

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY DISSENT IN 1917

**"THEY LOOK IN VAIN":
BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY DISSENT AND
THE QUEST FOR A NEGOTIATED PEACE DURING THE GREAT WAR
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON 1917**

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ABSTRACT

Within the extensive literature on British dissent in the First World War, there is a significant lack of study on the critical year of the War, 1917. This thesis addresses this omission by examining the period from December 1916 to January 1918. In the orthodox view of dissent in the Great War, the dissenters became an increasingly powerful political movement which succeeded in capturing the Labour Party and in driving the Coalition Government into accepting a moderate set of war aims. This thesis revises the orthodox view by arguing that by August 1917 dissent was becoming a spent political force whose ideas were coopted by less radical groups who had little or no commitment to real dissenting objectives. The chronological approach focuses on the contribution of five leading representatives of Liberal-Radical and Independent Labour Party dissent: Noel Buxton, Arthur Ponsonby, E.D. Morel, Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden. The analysis reveals that these dissenters assumed the prominent role in the call for a negotiated peace in the first half of 1917. In mid-1917, however, their cause suffered serious setbacks with the Southgate Brotherhood Church Riot of 31 July, the Special Labour Party Conferences of August and the creation of the Government-sponsored National War Aims Committee. Throughout the fall of 1917, the dissenters came under growing Government repression and, for a variety of reasons, increasingly found themselves displaced from their pre-eminent position in the leadership of the peace-by-negotiation movement. Seen in this light, the Labour Party's 28 December 1917 War Aims Memorandum, Lloyd George's 5 January 1918 speech at Caxton Hall and American President Woodrow Wilson's 8 January 1918 speech to Congress, all attributed to dissenting pressure, in actuality represent defeats for

dissent. By mid-February 1918 the dissenters were even further removed from political influence than they had been before December 1916. It has been observed that the dissenters lost the War but won the peace. The epilogue examines this presumed paradox and finds it to be more apparent than real.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACIQ	Advisory Committee on International Questions
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BSP	British Socialist Party
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CO	Conscientious Objector
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
FO	Foreign Office Papers
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NCF	No-Conscription Fellowship
NAC	National Administrative Committee
NEC	National Executive Committee
NWAC	National War Aims Committee
PD	Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, fifth series
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
WIL	Women's International League

INTRODUCTION

British foreign policy dissent in the First World War has been a source of interest since the period itself. This is somewhat paradoxical in light of the failure of the League of Nations--the establishment of which seemingly fulfilled what was ostensibly a key dissenting demand--in the inter-war period. Indeed, it has been said that the dissenters lost the war but won the peace. It was their view of the origins of World War I which remained the unchallenged orthodox interpretation until the 1930s, and in some respects, until the 1960s. This might explain the dissenters' appeal. Despite the broad acceptance of the dissenters' version of history, considerable gaps exist in the historiography of British foreign policy dissent. In particular, historians have not examined closely, from the perspective of peace advocates in the belligerent countries, the most significant year of the First World War--1917. As the noted historian of British dissent, A.J.P. Taylor, has observed:

1917 was in every country the great year of discussion for a negotiated peace; it was also the year which saw the dawn of the New World--in more senses than one...Two great events caused this Dawn. One was the entry of the United States into the war; the other was the Russian Revolution.

Although existing historical treatments of British foreign policy dissent have touched on 1917, they have not demonstrated the confluence of dissenting ideas and personalities with the dramatic international and domestic political events of this pivotal twelve month period.¹

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1729-1939, (London, 1957), pp. 145-146. One significant exception is the recently published volume 14 of The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell. In this work, the editors have followed the career to emphasize the importance of 1917. See R.A. Rempel, L. Greenspan, M. Lippincott, B. Haslam, A. Lewis, The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, Pacifism and Revolution, 1916-1918 (London, 1995), passim.

By concentrating on the dissenting experience during 1917, this thesis attempts to enrich current historical understanding of British dissent. Using a narrative and chronological approach, this thesis will highlight the impact of political, military, diplomatic and social factors on the development of foreign policy dissent. Within this basic framework, the thesis will place in particular prominence the peace advocacy of five individuals. Each contributed significantly to the dissenting movement during the First World War, yet at the same time represented a different facet of this peculiarly amorphous British tradition. The individuals concerned are, Noel Buxton, an example of moderate Liberal-Radicalism; Arthur Ponsonby, a more radical Liberal dissenter; E.D. Morel, an extra-parliamentary Liberal publicist; James Ramsay MacDonald, a moderate Independent Labour Party (ILP) parliamentarian active in foreign policy dissent; and Philip Snowden, a more fervent and strident advocate of foreign policy reform than MacDonald. The thesis will also consider other people within the broad dissenting movement.

The interpretation of British dissent that is presented below questions the orthodox view of a movement that gathered momentum steadily throughout 1917 and, indeed, continued to do so up to November 1918. This thesis, by contrast, will argue that, by January 1918, the dissenters' campaign for a negotiated settlement was as distant a prospect as at any time since August 1914. The dissenters' campaign for a negotiated peace reached a climax, not towards the end of the war, but in the summer of 1917.

Largely as a result of the overthrow of Tsarist Autocracy in March 1917, the advocates of a peace-by-negotiation had been able to recover from the setback of Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare at the beginning of the previous month. Those dissenters who were inspired by the first Russian Revolution--especially, but not exclusively, by the Provisional Government's endorsement of a peace without annexations or indemnities--saw in these momentous developments the framework for both an early and just peace. Around the same

time, the formal enlistment of the United States to the Allied cause in April 1917 exposed certain divisions within British dissent. Some dissenters continued to hope that President Wilson would still be able to forge the moderate and liberal peace settlement for which he had stood throughout the protracted period of American neutrality. Others, however, feared that, once American blood had been drawn, the President would find it impossible to maintain his pose of impartiality and that Wilsonian idealism would be swept away by a tide of domestic war hysteria. Yet, the foreboding engendered by American intervention did not, in the main, reduce the growing optimism of British dissenters. This buoyant mood was sustained until August 1917. From the late summer onwards, however, the dissenters were forced into a protracted rear-guard action as a range of forces endeavoured to co-opt parts of their programme, but without embracing the keynote dissenting demand for a peace-by-negotiation. The publication of the Lansdowne Letter, the Labour Party's War Aims Memorandum of December 1917, Lloyd George's 5 January 1918 war aims speech, President Wilson's 22 January 1918 Senate address and the Labour Party Conference of January 1918, all appeared to vindicate British dissent. But, in reality, each served to demonstrate the failure of dissent during the previous year to transform fundamentally public and political opinion. Until August 1917, dissenters were making significant strides towards what they considered to be a satisfactory negotiated settlement. Yet, throughout the fall the dissenters lost control of the vision they had created. This thesis will analyze these complex and contradictory developments.

Definitions and Overview

In his seminal study of the critics of British foreign policy, A.J.P. Taylor defined a dissenter as a person who "repudiates [his national foreign policy] aims, its methods, its principles. What is more is that he claims to know better and to promote higher causes; he asserts a superiority,

moral and intellectual."² Taylor's explanation captures the self-righteousness of the dissenters and suggests a rich heritage from which the dissenters gained the strength and the inspiration that sustained them throughout what came to be called the Great War. British foreign policy dissent has a diverse background. Its different elements stem from the contrasting traditions of liberalism, socialism, and Protestant nonconformity. To take the first dissenting strand, many of the heterodox foreign policy ideas which surfaced in the First World War can be traced back to the liberal internationalism of the mid-nineteenth century, which can itself be divided into two principal schools: Cobdenite internationalism and Gladstonian internationalism.³

Richard Cobden was the quintessential spokesman for the 'Manchester School'⁴ in the emerging Liberal Party of the 1840s and 1850s. In the Cobdenite view there was a natural harmony of international interests based on commercial intercourse between different states. Cobden assumed that aggression was unnecessary and would ultimately disappear with the spread of free trade and non-intervention. For Cobden, autocratic Governments had sought to enrich the few by erecting and maintaining tariffs to prevent mutually beneficial trade. Furthermore, such Governments tried to retain control of foreign policy in order to direct the resources of the nation, to provide new opportunities for the ruling class, to protect their investments, or to

² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³ There were earlier antecedents but the Great War dissenters most often referred to their mid-nineteenth century roots. See Michael Howard, War and the Liberal Conscience (London, 1978), *passim*; Martin Ceadel, The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations (Oxford, 1996), *passim*.

⁴ The 'Manchester School' is an economic concept based on free-trade and *laissez-faire*. As the name suggests, the view originated from Manchester and was propounded principally by Lancashire cotton interests.

safeguard other members of the European aristocracy.⁵ Free trade was supposed to deprive meddling Governments of the opportunity to interfere with trade and, ultimately, to establish a peaceful and stable world order. He advocated instead a policy of non-intervention. This policy of non-involvement with other states would counter the deleterious effects of 'balance of power' diplomacy.⁶

Cobden advanced other ideas that later became key elements of the dissenting position. He rejected the view that Britain was morally superior.⁷ This sentiment was in accord with both free trade and non-interference. Consequently, because Britain was no more righteous than other nations, it could not be obliged to maintain the balance of power.⁸ Another of Cobden's central tenets was that war was the result of the undemocratic nature of government. He believed that foreign policy should be formulated by a democratically elected House of Commons.⁹ Indeed,

⁵ Cobden's views were probably influenced by Charles James Fox, the great supporter of the American revolutionaries. Fox opposed the notion that war could be used to defend liberty. While the fear that a large standing army threatened freedom was not new in Britain, Fox argued further that the navy was sufficient to defend Britain. Fox's suspicion of the military extended to the governing authority generally. Indeed, according to A.J.P. Taylor, "Fox held that ministers were acting to secure their places and to destroy liberty in this country." Thomas Paine, the British Radical and author of The Rights of Man (1791-1792), built on Fox's ideas by arguing that "wars are caused by governments. Democracy will end them." Taylor, The Trouble Makers, pp. 29-33. Also see Howard, War and the Liberal Conscience, p. 29. By the First World War, the assumption that democracy was pacific was widespread within dissent.

⁶ There is some disagreement between historians, however, over the extent to which Cobden adhered to a policy of 'non-intervention'. See Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 51; Kenneth E. Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice in Britain to 1931 (The Hague, 1967), pp. 7, 8; Howard, War and the Liberal Conscience, p. 44.

⁷ Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 52.

⁸ Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy, p. 7.

⁹ Taylor, The Trouble Makers, pp. 52, 66. Of course, the meaning of 'democratic', changed drastically at several critical junctures of nineteenth-century British politics. The Great Reform Act of 1832 granted the franchise to borough householders with an annual value of £10 and to freeholders of property worth forty shillings a year in the counties. It was intended to include some elements of the middle-class and to exclude the working-class. The Second Reform Act

British dissenters had been calling for a 'democratic foreign policy' ever since the era of the French Revolution. For the dissenters, this phrase denoted a foreign policy either formulated by the people, through a Parliament based on a wide suffrage, or through close governmental attention to public opinion. The solicitude of dissent for public opinion raises, in turn, the question of 'secret diplomacy', or 'Old Diplomacy', conducted by diplomats without reference to the people. The dissenters, particularly in the Edwardian period and during the Great War, called for parliamentary reforms which would oblige the Government to keep Parliament fully informed on foreign policy matters. Only then could the dissenters hope to have a fully instructed public capable of forming the right opinions. This prescription became known as the 'New Diplomacy'.¹⁰

The foreign policy ideas of William Gladstone, the 'Grand Old Man' of the Liberal Party in the latter half of the nineteenth century, added another dimension to liberal internationalism.¹¹ Gladstone too shunned large military expenditures and preferred to rely on Britain's capacity to arm quickly.¹² In contrast to Cobden, Gladstone was prepared to countenance military aggression far more readily, especially if the force of arms promoted Christian moral ends. He favoured cooperation between European states to restrain aggressive or immoral Governments.

of 1867 lowered the franchise to include more householders and lodgers. The Third Reform Act of 1884 expanded the franchise to cover agricultural labourers. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 granted universal manhood suffrage to those men over eighteen and gave the franchise to women over thirty.

¹⁰ For a more detailed definition of New Diplomacy see Arno J. Mayer, Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918 (New York, 1969), pp. 54-55. According to Mayer, "the most succinct, representative, and symbolic summary of this reform program is to be found in the [Union of Democratic Control] UDC platform." For the UDC's cardinal points, see Appendix A.

¹¹ Gladstone was Prime Minister in 1868-74, 1880-1885, 1886, 1892-1894.

¹² Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 73.

Specifically, Gladstone envisioned a revived Concert of Europe, which he conceived as an alliance of like-minded nations upholding the international rule of law.¹³ Gladstone's attempt to fuse foreign policy and morality became apparent during his celebrated 1876 campaign against Benjamin Disraeli's tacit support for the Ottoman Empire's "pacification" of its Bulgarian Christian subjects.¹⁴ The subsequent uproar over 'Bulgarian Atrocities' is an ideal example of how dissent tried to mobilize public opinion to force Governments to pursue a righteous foreign policy. Yet, six years later, when Britain occupied Egypt during Gladstone's second premiership, convinced Cobdenites such as John Bright saw only the huge gulf separating Gladstonian theory and practice.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the existence of disagreement within the dissenting camp, a far more damaging rift within Liberalism was that which opened up in the 1890s between the critics of empire (Cobdenite and Gladstonian alike) and that faction of the Party which embraced Britain's imperial mission without hesitation. Indeed, on foreign policy matters these Liberal Imperialists shared much common ground with their Unionist Party rivals. The outbreak of the Boer War

¹³ Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy, p. 13, Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 71. Gladstone said during the Midlothian campaign of 1879 that he believed in "the equality of the weak with the strong; the principles of brotherhood among nations, and of their sacred independence." During the Great War, dissenters frequently invoked the memory of Gladstone. They seemed, however, to have forgotten his Egyptian policy. According to A.J.P. Taylor, the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 marked Gladstone's break with dissent (Taylor, The Trouble Makers, pp. 57, 87). Gladstone's respect for the rule of law was exemplified by his willingness to submit to arbitration the United States' claim for damages arising from Union losses to the British-built Confederate raider, the Alabama.

¹⁴ Disraeli was Prime Minister from 1867-1868 and from 1874-1880.

¹⁵ Indeed, the elder statesman of English Radicalism and erstwhile political ally of the late Cobden had resigned from Gladstone's cabinet after the British bombardment of Alexandria, complaining that this naval action was "simply damnable--worse than anything ever perpetrated by Dizzy." Philip Magnus, Gladstone: A Biography (London, 1954), p. 290.

in 1899 brought the Liberal Party's divisions to the fore.¹⁶ Much of the Party's anti-imperial wing criticised the war on traditional, that is Cobdenite or Gladstonian, grounds. However, opposition to the Boer War and to the imperial idea generally also reflected advances in liberal social and economic thought from the conventional laissez-faire political economy of both Gladstonians and Cobdenites. Ever since the 1880s collectivist solutions to the problems of poverty and unemployment had been explored from all points on the political spectrum. In certain liberal circles there emerged a growing sense that economic insecurity was perpetuated by Britain's imperial commitments. The classic liberal statement of this view was made in J.A. Hobson's Imperialism which was published in 1902 while the Boer War still smouldered. This famous New Liberal¹⁷ essayist (and future wartime dissenter) regarded imperialism as a function of underconsumption in the home market. By diverting investment away from the domestic economy, imperialism was responsible for the low wages that plagued the British worker. Hobson proposed progressive taxation of the surplus capital currently being invested in imperial ventures and the redistribution of this wealth via programmes of social reform. Owing to the influence exerted by Hobson and other votaries of the New Liberalism, British dissent was increasingly identified in the Edwardian era not only by its alternative foreign policy ideas but also by its collectivist domestic outlook.

The second strand of dissent was socialist internationalism. There was no significant socialist theory of foreign policy until the 1880s. At this juncture the Social Democratic Federation, under Henry Hyndman, and the Socialist League, led by William Morris, began to

¹⁶ Laurence W. Martin, Peace without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals (Yale, 1958), pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ The term 'New Liberalism' refers to so-called 'positive liberalism' or 'advanced liberalism'. New liberals sought to expand the meaning of liberalism. In their view the state should actively provide opportunity for its citizens.

see in capitalism and its offshoot, imperialism, the mainsprings of international tension.¹⁸ This mode of analysis represented a distinct break from the Cobdenite view, later supplemented by Norman Angell, of trade as the ultimate solvent of Great Power rivalry. Similarly, while liberal dissenters tended to view imperialism as a rectifiable defect of capitalism, socialists regarded empire as the defining characteristic of monopoly capitalism. The socialists rejected Cobden's doctrine of non-intervention but, like the liberal dissenters, they too called for national self-determination, an end to militarism, and the democratic control of foreign policy. A somewhat longer term objective was an alliance of socialist states. For the most part, however, the creation of an alternative socialist foreign policy took second stage to the socialists' domestic concerns.¹⁹

The third, most deeply rooted, strand of dissent was Nonconformity. Gladstonian moralism had had a profound resonance for numerous members of Britain's non-established Protestant churches. Most were 'pacifists',²⁰ that is they advocated peace on a selective basis but without categorically ruling out the resort to military action. A smaller number were outright 'pacifists' who rejected the use of force on religious grounds and organized a number of peace societies along denominational lines. The heirs of these nineteenth-century religious pacifists would comprise the bulk of the 16,500 or so conscientious objectors (COs) in Britain during the

¹⁸ See Howard, War and the Liberal Conscience, pp. 63-64, 88-89; John Turner, British Politics and the Great War (New Haven, 1992), p. 38.

¹⁹ See Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy, ch. 1.

²⁰ Martin Ceadel employs this designation to distinguish those dissenters who thought that war was best avoided but not always wrong from 'pacifists' who regarded all wars as immoral. Ironically, contemporary usage of the latter term was far closer in spirit to Ceadel's definition of 'pacifism' than to the creed of nonviolence with which 'pacifism' has been associated since the 1930s. See Martin Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith (Oxford, 1980), pp. 2-5; James Hinton, Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in the Twentieth Century Britain (London, 1989), pp. ix-xi. Unless otherwise indicated below, the concept of pacifism is here employed in its more modern and restrictive sense.

First World War.²¹ While acknowledging the importance of the pacifist dissenting persuasion, this thesis will not deal with the phenomenon of conscientious objection.

During the Edwardian era there was a confluence of liberal and socialist thinking about foreign policy. For example, the dissenting critique of international finance and armaments manufacture was rooted both in the instinctive socialist mistrust of powerful profit-making concerns and the traditional liberal loathing of vested interests. Indeed, by the turn of the century the banking and arms producing fraternities had supplanted the privileged and bellicose aristocracy as the foremost objects of liberal dissenting scorn. Both shades of dissent played up the destabilising effects of the international arms race. The quest for competitive advantages in this military and naval build up and for 'security' more generally supposedly resulted in the consolidation of the two alliance systems in order to rectify the perceived imbalances of power. Furthermore, the routine recourse of the Great Powers to 'secret diplomacy' increased the threat of war by breeding suspicion and by obscuring the real state of international relations. This already precarious situation was aggravated, in the minds of all dissenters, by the 'jingo' press and military officers who exploited governmental and public insecurities to fan the flames of xenophobia.²²

By 1914 there definitely existed a loose body of dissenting doctrine, drawing upon all the

²¹ It should be stressed, however, that thirty-three percent of even the most traditionally anti-war nonconformist sect--the Quakers--enlisted the British war effort throughout. Not everyone who refused military service did so on religious grounds. Yet, whether opposing the war for strictly religious reasons or more diffuse moral concerns, the majority of COs were prepared to undertake noncombatant duties. A small minority of COs--about 1,300 in all--demanded unconditional exemption from all activities which could be construed as helping the British war effort. Within this latter category, Ceadel distinguishes between the apolitical pacifism of the 'absolutists' and the 'collaborative' pacifist position of those who endeavoured to link their conscientious objection to the campaign for a negotiated peace (Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain, ch. 4).

²² See Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain, pp. 5-6.

strands of dissent discussed above. At its core was a belief in the need for, and practicality of, negotiated settlements to international conflicts. The dissenting perspective was also formed by an antipathy towards imperialism and a commitment to free trade, selective non-interference and a democratic foreign policy predicated on confidence in an inherently pacific human nature.²³ A great many contemporaries would subscribe to isolated planks of this dissenting platform but without adhering to the sine qua non of wartime dissent--the conviction that only through a military stalemate could the combatants reach a lasting, negotiated peace.²⁴

Historiography

The tone and approach to the study of British dissent in the First World War have been defined in large part by the dissenters themselves. Samuel Hynes, a cultural historian, describes the pervasive "Myth of the War" which surrounds the Great War. An essential element of "The Myth of the War" is a "radical discontinuity of present from past." Furthermore, millions of soldiers were to have been "slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals" and idealistic young men were said to have been lied to by old men on the home front.²⁵ To a large degree, the dissenters are the originators of this view. They were successful in not only portraying themselves as prescient enlightened martyrs who foresaw post-war instability in the event of a jingoistic and punitive peace, but also in establishing the parameters of debate. In the immediate

²³ The dissenters' hostility to Tsarist Russia best exemplifies the dissenters' attitudes towards imperialism. Russia became dissent's "chief bugbear" after the Polish revolt in 1830 (Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 45).

