of persuading Germany to accept any agreement that did not immediately allow her to rearm was remote, as Hitler’s actions on 14 October 1933 clearly demonstrated. However, whereas Britain and America refused to make any concessions on the issue

of multilateral security arrangements, the French were prepared to drop all of their demands in this area and were even prepared to accept the possibility of German rearmament and French disarmament within four years. No other government was willing to relinquish so much for the sake of agreement at the World Disarmament Conference, but few in Britain or America recognised this at the time. As Herriot pointed out at the height of the Disarmament Conference, ‘world opinion was most unjust to France.’<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General Arthur Cecil Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe* (London: Collins, 1938), p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Vaïsse, *Sécurité d’abord: la politique française en matière de désarmement, 9 décembre 1930 – 17 avril 1934* (Paris: Pedone, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> See Temperley, *Whispering Gallery* and John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Disarmament Deadlock*, (London: Routledge, 1934).

<sup>5</sup> For the text of the memorandum, see *Comment et pourquoi désarmer? Avec le texte intégral du mémorandum français sur le désarmement* (Paris: Editions de L’Europe Nouvelle, 1931).

<sup>6</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Conf. D/56, 5 Feb. 1932, League of Nations Archives, Geneva.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the special committee meetings of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale, cote 726, série SDN, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris (summarised in Vaïsse, *Sécurité d’abord*, pp. 138-48); Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Note de M. Aubert remise au Président du Conseil le 6 janvier 1932: Observations à soumettre au CSDN (8 janvier)’, cote 498, Tardieu Papers, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

<sup>11</sup> The refusal of British public opinion to accept further military commitments is cited as the principal reason for the British government’s decision not to accept them in the summary of disarmament discussions of 8 Dec. 1931, FO 800/285, Simon Papers, National Archives, London.

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- <sup>12</sup> Christoph Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 162.
- <sup>13</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 203.
- <sup>14</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, p. 32.
- <sup>15</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 206.
- <sup>16</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, pp. 33-4.
- <sup>17</sup> Philip Noel-Baker, *The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932-1934, And Why It Failed* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), pp. 4, 81-110.
- <sup>18</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 211.
- <sup>19</sup> Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, pp. 249-58
- <sup>20</sup> Cabinet meeting 56 of 31 Oct. 1932, CAB 23/72, National Archives, London.
- <sup>21</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, ser. 2, vol. 4, no. 220.
- <sup>22</sup> F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 515.
- <sup>23</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 243.
- <sup>24</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, p. 108.
- <sup>25</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, pp. 239, 242.
- <sup>26</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, p. 176.
- <sup>27</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 255.
- <sup>28</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 261.
- <sup>29</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 264.
- <sup>30</sup> Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, p. 597.
- <sup>31</sup> Edward W. Bennett, *German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 78-85. For an example of French intelligence with respect to German violations of the Versailles Treaty, see *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1932-1939*, ser. 1, vol. 4, pp. 120-8.
- <sup>32</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940* (London: Arnold, 1995), p. 7.
- <sup>33</sup> *New York Herald* (Paris), 28 Nov. 1931.
- <sup>34</sup> Quoted in Paul Chopine, *Six ans chez les Croix de Feu*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), p. 71.

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<sup>35</sup> On the debate, see 'A Debate on a Tumult: French Chamber and Trocadéro Meeting', *Headway*, Jan. 1932, pp. 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Their argument was first outlined in Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching, 'Britain and the World Disarmament Conference,' in P. Catterall and C. J. Morris, (eds.), *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 35-56. See also Dick Richardson, 'The Geneva Disarmament Conference, 1932-1934' in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone, (eds.), *Decisions and Diplomacy: essays in twentieth century international history: in memory of George Grun and Esmonde Robertson* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 60-82; and Carolyn Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference: A Study in International History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Richardson and Kitching, 'Britain and the World Disarmament Conference,' pp. 52, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Richardson, 'Geneva Disarmament Conference,' p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Richardson, 'Geneva Disarmament Conference,' p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Richardson and Kitching, 'Britain and the World Disarmament Conference,' p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, pp. 264, 273, 278-9.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>43</sup> Temperley, *Whispering Gallery*, p. 205; Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, pp. 33-4; Richardson and Kitching, 'Britain and the World Disarmament Conference,' p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> Note of 13 Mar. 1933, W2738/40/98, FO 371/17353, Foreign Office General Correspondence, National Archives, London.

<sup>46</sup> 'Memorandum of a conversation at the White House, 5 Jan. 1932', container 20, Norman Davis Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>47</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1932*, vol. 1, p. 186.

<sup>48</sup> United States Department of State, *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941*, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 188-9.

<sup>49</sup> 'Note sur l'Egalité des Droits, la Sécurité et le Désarmement, Geneve, le 4 Octobre 1932,' cote 872, série SDN, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères.

<sup>50</sup> Vaisse, *Sécurité d'Abord*, pp. 605-6.

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen A. Shuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe: the Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Transcripts of the speeches at the Trocadéro Conference are contained in cote 34, Herriot Papers, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

<sup>53</sup> Salvador de Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon: Memoirs*, (Westmead: Saxon House, 1974), p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, pp. 249-58.

<sup>55</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, ser. 1, vol. 1, p. 439.

<sup>56</sup> 'Note sur l'Egalité des Droits, la Sécurité et le Désarmement, Geneve, le 4 Octobre 1932', cote 872, série SDN, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères.

<sup>57</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, ser. 1, vol. 1, pp. 710-18.

<sup>58</sup> J. Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945*, (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, ser. 1, vol. 1, docs. 250, 255, 260, 266, 268, 272-3 and 286.

<sup>60</sup> Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, p. 602.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Charles Farwell Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 64, 69; *L'Echo de Paris*, 16 Nov. 1932.

<sup>62</sup> Confidential memorandum of 21 Nov. 1932, container 17, Norman Davis Papers.

<sup>63</sup> See Memorandum by R. F. Wigram of conversations with Comert and Cot, 23 Dec. 1932, W14116/1466/98, FO 371/16470.

<sup>64</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, ser. 1, vol. 3, pp. 897-9.

<sup>65</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, ser. 1, vol. 3, pp. 295-6.

<sup>66</sup> Néré, *Foreign Policy of France*, p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum on French Disarmament Policy, 12 Aug. 1933, W9445/40/98, FO 371/17366.

<sup>68</sup> Edouard Réquin, *D'une guerre à l'autre, 1919-1939: Souvenirs*, (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1949), p. 181. See also Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, p. 461.

<sup>69</sup> Quotation from *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 28 Oct. 1932, pp. 2901-38, cited in Tyrrell to Simon, 30 Oct. 1932, W11932/1466/98, FO 371/16466.