²⁴ H. Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation and the British Anti-War Movement, 1914-1918," The Canadian Journal of History X, 3 (1976), pp. 371-372.

²⁵ Samuel Hynes, A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture (London, 1990), pp. ix-x.

aftermath of the war the dissenting message was restated in Trevelyan's From Liberalism to Labour.²⁶ In this pre-campaign statement for the 1922 election, Trevelyan reiterated the culpability of pre-war Liberal diplomacy and linked the Party's sorry foreign policy record to its seemingly irreversible wartime decline. Trevelyan also juxtaposed these Liberal shortcomings with the qualities of Labour Party foreign policy. The first significant work on the UDC was by Helena Swanwick, a member of the Executive Committee of the UDC. In the 1924 study, Builders of Peace: Being Ten Years' History of the Union of Democratic Control, she was unflinching in her praise of the organization's work and the contribution of the UDC's undisputed leader, Morel.²⁷ In 1926, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson produced another influential dissenting view of the Great War. Dickinson, in the preface of his study of the origins of the war, The International Anarchy, 1904-1914, stated his thesis explicitly: "The anarchy of armed States always has produced war, and always must." He made his "moral" equally clear: "I believe, with most instructed people, that modern war, with all the resources of science at its disposal, has become incompatible with the continuance of civilization."²⁸ Implicit was the suggestion that an international Government would eliminate the anarchy, thereby ensuring peace. In 1928 Ponsonby published Falsehood in Wartime, a condemnation of British Government propaganda in the First World War. He focused on such documents as the Bryce Report, an official description of German atrocities in Belgium, to prove that such records were not only untrue but were deliberately created by the Government to advance a bellicose policy.²⁹ These and other

²⁶ Charles Trevelyan, From Liberalism to Labour (London, 1921), *passim*.

²⁷ Helena Swanwick, Builders of Peace: Being Ten Years' History of the Union of Democratic Control (London, 1924), *passim*.

²⁸ G. Lowes Dickinson, The International Anarchy, 1904-1914 (New York, 1926), p. v.

²⁹ Arthur Ponsonby, Falsehood in Wartime (London, 1928).

interwar works by dissenters consolidated the impression that undemocratic authority had abused the public trust, leading the nation into a costly and needless war. Indeed, it could be said the dissenting studies paved the way for the British policy of appeasement in the inter-war period.

The sympathetic tone of dissent-related studies continued in the post-Second World War period. Gerda Crosby wrote Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-1919 in 1953.³⁰ As the title suggested, the book was an account of the British Government's position on disarmament during the war. In particular, Crosby spent much time on the efforts of dissenters to move disarmament into the realm of practical politics. This work was followed by A.J.P. Taylor's still suggestive essay, The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939. In his inimitable, discursive style, Taylor summarized what he believed to be 150 colourful and praiseworthy years of dissent. He maintained that the dissenters embodied a number of contradictions. Despite these different impulses, they were able to convert the Labour Party to their programme. Moreover, they were able to win over Lloyd George, at least temporarily. By mid-1919, he reasoned, the dissenters were duped because they overestimated Wilson's, and Lloyd George's support.³¹ It cannot be surprising that Taylor would later assert in his controversial book, The Origins of the Second World War, that appeasement represented all that was best in Britain. In 1958 Laurence Martin published his invaluable contribution, Peace without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals. This work concentrated on the dissenters' intellectual relationship with Wilson and explored the practical manifestations of that

³⁰ Gerda Richards Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-1919 (Cambridge, 1957); Hynes, A War Imagined, p. 145.

³¹ See Taylor, The Trouble Makers, ch. 5, "The Great War: The Triumph of E.D. Morel." Noel Fieldhouse, in an important article on Buxton, sought to develop further Buxton's stature as a dissenting figure. H.N. Fieldhouse, "Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor's, 'The Trouble Makers'," in M. Gilbert, ed., A Century in Conflict 1850-1950, Essays for A.J.P. Taylor (London 1966), pp. 175-198.

interaction. To that end, Martin maintained that the dissenters were successful in implanting their dissenting view of foreign policy into President Wilson's mind.

In the late 1960s the emphasis shifted to organizational studies. R.E. Dowse's 1966 history of the ILP presented a cursory treatment of the close wartime ILP-UDC connection and stressed the leading role of the ILP.³² Five years later Marvin Swartz followed with his examination of the UDC, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War. As if working to counter Dowse's thesis, Swartz demonstrated that the UDC was the most important dissenting organization in wartime Britain and that it was the UDC that was the principal creator of an alternative foreign policy. His argument was flawed, however, when he maintained that it was the UDC which provided the Labour Party with its foreign policy and that the UDC forced the Government to accept UDC principles. Indeed, the greatest weakness with Swartz's thesis was his propensity to give too much credit to the UDC for changing the face of British politics.³³

The 1970s and 1980s inaugurated a return to the more general discussions of dissent. Rather than centre on one group, Keith Robbins, in The Abolition of War: The 'Peace

³² R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party, 1893-1940 (London, 1966). Kenneth Miller's Socialism and Foreign Policy made a useful contribution to the study the formation of a Socialist foreign policy up till the collapse of the second Labour Government in 1931. In ch. 1, "Radical, Liberal, and Socialist Interpretations," Miller acknowledged the liberal dissenting vein in the Labour Party's foreign policy (see Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy).

³³ Marvin Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War (Oxford, 1971). Also see H.H. Hanak, "The UDC during the First World War," in Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 36 (November 1963), pp. 168-180. Catherine Cline, in her 1963 work, Recruits To Labour: The British Labour Party, 1914-1931, and in her later study of Morel, agreed with Marvin Swartz's view that by the end of January 1918, UDC principles "had acquired a sudden respectability" and that the 28 December Labour war aims programme "embodied the programme of the UDC both in its general principles and its specific recommendations" (C.A. Cline Recruits To Labour, pp. 20-21; C.A. Cline, E.D. Morel, 1873-1924: Strategies of Protest [Belfast, 1980], p. 113).

Movement' in Britain, 1914-1919, tried to "isolate distinctive issues and to show how the individuals and groups which concerned themselves with them were related to each other." In a sense, his approach was similar to Laurence Martin's except that Robbins emphasized the interaction between a wider group of dissenters in Britain.³⁴ H. Weinroth has examined the failure of the peace-by-negotiation movement to bring about a settlement in 1917 or early 1918. His central point is that the dissenters, who were primarily drawn from the middle class, failed to bring about a negotiated peace because they feared fuelling working class discontent. Michael Howard's War and the Liberal Conscience provided a sturdy and wide ranging overview of the origins and fate of dissent from 1500 to 1975. More recently, Martin Ceadel, in Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith, remedied the dearth of theory in the study of pacifism during the Great War. He tried to differentiate between pacifism as non-resistance and pacifism as selective activism. Thomas Kennedy, in The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919, narrowed the focus on pacifism to the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and the conscientious objector (CO) during the First World War.³⁵ His study of the leading pacifist organization highlighted the obstacles to cooperation within the movement.

Although there is a large body of writing on dissent, the literature remains uneven. Most studies have covered a wide period. A.J.P. Taylor, for example, devoted only a chapter to dissent in the First World War, stressing the importance of the dissenters' contribution, if uneven, to the foreign policy debate in during the war. Michael Howard only spent half a chapter on the Great War. Moreover, even those studies which do dwell on wartime deal far too cursorily with

³⁴ Keith Robbins, The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-1919 (Cardiff, 1976), p. 36.

³⁵ Thomas C. Kennedy, The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919 (Fayetteville, 1981).

1917--the most important year of the war. Taylor did focus on 1917, but only within his very brief overview. Laurence Martin, Marvin Swartz, Keith Robbins, Martin Ceadel and Thomas Kennedy either considered 1917 as just another year within the narrow context of their group or downplayed 1917 because of a particular thematic framework. As a result, previous works have obscured the confluence of ideas, events and personalities which shaped dissent in that watershed year.

By examining the odyssey of dissent in 1917, this thesis seeks to supplement existing historical writing on the British dissenting tradition. The thesis, written from the dissenters' perspective, will use a narrative approach similar to that of Laurence Martin and Keith Robbins. It will follow a chronological pattern to highlight the effects of political, diplomatic and military events and the interaction of personalities on the evolution of dissent. The thesis will challenge certain historiographical assumptions about the strength and direction of dissent in this period. Historians of dissent have invariably held that dissenting ideas became increasingly influential from December 1916 until the end of the war, apart from a brief setback for dissent occasioned by the great German offensive of March 1918. Specifically, historians have emphasized that, by the beginning of 1918, the Labour Party, public opinion, and the Government were all profoundly influenced by dissenting views.³⁶ Conversely, this thesis will argue that a dissenting foreign policy was no closer to fruition in January 1918 than at any time during the conflict. The

³⁶ On the capture of the Labour Party by dissent, see Taylor, The Trouble Makers, pp. 154-155; Dowse, Left in the Centre, p. 26; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 165-169; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 153; John Turner, "British Politics and the Great War" Britain and the First World War, John Turner, ed., (London 1988), p. 128. Also see Pelling, America and the British Left: From Bright to Bevan (London, 1956), p. 111; Alan Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin: Trade Union Leader, 1881-1940 (London, 1960), p. 77. On the impact of dissent on popular opinion, see Ponsonby, "Changing Opinion," The U.D.C., March 1918, quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 193; David R. Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," The Historian, vol. 24, no. 4 (1971), 22-39. On the extent of dissent's influence over the Government, see Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 195-198; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 153.

dissenters lacked wide credibility and key elements of their programme had been usurped by conservative forces.³⁷ It is a paradox that, up until August 1917, the dissenters were making significant gains in their drive for a negotiated peace, owing to the interaction between domestic and external forces. After August, the dissenters lost control of their peace-by-negotiation agenda to such an extent that by the beginning of February 1918, they had less influence than in December 1916. This thesis will address this apparent paradox.

At the same time, any analysis of dissent in 1917 has to consider the various strands from which the dissenting fabric was woven. To accomplish this task, this thesis will focus on five individuals: Noel Buxton, Arthur Ponsonby, James Ramsay MacDonald, Edmund Dene Morel, and Philip Snowden. They were among the most important dissenting politicians and theorists during the war and exemplify clearly the different streams of dissenting thought.

Noel Buxton is representative of the moderate Liberal Radical approach to dissenting foreign policy. A.J.P. Taylor saw Buxton as one of the most influential men in the dissenting movement. This authority derived both from his moderation and from his leading role in pre-war dissenting politics.³⁸ Buxton was a founding member of the Balkan Committee in 1903³⁹ and the first chairman of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee, formed in December 1911. Unlike many dissenters, Buxton supported Britain's entry into the war, and, along with his brother, Charles Roden Buxton, agreed to undertake a semi-official mission to Bulgaria in November 1914 to persuade her to join the Allied cause. After the failure of his mission, and a nearly successful

³⁷ This thesis intends to build on Laurence Martin who has argued that the leadership of the Labour Party adopted radical war aims to prevent the Party from being taken over by the extreme left. Martin, Peace without Victory, p. 133.

³⁸ Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 148.

³⁹ The Balkan Committee worked for just and lasting territorial settlements in the region. T.P. Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, 1904-1918: A Study Based on the Papers of Lord Noel Buxton (London, 1932), pp. 2-3.

assassination attempt by a Turkish student, Buxton began to devote his energies to the search for a negotiated peace. He is typical of the pre-war Liberal-Radical--interested in a negotiated peace but shunning the methods of (and any association with) the foremost dissenting organization of the war, the UDC.⁴⁰ He believed that public criticism of pre-war foreign policy by the UDC and other organizations only undermined their credibility within the Liberal Party and precluded a fair hearing of their proposals for negotiation. Buxton is also important because he worked tirelessly to use President Wilson to broker a negotiated peace. As with many other Liberals, he joined the Labour Party after the war. His contribution to dissent was sufficiently great to merit his appointment as Minister of Agriculture in the 1924 and 1929 Governments. This appointment may seem odd but Buxton also had a lifelong interest in the condition of the agricultural labourer.

Arthur Ponsonby typified another facet of Radical Liberalism. He became Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's private secretary in 1906.⁴¹ In true dissenting tradition, Ponsonby strongly denounced the Tsar's visit to Britain in 1908. Indeed, his protestations were sufficiently strong to provoke the ire of the King who struck his name off the list of guests to a royal garden party. Ponsonby was the co-founder and the first Vice-Chair of the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee. He later became its Chairman. Though not a well-known figure in traditional high political history, he was nonetheless one of the most powerful thinkers behind the dissenters' quest for a negotiated settlement. Ponsonby opposed British intervention in 1914. He was consulted from the beginning by others who were concerned about the direction of future foreign

⁴⁰ He tried very hard to avoid any official link with the UDC but he was personally involved with many of its leading figures, including his brother and dissenter of secondary importance, C.R. Buxton. Helena Swanwick, a long-time UDC stalwart, claimed that Buxton gave money to the UDC early on (Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 85).

⁴¹ Campbell-Bannerman was Prime Minister from 1906 to 1908.

policy and about moderate, rational war aims. Ponsonby formally joined the UDC in September 1914 and strove to propagate the demand for the democratization of foreign policy. His views and actions indicated strong Cobdenite leanings. Ponsonby, for example, was wary of the creation of a strong, interventionist international league. Like Buxton, Ponsonby switched to the Labour Party after the war. His rise to the position of the Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office in the first Labour Government in 1924 and Under-Secretary to the Dominion Office in 1929 are reflections of his seminal role in the creation of the new policy. Moreover, he represents those Liberals who were prepared to denounce the foreign policy of their own Party and Government from the beginning of the war.⁴²

E.D. Morel, undeniably the most experienced agitator and successful dissenting publicist during the war, represented a less isolationist element of Liberalism than that offered by Ponsonby. In 1900, Morel wrote an exposé of the systematic exploitation of native rubber plantation workers in King Leopold's Belgian Congo. Four years later, Morel established the Congo Reform Association. In 1912, his attention shifted to a different public campaign, this time against British and French secret diplomacy. Morel's inclusion introduces an extra-parliamentary liberal who was also in the UDC. Morel was more than the Executive Secretary of the UDC--he was its principal organizer and propagandist. According to Helena Swanwick: "E.D.M. was the U.D.C., and the U.D.C. was E.D.M."⁴³ Morel blamed the war on 'Old Diplomacy' and believed that all major European powers were responsible for its outbreak. He highlighted Britain's war guilt and greatly downplayed that of Germany's. Morel had no sympathy for "gallant little Belgium"--the same brutal Belgium he struggled against over the

⁴² See Raymond A. Jones, Arthur Ponsonby: The Politics of Life (London, 1988); A.J. Anthony Morris, Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914: The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment (London, 1972), pp. 177-178.

⁴³ Quoted in Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 133.

Congo. As a result, he was viewed by many as dangerous and, more than any other member of the UDC, was seen by the jingo press as pro-German. In September 1917, Morel was sentenced to six months in prison for attempting to send a pamphlet covertly to neutral Switzerland. After the war, he devoted himself to the revision of the Versailles Treaty. Elected as a Labour member of Parliament in 1922, 1923 and 1924, Morel was not invited to join the Cabinet. He died in 1924 a bitter man because of his exclusion from the position of Foreign Secretary in the Labour Government.⁴⁴

James Ramsay MacDonald has been included in this study as a representative of the moderate wing of the ILP. MacDonald was the Labour Party's Secretary until the outbreak of the war and a central negotiator of the secret Lib-Lab electoral pact created in 1903. He was also the Chairman of the ILP, one of several socialist bodies federated to the Labour Party. The Labour Party supported the Asquith Government's policy on the need to enter the war, and, as MacDonald could not endorse such action, he resigned as Labour Party Chairman. Yet he continued in Parliament and in the country as leader of the anti-war ILP. Unwilling to remain silent on the war, MacDonald was also one of the founding members of the UDC. Later, in 1924, he would become the Labour Party's first Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Of the small Labour parliamentary contingent, he was the foremost theoretician⁴⁵ and one of the labour movement's best speakers in the House of Commons. An analysis of his position in 1917 provides insight into the views of a socialist and an able politician intent on securing a negotiated peace and maintaining as much unity as possible within the labour movement as a whole.

Snowden, the other leading figure in the ILP, is indicative of a more uncompromising

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 133, 135.

⁴⁵ Rodney Barker, "Socialism and Progressivism in the Political Thought of Ramsay MacDonald," A.J.A. Morris, ed., Edwardian Radicalism, 1900-1914: Some Aspects of British Radicalism (London, 1974), pp. 114-130.

and confrontational socialist internationalism. His hopes, like those of MacDonald, were placed on revolutionary Russia's ability to lead Britain to a compromise peace. Like MacDonald, Snowden was a member of the Executive Committee of the UDC, but his strength and policy preoccupations were shaped by his role in the ILP. Moreover, Snowden, elected as Chairman of the ILP in 1917, was unhindered by a position on the executive of the Labour Party. As a result, he was able to press the anti-war socialist perspective with greater vigour both within the Labour Party and without.⁴⁶

This thesis will also consider the contributions by the leading newspapers of dissent to the peace-by-negotiation debate in 1917. No study of dissent in 1917 would be complete without extensive scrutiny of The Nation, Liberal dissent's leading weekly journal. The Nation's editor, H.W. Massingham, was one of those Liberals who originally supported Britain's involvement in the war but was persuaded by the events of 1916, particularly the introduction of conscription, to seek an alternative to peace through military victory. His paper provided some of the best dissenting analysis of the war. Close attention will also be paid to the monthly The U.D.C., Morel's primary platform and a forum for both Ponsonby and for Trevelyan, another Liberal MP and leading dissenter. The ILP's Labour Leader, a weekly edited by Fenner Brockway, carried Snowden's regular "Review of the Week," which provided a synopsis of current affairs, as well as other insights on the anti-war ILP's troubled relationship with the pro-war Labour Party. In fact, The Labour Leader's position closely parallels that of the principal organ of socialist dissent, The Herald, the Labour Party's weekly newspaper. Edited by George Lansbury, a Christian who was to become one of the leading figures in Britain's inter-war pacifist movement, The Herald adopted an editorial perspective which was quite at odds with the Party's support for the war.

⁴⁶ While MacDonald resigned as leader of the Labour Party in August 1914, he remained the Party Treasurer.

The Wilderness Years—August 1914–November 1916

The dissenters played a minor political role from August 1914 until December 1916. On 30 July 1914, prior to the invasion of Belgium, Ponsonby warned Herbert Henry Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister, that nine-tenths of the Liberal Party were opposed to British participation in a war between France and Germany. In a stunning reversal on 3 August, however, Ponsonby's majority turned out to be less than forty MPs after Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's powerful Commons speech outlining "British interests, British honour, and British obligations" in the Belgian crisis.⁴⁷ It is amazing that these Liberal dissenters were unable to attract more support. The dissenters simply underestimated the logic of Britain's interests in an independent Belgium, the emotive power of Britain's 1839 pledge to guarantee Belgian neutrality and, more generally, the need to defend small nations against unwarranted aggression. Belgium remained the dissenters' greatest stumbling block throughout the war. Also, many Liberals who were sympathetic to the dissenters were unwilling to be seen attacking their own Government's foreign policy. This tendency became much stronger once the nation was at war. In short, dissenters were perceived as disloyal.

Following the startling collapse of anti-interventionism early in August 1914, the dissenters cautiously began to regroup and made tentative efforts to raise the subject of a negotiated settlement. At the end of August several members of the Liberal minority, and much of the leadership of the ILP, founded the UDC, which was to become the most significant of the

⁴⁷ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916, vol. II, (Toronto, 1925), Appendix D, "Speech by Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons on August 3, 1914," p. 309. For Ponsonby's warning to Asquith, see Ponsonby to Asquith, 30 July 1914, Ponsonby Papers, C.660.

numerous dissenting groups.⁴⁸ Some letters, unrelated to the UDC, appeared in the press early in 1915, arguing that Germany might be ready to discuss peace if the Allies were the first to state their terms. The ILP also passed pro-negotiation resolutions during their 1915 annual conference.⁴⁹ At first the dissenters kept an especially low profile in Parliament and concentrated their efforts beyond Westminster.⁵⁰ Not until 8 November 1915 did the dissenters seriously attempt to persuade parliamentary opinion when, on a Vote of Credit, they called for a clear statement of war aims to provide direction to the British people. Lord Courtney, a Liberal Unionist peer and Lord Loreburn, a former Lord Chancellor, spoke in the House of Lords. Their efforts were matched by those of Ponsonby and Trevelyan in the House of Commons.⁵¹ The next, more concerted call for a negotiated peace from Ponsonby, Trevelyan and Snowden occurred during the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill on 23 February 1916. Also, spurred by rumours that the Asquith Government was going to institute a post-war economic boycott of Germany, the UDC added its fifth cardinal point in favour of post-war free trade on 2 May 1916. On 23 May, they launched another parliamentary attack on the

⁴⁸ Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, p. 132. For a list of UDC Executive members and General Council member, see Appendix B. Among other groups that opposed the war or resisted conscription the British Socialist Party (BSP), the Women's International League (WIL) which was founded in 1915, the NCF which was organized late in 1914, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) which was also established late in 1914. Their memberships frequently overlapped.

⁴⁹ Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 377.

⁵⁰ One such effort was the organization of the Peace Negotiations Committee by the UDC, the NCF, the ILP and the FOR. The Committee, formed in April 1916, began a 'Peace Memorial' which was signed by 250,000 people. It was delivered to Lloyd George in December 1916.

⁵¹ Lord Courtney was a Liberal Unionist peer and brother-in-law of Beatrice Webb, the famous diarist and noted Fabian Socialist. She was married to Sidney Webb, the founder of the Fabian Society. Lord Loreburn was a Liberal and former Lord Chancellor.

Government, this time with the help of MacDonald.⁵² A third effort was made in Parliament in October.

All of these dissenting efforts met with public opprobrium. The dissenters' first indication of this public hostility was the invective of the press following The Morning Post's publication on 10 September 1914 of the confidential draft circular of the UDC. Throughout this period, and indeed, throughout the war, the leading figures in the UDC were subjected to personal abuse, including jostling and the occasional physical assault. Furthermore, the dissenters' meetings were broken up with some frequency. Consequently, the UDC remained discreet until autumn 1915.⁵³

By the autumn of 1916, however, domestic-political, military and international developments had begun to provide the dissenters with fruitful opportunities to advance the cause of a negotiated peace. The changing situation in all three arenas encouraged more energetic and effective dissenting initiatives. The easing of hostility on the political front was partly the result of considerable dissatisfaction within the Liberal Party over the conduct of the war.⁵⁴ Ponsonby

⁵² PD (Commons), 11 November 1915, 75, col. 1454; Jones, Arthur Ponsonby, pp. 104, 106. The speeches by Loreburn, Courtney, Ponsonby and Trevelyan were published in pamphlet form. See UDC leaflet No. 16b, "Earl Loreburn and Lord Courtney of Penwith in the House of Lords" (8 November 1915); UDC leaflet No. 15b, "Mr. Ponsonby and Mr. Trevelyan in the House of Commons" (11 November 1915). Ponsonby warned his listeners that "militarism had never been crushed by force of arms." He also lamented the lack of time allotted for the discussion of foreign policy. PD (Commons), 11 November 1915, 75, col. 1456. The 23 February and the 23 May debates were also published by the UDC in pamphlet form.

⁵³ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 36, 69. For a more detailed examination of the disagreement within the Liberal Party on the methods of the UDC, see ibid., ch. 1. For a more wide ranging account of anti-UDC feeling and actions, see ch. 6. Also see Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 69. See R.A. Jones for a description of Ponsonby's assault by a mob on the railway platform at Kingston-upon-Thames on 15 July 1915 and for further discussions on public hostility (Jones, Arthur Ponsonby, pp. 92-98, 104).

⁵⁴ The historical debate surrounding the demise of the Liberal Party is one of the most significant controversies in twentieth-century British political history. For some of different treatments of the Liberal Party during the war see Trevor Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal

had not been entirely mistaken when he warned Asquith that much of the Liberal Party did not want war. However, he had not been wrong about the depth of attachment inside the Party to liberal principle. The Liberals were quite prepared to support the war on the condition that it be conducted along liberal lines.⁵⁵ Yet, from the very outset, Asquith's Cabinet adopted measures which many Liberals deemed to be anathema to their creed. The most contentious steps taken were the implementation of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA),⁵⁶ the acceptance of Coalition Government in May 1915 and moves towards trade protectionism and conscription.⁵⁷ Dissenters anticipated that the ministerial changes and the enactment of policies they judged to

Party, 1914-1935, (London, 1966); Michael Freedman, Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914-1939 (Oxford, 1986), ch. 1; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control; J.M. Bourne, Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918 (London, 1989); Turner, British Politics.

⁵⁵ Wilson, The Downfall, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁶ Immediately after the outbreak of war and without serious debate, DORA was brought into force. This enabling law and its supplementary code of regulations effectively allowed the Government to take almost any action, however drastic, it deemed necessary for the defence of the realm. DORA was used with considerable effect against the dissenters in 1917. For an excellent treatment of DORA, see Andrew Bone, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "Beyond the Rule of Law: Aspects of the Defence of Realm Acts and Regulations, 1914-1918" (Hamilton, McMaster University, 1994), especially chs. 4 and 5.

⁵⁷ Reginald McKenna, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, made a small departure from the Liberal Party's free-trade policy when he introduced import duties on cars and luxury items in his budget in September 1915 (Turner, British Politics, p. 84). Moreover, the Cabinet accepted the Paris Resolutions in June 1916. The Resolutions, the result of meetings between Allied Governments on 14-17 June 1916, declared that economic warfare would continue against Germany after the war was over in the form of an economic boycott. At first, conscription was eschewed in favour of voluntary enlistment. Voluntarism seemed to be sufficient after Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, led several enlistment drives which had provided over 1,000,000 men by the end of 1914. But it failed to meet the challenge of a sustained war (Bourne, Britain and the Great War, p. 157). The first limited Military Service Act became law on 10 February 1916. The issue was reopened in April when it became clear that full military compulsion was necessary if Britain were to establish and maintain a seventy division army. The result was that the second Military Service Act of May 1916 passed on 29 May 1916.

be antithetical to liberalism would alienate elements within the Liberal Party.⁵⁸

These deviations from traditional liberalism were deeply resented by those in the Party, and they comprised powerful groups, who believed that the Liberal Party had brought in Prussianism. F.W. Hirst, then editor of The Economist, expressed the exasperation that many liberals felt about the direction of Government policy. He wondered whether C.P. Scott, the influential Liberal and editor of The Manchester Guardian, felt "as much stirred as I do about the wickedness, and folly, and shame of introducing compulsory service? I feel that this, with Protection, the Censorship, and a military bureaucracy would make England no place for people like me." A week later, Hirst warned that compulsion would be used "to discipline and enslave the working classes and to keep down Ireland." For liberal anti-conscriptionists, compulsion was either not needed or was beyond British strategic capabilities. Moreover, if such a drastic policy were required, then the question arose about the need for such extensive British involvement. Scott also rued the direction of policy, considering that the McKenna duties to be a "vast extension of the [Protection] policy."⁵⁹

The wartime growth of interventionist Government was viewed with great suspicion and trepidation by many liberals. The war's adverse impact on individual liberty unexpectedly convinced Edwardian 'New Liberals', never more than a small minority of the Party, of the

⁵⁸ Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 380. Also see Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, ch. 4.

⁵⁹ Trevor Wilson, ed., The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott, 1911-1928 (London, 1970), F.W. Hirst to Scott, 21 May 1915, pp. 124-125; Hirst to Scott, 28 May 1915, p. 126; Scott to Hobhouse, 20 January 1916, p. 175; Wilson, The Downfall, p. 40. W.M. Pringle and Josiah Wedgwood were also examples of Liberal MPs who were highly critical of the Liberal Government's deviation from liberalism. They later became dissenters (Wilson, The Downfall, p. 33). Many anti-conscriptionists were concerned that the withdrawal of labour would disrupt home industries which would erode exports and, in turn, undermine Britain's balance of payments.

dangers of excessive state intervention.⁶⁰ According to Michael Freedon,

Freedom and the voluntarist organization of society underpinned the moral support of government action as well as ensuring that the nature of the war was truly determined by the people, because voluntarism alone made the people effective masters.

Leonard Hobhouse,⁶¹ unsympathetic to the new coercive state, added explicitly that there was no political obligation to an immoral state. In short, the wartime experience destroyed the New Liberals' view of the benign state and forced them to revert to the traditional liberal defence of individual liberty against authoritarianism.⁶²

In spite of their misgivings about many of his Government's policies, however, most liberals accepted Asquith's direction of the war effort for two reasons. First, many conceded that drastic policy changes were urgently needed as temporary expedients to win the war. Scott, initially a supporter of conscription, defended the growth of the wartime state:

...unless this country pulls itself together and submits to something not unlike a Prussian organization for the period of the war, the war may be almost indefinitely prolonged, the issue even jeopardised, with the loss necessarily of innumerable lives precious to us which might be saved.⁶³

The second reason for accepting Asquith's changes in political tack was the desire to avoid undiluted Unionist rule.⁶⁴ The Irish Nationalist Party tribune, John Dillon, stated this view in a letter to Scott, condemning the passage of the first Military Service Bill:

⁶⁰ Freedon, Liberalism Divided, p. 12.

⁶¹ Leonard Hobhouse was a New Liberal theorist and leader writer for The Manchester Guardian.

⁶² Freedon, Liberalism Divided, pp. 25, 38, 23, 27. According to John Turner, twenty-seven Liberals and nine Labourites voted consistently against conscription. He listed ILP members W.C. Anderson, MacDonal and Snowden as members of the nine opposed to conscription (Turner, British Politics, p. 76).

⁶³ Wilson, ed., The Political Diaries, Scott to Hobhouse, 7 May 1915, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Wilson, The Downfall, pp. 40-41.

The threat of a general election - and the conviction was/is universal, that an election on the issue of the present Bill would result in the Conscriptors sweeping the country - caused a very large number of radical and labour members opposed to the Bill to support the Government [and vote for Conscriptors]. Indeed, such was fear of the Unionists that many liberals supported Conscriptors because they believed that the Unionists would win a subsequent general election.

Scott agreed when he added in his diary four days later that an election run on the basis of conscription would result in "Tory Government for 20 years."⁶⁵

As expected, the inclusion of Unionists in the Government in May 1915 further eroded support for the war within elements of the Liberal Party.⁶⁶ As early as August 1914 Scott expressed concern over the inclusion of Unionists in the Government:

We have I think no longer a Liberal Government...and to all intents and purposes there is a coalition, the first symbols of which are the appointments of [Lord] Kitchener as a member of the Cabinet and (a minor matter) of F.E. Smith, as press-correspondent in intimate association with the Admiralty and War Office. This state of things is likely to continue and develop and will have a tremendous reaction on our politics.⁶⁷

The crucial change came in May 1915 with the advent of the First Coalition. Asquith brought in Andrew Bonar Law, the leader of the Unionist Party, Sir Edward Carson, a prominent Ulster Unionist, and Arthur Balfour, a former Unionist leader, among others. After May 1915

⁶⁵ Quoted in Wilson, ed., The Political Diaries, John Dillon to Scott, 7 January 1916 and 11 January 1916, pp. 168, 169.

⁶⁶ A formal coalition was not formally created until 19 May 1915. It brought in Unionists and Labourites into the Government but still left the Liberals with most authority. The need for a coalition became apparent with the Munitions Crisis of May 1915. The crisis arose from a lack of shells, first made apparent by the British losses at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle on 10-12 March, and the failed British attack on the Aubers Ridge of 9 May 1915. Allegations that the attacks floundered because of insufficient ammunition were published in The Times on 14 May.

⁶⁷ Wilson, ed., The Political Diaries, Scott to Dillon, 9 August 1914, p. 100. Also see Wilson, The Downfall, p. 33. Kitchener was the commander-in-chief of British forces in South Africa during the Boer War. He was a non-Liberal Field Marshall. His appointment to the War Office, though, was generally seen as apolitical. However, F.E. Smith, an ardent Ulster Unionist, was widely disliked by Liberals.

Ponsonby indicated that up to that point they, presumably the UDC, had focused on the "origins and the settlement." Now the conduct of the war would become an issue.⁶⁸

The effect of the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition in December 1916 was even more pronounced. The dissenters realized immediately that the new Government had been created in order to implement policies which were diametrically opposed to their vision of a negotiated peace. A Morel editorial in The U.D.C. clearly indicated where his organization stood. He argued that it was time for negotiation, preferably through President Wilson, and that it was not time for the intensification of the war effort for which Lloyd George was likely to press.⁶⁹ An article in The Tribunal, the NCF weekly, charged that Lloyd George would introduce industrial conscription, for it claimed the Coalition was controlled by the Northcliffe Press. Ultimately, the Government would reduce civil liberties to the same level as in Germany.⁷⁰ The rise of Lloyd George even led the UDC, backed by other dissenting groups, to decide to support peace-by-negotiation candidates at future by-elections.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ponsonby to Trevelyan, 22 May 1915, quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 66-67. Trevelyan agreed.

⁶⁹ The U.D.C., December 1916, p. 15. Lloyd George's support for full compulsion increasingly drew him together with the ginger groups on the Right, namely the Tariff Reformers and the Milnerite Social-Imperialists. Both were determined to go "all out" to win the war. Even before 1914, the Social-Imperialism advanced by Lord Milner espoused the concept of 'National Efficiency'. With the pressures of war, Milner, Carson, and a number of Conservative newspaper editors urged Lloyd George to form a small Government that would overcome 'pacifist' resistance and go 'all-out' (Robert J. Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social Imperialism, 1900-1918 [Princeton, 1975], pp. 338-339).

⁷⁰ "Industrial Conscription," The Tribunal, 14 December 1916, p. 4. Lord Northcliffe owned a number of papers including The Times and The Observer. In the latter part of the First World War, Northcliffe's papers accounted for half of the London newspaper circulation. This represented (and still does) unparalleled media domination. See Lord Beaverbrook, Men and Power, 1917-1918 (London, 1956), p. 59.

⁷¹ Vera Brittain, Pethick-Lawrence, A Portrait (London, 1963), p. 80. Pethick-Lawrence, a staunch UDC supporter, ran in the South Aberdeen by-election in April 1917.

At the same time many dissenters hoped that the new Government might benefit the cause of a negotiated peace. Morel stated that "Mr. Lloyd George is Prime Minister. But we refuse to assume that his policy and the tone of his diplomacy must be that of the 'knock-out' interview until he has spoken." According to Keith Robbins, the dissenters not only saw Lloyd George as a knock-out enthusiast but also viewed him as so unscrupulous that he might try to reach a negotiated settlement if it would suit his purposes.⁷²

Labour experienced the same political unrest as the liberals. As has been intimated already, the labour movement was badly divided by the war. Immediately after the outbreak of the war Ramsay MacDonald had resigned as Chairman of the Labour Party. The ILP refused to follow the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Parliamentary Labour Party in supporting the war, though the ILP did not separate from the Labour Party. Most of the Labour Party endorsed Britain's entry into the war. Certain sections, namely the Fabian Society, even welcomed war collectivism as a way to expand permanently the role of the state. The Labour Party half-heartedly rejected conscription⁷³ but worked with the Government to increase industrial output, even at the expense of some union prerogatives. The Party joined both the Asquith and Lloyd George Coalitions.

Like many in the Liberal Party, the ILP was alarmed at the encroachments of the wartime state. As James Hinton has pointed out, "within the labour movement...attitudes towards the desirability of state intervention might themselves go some way to determining the attitudes to

⁷² The U.D.C., December 1916, p. 15; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 113.

⁷³ The Labour Party opposed the bill on 6 January 1916 but was won over on 12 January when Asquith promised the Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) not to bring in industrial compulsion and not to conscript married men. The Labour Party conference, which met in Bristol in late January, rejected conscription but decided against fighting it. It also decided to stay in the Coalition.

the war itself."⁷⁴ DORA, the Munitions Act and the Military Service Acts were seen as instituting a "servile state," in which the British worker would be deprived of all freedom and independence.⁷⁵ A widespread perception in the labour movement was of the workers being subordinated to the employers' interests. The concerns generated by certain provisions of the Munitions Act were compounded by a fear that military conscription would lead to fullscale industrial compulsion. Writing in November 1914, Robert Young, President of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), could detect "no difference between Germany's militarism...and the British advocacy of conscription."⁷⁶ Most labour supporters distrusted deeply the Unionist Party and Liberals such as Lloyd George. David Kirkwood, one of the future leaders of the Shop Stewards' Movement, told Lloyd George: "We regard you with suspicion because every Act with your name associated has the taint of slavery about it." The Fabian Beatrice Webb expressed similar sentiments, noting that

the Lloyd George-Curzon group want to mobilize labour whilst retaining for the ruling class property intact and the control of trade and industry. Lloyd George is indifferent rather than hostile to democracy. He wants to win the war; and as he finds more effective resistance to any interference from the capitalists than he does from the ranks of labour, he limits his demands to the enslavement of the working class.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ James Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement (London, 1973), p. 42.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 44. Hinton claims that the Ministry of Munitions was manned by so many employers that "In such an organization it was difficult to tell where business control ended and state control began" (ibid., p. 29). The Coalition passed the Munitions of War Act (1915) in June. This act created the Ministry of Munitions. The Minister had the power to control any and all munitions factories. The Minister also regulated profit, wages, and work practices. The Munitions Act made strikes illegal and provided for forced arbitration.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 50, 38.

⁷⁷ Kirkwood to Lloyd George, December 1915, quoted in Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement, p. 46; Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. 3, 1905-1924 "The Power to Alter Things" (Cambridge, 1984), p. 269 (7 December 1916). Lord Curzon was a potential Conservative leader and was influential in the House of Lords.

If the first factor to provide the dissenters with growing opportunities was disaffection within the Liberal and Labour parties, the second factor was military stalemate. In particular, the human costs and inertia of trench warfare led to a general reevaluation of the reasons for, and objectives of, the war. Nineteen-sixteen was a year of apparently shocking reverses for both the British Army and the Royal Navy. The British suffered a humiliating loss on 29 April when the force in Iraq surrendered to the Turks at Kut-el-Amara. The Battle of Jutland on 31 May between the British Grand Fleet and the German High Seas Fleet turned into a minor tactical defeat for the British. Of greater importance was the psychological blow inflicted on the British public who had long expected the Royal Navy to obliterate the Imperial German Navy at their first encounter. The last remnants of Britain's pre-war regular army had already perished in unsuccessful actions around Loos and Neuve Chapelle in 1915. Kitchener's 'New Armies' were then committed to a great battle on the Somme. To many on the home front, the Battle of the Somme seemed an unmitigated failure⁷⁸ and certainly the limited gains were a bitter popular disappointment. In addition to British bloodshed on the Somme, the public had to grapple with the frightful losses of the French Army at Verdun. The only glimmer of hope seemed to be the Russian Brusilov Offensive of July 1916. That attack initially appeared to be a success. Even Romania thought so and was persuaded to join the Allies in August. However, the eastern push also ground to a halt, at a cost of heavy Russian casualties. Even the attachment of Romania to the Allied cause became a liability to the Allies after Bucharest fell to the Central Powers early in December.

The lacklustre performance of the armed forces and the high cost of the war caused many to question its purpose. Samuel Hynes contends that by 1916 "the early idealistic supporter for the war had leaked away." By 1917, he adds, "the turn that had occurred in the consciousness

⁷⁸ Bourne, Britain and the Great War, p. 67.

of the soldiers had also occurred among thoughtful people at home."⁷⁹ Dissenters such as Trevelyan predicted as early as late 1915, that public disaffection with the war would grow if it continued to appear that Germany could not be defeated. They believed that this war-weariness would increase dramatically if it were known that the German Government was prepared to accept what they felt to be the basic British war aims: the evacuation of Belgium and northern France.⁸⁰ By November 1916, once it was clear that a breakthrough on the Somme was elusive, the dissenters became even more confident that their alternative of peace-by-negotiation could gain acceptance. In August 1916 Morel had confided to Trevelyan his view that the war might last another two years but that this provided them with an opportunity to advance the cause of a negotiated peace. Indeed, the dissenters realized that they could make meaningful headway only within the context of a military stalemate.⁸¹

The third circumstance which helped British dissent in 1916 was the peace diplomacy of President Wilson. The dissenters were buoyed by Wilson's public endorsement of the idea of a post-war league of nations to enforce the peace. On 27 May 1916, before an audience of the League to Enforce Peace in New York, Wilson said that he wanted a permanent peace and considered that peace was the business and interest of all of humanity. He condemned secret diplomacy and hoped to establish an international organization based on common fundamental beliefs and which would engage in concerted action to defend those principles. Wilson listed three tenets--equal rights for small states, national self-determination, and international security which he considered as central to any future international league of nations. He stated that these

⁷⁹ Hynes, A War Imagined, pp. 145, 173.

⁸⁰ Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 380.

⁸¹ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 78-81. MacDonald also argued that the military stalemate necessitated a negotiated settlement.

elementary principles would have to be accepted in order to secure American participation. For the dissenters, the President's plan satisfied Britain's post-war security concerns.⁸² Also, Wilson's attempt to initiate peace discussions raised the possibility of international support for the dissenters' contention that German military defeat was not a prerequisite of Britain's future security. Moreover, Wilson's reelection in November 1916 heralded a continuation of American interest in a peaceful settlement.

To make peace negotiations look attractive, the dissenters increasingly reiterated throughout the latter half of 1916, and indeed until March 1918, their absolute belief in Germany's willingness to meet Britain's minimum demands. While these requirements changed somewhat depending on the exigencies of the times and on the audience to which these appeals were aimed, the dissenters held that these conditions were Belgian independence, the evacuation of German troops from northern France (though not from Alsace-Lorraine), and the satisfaction of Serbian "national claims."⁸³

British dissent capitalized on the events of December 1916. First, the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition signalled to many who were not dissenters that the war would no longer be fought to a reasonable conclusion. Also, in the minds of some who hitherto had supported the Asquith Coalition, the advent of Lloyd George's coalition, with its higher ratio of imperialist and conscriptionist politicians, persuaded some liberals to be more critical of the knock-out blow policy. The dissenters stood poised to attract a considerable number of now 'uncertain' Liberals. Second, the dissenters could now put forth their ideas on a negotiated peace within the more

⁸² Martin, Peace without Victory, pp. 68, 108; Thomas J. Knock, To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order, (New York, 1992), pp. 76-78.

⁸³ See Morel's speech on 22 October in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 79. Swartz also discussed articles with the same theme by MacDonald and C.R. Buxton which appeared in The U.D.C. in the fall of 1916.

receptive conditions created by a military deadlock.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 139.

Chapter 1: EARLY DAYS—DECEMBER 1916 to JANUARY 1917

Introduction

Surveying the domestic political scene late in 1916, The Nation struck a distinctly pessimistic note with its observation that "Mr. George has not beaten the Germans, but he has destroyed two British Governments and some of the liberties of the British people."¹ The advocates of a peace-by-negotiation had been discouraged by the dramatic reconfiguration of ministerial politics that took place early in December 1916. A 'palace coup' against Asquith had resulted in the formation of a second Coalition Ministry, dominated by its Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and other (predominantly Unionist) proponents of a "knock-out blow" to the Central Powers.² For all that these hardliners appeared to have assumed control over the war effort, however, both strategic and international political developments suggested to dissenters that the prospects for peace had actually never been better.

Dissenters had long hoped that the strategic stalemate would lead to peace negotiations

¹ "A Leap in the Dark," The Nation, 9 December 1917, p. 344. For almost identical views, see, David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1977), p. 200; Snowden, The Labour Leader, 14 December 1916. p. 1.

² The fall of Asquith and the advent of the Lloyd George Coalition has been a contentious area of historical debate ever since the publication of Lord Beaverbrook's controversial study, Politicians and the War, 1914-1916 (London, 1928). Of the voluminous literature that has been generated since, see David Lloyd George, War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, vol. 2 (London, 1933), pp. 832-1005; Roy Jenkins, Asquith (London, 1964), chs. XXVI and XXVII; Stephen Koss, Asquith (New York, 1976), ch. 9; J.M. McEwen, "The Struggle for Mastery in Britain: Lloyd George versus Asquith, December 1916," Journal of British Studies xviii (1978): pp. 131-156 and, most recently, John Turner, British Politics, pp. 126-151.

and, by late 1916, such a situation of deadlock seemed to be materializing. The two major western offensives of the summer, by the Germans at Verdun and the British on the Somme, had failed, at an enormous cost in casualties, to secure any perceptible advantage over the enemy. From the Allied perspective, only their naval blockade was working well. The Russian offensive, which had begun in July 1916, was collapsing. The Romanians, who had declared war on Germany in August 1916, were in full retreat only three months later. Bucharest fell to the Central Powers on 6 December 1916. Despite these setbacks for the Allies in the East, a breakthrough for the Central Powers on the crucial Western Front remained elusive.

The loose peace-by-negotiation coalition was, if anything, even more encouraged at the year's end by diplomatic overtures from inside the enemy and neutral camps. The German Peace Note of 12 December 1916, followed by an American call for terms on 18 December, added credibility to the dissenters' demands that Britain clearly articulate its war aims. More importantly, perhaps, the dissenting call for a negotiated peace, hitherto apparently restricted to an isolated but vocal minority of 'cranks', was suddenly being echoed by powerful and influential voices abroad. The Allies' replies to President Wilson's initiative (in the first instance, on 30 December 1916, and then, more fully, on 10 January 1917) reflected British governmental concern with two perplexing problems: first, the vexed British relationship with the most important neutral power and its principal paymaster, the United States³ and, second, the increasing strength of the pro-negotiation lobby in Allied countries. Finally, Wilson's famous "Peace without Victory" address to the Senate on 22 January 1917 appeared to vindicate the peace-by-negotiation forces in Britain and to validate their alternative, dissenting approach to foreign policy.

³ For a brief discussion of Government concern about the danger of alienating the American Government, see below, footnote 18.

The German Peace Note

By late 1916 German military power had reached its zenith. As Germany's political leaders contemplated the dispatch of a tentative peace feeler to the Allies, the Reich appeared to many observers to be undefeatable militarily. The German Government, particularly German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg and the High Command, however, realized that, in the long term, superior Allied resources of men and matériel would ultimately carry the day. This outcome would only be hastened if the United States were to join the Allied cause. Some German strategists felt that the inevitability of German defeat could only be preempted by escalating the U-boat war in the Atlantic while the United States remained neutral, or, failing that, by keeping the Americans out of the war just long enough to force Britain to sue for peace.⁴ Yet, certain voices inside the German Government counselled against such a desperate and dangerous gambit. Against a backdrop of acute division (between the military and civilian politicians) over this crucial strategic choice, the German Government decided at Pless on 9 December 1916 to launch their peace initiative. Three days later Bethmann-Hollweg delivered a speech to the Reichstag in which he spoke of Germany's willingness to end the conflict. This gesture was followed immediately by the submission to President Wilson of a Peace Note, to be forwarded to the Allied Governments. In the event of rejection of these overtures, it was agreed, German U-boats would begin unrestricted submarine warfare.⁵

⁴ Z.A. Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War (London, 1971), p. 113.

⁵ Devlin, Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson's Neutrality (London, 1974), p. 573. The German initiative's shortcomings were precisely those foreseen by opponents of a similar Allied effort. According to Karl Birnbaum, the Chancellor's speech was intended to be balanced and unprovocative, though he had to make a speech that reflected points of view of both the moderates and the military. The terms that Bethmann-Hollweg had to frame were maximums but also had to appear reasonable (see Karl E. Birnbaum, Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916-January 9, 1917 [Stockholm, 1958], p. 248; Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 569).

The German Peace Note of 12 December 1916 was widely publicized in the British press the following day. However conciliatory the mere fact of a Note appeared, its tone was distinctly belligerent. The Note referred to Germany's "unshakable lines," "indestructible strength" and to the justice of the Central Powers' cause. The Chancellor also claimed that the war up to this point had amounted to a German victory. His peace diplomacy, therefore, was not motivated by weakness but by a sense of duty to the nation, God, and humanity. If the Allies rejected the offer to end the war then every German would blame the Allies for the continuing slaughter. It was from this position of strength, the Note implied, that Germany was prepared to make this magnanimous offer to negotiate directly with the Allies.⁶

The new Lloyd George Government, committed as it was to a resolute prosecution of the war, did not take the German offer seriously. The Note was seen as a ploy to garner the sympathy of neutrals, especially the United States, by embarrassing the Allies.⁷ Non-dissenting political opinion was also understandably suspicious of the German *démarche*. Taking aim directly at advocates of peace negotiations, such as the UDC, The New Statesman, the pro-war Fabian weekly, stated that if the Chancellor's assessment of Germany as both a pacific and invulnerable power was shared, then this could only result in a 'German' peace. Germany's

⁶ James Brown Scott, ed., "Statement of Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg in the Reichstag," 12 December 1916, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, December 1916 to November 1918 (Washington, 1921), pp. 1, 2; Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War, pp. 116-117. A pugnacious address by the Kaiser to troops assembled in Alsace cast doubt on the seriousness of German intentions to negotiate. The Kaiser's sentiments were shared by most of the uncompromising leadership of the German High Command. Indeed, the military's publication of the text of the Kaiser's speech on 15 December may have been deliberately timed to undermine Bethmann-Hollweg's initiative (see Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 574; Birnbaum, Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare, p. 248).

⁷ V.H. Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918 (Oxford, 1971), pp. 59-64. Also see Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War: The Lloyd George Government's Reactions to Woodrow Wilson, December, 1916-November, 1918 (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 19-27.

objective was to divide the Allies, and the war must only be ended on Allied terms. The unsigned article also discouraged any precise Allied statement of peace terms because these would either be too extreme, which would help Germany alienate the neutrals, or "something less," which would divide the Allies.⁸ Beatrice Webb probably captured the predominant popular reaction to the Note in her private observation that "the peace overtures of Germany find the country (except for the little sect of pacifists) curiously united in favour of carrying on the war without an attempt to negotiate."⁹

For the dissenters, by contrast, the Note was welcomed as a catalyst of peace negotiations. Overlooking the defiant subtext of Bethmann-Hollweg's speech, not to mention the explicitly truculent stand taken by the Kaiser, the German Note confirmed the belief of many dissenters that the military struggle had arrived at an impasse. Morel was convinced that such a stalemate had been reached. He also identified recent peace demonstrations in Frankfurt and Dresden as evidence of deteriorating morale on the German home front. These signs of diminishing popular enthusiasm for the war effort, in conjunction with the apparent strength of minority (anti-war) socialist opinion in Germany suggested to Morel that a supposedly rampant Prussian militarism had already been tamed. Morel also sensed that war weariness was growing in Britain, owing to rising food prices, the seemingly wasted casualties of the Somme and the mounting discontent of the soldiers.¹⁰

Like his colleague in the UDC, Arthur Ponsonby also believed that a decisive military victory for either side in the war was now improbable. Despite the Government's disposal of the

⁸ "The Allies' Attitude to Peace," The New Statesman, 16 December 1916, pp. 244-245.

⁹ Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. 3, 1905-1924 "The Power to Alter Things" (Cambridge, 1984), p. 273 (18 December 1916).

¹⁰ The U.D.C., December 1916, p. 15.

German Note, Ponsonby remained concerned about the likely consequences of Lloyd-George's insistence on "prosecuting the war to a successful issue." He wondered whether this meant the surrender of all at the same time or the massacre of humanity for unattainable ends. Even if outright victory were feasible, he told a hostile constituency meeting, German defeat could never justify the huge sacrifices. Ponsonby withheld from his constituents his convictions that Germany did not really threaten British security and that, on the contrary, the real obstacles to peace were those who exaggerated the 'Prussian menace' and who had used secret diplomacy to shut Germany out from its 'place in the sun'. Ponsonby had upheld two principal supports of a negotiated peace--the unacceptably high cost of victory and the inability of belligerents to reach a decisive military verdict regardless--and, in so doing, had implicitly extended support for the German Note.¹¹ Indeed, shortly after his encounter with the angry voters of Stirling Burghs, Ponsonby privately urged Lloyd George not to reject the German Note too quickly. He feared that any such hasty rejection might persuade neutral and domestic opinion that only Britain was committed to waging a war of aggression.¹²

¹¹ "Heckling Ponsonby at Stirling," Forward, 23 December 1916, p. 8. Since declining to support his Liberal Government's declaration of war in August 1914, Ponsonby had been constantly fighting off calls from his constituents and constituency executives to resign his Stirling Burghs seat. For a perspective similar to those of Morel and Ponsonby, see Bertrand Russell, "The Momentum of War," 14 December 1916, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 1, pp. 19-20. A dissenter on the fringe of the UDC, Russell was closely involved at this time with the cause of conscientious objection and the most strident anti-conscription organization, the NCF. In this issue of the NCF's weekly he argued that the warring countries were spent and that even the expectation of complete victory had "faded on both sides." Although the war dragged on, there was no point in continuing the fight since the fundamental objectives of the Allies could be secured by negotiation: Germany was willing to evacuate Belgium and the occupied parts of France (Russell made no mention of the fate of Serbia). Only the expansionist demands of extremists in Britain persuaded the average German to carry on the war. Yet, Russell was confident that, ultimately, the British people would not continue fighting for a set of secret and unspecified war aims.

¹² Ponsonby to Lloyd George, 14 December 1916, Ponsonby Papers, C.665. H. Weinroth has noted that Ponsonby and other dissenters "harboured the illusion that Lloyd George might be won over to their views." Ponsonby wrote how he believed that Lloyd George was the only man

Despite being encouraged by the German Note, many dissenters were also wary lest their enthusiasm for Bethmann-Hollweg's proposals be construed as "pro-German" or as endorsing a "German" peace. MacDonald was acutely aware of this dilemma. He agreed with the influential Edwardian peace publicist, Norman Angell, that the British Government should state its peace terms. Indeed, Macdonald was urging it publicly to do so. But he also thought that the best strategy for dissent was "an active diplomacy, and leaving the rest vague," presumably to avoid charges of 'pro-Germanism' and the loss of credibility at this crucial juncture. MacDonald even complained to Angell that "some of our friends are not very discreet in their tactics and they bind our hands without gaining anything. We are to have a delicate situation facing us this week."¹³

Characteristically for a dissenter who preferred to work through official channels rather than to appeal to the public directly, Buxton's reaction to the German Note was articulated in private communications, to the British Government and to one of President Wilson's closest advisors, Colonel Edward House. The conduit for the latter correspondence was William Buckler, a Special Attaché to the American Embassy in London, who throughout 1917 sent regular and detailed reports to House concerning developments inside the dissenting camp. Buxton was regarded as a man of influence and as the most reliable source of information on Liberal opinion in Britain. In Buckler's judgment, "Buxton's moderation and unaggressive manners enable him to reach ears which would be sealed to such men as Trevelyan or MacDonald." Buckler also sensed in Buxton a "pretty sane and accurate" grasp of American

who could implement a compromise peace but was unfortunately in the grip of the "materialist point of view" and inflexible colleagues (Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 38).

¹³ MacDonald to Angell, 18 December 1916, Norman Angell Collection, Correspondence MacDonald, James Ramsay.

public opinion.¹⁴

Buxton advocated negotiations with Germany on the basis of the 12 December Note. However, he also implied that any specific German claims could, of course, always be rejected.

Whatever the terms put forward at first by the enemy Governments, it is highly probable that they would ultimately make far greater concessions, rather than continue the War.

An armistice is not involved in the present suggestion, and if our own terms cannot be obtained, the Government are not committed to accepting the terms offered.¹⁵

In his memorandum of 16 December 1916 to the British Government, Buxton concentrated upon the issue of British reliance on American goodwill. He stressed that:

we cannot contemplate without alarm the unfavourable change in neutral opinion towards this country which would undoubtedly take place if the Allies refused to discuss the question of peace.¹⁶

Snowden also threw his support behind the German initiative, declaring that: "an awful responsibility will be incurred by any Government which contemptuously rejects any reasonable offer to negotiate peace." Snowden's reaction indicated a unanimity of sorts among dissenters.

¹⁴ Buckler to House, 27 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. For more discussion on the accuracy of the characterizations of Buxton, see below, pp. 76-77, 91 n. 45.

¹⁵ See the enclosure from Buxton in Buckler to House, 22 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. According to T.P. Conwell-Evans and Mosa Anderson, Buxton sent copies of his memorandum to all members of the Cabinet (Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, p. 126; Anderson, Noel Buxton: A Life [London, 1952], p. 86). For a similar view of the German note as merely a preliminary to negotiations and for interesting speculation about the shape of a future, moderate peace, see "The German Offer of Peace," The Nation, 16 December 1916, pp. 397, 401. The liberal weekly was confident that Germany would accept the status quo ante bellum in the West and in the colonies and that there were two German alternatives in the Balkans. Of these, the annexation of Serbia to Austria was unacceptable to The Nation. Its preferred option of settlement through a European conference was viewed as feasible given the evidence of German moderation and the pressure to compromise that would continue to be exerted by the naval blockade and the strains of the War generally. At the same time the newspaper appreciated that the Germans still held the field and had made no indication of being prepared to offer the necessary concessions that would make a conference possible.

¹⁶ Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, p. 126.

He saw the German initiative "momentous" and as a catalyst to be ignored at the Government's peril.¹⁷

Lloyd George's initial response to the German initiative was delivered in a keynote Commons speech of 19 December 1916, his first detailed policy statement since assuming the highest office of state. The new Prime Minister wished to strike an appropriately steely chord in his review of both foreign and domestic policy. He achieved the desired effect by issuing a veiled threat of industrial conscription at home and by scorning the recent diplomatic foray of Bethmann-Hollweg. The British Government, he said, could not accept a blank negotiating slate if Germany was in the ascendant. Yet, Lloyd George sought to demonstrate that Germany merely wanted time to reorganize militarily. Echoing the Unionist leader and Chancellor of the Exchequer, Andrew Bonar Law, Lloyd George reemphasised that British terms were "restitution, reparation and guarantee against repetition"--Bethmann-Hollweg had offered none of these. He prophesied a long war and promised that the British Government would wait for the right moment before deciding on the contents of any peace settlement. But Lloyd George was mindful of a potentially hostile American reaction to his address. The Government had already commissioned several investigations into the extent of the British dependence on American financial and material resources, and the Prime Minister was aware that this dependence was complete. With one eye turned to the American public, Lloyd George told the Commons that the Allies might not rule out peace entirely if they knew the details of German terms.¹⁸ Thus, while refusing to enter into

¹⁷ The Labour Leader, 14 December 1916, p. 2.

¹⁸ PD (Commons), 19 December 1916, 88, cols. 1334-5, 1338; Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 61-62; Scott, ed., "Speech of Premier Lloyd-George on the German Proposals in the House of Commons," 19 December 1916, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 17. Wilson's peace note was not public knowledge until it was revealed in the morning papers of 21 December (see Arthur Link, Wilson, vol. V, Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917 [Princeton, 1965], p. 220). Britain's financial problems became critical when, at the end of November 1916, American banks were warned by the United

negotiations immediately, Lloyd George did not wish to be seen shutting the door completely.¹⁹ Even some dissenting opinion was encouraged by the Prime Minister's apparent willingness to review German terms. The speech was certainly not of the "knock-out" variety, declared Snowden--praise indeed, albeit muted, from a most unexpected source.²⁰

President Wilson's First Peace Offensive

In spite of the difficulties inherent in supporting enemy diplomacy in wartime, the dissenters made shrewd use of the German Note. They immediately started a campaign to elicit a satisfactory response from the British Government. To improve their chances of success, the top priority was to induce President Wilson to mediate the conflict. Ever since the outbreak of war, dissenters had urged the American President to promote a negotiated settlement. These attempts at persuasion intensified after 27 May 1916, following a speech by Wilson to the League to Enforce Peace, in which he pledged American support for a post-war international league. After the lull occasioned by the Presidential elections of November 1916, the dissenters redoubled their efforts to convince Wilson that circumstances were propitious for a presidential peace initiative. Wilson was actually rather chagrined when one such appeal, from Trevelyan, was published in the New York Times of 5 December 1916. But the President was by no means deaf to these pleas by British dissenters. Also on 5 December, the anti-conscriptionist Liberal MP, J.H. Whitehouse, was granted a private audience with House. When asked how the British

States Federal Reserve Board to issue no more loans to the warring nations (Kathleen Burk, Britain, America and the Sinews of War, 1914-1918 [London, 1985], pp. 84-86).

¹⁹ Link, Wilson, Campaigns, p. 231.

²⁰ The Labour Leader, 21 December 1916, p. 5. Also see The Nation, 23 December 1916, p. 433.

Government would receive a peace note from Wilson, Whitehouse predicted that it would trigger a wave of pro-negotiation sentiment that would force the Government to the table.²¹

From the dissenting perspective, Wilson's intervention became even more imperative after 12 December. Keith Robbins notes that both Trevelyan and Whitehouse again requested the President to act after the publication of the German Note. Other dissenters did likewise, most notably Bertrand Russell, the clandestine conveyance to America of whose 23 December "Open Letter to President Wilson" almost led to a second legal prosecution of the harried philosopher-pacifist.²² Wilson himself had been taken aback by the German Note, partly because he had already drafted one of his own. In spite of being preempted by Bethmann-Hollweg, the President, arguably, now had even more incentive to make a dramatic diplomatic intervention. Wilson had begun to entertain the probability of a German victory--one which would greatly alter the balance of power and jeopardize the achievement of a lasting, just peace. Although Wilson had wanted to launch some kind of initiative since the end of November, after 12 December he felt that he had to wait in order to distance his overture from that of the Germans. Yet, by 17 December, he had decided to proceed. The following day, against the advice of House, Wilson

²¹ Trevelyan's communication reached its destination courtesy of the sympathetic Buckler (see Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," p. 160, n. 81). On his and Whitehouse's manoeuvring, see Link, Wilson, Campaigns, pp. 208-209; House to Buckler, 6 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 3; House to Wilson, 6 December 1916, House Papers, Series I, Box 121, Folder 4270; Knock, To End All Wars, p. 108. On the dissenters' relationship with Wilson generally, see Martin, Peace without Victory, chs. 4 and 5; Pelling, America and the British Left, pp. 108-110; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, *passim*. Trevelyan believed that he had convinced Wilson to act when he claimed that the President had followed the suggestion that he had recently made (Trevelyan to Angell, 22 December 1916, Norman Angell Collection, Correspondence Trevelyan, Charles).

²² Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 114; Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, pp. 5-10, 14 and on Russell's hounding by British legal and military authorities, R.A. Rempel, ed., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 13, Prophecy and Dissent, 1914-1916, (London, 1988), pp. lx-lxiv.

ordered Secretary of State Lansing to send out his peace note that evening.²³

The document began with Wilson stating that he was merely offering helpful suggestions as a friend and a neutral. He assured his Congressional audience that his diplomacy was in no way connected with the recent German démarche. He wanted to assist in the exchange of views required to end the war but was not prepared to mediate. None of the belligerents had as yet outlined specific war aims. This task was the necessary first step towards a peace conference. The President, wishing to sound impartial, but actually angering the Allied Powers mightily, called "attention to the fact that the objects which the statesmen of the belligerents on both sides have in mind in this war are virtually the same, as stated in general terms to their own people and to the world." Rising hopes for peace, however, would be dashed if a war being fought for unspecified ends were to cost millions more lives and exhaust the material resources of the nations involved. But peace was within reach because the belligerents' differences were not irreconcilable.²⁴

The President's Note received scant praise in some circles in Britain. Predictably, the staunch fight-to-the finish mentality of both The Times and The Morning Post remained unaffected by Wilson's peace diplomacy. The Fabian socialist New Statesman denied that an undoubtedly war weary public was prepared to accede to an unsatisfactory and premature peace. Indeed, the editorial detected a renewed determination to attain ideal terms. The newspaper also observed that Wilson's peace initiative could not but appear to reinforce that of the Germans. The latter comment shows how the tepid British response to Wilson's effort was very much

²³ Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 575; Daniel M. Smith, The Great Departure: The United States and World War I, 1914-1920 (New York, 1965), p. 82; Arthur Link, Woodrow Wilson: A Brief Biography (New York, 1963), p. 110; Link, Wilson, Campaigns, p. 217.

²⁴ Scott, ed., "Note of President Wilson to the Belligerent Powers Suggesting a Statement of Peace Terms," 18 December 1916, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 13-14, 15.

conditioned by its timing. Lord Crewe, a senior Liberal figure inside the recently dismantled Asquith Coalition, pointed to the crux of this matter to Buxton. Despite Wilson's denial of any link between his own and the German note, it was "almost inevitable that the two should be regarded as possessing a close connexion."²⁵

On 22 December the American Ambassador to Britain, Walter Hines-Page, informed his Government that Wilson's address had been poorly received, in large part owing to its apparent placement of Germany and Britain on the same moral plane. Arthur Henderson, for one, lamented the wording of Wilson's offer. British Labour's representative in the War Cabinet, along with numerous other upholders of the Allied cause, were adamant that the Central Powers were fighting for completely different, less honourable, motives than were their opponents. Snowden also interpreted the President's comments as a statement of the belligerents' moral equivalency but, as a dissenter, he was far less perplexed by the implications of such a comparison.²⁶ Finally, those who were critical of the President suspected that he hoped that once discussions were started they would never be stopped.²⁷

Wilson's dramatic gesture was embraced with enthusiasm by the dissenters. The fact that this latest call for peace came from such an eminently respectable source lent British dissent a degree of credibility which had previously been lacking. The dissenters asserted that Wilson had been misinterpreted and had not played into German hands. They felt that the President might

²⁵ Crewe to Buxton, January 2, 1917, quoted in Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, p. 127; The New Statesman, 30 December 1916, p. 290 (the editorial did at least concede that Wilson deserved a reply). See also, Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 61. British newspaper attitudes to the note are reviewed in Buckler to House, 22 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4).

²⁶ Smith, The Great Departure, p. 73; Henderson to Buxton, 2 January 1917, Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Boxes 1-2, letter E-H, Arthur Henderson file; The Labour Leader, 4 January 1917, p. 1.

²⁷ Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 61-62.

even be right in believing that the peace terms of the various powers were not irreconcilable. The friendly greeting of Wilson's note in The Nation was echoed in both the Manchester Guardian and Westminster Gazette, which led Buckler to anticipate that Liberal opinion generally, and not just the dissenting camp, was sympathetic to the President's ploy.²⁸

The dissenters also welcomed Wilson's personal intervention because they perceived him as the ideal arbiter. Buckler reported to House that "Macdonald (sic) and others believe...that both sides ought to state terms frankly but confidentially to Uncle Sam as the 'honest broker.'"²⁹ For Morel, Wilson was perfectly cast in this role. The linchpin of the UDC identified with each of Wilson's three goals; to keep the United States out of the War, to stop the War and to forge "a Peace out of which can be created definite international safeguards for all nations." Through his intervention, Wilson had enhanced the prospects for a negotiated peace because Germany would now be obliged to state its terms. Shortly thereafter negotiations could begin. Wilson was "a true statesman," in the mind of Morel, who "is to-day, and will continue to be for a long time to come, the most powerful and most independent personality in the world." Morel also stressed that if the Central Powers were intransigent, Wilson could warn them to be flexible or risk

²⁸ See The Nation, 30 December 1916, p. 457. On the editorial line of the two Liberal dailies, see Buckler to House, 22 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4, in which the correspondent detected a "sense of weariness, of hopeless deadlock [which] has increased surprisingly since Oct. 1." By way of contrast to Buckler's upbeat tone, the paucity of praise for Wilson in the press as a whole prompted Buxton (in a huge leap of faith) to write House that public opinion was far more favourable to the 18 December move than the newspapers acknowledged (Buxton to House, 28 December 1916, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, File 729).

²⁹ Buckler to House, 27 December 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. MacDonald's vision of how negotiations might unfold indicates that he had an untenable view of international affairs. In addition to the American offer to mediate, Germany would have to agree to certain minimum pre-conditions such as the evacuation of Belgium and France before negotiations could start. To deal with the difficult demands of the other Allies for "Dalmatia and the Bosphorus (sic)," 'they' thought Germany should make a unilateral withdrawal from north-eastern France and Belgium. This would shift the onus on to the Allies and put pressure on them to use an intermediary to induce the Russians and Italians to give up their demands.

finding America on the side of the Allies.³⁰

In fact, many dissenters advocated acceptance of American mediation not because Wilson was an 'honest broker' but because he favoured Britain, something certainly not apparent from his Note. Morel had at least implied that the Allies too might find a less compliant United States if they stalled negotiations.³¹ Buxton, who thought Wilson's offer of mediation "most opportune,"³² referred to America's impartiality in Parliament on 21 December. At the same time, he told the Commons, there was no valid reason to rebuff President Wilson as his diplomacy was in accord with basic British objectives. Buxton was trying to bridge the gap between Lloyd George's determination to fight and his expression of interest in hearing German terms, by calling for the acceptance of American diplomatic intervention. He wanted the Government to appreciate that the United States was the "paramount factor" in Allied success, that its friendly neutrality was essential in view of America's pivotal supply role, and that Britain had American support already. Buxton warned the Commons that declining to state terms would be "a grave diplomatic error" and provide fuel for the arms embargo lobby in America.³³ This

³⁰ Morel, "The War Cannot Go On," The U.D.C., January 1917, pp. 28-31.

³¹ Ibid. Though not a dissenter at this time, Josiah Wedgwood was another example of those Liberal MPs who wanted American action. He travelled to the United States in mid-December 1916 and, before leaving, discussed this memorandum with Walter Runciman, former President of the Board of Trade, and Lord Robert Cecil, the new Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. According to Wedgwood, they gave him "their private blessing." He presented his document, which was clearly written for an American audience, to House on Boxing Day 1916. He stated that he believed that the United States and Britain were the only truly liberal nations in the world. As they were of like mind, then negotiations would be unlikely to damage British interests (Wedgwood, p. 118; "America and Peace", Buxton Papers, Box 35).

³² Buckler to House, 22 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4.

³³ PD (Commons), 21 December 1916, 88, cols. 1768, 1769, 1771-2. Buxton argued that if the Allies eschewed territorial gains through the process of negotiation, then this would discredit [Prussian] militarism more effectively than a decisive battlefield success. His speech bears a striking resemblance to an article published three months earlier in which he etched out an American perspective on the European conflagration. Here he argued that the Americans were

inconsistency--that dissenters wanted a seemingly impartial but really mildly pro-British America--stemmed from the dissenters' view of the optimum outcome of the war. Dissenters hoped for a stalemate or, barring that, a slim British victory, to bring about a moderate and lasting settlement. The worst-case scenario for dissenters was a German victory which would, in turn, reward militarism and threaten civil liberty.

Buxton reiterated some of his views in a series of memoranda which were intended primarily for American and British governmental figures and, secondarily, for sympathetic voices in the British press and Parliament. In one such paper Buxton asked rhetorically whether the United States could be ignored. If America's moral support was useful, its material assistance was imperative. British dependence on American finance, munitions, food and raw materials required the cultivation of an American goodwill that could not be taken for granted given the ill feeling directed at Britain's blacklist of American firms dealing with Germany, the naval blockade and postal censorship. He again argued that an Allied refusal to draft terms would strengthen those Americans who favoured an embargo on arms exports and loans and that continuing intransigence might even jeopardize the flow of wheat from the United States.³⁴

Supporters of a negotiated peace also used Wilson's call to put forth some of their own

not really neutral, that they were appalled by the atrocities perpetrated by the Central Powers and only prevented from considering intervention on the Allied side because of the hostility of Irish, German and some Eastern European immigrant lobbies (Buxton, "The War and America," The Contemporary Review, November 1916, pp. 555-561). His Commons address was actually prepared before news of the peace note was released to the public, and in it Buxton merely alluded to rumours in the lobby of a dramatic Presidential initiative. Almost immediately, Buckler relayed the text of Buxton's speech to House (Buckler to House, 22 December 1916, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4).

³⁴ "The Allies and America," Buxton Papers, Box 35, WWI file. Buckler forwarded a copy of this memorandum to House in a letter of 29 December 1916 (Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. Crewe received a copy from Buxton personally on December 29 (Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, p. 127). The latter also sent a condensed version to the editors of The Daily News, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Chronicle.

views on a satisfactory settlement. As regards some key specifics of the elusive settlement, Buxton wanted the United States' support for internationalization of the Dardanelles and Russian annexation of Armenia.³⁵ Wedgwood agreed that American diplomatic and military power was vital to guarantee free and equal access to the Straits. In his blueprint for peace Wedgwood also called for the complete independence of Poland, Belgium, Serbia and Romania, the internationalization of all African colonies and the international control of Pacific islands. More contentious terms included national independence for the whole of Ireland, Bohemia, Bosnia, Albania, Armenia and Finland, freedom of the seas, Swiss annexation of Alsace and the division of Lorraine between France and Germany. Wedgwood's vision, steeped in the liberal tradition of free trade, rights for small states and the right to national self-determination, centred on formulating a proposal that would satisfy neither side fully so that it would be acceptable to all.³⁶

Employing the spectre of an alienated American public opinion, the dissenters strove relentlessly, in Parliament, the press and their private correspondence, to persuade the new British Government to moderate its foreign policy and accept President Wilson's offer. The NCF's Catherine Marshall believed that now, in the immediate aftermath of Wilson's Peace Note, was the time for action, although she was shrewd enough to appreciate that demands for terms were best voiced by those other than the "pacifists."³⁷ Buxton judged that the prospect of negotiations with Germany had never appealed to more than a "section" of British opinion, while responding to Wilson's request for terms was more broadly acceptable in liberal circles.³⁸ In

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Wedgwood, "America and Peace," Buxton Papers, Box 35.

³⁷ Quoted in Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 115.

³⁸ Buxton to Buckler, 6 January 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 729.

Trevelyan's view, Governments could not now resist stating terms for fear of appearing irrational, and "we are placed in a most powerful position for agitation if they do."³⁹

Dissenting Reactions to the Allied Replies

By the end of December 1916, the British Government was under enormous pressure to issue a war aims statement. Moreover, the proposals needed to be conciliatory enough to assuage American public opinion. The Government's plight was alleviated by the curt dismissal of Wilson's note delivered by the German Government on 26 December. This concise reply accepted the "friendly spirit" of American initiative but considered that a direct exchange of views to be "the most suitable way of arriving at the desired result [the foundation of a lasting peace]." The German Government also proclaimed that it had made the first move towards peace and further rebuffed the President by adding that Germany was only interested in working toward an international league after the war was over. Only then could they collaborate with the United States on this vital matter of international security.⁴⁰

The Allied Governments decided to answer the German offer of direct negotiations first and then to reply to President Wilson. Their response to Germany on 29 December 1916, began with a declaration of Allied unity. The note then contested the German view that the Allies had

³⁹ Trevelyan to Angell, 22 December 1916, Norman Angell Collection, Correspondence Trevelyan, Charles.

⁴⁰ Scott, ed., "German Reply to President Wilson," 26 December 1916, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 22. The German answer turned into a German diplomatic failure. According to Patrick Devlin, its "negative character" helped the Allies to formulate a response to Wilson. The German reply did not deal with the questions of restoration, restitution and reparation as laid out in Lloyd George's 19 December speech. Keith Robbins goes further, saying that the German reply was a snub to the President. The very rapid response of the Germans to Wilson's note allowed the Allies to issue a reply to the German Note that was harsher than they might otherwise have considered advisable (Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 590; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 115).

caused the war and that the Central Powers were already victorious. Indeed, these German claims were "sufficient to render barren any attempt at negotiation." The reply also doubted the pacific intentions behind Germany's diplomacy because their note contained nothing of substance in the crucial area of war aims: it was instead a "manoeuvre of war" choreographed to avoid the penalties for aggression and to impose a German peace. Furthermore, the German Note was calculated to weaken Allied domestic opinion, to strengthen German domestic opinion, to deceive and to intimidate neutral countries and "finally to justify new crimes in advance."⁴¹ The Allied note affirmed that they sought the "reparation of liberties" and expounded upon the principle of national self-determination. They wanted assurances on the rights of small states and, possibly, more general guarantees of security in the post-war world.

Although the Allied note was clearly inadequate as a statement of war aims, the Lloyd George Government had at least responded to Germany and established a framework for future dialogue. But most dissenters dismissed the 29 December reply out of hand.⁴² Morel denounced both its tone and contents, whilst acknowledging that there might still be room for talks if the right preconditions could be achieved. But the Allies were misguided in treating the German Note as a trap. Morel saw in the reply a demonstration of the Allied Governments' unswerving faith in the viability of military victory. Yet the Allied war effort was fading: Russia was weak and unable to prop up Romania; Italy had a large peace movement; in all theatres of

⁴¹ Scott, ed., "Entente Reply to German Proposals," 29 December 1916, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 26-28.

⁴² The Nation was ambivalent about the 29 December reply. On one hand the editorial was sorry not to see a proper statement of aims especially when Wilson's call for a confidential list of objectives mitigated the worst elements of a public statement of terms. On the other hand, the editorial still thought that there was hope for peace. Furthermore, now the Allied reply had shifted the onus onto Germany. If there were no change in the German position, The Nation argued, then the 12 December German Note would look like a war ploy. This in turn would lessen American goodwill toward Germany and risk war with the United States over an expanded submarine campaign (The Nation, 6 January 1917, p. 485, 488).

the war forward movement had ceased. Especially distressing was the huge toll of casualties on the Western Front. Surely, Morel reasoned, the Government could not be planning another fruitless offensive. The German war effort, by contrast, was not nearly so shaky.⁴³

Snowden was equally vehement in his denunciation of the Allies. The truculence of their note had effectively handed the moral high ground over to Germany.

What has happened during the past three weeks in the way of declarations of the statesmen of the Allied countries, and the brutal jingoism and arrogant militarism of the press has shown the world that the responsibility for the continuation of the war, and all that is involved in the loss of life and wealth, must henceforth rest with the Entente Powers.⁴⁴

There was also concern in dissenting circles that the Allied response only bolstered those extremists in Germany who claimed that the Entente was intent on destroying them. The Liberal scholar and elder statesman, Lord Bryce, who in 1915 had chaired the notorious Committee of Inquiry into German Atrocities in Belgium, voiced this dissenting fear to Buxton.

the only result is to confirm the dogged and ferocious resistance of Germany and Austria, whose peoples will feel they must fight to the death rather than submit. Every additional item of defeat and humiliation counts. We are in for a long war now. I hope those pacifists who have been asking the Allies to show their hand are happy at last.⁴⁵

In spite of the appearance of Allied intransigence, the dissenters were not deterred from further lobbying of both the British and American Governments to continue working towards a negotiated peace. In another privately circulated memorandum, Buxton exhorted the United States to propose some form of international administration of the Straits, so that Russia would not have to keep fighting in order to achieve its premier strategic objective in the Near East--unrestricted naval access through the Dardanelles. In Buxton's view, it was better for America

⁴³ Morel, "The War Cannot Go On," The U.D.C., January 1917, p. 28-31.

⁴⁴ The Labour Leader, 4 January 1917, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Anderson, Noel Buxton, p. 90

to deprive Russia of Constantinople by assuming control of the city itself than to have Britain--which distrusted tsarist intentions in the region--stand in Russia's way and thereby deter the latter from negotiating.⁴⁶ Buxton was trying to induce Wilson to put forward certain proposals which would satisfy British concerns and thereby hasten a settlement. His plan was to coax the United States into European politics by committing it permanently to guarantee a 'liberal' peace. This proposal was, like much other dissenting talk of the time, part of a more concerted attempt to inhibit Lloyd George and the jingoes from ruining the promise of the peace diplomacy of December 1916. Some dissenters even believed that the Allied answer to Wilson's offer to mediate represented a degree of success for their campaign of persuasion.

On 10 January 1917 the Allied leadership released its most comprehensive statement of war aims to date. This subtle response to the American President actually appeared to address many concerns of the dissenters. It commenced with an appreciation of Wilson's endeavours and with an endorsement of his post-war scheme for an international league backed by the sanction of force. However, the Allies protested the comparison of themselves and the Central Powers. The former were fighting not "for selfish interests, but above all to safeguard the independence of peoples, of right, and of humanity." Conversely, the German and the Austro-Hungarian Empires were fighting for a European hegemony and "economic domination of the world." The reply blamed the war's origins on the Central Powers and catalogued the atrocities which they had perpetrated since its outbreak.⁴⁷

The Allies were not prepared to disclose the specific amount of the indemnities they coveted until the start of any negotiations. But they were definitely seeking the restoration with

⁴⁶ "The Straits and America," 4 January 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730; Buxton to Buckler, 6 January 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 729.

⁴⁷ Scott, ed., "Entente Reply to President Wilson," 10 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 35-36.

indemnities of Belgium, Serbia and Montenegro. In addition, all occupied territory in France, Russia and Romania would have to be evacuated. Europe would be reorganized and "guaranteed by a stable régime," evidently an international organization of states. The Allies demanded respect for the principle of nationality and that any reapportionment of national boundaries be based on "territorial conventions and international agreements." Furthermore, the settlement would have to include the "restitution of provinces or territories wrested in the past from the Allies by force or against the wishes of the inhabitants." Specifically, this implied the liberation of Italians, Slavs, Romanians, Czechs and Slovaks as well as the "populations subject to the bloody tyranny of the Turks," whose European possessions were to be confiscated. In conclusion, the Allies did not intend to exterminate the German people or their state but, rather, to achieve a peace consistent with liberty, justice and respect for international obligations--goals to which the United States was committed.⁴⁸

The Allied note of 10 January was better received by dissenters than the message to Germany that had been delivered eleven days earlier. The Nation concluded that the Allies had accepted the League of Nations idea and pledged themselves to the principle of national self determination. Furthermore, such minimum demands as the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from Europe and freedom for its Christian minorities were hardly excessive.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Scott, ed., "Entente Reply to President Wilson," 10 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 35-37. The Poles were excluded from this pledge to the subject peoples of Europe because the Tsar had recently made a public declaration which the other Allies deemed in excess of their minimum demands for other nationalities.

⁴⁹ The Nation, 13 January 1917, p. 513. At the same time, pro-war opinion could also draw an encouraging message from the document. The New Statesman praised the Allies' answer to President Wilson and remarked that the continuation of peace talk appeared to have strengthened the Allied position vis à vis neutral and domestic opinion (see The New Statesman, 13 January 1917, pp. 337, 338; 20 January 1917, p. 362).

Buxton was tentative in his approval of the statement. He appreciated the promise of a post-war international league but, overall, regretted the absence of a more conciliatory tone. To his friends Buxton confided his anxieties about Allied plans for the Straits and for the Habsburg Empire. He opposed any dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, the continuing territorial integrity of which he judged essential for peace.⁵⁰ Buxton and many other dissenters were embarrassed by the Allied leadership's solicitude for oppressed nationalities. The liberation of subject peoples was, after all, a keynote article of the Gladstonian faith. Yet Buxton felt that ill-judged Allied promises to the Czechs and Slovaks especially, by threatening the very structure of Austria-Hungary, would induce the latter to carry on fighting even against the most overwhelming odds. Such a settlement of the nationalities problem in Central Europe would be disastrous and, moreover, the British people were unwilling to pay the price of prolonging the war for such a purpose. Buxton maintained a tenuous connection with the traditions of Gladstonian Liberalism by advocating instead a scheme of internal 'home rule', on the grounds that the goal of complete independence from Habsburg rule was not universally shared by its Slavic subjects. Unfortunately for Buxton, he was subjected to sustained ridicule by the same newspaper which chose to publicize his personal resolution of this most perplexing of dissenting dilemmas. The New Statesman questioned Buxton's estimate that Czechoslovakian independence would cost 500,000 British lives. Indeed, it did not foresee any extra casualties or any extension of the war, because Austria-Hungary would collapse as soon as Germany was beaten. The newspaper then launched a scathing personal attack on this erstwhile sympathiser with the plight of oppressed peoples:

The spectacle of Mr. Buxton as a champion of German-Magyar dominion over the subject races of the conglomerate Austrian Empire is so remarkable that we hope he will forgive us if we hesitate to accept quite at their face value the

⁵⁰ Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 116; Anderson, Noel Buxton, pp. 88-89.

doubts which he expresses as to the genuineness of the Bohemian demand for liberation. They are inspired, we cannot help suspecting, less by his knowledge of the situation on the spot than by his apprehensions as to the prolongation of the war...Buxton's argument is typical of so much that passes for sound reasoning nowadays in certain quarters that it deserves examination. Actually, it is no more than an edifice of vague doubts founded neither on military knowledge nor, as far as we can see, upon any serious attempt on common-sense lines to envisage the end of the war.⁵¹

Snowden too was dismayed by the content of the Allied reply to Wilson. He approved their acceptance in principle of a post-war international league but felt that the Government had attached to it so many conditions as to make it virtually unworkable. As if arguing the German perspective of the British note,⁵² Snowden ventured that its principal message was the Allied desire for conquest. The Allies clearly wished to break up Germany, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. The imposition of such a victory would so humiliate Germany, however, that in the process of achieving their desired ends, the Allies would sacrifice the security without which there could be no lasting peace. For Snowden, genuine security would remain elusive if there were any vanquished powers at the end of the war.⁵³ But Snowden must at least have been

⁵¹ Buxton, "The Liberation of Bohemia," The New Statesman, 20 January 1917, p. 373 and also the unsigned editorial on p. 362 of the same issue. More generally, see Hanak, "The UDC during the First World War," passim.

⁵² The German Government used the Allied note to prove that the Entente powers were bent on conquest. In their view, the decisions to seize Alsace-Lorraine and several Prussian provinces, to 'humiliate' and 'curtail' the Austro-Hungarian Empire and to partition Turkey and Bulgaria were patently not based on the principles of reparation and restitution (Scott, ed., "German Comment upon Entente Reply to President Wilson," 12 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 45). The lead article in The Tribunal entitled "Punishing Germany" mocked the view that Britain was wholly absolved of the guilt of starting the war and that, consequently, Germany should be crushed. He argued, as Ponsonby had done before his constituents in December, that you could not punish a nation; the personal cost would be too great on all sides. A week later another unsigned lead article raised the spectre of militarism stating that it did not believe "that the triumph of British militarism means perpetual peace and the safety of small nations ("The Need for Guarantees," The Tribunal, 11 January 1917; p. 1; "Punishing Germany," 4 January 1917, p. 1)."

⁵³ The Labour Leader, 18 January 1917, p. 1.

pleased that the Government had stated its objectives. Here was vindication for those, like him, who had long urged the Government to declare its aims. Also, the 'expansionist' war aims of the Allies were suddenly exposed to the view of the whole world.

Many dissenters attacked the 10 January statement for pricing its minimum demands too high. Even the generally upbeat Buckler thought that the Allies had strengthened the "German militarists." H.N. Brailsford, journalist of renown and a UDC and ILP member, complained bitterly that he would rather have been kept ignorant of Allied terms. He was now convinced that only complete victory would satisfy their political and military leaders.⁵⁴ These suspicions could only be confirmed by the British supplement to the Allied note which the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, dispatched to Wilson on 13 January. Balfour stressed the importance of expelling Turkey from Europe, of promoting national self-determination in aggressive Imperial states and of an effective international system that would punish aggression. The principal theme of Balfour's note was the brutal, perfidious, and bellicose nature of German militarism. Of the future peace, he said that "the people of this country share to the full the desire of the President for peace, [but] they do not believe peace can be durable if it be not based on the success of the Allied cause."⁵⁵

It was hugely ironic that many proponents of a 'democratic' foreign policy actually advocated the resort to secret diplomacy in order to stimulate peace talks. MacDonald thought that only these questionable methods would allow the belligerents to explore their options without the extremists undermining the discussions with their intemperate demands.⁵⁶ Buxton too

⁵⁴ Buckler to House, 1 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 116.

⁵⁵ Scott, ed., British Supplement to Entente Reply to President Wilson, 13 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 45-49.

⁵⁶ For MacDonald's private view on secret diplomacy in this period, see p. 49.

believed that it was crucial for the British Government to state its aims to Wilson in confidence. Only then could they avoid the pitfall of committing to unattainable objectives yet still satisfy American opinion. Furthermore, any level of discussions with Wilson would dissuade him from entering into direct negotiations with belligerent countries. Even if their demands were leaked, the British Government would remain uncommitted because these terms would have no official standing and could not, therefore, be exploited by the German jingoes.⁵⁷

Yet the Allies' 10 January statement had in many ways helped the dissenters advance their vision of a negotiated peace. The dissenters were most successful in focusing the attention of a section of the divided Liberal Party on the need to craft a moderate settlement. They experienced a small setback because Allied Governments were able to produce a war aims statement that was acceptable to both American and British public opinion. However, the dissenters were now able to concentrate their attention on the 'expansionist' Allied programme which they argued went well beyond Asquith's 9 November 1914 war aims speech at Guildhall and start building a case for the restatement of British war aims.⁵⁸ The dissenters had not succeeded--despite their best efforts--in convincing the public that a moderate approach, in conjunction with presidential mediation, would lead to an early and permanent peace. Nonetheless, with Wilson apparently on their side, their prospects looked hopeful.

⁵⁷ Buckler to House, 27 December 1916, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box, 1, Folder 4; Confidential Memorandum "The Allies and America," Buxton Papers, Box 35, WWI file.

⁵⁸ From the outset, Asquith declared that the war was to liberate Belgium, to seek reparations for Belgium, to protect France and smaller nationalities, and to defeat Prussianism (Speeches by the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, K.G. [New York, 1927], pp. 223-224). At the end of January 1917, Walter Long, the Colonial Secretary, appeared to confirm the dissenters' suspicions with his statement that Germany's colonies would not be returned to her after the war (Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 42).

The Continuation of Wilson's Peace Offensive

Following his receipt on 26 December of the German reply to his note, President Wilson resolved to establish himself as a 'rallying point' for those in the warring nations who were interested in a negotiated peace.⁵⁹ Wilson chose the Senate on 22 January 1917 as the venue for his most important foreign policy statement of the war so far. For Wilson, only a just peace could be a secure peace. He proposed as a guarantee for such a peace American participation in a "League for Peace."

The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power?...Only a tranquil Europe can be a stable Europe. There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.

The only solution was, he continued, employing one of the celebrated phrases of wartime diplomacy, a "peace without victory."

Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which the terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last.

Wilson then outlined the other prerequisites of a lasting settlement: "equality of rights among organized nations," the acceptance of national self-determination, access to the sea for land-locked countries, freedom of the seas and the limitation of armaments.⁶⁰

The British response to Wilson's Senate speech was ambivalent. Buckler declared that

⁵⁹ Martin, Peace without Victory, pp. 122-124; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective (Cambridge, 1987), p. 28.

⁶⁰ Scott, ed., "Address of President Wilson to the Senate," 22 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 51, 52-53. Also on Wilson's address, see Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, pp. 32-33; Martin, Peace without Victory, pp. 124-126; Arthur Walworth, Woodrow Wilson (New York 1978), pp. 79-80.

the address was popular with "Liberals and democrats" and "on the whole...I think it has been wonderfully received." This would have been wishful thinking even if the ailing attaché had been monitoring British opinion more closely than he probably had during his past two weeks of enforced idleness. More typical of British sentiment was The New Statesman's equation of "no victory" with German victory: "Nothing short of victory will satisfy the Allied peoples, and nothing short of it will secure our aims--and Mr. Wilson's."⁶¹

The low-key governmental response⁶² reflected official disquietude at the likely implications of the 'peace without victory' maxim. Bonar Law answered Wilson at a war loans rally in Bristol on 24 January. It was impossible for Britain to view the war from a neutral perspective in the face of German aggression and barbarity. The Chancellor of the Exchequer did like the idea of an effective international league, however. He reiterated that Britain had only eschewed peace negotiations so far because to consider peace now would result in "a peace based on a German victory." To great applause he closed by proclaiming that "what President Wilson is longing for we are fighting for."⁶³

Laurence Martin argues that the official reaction to Wilson's speech was taken by the pro-negotiations lobby as evidence of the British Government's 'extreme' interpretation of its own statement of 10 January. Snowden observed that the gist of Wilson's message clearly conflicted

⁶¹ Buckler to House, 26 January 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; The New Statesman, 27 January 1917, p. 389.

⁶² Sterling Kernek states that the Foreign Office concluded that it was not necessary to make a formal reply. Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 33. Also see Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 65-66.

⁶³ Scott, ed., "Comment of Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the Address of President Wilson," 24 January 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 57-59. See also Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, pp. 32-33. The UDC published a pamphlet on Wilson's speech entitled, "President Wilson's Message to the World" (London, 1917), UDC 33b.

with the Allied positions on Constantinople and the freedom of the seas. Labour's The Herald concluded that the Entente powers were fighting for vengeance and not for the noble ends proclaimed by Wilson. Some dissenters also detected domestic concerns behind the British rebuff to Wilson. Bertrand Russell, for example, argued that American diplomacy had failed because of the War Cabinet's desire to institute a more thoroughly militarized administration of the domestic war effort.⁶⁴

Wilson's impassioned plea was instantly acknowledged by dissenters as an inspirational call for a liberal peace. They deplored his critics' fixation on one aspect of the message, arguing that the sense of 'peace without victory' had not been properly grasped.⁶⁵ Buxton maintained that "the result was that Wilson appealed to the silent masses, which was the essential thing to bring about." For Snowden, it was vital that Wilson had spoken "in the name of humanity, and repeated that the issues at stake in this war can only be settled by reason." He felt that Wilsonian peace was within reach. The UDC also applauded the American President. Dissenters generally urged acceptance of American mediation for the same reasons they had highlighted the previous December, namely, that the United States really did support basic British objectives and that American diplomatic involvement was necessary in order to guarantee post-war security.⁶⁶

The dissenters were now convinced that Wilson was fully converted to their own foreign policy platform. Morel expressed his firm conviction that "if she [the United States] comes in,

⁶⁴ Martin, Peace without Victory, p. 82; The Labour Leader, 25 January 1917, p. 1; The Herald, "Well Done, Wilson," 27 January 1917, p. 9. Russell, "President Wilson's Statement," 1 February 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 9, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁵ See, for example, The Herald, 27 January 1917, p. 9; The Nation, 27 January 1917, p. 573; The Westminster Gazette, 23 January 1917, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Buxton to "Elizabeth," 8 February 1917, Buxton Papers (Duke), 34-C, Box 2, letters 1911-49; The Labour Leader, 1 February 1917, p. 1; Swartz, p. 137; "Well Done, Wilson!," The Herald, 27 January 1917, p. 9; The Nation, 27 January 1917, pp. 573-574.

she will come in on the programme of the Union of Democratic Control, which President Wilson has made his own." Snowden claimed that Wilson now publicly supported the ILP's and "other pacifist bodies'...ideas and proposals." Russell echoed these views, remarking that "President Wilson...states in simple, emphatic language the view for which pacifists have contended."⁶⁷

In light of the disappointment of dissenters at the Allied declaration of 10 January, Wilson's Senate speech provided fresh impetus, guidance and credibility to the pro-negotiation forces. Wilson had reinforced their own message which, in turn, reflected well upon dissent. They could now hope that the pressure exerted by the United States might persuade the British Government to accede to a negotiated settlement. But Snowden was definitely mistaken in his belief that, "it will not be possible, after this [Wilson's] declaration, for the war-to-a-finish patriots to invoke the support of the United States."⁶⁸ Bonar Law's Bristol speech indicated that the Government too might employ liberal rhetoric to advance its fight-to-the-finish policy, just as Wilson himself would later do in justifying American entry into the war as necessary to make the world safe for democracy.

The Labour Party

At the outset of the Lloyd George coalition early in December 1916, the new Prime Minister invited the Labour Party to participate more fully in the reconstructed administration. He requested Arthur Henderson to sit in the new, smaller and more powerful War Cabinet. In addition ministerial positions were allocated to Labour men--including, ultimately, a specially

⁶⁷ Quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 137; The Labour Leader, 25 January 1917, p. 1; "President Wilson's Statement," 1 February 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 9, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁸ The Labour Leader, 25 January 1917, p. 1.

created Ministry of Labour--and concessions were granted on certain policy matters of interest to organized labour. The executive of the Labour Party was at first reluctant to collaborate, but, after a meeting with the executive where Lloyd George managed to isolate Snowden and Sidney Webb, the leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party agreed. Though the executive of the Labour Party accepted to join the new Government, many labour supporters remained suspicious and this decision, moreover, had yet to be ratified by party conference.⁶⁹

The Labour Party conference of 23-26 January 1917 focused on two main issues: the Party's entry into the Lloyd George Coalition and its support for the war. After a heated debate, the Party voted to remain in Government. Snowden and E.C. Fairchild, an executive member of the marxist British Socialist Party, attacked the executive's decision. Yet, the vote to reject that portion of the executive's report which supported Labour participation in the Government was defeated by 1,849,00 to 307,000 votes. Fairchild also moved to declare the war an imperialist war and to demand that the Government enter negotiations immediately. Not surprisingly this motion did not pass either. The results was 302,000 for and 1,697,000 against the motion. Bruce Glasier, a long-standing ILP member, moved that the executive call for a meeting of the International Socialist Bureau with a view to establishing a war aims programme acceptable to international labour. This motion was rejected by 1,498,000 to 696,000. MacDonald argued that if international organized Labour wanted to have any say in the terms of peace it must consult and then issue a declaration. Indeed, the consultation process might even

⁶⁹ Even the pro-war section of the labour movement distrusted Lloyd George. Beatrice Webb predicted that his "reactionary" and "non-egalitarian" leadership would result in the suppression of the working class, India, and Ireland, while the ruling class would survive unscathed. In addition, the new Government was bound to carry on the fight irrespective of the human and financial costs (MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, pp. 269-270 (7 December 1916). On Lloyd George's troubled wartime relationship with the labour movement generally, see especially, Chris Wrigley, David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: War and Peace, (Hassocks, 1976), passim.

require an international meeting. His enthusiasm for such a conference was a foretaste of his position on the Stockholm conference in August. W.P. Purdy, in the Presidential Address at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, said that the Allies' terms were sound, especially if there were some kind of federation of nations "which will act - by force if necessary - in preserving the peace of the world". An amendment proposed by Will Thorne of the General Workers Union, calling for the war to continue until victory was achieved, passed 1,036,000 to 464,000.⁷⁰

The dissenters maintained that the full extent of their success at Manchester was obscured by the Labour Party's block-voting system. Morel attributed the Labour Party's renewed pledge of support for the war to the "cumbrous and extraordinarily undemocratic voting system in vogue at these conferences." A truly representative vote would have yielded considerably different results, although he admitted that a real majority still backed the war. John Scurr, The Herald correspondent, seconded Morel's view, reporting that the 'peace' section was stronger than it appeared. The Nation agreed that the voting system "disguises and overwhelms minorities" and that the ILP motion on the Government indicated the actual feeling of the conference.⁷¹

In spite of these apparent setbacks, the dissenters viewed the conference as a qualified success. They felt that the changing mood of labour had been demonstrated and that Labour Party support for the war was ebbing. Morel interpreted the acclamation of MacDonald as Treasurer, along with the election to office of other ILP representatives, as evidence that the Labour rank-and-file now supported a pro-negotiation position. The Labour Leader, too, noted a "changed atmosphere," particularly in the warm reception accorded to Wilson's 22 January

⁷⁰ "Labour Party Conference," The Labour Leader, p. 7; Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 23 January 1917, pp. 125-129.

⁷¹ The U.D.C., February 1917, p. 40; John Scurr, "Labour Party Conference," The Herald, 3 February 1917, p. 4.

speech.⁷² MacDonald observed that more delegates appeared to have accepted the ILP's position and Snowden surmised that the delegates' attitudes were radically different from those expressed at the previous year's conference in Bristol. The latter regarded the success of several "emergency" ILP motions as tantamount to "rescind[ing] the decisions against peace negotiations, international relations and support for the Coalition Government." He maintained that the conference was a victory for the ILP, claiming that the 'peace' section now had the endorsement of the rank-and-file and that there would be no "war party" at the conference of 1918.⁷³

Conclusion

December 1916 and January 1917 had been portentous months for British dissenters and their quest for a negotiated peace. Following the low point of the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition, the dissenters were bombarded with peace initiatives and statements of war aims. Their drive for a negotiated settlement was affected by four extraneous factors: the German Peace Note, the Allied statement of 10 January, Wilson's interventions, and the Labour Party conference.

The German Peace Note set in motion what was to prove the most frantic period of peace diplomacy of the whole war. The dissenters were fortunate that the impetus came from abroad. The German initiative reaffirmed the somewhat credulous dissenting view of a Germany that was

⁷² The U.D.C., February 1917, p. 40; John Scurr, "Labour Party Conference," The Herald, 3 February 1917, p. 4; "Labour Party Conference," The Labour Leader, 25 January 1917, p. 6. Also see Carl F. Brand, The British Labour Party: A Short History (Stanford, 1974), pp. 39-42.

⁷³ "The I.L.P. Story of the conference," The Labour Leader, 1 February 1917, p. 6; The Labour Leader, 1 February 1917, p. 1. Snowden listed three of the "emergency" motions. One opposed the Paris Resolutions. Another protested governmental repression of civil liberties through DORA and the Military Service Acts. The third supported Wilson's position on an international system based on a League of Nations.

interested in securing a fair, moderate settlement. The belligerent tone of the German response to Wilson's 18 December peace note, not to mention their resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, could both be blamed on a natural and understandable reaction to Allied extremism.

Even the Allied Governments' carefully crafted response to President Wilson held promise for the dissenters. They had been clamouring for a statement of war aims for months, on the grounds that the British people deserved to know for what they were fighting. Such knowledge, the dissenters conceded, might strengthen the public's will to resist the Central Powers. But, privately, they hoped for a statement that was either so extreme as to spark a public backlash and generate support for open diplomacy, or else a statement of terms that might lead directly to negotiations for peace. The combination of German diplomatic ineptitude and Lloyd George's deft handling of his Government's replies to Germany and America, however, allowed the British Government to emerge as a clear victor in the struggle to win over British and American domestic opinion. Yet the dissenters at least had confirmation of what they believed were predatory Allied war aims. Their campaign to force the Government to replace the 10 January proposals with a new, more satisfactory, war aims programme would become their principal focus throughout 1917.

Wilson had introduced the first real possibility of mediation. The German initiative was an unprecedented step forward, but the move became important only with Wilson's intervention. Whereas the German move was easily construed by the Government as a mere ruse de guerre, President Wilson had exactly those peace-making credentials which the dissenters sought in an arbitrator. He was an apparently disinterested, powerful neutral with a distinctive ability to implement and guarantee a settlement. Wilson had intervened twice diplomatically and had come, they believed, very close to arranging negotiations. The dissenters were now convinced that Wilson stood for the same liberal peace as they did. They could also congratulate themselves for

stimulating Wilson's diplomatic offensive foray and an Allied statement of terms, however unsatisfactory. Wilson's quasi-dissenting views meant that, despite the setback of 31 January, he could and would continue to press for a liberal peace. The dissenters could look forward to reasonable success in the future with Wilson as their champion. However, they overestimated their ability to manipulate Wilson and were peculiarly adept at the politics of illusion. "Shocked and confused by the circumstances beyond their control, British Liberals often heard in Wilson's tendentious pronouncements the reverberating echoes of their own self-righteousness."⁷⁴

Finally, the Labour Party conference appeared to show that the Labour Party would not continue acting as a bulwark against the peace agitation of its minority elements. The dissenters were confident that the Manchester meeting had been a great success, marred only by the party's oppressive block voting system. Dissenting opinion welcomed warmly what it perceived as the timely American intervention in the peace process. Wilson's move came at a crucial moment when it seemed to the hopeful that Germany was prepared to negotiate in good faith.

At the very moment when they hoped for a breakthrough in favour of negotiation, however, the dissenters were dealt a cruel blow. On 31 January the German Ambassador Johann von Bernstorff gave Lansing two documents. The first was a private letter, ostensibly from him to House. Actually, most of the letter was written by Bethmann-Hollweg and was intended for the President. It was a statement of terms which did not lend itself to anything remotely resembling a compromise settlement. The second document was a declaration that unrestricted submarine warfare would resume on 1 February. This move represented the abandonment of the

⁷⁴ Stephen E. Koss, Fleet Street Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News (London, 1973), p. 207.

'Sussex Pledge' of 4 May 1916.⁷⁵ It signified a disastrous development in German-American relations. German credibility was seriously damaged in the President's view by the public and private nature of the German communications. The majority of the American press saw Germany's strategic gambit as a virtual declaration of war.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The Sussex Pledge had been given to the American Government following the torpedoing of the Sussex by a German U-boat on 25 March. The vessel had been sunk without warning and several American citizens had perished. The Germans promised that, henceforth, no merchant vessels would be sunk without warning and that its submariners would try to save lives unless ships tried to escape or resist. See G.R. Conyne, Woodrow Wilson: British Perspectives, 1912-21 (New York, 1992), p. 64.

⁷⁶ Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War, pp. 199-200. Also, see Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 36.

Chapter 2: THE FLOW OF THE TIDE--FEBRUARY 1917 TO MARCH 1917

Introduction

Historians have focused on the apparent insignificance of February and March 1917 because the broad strategic picture of the war offered little encouragement to British dissenters. German submarine warfare was already having a deadly effect on allied shipping and its impact would become even more devastating as the spring progressed. In addition, the Germans had strengthened their defensive positions on the Western front by staging a series of planned withdrawals. Nor was the dissenters' quest for a negotiated peace boosted by developments on the diplomatic front. The renewal of unrestricted U-boat activity had resulted on 3 February in the suspension by the United States of all diplomatic relations with Germany. This move appeared at first to reverse the momentum which the dissenters had been building since December 1916. The American drift toward a more explicitly pro-Allied position, confirmed by their adoption of 'armed neutrality' on 26 February, was viewed with foreboding by the dissenters. They were perturbed that these signs of American partiality would prevent President Wilson both from posing as a credible "honest broker" and from exerting a moderating influence on Allied diplomacy. Although disappointed by Wilson's suspension of diplomatic contacts with Germany, most dissenters were at least relieved that the United States had not entered the war immediately.

Traditionally those studying dissent have shifted their attention from the dissenters' concern for the failure of peace negotiation hopes engendered by the seemingly inevitable move to war to the impact of the Russian Revolution. This emphasis, however, has underestimated the

dissenters' impressive and continuous efforts in February and March to promote a negotiated settlement. Indeed, the intensification of diplomatic strife between the United States and Germany, following so closely upon Wilson's congressional address of 22 January, sharpened the dissenters' sense of urgency over the next month, spurring the dissenters to redouble their efforts towards forging such a compromise peace. During the two-month interval from the breakdown of American and German diplomatic ties to President Wilson's decision for war, they endeavoured to soften the British Government's war desiderata. By so compelling the Lloyd George administration to renounce its more ambitious war aims, the dissenters hoped that such evidence of Allied moderation would reopen the negotiation window.

Both the unfavourable strategic situation and the potential defection of Wilson to the Allied cause, however, were more than offset by the March Revolution in Russia. The collapse of tsarist autocracy, by far the most significant event for the dissenters in 1917, triggered a flurry of activity by the peace-by-negotiation forces. They were convinced that a new age of liberty had arrived. The Provisional Government's introduction of democratic rights and freedoms to Russia by its proclamation of 16 March was construed by the dissenters as a sturdy buttress for their peace-by-negotiation position because of their view of the peaceful nature of 'free' people. Specifically, the dissenters thought that they could embarrass the Government into restoring civil liberties. Moreover, the conversion of a key British ally to the need for an early negotiated peace added considerable pressure on the British Government to review its war aims position. The Russian Revolution spread optimism and hope throughout the dissenting camp that peace, at last, was close at hand.

The Fading Voice of Reason

On 3 February 1917 President Wilson suspended diplomatic relations with Germany. The

dissenters were already concerned that Germany's resumption of its U-boat campaign would undermine their own contention that the Central Powers would accept a moderate peace. Wilson's latest decision now forced the dissenters to confront the possibility of American entry into the war on the Allied side. British dissent was divided between a minority who believed that American intervention would strengthen the Allied 'jingo' lobby, and a majority who were confident that Wilson would moderate the demands of the Entente extremists.

Many dissenters insisted, at least publicly, that any resort by the United States to armed force would not preclude its President from constraining Allied war aims. Ponsonby, for example, was confident that,

even if [Wilson] is drawn in, which seems almost inevitable, he will as a belligerent exercise a moderating influence in the councils of the Allies and prevent the war being continued for objects which are not in accordance with the aims for which the war was originally waged.

Likewise, Trevelyan told Buckler that "the President is now the acknowledged leader of all those, whether here [in Britain] or in Berlin, who desire a durable peace."¹ So long as Wilson insisted on the "limitation of American liability" to the protection of its interests through international security, argued The Nation, its enlistment to the Allied cause should not be viewed with undue alarm. If this notion of limited liability was made explicit to the Allies, the President's moderating influence would be bolstered and his authority perhaps even increased. Somewhat hesitantly, The Herald agreed that the United States was bound to enter the war only on its own terms. The Labour weekly was further encouraged by the Americans' apparent desire for an "all-round settlement, based on the mutual recognition of rights, and not merely destroying one set

¹ "An Ex-diplomatist on a Negotiated Peace," The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 7; Buckler to House, 10 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. See also "Enter America," The Nation, 10 February 1917, p. 640; "Why America Comes In?," The Nation, 17 February 1917, pp. 672-673.

of opponents."²

The prospect of armed intervention by the United States, however, also prompted a wave of pessimistic and apprehensive dissenting speculation. It was feared that President Wilson's departure from a formally neutral stance would lead to his abandonment of the league idea, a prolongation of the war and, post-war, an unwelcome return to the discredited balance of power system of diplomacy. Snowden and MacDonald both thought that the United States could and would stay out of the war. The former warned the public to be wary of news from the United States tailored to fit the British press. He believed that Wilson again needed to call for a rational peace and a statement of terms from the Central Powers so that a peace conference could proceed. The leading ILP figure anticipated disaster if the United States entered the war and his disappointment at the suspension of German-American diplomatic relations was almost palpable:

It is inconceivable that the people of the United States can think so lightly of the war as to be ready to embark upon it without having exhausted every possible means to avert it...it will be a strange and painful sequel to the peace efforts [Wilson] has lately been making.

Although Snowden lamented the increased likelihood of American belligerency, he believed that Wilson might still be able to effect a compromise peace. The President's recent Congressional address had, after all, confirmed his unswerving commitment to achieving such a settlement. Snowden felt that Wilson could "speak again in the name of humanity, and repeat that the issues at stake in this war can only be settled by reason." The continued neutrality of the United States, however, would be crucial to the promotion and protection of the requisite detachment and rationality.³

² "Why America Comes In?," The Nation, 17 February 1917, pp. 672-673; "The Crisis: An Appeal to Rossendale," The Herald, 10 February 1917, p. 9.

³ The Labour Leader, 8 February 1917, p 1. For MacDonald's view, see "The Position To-Day," The Labour Leader, 1 March 1917, p. 4.

Buxton attempted to clarify both dissenting viewpoints for the benefit of House. Buxton sensed that the "whigs and liberals" favoured American action. "The writers of The Nation," he felt, were a "good microcosm" of this segment of opinion. The far less broad phalanx which remained dubious about American involvement, according to Buxton, feared the spread of war fever, presumably to the United States, and, also, the removal of the only strong neutral presence.⁴ Buckler also identified the divisions in dissenting ranks on the question of American intervention. Whereas Buxton thought that the latter viewpoint was the minority one, however, Buckler claimed that the vast majority of dissenters desired the United States to stay out of the conflict. If Wilson chose to intervene "just when the war fever of the Entente is becoming exhausted," Buckler reported to House, then a massive infusion from America's "immense resources" would, most dissenters feared, prolong the war indefinitely.⁵

Buxton moved in influential circles. On occasion, he would meet privately with Lloyd George and he was a frequent presence at the celebrated weekly 'Nation lunches'.⁶ It is also clear from Buckler's reports that the Liberal MP for North Norfolk was House's principal source

⁴ Buxton to House, 8 February 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 23. See also, Alfred E. Havighurst, Radical Journalist: H.W. Massingham (1860-1924) (London, 1974), p. 249; Knock, To End All Wars, p. 119. Buxton also thought that many British conservatives were alarmed lest a belligerent United States come unduly to rein in Allied war aims. The military situation was such, however, that these hardliners were pleased to embrace America as an ally.

⁵ Buckler to House, 23 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4, p. 3. See also, Martin, Peace without Victory, pp. 85, 129.

⁶ Buxton breakfasted with the Prime Minister on 5 February and met with him at home on 22 May. For evidence of Buxton's priministerial contacts see Buckler to House, 7 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Buckler to House, 22 May 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6. The informal meetings known as The Nation lunches, instituted by the editorial staff of The Nation in the Edwardian era, had long provided a forum for the interchange of ideas between leading New Liberal intellectuals and Radical ministers and MPs. See Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 108-109. One of these gatherings occurred on 6 February (Havighurst, Radical Journalist, p. 249).

of information on British dissenting opinion.⁷ Buxton would pass on to Buckler his observations on both official and dissenting perspectives. The latter would, in turn, diligently relay the intelligence to House. Buxton also frequently wrote to House directly and arranged for Buckler to meet other leading dissenters. In fact, Buxton's 'salon' was a nexus between the British Government, moderate pro-negotiation liberals (and sometimes socialists), and the White House.⁸ As Laurence Martin has observed, the existence of "reasonable men" such as Buxton was instrumental in persuading Wilson and House that aggressive British war aims might ultimately be transformed into a policy of moderation.⁹

By the end of February, the possibility of American intervention loomed much larger. Throughout the month, Wilson hoped that Germany would retreat from their abandonment of the Sussex Pledge.¹⁰ On 26 February the American Government obtained a telegram that had been sent from Arthur Zimmermann, the German Foreign Minister, to the German legation in Mexico. This communication promised the Mexicans territorial gains from the United States if they were to ally with Germany against America. On the same day, in response both to the continuing loss of American lives and property on the high-seas as well as the intercepted Zimmermann Telegram, the President made his "Armed Neutrality" address to Congress. Although America was "not now proposing or contemplating war", he said, the nation must be prepared to defend its neutral rights. To that end, he wished to receive from Congress before it dissolved on 4

⁷ For further correspondence between the two Americans on dissenting views of the implications of military intervention by the United States, see Buckler to House, 7 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Buckler to House, 10 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4.

⁸ See Buckler's recollection of one such meeting at Buxton's residence on 16 February 1917, Buckler to House, 23 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4.

⁹ Martin, Peace without Victory, p. 129.

¹⁰ On the Sussex Pledge, see above, p. 71 n. 75.

March the authority to arm American merchantmen. Wilson's speech was followed by the passage in the House of Representatives on 1 March of the Armed Ship Bill. Although the proposed legislation was then filibustered in the Senate, the President was, in any event, entitled to act without congressional approval, and his speech was widely interpreted as signifying a de facto American entry into the war.¹¹ The Nation, for example, saw the adoption of armed neutrality as a "milestone" on the road to war. The New Statesman was even more direct, stating that "the guns once mounted will be used, and that when they are, America will be at war."¹²

Allied War Aims Attacked

For a short period Germany's new submarine campaign led to an almost complete cessation of dissenting peace efforts. Effectively, as Buxton stated to Buckler "the anti-jingo Liberals [felt] that nothing could any longer be gained by openly attacking the government for these Entente extravagances [the 10 January statement]."¹³ Following the news in the latter half of February that American-German tension had increased dramatically, the dissenters sought once again to influence international political developments. In practice, this meant replacing the joint British and French note of 10 January with a softer statement of Allied war aims. There were three policy dimensions to this fresh round of peace campaigning. First, the dissenters pressed for clarification of the ambiguities in the Allies' 10 January statement. Second, they sought to cast doubt on the supposed moderation of these proposals, especially in their application to German

¹¹ Scott, ed., "Wilson Address on Armed Neutrality to Joint Session of Congress," Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 77-79); Knock, To End All Wars, pp. 116-117; Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, pp. 654-656; Charles Seymour, American Diplomacy during the World War (Hamden, 1964), pp. 204-205.

¹² The Nation, 3 March 1917, p. 721; The New Statesman, 3 March 1917, p. 506.

¹³ Buckler to House, 7 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4.

colonies, the Near East and various nationalities questions raised by the war. Third, as the next section demonstrates, the dissenters had somehow to portray Germany as amenable to a compromise peace which would still guarantee British security.

The starting point of invigorated dissenting peace efforts was the suggestion of a lack of clarity in the Allies' 10 January programme. Trevelyan, for example, told the Commons of his satisfaction that the Government had etched out its war aims. But, citing the statement's fudging of the nationalities question as it affected both Austria-Hungary and certain Allied countries, the veteran Liberal claimed that British war policy remained indistinct.¹⁴ Given the multiplicity of interpretations that it was possible to place on the Allied programme, the dissenters argued that it behoved the Government to clarify its objectives. Ponsonby saw a massive contradiction between the original rationale for war and the Allies' present intentions. Some enemy territory might have to be broken up, he agreed, but the Government should not deny that it favoured such a policy of dismemberment.¹⁵ MacDonald also attacked the imprecision of the Allied reply to President Wilson. Like Buxton, the ILP leader did not deny that the war had to be fought to some conclusion. But it was imperative for the Government to define its objectives in order that the British might know precisely for what they were fighting. MacDonald had every confidence that the people would maintain the same war effort in the absence of lies about conditions in Germany. MacDonald was, of course, primarily interested in promoting peace negotiations. He continued his speech to the House in a much more characteristically dissenting vein:

Certainly I believe this House will agree with me in this, that if negotiations can do it, it should be done that way--and by negotiations I do not suggest that the Foreign Secretary should address a Note to Berlin, but I mean simply that diplomacy should use the opportunities which it now has got and that it should keep on defining its position, expounding its position, removing

¹⁴ PD (Commons), 20 February 1917, 90, cols. 1188-1192.

¹⁵ Ibid., cols. 1177-1178.

misunderstandings...the diplomatists should be as busy as the Army.¹⁶

Even when Allied terms could be discerned more clearly the dissenters considered them much too punitive to persuade the enemy of the wisdom of negotiations. On 2 March the UDC Executive resolved that, given the overall thrust of its 10 January proposals, Britain was now fighting for more than the people had been told and that the Allied statement was being interpreted by the Government in the most aggressive way possible. In his February editorial for The UDC, Morel accused the Allies of pursuing a policy of conquest by proposing to exclude Germany from Africa. Britain had a smaller population yet a larger imperial territory and would be "crushing" Germany by confiscating the latter's legitimately held "footing in the tropical and sub-tropical world." Germany was also threatened, Morel added the following month, by the post-war economic boycott portended by the Paris Resolutions of 1916.¹⁷

In Parliament MacDonald complained that neither did Allied war aims in the Near East provide a guarantee of lasting peace. The ILP leader was perplexed by the implied aggrandizement of Russian regional influence: "Constantinople in the hands of any large hostile Power, and the Dardanelles fortified by that Power, create a problem of Imperial military defence which will make it absolutely impossible for this country ever to pursue the road of unarmed peace." MacDonald regarded as a grave error the Government's apparent departure from what the dissenters had, heretofore, believed was an agreed policy of internationalization for the Straits.¹⁸

Ponsonby too had reservations about the Government's future plans for this strategically

¹⁶ Ibid., 12 February 1917, 90, cols. 340-342, 344.

¹⁷ The U.D.C., February 1917, p. 40; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 136-137; Morel, "The Alternative," The U.D.C., March 1917, p. 55.

¹⁸ PD (Commons), 12 February 1917, 90, cols. 342, 347.

vital Near Eastern waterway. He preferred internationalization of the Straits to the outright Russian control that was currently being mooted. The former expedient would satisfy Russia's legitimate right of navigation to a warm water port. But merely substituting Russian for Turkish control of the Straits would be most unsatisfactory. Ponsonby sensed the real motivation behind British and French tolerance of Russian designs on the Straits:

One of the demands Germany will make...will be for some opportunity for the expansion of her trade and enterprise, and the line of least resistance is Asia Minor. If you put Russia in possession of Constantinople, is it to block that way for Germany?

Ponsonby conveyed no sense of concern for the inhabitants of the southern Balkans and, in very traditional fashion, articulated simplistic free-trade arguments to denounce the prospect of a Russian presence at the Straits. Even more surprisingly, Ponsonby demonstrated remarkable sensitivity to British security concerns. Although a long-standing critic of great power diplomacy, Ponsonby perhaps sensed the tactical wisdom of pointing out that, in a world of shifting alliances, Britain might one day be faced by a Russo-German combination. The result of such an alliance, with Russia in possession of Constantinople, "would be severe."¹⁹

Buxton also continued his earlier assaults on British war policy in the Near East. Buxton desired an independent Serbia which would, first, eliminate any need to dismember Austria-Hungary and, second, satisfy British security concerns in the Near East by bisecting the Berlin-Baghdad railway and thus keeping Germany out of Turkey. The same British strategic sensitivities would be further soothed by neutralization and internationalization of the Straits.²⁰

The dissenters also censured the Allies' provocative and unbalanced treatment of minority nationality issues. Although Asquith had never claimed to be fighting for territorial change in

¹⁹ "An Ex-diplomatist on a Negotiated Peace," The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 7.

²⁰ The New Statesman, 17 February 1917, p. 468; 3 March 1917, p. 516.

Central Europe, Ponsonby objected to the Commons that the Lloyd George administration now appeared to be backing Czech-Slovak assertions of independence from Habsburg rule. Not only did this threatened dismemberment of Austria-Hungary represent an unjustifiable extension of Allied war aims, he continued, but Britain was supporting the establishment of a separate state for a people about whom few of its own subjects knew or cared anything.²¹ Buxton believed that a more equitable resolution of nationalist grievances in the Habsburg Empire lay in the granting of national autonomy on a federal basis--the creation of relationships between centre and periphery similar to that which supporters of Home Rule believed should exist between mainland Britain and Ireland. MacDonald's answer was the appointment of an international committee with a mandate to settle national problems along racial, religious, and historical lines. In Wilsonian language, he postulated that:

With a view to the future and with the desire to make Europe really a home of liberty and of peace, it is absolutely essential that this War should be conducted in such a way that the nations will accept what has happened and begin, for the first time in the history of Europe, a peace by consent of the peoples that have hitherto been at war.²²

The dissenters urged a modified treatment of the equally vexing Alsace-Lorraine question. Ponsonby considered the Allies' apparent insistence on full restoration of the two provinces to France as too extreme. He urged clarification of what the Government meant in promising "restitution of provinces formerly torn from the Allies by force." For Ponsonby, a compromise was necessary, "based on geographical, racial, and political considerations, and founded on the wishes of the inhabitants." This brief, lofty statement concealed a great deal. Ponsonby's reference to the "wishes of the inhabitants" was actually a call for a plebiscite, which the dissenters believed France would lose. MacDonald's silence on the fate of the disputed provinces

²¹ PD (Commons), 20 February 1917, 90, col. 1181.

²² Ibid., 12 February 1917, col. 342; The New Statesman, 17 February 1917, p. 468.

suggests that he did not consider that area to be part of 'occupied' France.²³ Most dissenters categorised the peoples of Alsace-Lorraine as Germanic. Anti-French bias led them to believe that these populations were content with the territorial status quo. The plebiscite, apart from its effectiveness as a rhetorical tool, was seen as a way of escape from agreement to continue the war for French revanchisme.

Dissenting Confusion over Germany

The corollary to all these dissenting allegations of Allied aggression and intransigence was their view of a Germany ready to negotiate in a true spirit of compromise. Morel had noted in February's UDC that the latest German communication of 31 January contained the "first specific repudiation of a German intention to annex Belgium." In an interview with The Labour Leader, Ponsonby implied that the German Government's reply to President Wilson of 26 December had been sincerely meant. He also felt the German Note of 12 December had been unfairly rebuffed because of the mistaken Allied view of it as a ruse de guerre. Snowden, enormously encouraged, cited the overwhelming victory of an anti-war socialist candidate in an election to the Reichstag as evidence of a widespread popular opposition to the war in Germany.²⁴

The dissenters, however, were critical of Germany's resumption of submarine warfare on 31 January. In an uncharacteristic volte-face, Morel condemned the German note to Wilson as "a monument of incapacity" and the submarine policy as an ill-timed and "major folly." Indeed, he castigated the entire thrust of German diplomacy since their 12 December initiative,

²³ "An Ex-diplomatist on a Negotiated Peace," The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 7; PD (Commons), 12 February 1917, 90, col. 347.

²⁴ The U.D.C., February 1917, p. 40; "An Ex-Diplomatist on a Negotiated Peace," The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 7; The Labour Leader, 8 March 1917, p. 1.

finding it "impossible to imagine anything more unskilful than the way in which the German Government has dealt with the situation." Snowden agreed that the German submarine policy was "as brutal as it was unnecessary." The international repercussions were "changing hourly," and although he could not foresee events, Snowden feared that "the whole neutral world was going to be brought into the vortex of this war." The Nation criticized the German announcement as "the most deplorable document in its record," predicting that the United States would now join the fight against the Central Powers. The new German move was particularly inopportune because it diverted attention away from Walter Long's almost equally provocative statement concerning the post-war fate of Germany's imperial possessions.²⁵

The dissenters were also vexed by Germany's own failure to state its peace terms clearly. Snowden was disappointed with the German reply to the Allied note of 10 January. He regarded it as unfortunate that Germany had interpreted the Allied initiative as a diplomatic affront. Until Germany produced a war aims statement, Buxton told Buckler, no further movement was likely. The American diplomat agreed:

If it were definitely known that she [Germany] is willing to evacuate something - even if only Belgium - Buxton thinks the effect here would be great. At present the "Times" + the jingoes are able plausibly to assert that there is no evidence of her willingness to evacuate a single acre.²⁶

Even the more overtly anti-war socialist The Herald admitted that the absence of a German statement could only heighten their guilt in the eyes of the British public. Yet any such conciliatory public declaration by Germany was unlikely, the newspaper argued, because this would be construed as a virtual admission of war guilt. Nonetheless, a private deal was feasible

²⁵ The U.D.C., February 1917, p. 40; The Labour Leader, 8 February 1917, p. 1; The Nation, 3 February 1917, p. 605.

²⁶ Buckler to House, 31 January 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Labour Leader, 8 February 1917, p. 1.

and, if negotiations were to proceed, Germany had to offer a more specific and balanced statement of terms.²⁷

Without excusing German transgressions, the dissenters attributed the former's inadequate diplomatic response and the escalation of submarine warfare to their perfectly understandable fears of the kind of Allied peace that had been outlined in the 10 January document. Buxton believed that this Allied note had allowed the "German jingoes" to supplant the moderates. Morel also blamed the increased U-boat activity on the 10 January note and Trevelyan agreed that the ambiguity of the Allied statement had discredited the German moderates, forcing them to adopt the desperate policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. In a speech to his constituents, Trevelyan claimed that both the German and Allied replies to Wilson rejected peace. But the Allied note was the more bellicose because it also promised the break up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁸ Ponsonby did not want to defend the intensification of German U-boat campaign but believed, nevertheless, that there was a possible link between the Allies' statement of aims and Germany's new naval strategy. Ponsonby later stated this contention still more boldly in the House of Commons. The submarine campaign heralded a new barbarism, but the Germans seemed to have been driven to that step by the Allies' proclamation of a war of conquest.²⁹

²⁷ "The Crisis: An Appeal to Rossendale," The Herald, 10 February 1917, p. 9. The Herald epitomized one of the principal contradictions of British dissent's wartime foreign policy: its belief in the inherently pacifist nature of the British public and simultaneous advocacy of secret talks, to preclude a popular backlash against a peace policy. Popular bellicosity was, therefore, conveniently attributed to the pernicious influence of capitalist, militarist and imperialist viewpoints of the right-wing press.

²⁸ Buckler to House, 7 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Morel, "The Alternative," The U.D.C., March 1917, pp. 54-55; "C.P. Trevelyan's Speech to his Constituents at the Labour Club, Brighouse" [pamphlet], 3 March 1917, Allen Collection, Box III.

²⁹ "An Ex-Diplomatist on a Negotiated Peace," The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 7; PD (Commons), 20 February 1917, 90, col. 1179.

The dissenters would hold Britain responsible for the future destruction and dislocation if the Government did not repudiate the extreme interpretations that had been placed on its 10 January reply. A prolongation of the war would not punish the German Government, Ponsonby insisted, but merely punish the innocent people of all belligerent nations. For Ponsonby, vengeance provided a poor rationale for continuing the war, as well as an ineffective means of eradicating militarism. Extreme demands undermined German Liberalism, the most effective tool for destroying German militarism.³⁰ MacDonald believed that even the German socialists opposed the Allied statement and that its ultimate effect would be to unite Germany against its external enemies. At the same time, MacDonald urged the Government to monitor German public opinion, which he believed to be badly divided between the militarist-extremists and a much larger chorus of moderate voices led by the minority socialists in the Reichstag.³¹

Peace, Parliament and Public Opinion

The dissenters attributed the shortcomings of the Allies' 10 January note, in part, to the British Government's failure to consult parliamentary or public opinion on the question of peace terms. Buxton stressed the vital importance of a policy which accurately reflected the views of both MPs and the wider public. He was convinced that the British people had especially serious reservations over three crucial planks of the Lloyd George Government's war policy platform: the destruction of Germany's colonial empire, the institution of a post-war economic boycott, and the banishment of Turkey from the Straits.³² MacDonald emphasized the British public's desire for a more

³⁰ PD (Commons), 20 February 1917, 90, col. 1183.

³¹ Ibid., cols. 1247-1249.

³² Ibid., cols. 1235-1241.

democratically controlled foreign policy and complained that MPs should have first debated the Allied note to Wilson before its dispatch. He wanted the whole question of war aims to be reviewed by the House so that a 'sane' war policy might be found. In MacDonald's view, he and his friends represented a far larger segment of popular opinion than Parliament. It was therefore imperative for the dissenters to have some say in the formulation of British foreign policy, perhaps through a parliamentary committee dealing with foreign affairs.³³ Snowden also took exception to the Government's handling of the Allied reply, although his criticisms centered more on Lloyd George's dictatorial political style. He berated the Prime Minister for not personally justifying the Allied statement to Parliament. More generally, he reproached Lloyd George's contempt for the consultative process and his willingness to allow subordinates, in this case Bonar Law, to manage the Commons while he pursued more important business.³⁴ These criticisms of the "devitalizing" of Parliament carried even more weight for dissenters after the March Revolution in Russia, which appeared to validate the need for healthy representative institutions.³⁵

Given the level of disquiet at the diminished standing of Parliament and what they believed was blatant ministerial disregard for public opinion, there was a certain logic to the focusing of dissenting energies on the Rossendale by-election of February 1916. The advent of the Lloyd George coalition had persuaded the UDC to nominate 'peace-by-negotiation' candidates

³³ Ibid., 12 February 1917, 90, cols. 340-342, 347; 20 February 1917, 90, cols. 1246, 1248-1249.

³⁴ The Labour Leader, 15 February 1917, p. 1. More generally on Lloyd George's presidential style and overhaul of administrative machinery, see Paul Harkison, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "David Lloyd George as the 'Hammer' of Dissent: The War Premiership, 1916-1918" (Hamilton, McMaster University, 1994), ch. III and Doreen Collins, Aspects of British Politics, 1904-1919 (Oxford, 1965), ch. 5.

³⁵ See, for example, The Nation, 17 March 1917, p. 789.

in vacant constituencies.³⁶ Rossendale was the setting of the first such electoral test of the peace-by-negotiation position. The UDC dispatched a "considerable amount of literature" to this predominantly working class Lancashire constituency. During the campaign, The Herald stated categorically that "every vote cast for Mr. Taylor...will be a vote not merely for an early and honourable peace, but for freedom and dignity of the human spirit."³⁷ Albert Taylor, a conscientious objector and the popular Secretary of the Boot, Shoe and Slipper Operatives' Union, received twenty-three percent of the votes cast.

This result appeared to confirm dissenting suspicions that a strong and growing minority supported an early, compromise peace and that they were succeeding in winning over public opinion. Snowden told MPs that, if the Rossendale result was projected nationwide, then 150 or so adherents of a peace-by-negotiation would be sitting in the House of Commons. With almost a quarter of the popular vote in a "typical Lancashire constituency" favouring peace negotiations, asserted C.R. Buxton, there must be massive support elsewhere for a swift cessation of the fighting. Neither Snowden nor anybody else in the dissenting camp, however, commented upon the discouraging March by-election result at Stockton-on-Tees, where the peace-by-negotiation nominee, a prominent Quaker banker named Edward Backhouse, was routed by 8,237 votes to 596. In April the peace-by-negotiation arguments of F.W. Pethick-Lawrence proved equally unpersuasive to the voters of South Aberdeen. Pethick-Lawrence, an executive committee member of the UDC, received a mere 333 votes from the total vote of 5,123.³⁸

³⁶ The U.D.C., December 1916, p. 15; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 113; Vera Brittain, Pethick-Lawrence, p.80.

³⁷ Quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 214; The Herald, 10 February 1917, pp. 1, 9.

³⁸ C.R. Buxton, "The Moral of Rossendale," The Herald, 17 February 1917, p. 1; PD (Commons), 20 February 1917, 90, cols. 1235-1241; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 119. The view that the Rossendale results could be projected nationwide also appeared in The

In the wake of the Rossendale by-election, on 20 February, the dissenters launched their first major parliamentary offensive of 1917. Ponsonby, Trevelyan, Snowden, Buxton and MacDonald all addressed the Commons. Together, their speeches represent an all-encompassing statement of dissenting foreign policy objectives. The House listened attentively as the dissenting message was put across. Both Ponsonby and Trevelyan felt that only six months previously many MPs would have stormed out of the chamber in disgust. The Nation praised Ponsonby's "impressive and tactful" speech for demonstrating beyond any doubt that Long's recent pronouncement heralded an Allied war of conquest for German colonial possessions. Buxton was also lauded in the liberal weekly for his own thoughtful dissection of the German colonial problem.³⁹

According to Laurence Martin, the 'peace debate' was a landmark event at which many private supporters of a negotiated settlement in the Liberal Party publicly endorsed this position for the first time.⁴⁰ Certainly, there was a high degree of collaboration between the UDC men and Buxton, despite the distance which the Liberal chose to keep from the leading dissenting organization. Although Buxton was less strident in his criticism of the Government than Ponsonby and others--as might be expected from a moderate who favoured 'permeation' over confrontation--their policy positions were remarkably similar.

The dissenting forces certainly ranked the 'peace debate' as an impressive tactical victory. Buckler agreed with their interpretation, reporting to House on 23 February that the occasion had

Tribunal. See "The Rossendale Election," The Tribunal, 22 February 1917, p. 3.

³⁹ Buckler to House, 23 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; The Nation, 24 February 1917, p. 693. Actually, Lloyd George had rejected Long's statement as recently as 3 February, saying that any decisions on Germany's colonies would have to await the convening of an Imperial Conference (The Nation, 10 February 1917, p. 639).

⁴⁰ Martin, Peace without Victory, p. 84.

been very successful for the "pro-negotiation group in the House." MacDonald realized that the dissenters had much to accomplish before forcing the belligerents to the negotiating table.⁴¹ But, buoyed by their minor parliamentary triumph, in the weeks leading up to the Russian Revolution the dissenters pushed even harder in the press and behind the scenes to soften the Allied war aims statement.

The belief that the 'peace debate' was successful, however, was largely confined to those who were already supporters of a negotiated settlement. The New Statesman was scornful of the dissenters' parliamentary protests. The speeches of Snowden and Trevelyan, "perverse and cantankerous," provided perfect illustrations of why dissent lacked popular support. By implying that Germany had been less guilty of preparing for war than the Allies, Snowden was discrediting his own country. Almost equally contemptuous was Trevelyan's suggestion that all subject nationalities should be freed and not only those of the Habsburg Empire. Countering Ponsonby and Buxton, The New Statesman stressed the inescapable logic of depriving Germany of its colonial possessions: the Allies' cause would be just if free trade in the tropical area were established.⁴²

Shortly after the 'peace debate' the dissenters registered another qualified public relations success. The occasion was a public discussion of "America and the Settlement of the War" at London's Central Hall on 19 March. The meeting was presided over by Lord Parmoor, a respected High Anglican and nominally Conservative peer, and organized by Buxton and Sir

⁴¹ Buckler to House, 23 February 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; "The Position To-Day," The Labour Leader, 1 March 1917, p. 4.

⁴² The New Statesman, 24 February 1917, pp. 481-482.

Edwin Pears, the Constantinople correspondent of the Liberal The Daily News.⁴³ Those present were supposed to engage in a non-partisan examination of the American perspective on the war. Buckler thought the event a great success, reporting to House that it was the first well-attended public meeting to question the orthodox, "knock-out blow" viewpoint.⁴⁴

Buxton had told the 1,200-1,400 strong crowd of the folly of "holding down" Germany. He alluded to intelligence from the "highest authorities" in the United States that, if Germany's aims had been revealed in December, the public would have found the terms more moderate than expected.⁴⁵ Germany had been prepared to abandon all conquered territories and also to restore and compensate Belgium. Serbia would have received an outlet to the sea, Italy would have got the Trentino, France would have been offered a large part of Lorraine, including Metz, and the Straits would have been opened to Russia. Apparently, Buxton had been informed of America's willingness to guarantee this prospective settlement with "all its force." Thus German national pride would have been soothed and the agreement would not appear as an Allied diktat.⁴⁶

The meeting had attracted the attention of many people eager for peace negotiations. Buxton told Buckler that Loreburn and Parmoor had both approved his address. Lord Lansdowne

⁴³ Martin, Peace without Victory, p. 84; Buckler to House, 10 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4. Buckler alluded to the impending meeting in a letter to House of 23 February (Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4). Although there is no evidence to date Buxton's decision to stage this initiative he was probably influenced by the result of the Rossendale by-election.

⁴⁴ Buckler to House, 23 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 5. Also see Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, p. 139.

⁴⁵ Buckler to House, 23 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 5. Buxton later replied to a query, perhaps from either Lord Parmoor or Lord Loreburn, that he had indeed seen the senior foreign policy officials on his visit to the United States in 1916. He even offered excerpts from his letters from House as proof of his connections (Buxton to Unknown, 27 March 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730; Untitled document listing excerpts, no date, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730).

⁴⁶ The Herald, 24 March 1917, p. 2.

had already made known to Cabinet his disquiet at the protraction of the conflict and, of course, he would make a dramatic public intervention in the peace-by-negotiation debate in November 1917. No longer in the Government, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary was moved in the wake of the Central Hall meeting to make discreet enquiries to Buckler as to the possibility of America brokering a peace. This was exactly the sort of impetus for peace which Buxton had hoped his meeting would generate. Yet Buxton's hopes were still viewed with scepticism, and not only by predictable voices such as those of the jingo press. Some people who wanted an early end to the war nevertheless doubted whether a satisfactory negotiated settlement could be crafted. For example, Bramwell Booth, the leader of the Salvation Army, expressed his doubts directly to Buxton: "I am not disposed to attempt what I think might do harm and not good--and that is really my considered view of the probable negotiation while present conditions obtain, especially in Germany and Russia."⁴⁷

Despite such discordant notes, Buxton postulated that any authentication by the United States of his Central Hall statements would "have a great effect." In reality, the dissenters, as well as moderates like Lansdowne, were excited over peace proposals that had never really been stated.⁴⁸ But Buxton was obviously implying that the position of the "knock-out blow"

⁴⁷ Booth to Buxton, 15 March 1917, Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Boxes 1-2, letters A-D, Bramwell Booth file.

⁴⁸ According to Buxton, the American officials had information from Berlin about the situation there. Their best evidence indicated that the terms he outlined at the Central Hall meeting were attainable the year before (Buckler to House, 23 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 5). It is possible that Buxton had received some of his information from E.L. Dresel, an American diplomatic official recently returned from Berlin, with whom he had had discussions early in March 1917. Buckler reported to House that even though Dresel had told Buxton that German terms were now stronger than in January, "Buxton was rather surprised to find that Dresel's view of the terms that the German moderates would accept was much nearer to Buxton's own views than he had imagined" (Buckler to House, 1 March 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 4). House told Buckler that the information House had passed on to Buxton came mostly from Bernstorff but the terms "were entirely different and ridiculously impossible" compared to what the German Government actually offered (House to Buckler, 19

enthusiasts would be seriously undermined if Germany's initial terms were fully revealed. The desired propaganda effect, however, could not be achieved without an American verification of his speech. Consequently, Buxton sought specific and public assurances from the United States that what he had said was accurate. To support his case for disclosure, Buxton assured his American contacts that there was a significant body of influential moderates who were in complete agreement with Wilson's stated foreign policy objectives. These individuals were merely awaiting confirmation of Buxton's pronouncements before campaigning openly for a negotiated peace. Buxton then asked Buckler if House, or somebody else, might authenticate his Central Hall address by providing "an amplification of what he has said himself." Buckler replied that such "amplification" would probably not be forthcoming. The following day Buxton suggested an alternative plan, whereby someone such as Loreburn who was "less 'tarred'" with the "pacifist motive" would send Page a request for verification of Buxton's 19 March comments.⁴⁹

Together, the 'peace debate' and the Central Hall meeting provided ample, if dubious, proof to the converted that Germany was prepared to restore the status quo that had existed prior to the outbreak of war. Peace negotiations, therefore, should begin immediately. Buxton wanted to encourage this generous view of German intentions so as to pressure the Government to act for peace while America was still neutral. While Buxton failed to stamp his interpretation of events late in 1916 with an official American seal, he did succeed in boosting his credibility within the peace-by-negotiation movement and with Buckler and House as well.

April 1917, Series I, Box 1, Folder 3).

⁴⁹ Buxton to Buckler, 27 March 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730; Buxton to Buckler, 28 March 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 729; Buckler to House, 28 March 1917, Series I, Box 1, Folder 5. Also see Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench, pp. 138-139.

The Russian Revolution

Tsarist autocracy in Russia collapsed dramatically in March 1917. By 12 March a Provisional Government had been formed, and Tsar Nicholas II abdicated two days later. The Russian monarchy was long an object of dissenting scorn, but its overthrow caught the peace-by-negotiation forces by surprise. Indeed, few commentators appreciated just how much strain nearly three years of war had exerted on the Russian social and political system. Yet British dissent did quickly grasp that the Russian Revolution was an event of enormous international import. Without overstatement, The Herald called the Revolution the "biggest event of the war."⁵⁰ It was immediately sensed by the dissenters that the Revolution signalled a great leap forward in their quest for a freer world and a negotiated settlement. The first of these intuitions was confirmed by the Provisional Government's hasty promulgation, on 16 March, of its celebrated Charter of Freedom which promised freedom of speech, writing and assembly. Discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities was to cease, and universal suffrage and a qualified right to strike introduced. By rapidly entrenching these fundamental civil liberties, the Provisional Government appeared to have begun the transformation of Russia from a bastion of authoritarianism to a model liberal-democratic state. Virtually the full spectrum of dissenting opinion could have echoed Ponsonby's praise for the establishment in Russia of a "constitutional system and free institutions."⁵¹ Indeed, the libertarian emphasis of the latter half of March

⁵⁰ Lansbury, "The Russian Programme," The Herald, 24 March 1917, p. 5. For other early reactions from British labour circles, see Stephen Richards Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1924 (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 16-21. On dissent's long history of Russophobia, see Morris, Radicalism Against War, pp. 59-64 and passim.

⁵¹ PD (Commons), 22 March 1917, 91, col. 2090. More generally, see Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, part III. Russell and Catherine Marshall, an NCF executive member, launched the NCF's "Charter Campaign" in late March 1917. Two documents were sent to NCF subscribers encouraging NCF supporters to endorse the Russian Charter in order to promote civil liberties in Britain. See "Russian Freedom Charter," 21 March

represents the first phase of the Russian Revolution.

Yet, pro-war forces largely welcomed the Revolution as well. They believed that the political changes would galvanize the Russian war effort to the obvious benefit of the Allied cause. Furthermore, owing to this instant refashioning of the Triple Entente into an alliance of liberal powers, it could now be asserted more plausibly that the War was, indeed, a struggle between democracy and Prussian militarism.⁵² However, dissenters found it easy to depict official or popular patriotic expressions of support for the Revolution as hypocritical and self-serving. Snowden hoped that the more enthusiastically the 'war party' endorsed the new Russian regime, the more clearly would the British people see the past failures of their own Government.

The Revolution in Russia is the supreme justification of those who have criticised Great Britain's alliance with the Russian autocracy. Now the war party in this country is applauding the overthrow of the Czar...but they must not be allowed to forget that these are the people with whom they have been in alliance for the past two and a half years.⁵³

Not surprisingly, the Russian Revolution was the foremost topic of debate in nearly every political weekly that hit the newsstands during the second half of March 1917. Massingham stated without equivocation to The Nation's readership that "the happiest event of our generation is now triumphantly completed." The same newspaper proclaimed confidently that the Russian Revolution would save liberty in Europe. George Lansbury's The Herald hoped that the eclipse of tsarism would undermine the militarists of all belligerent states. For the moment, however, Lansbury only lamented that recent attacks on civil liberties in Ireland and England appeared to

1917 in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 22, pp. 117, 463-464.

⁵² See, for example, The New Statesman, 24 March 1917, p. 577. More generally, see Mayer, Political Origins, pp. 69-70 and Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, pp. 106-107.

⁵³ The Labour Leader, 22 March 1917, p. 1.

indicate that the British and Russian Governments were moving in quite opposite directions.⁵⁴

Bertrand Russell also noted the striking contrast between Russia's embrace of freedom and the stranglehold of the Lloyd George Coalition on British liberties. He doubted whether the British authorities would follow the Russian lead and release their own "political and religious" prisoners--a thinly veiled reference to the incarceration of conscientious objectors, to whose plight Russell was at this time devoting most of his political energies.⁵⁵

In keeping with the libertarian theme of the first phase of the Russian Revolution, the Revolution was again closely aligned with the cause of domestic freedom at a rally in the Albert Hall on 31 March. Hastily organized by The Herald, a number of trade union and socialist speakers joined Lansbury and Robert Smillie, President of the Miners' Union, on the platform. The general tenor of the gathering, which filled this famous landmark of London, was encapsulated by the motion of support for the Russian revolutionaries:

This Meeting sends joyful congratulations to the Democrats of Russia, and calls upon the Governments of Great Britain and of every country; neutral and belligerent alike, to follow the Russian example by establishing Industrial freedom, Freedom of Speech and the Press, the Abolition of Social, Religious, and National distinctions, an immediate Amnesty for Political and Religious offences, and Universal Suffrage.⁵⁶

As regards the likely effects of events in Russia on the prospects of peace, most dissenters anticipated that the liberal complexion of the Provisional Government would lead to its

⁵⁴ The Nation, 24 March 1917, p. 813; "New Holy Alliance," The Nation, 24 March 1917, p. 816; Lansbury, "The Russian Programme," The Herald, 24 March 1917, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Russell, "Russia Leads the Way," 22 March 1917, in Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 23, pp. 118-119. Also see pp. xxxi, 114.

⁵⁶ "The Revolution at the Albert Hall," The Herald, 7 April 1917, pp. 8-13. See also, "The Meaning of the Meeting," The Herald, 31 March 1917, p. 5; "The Albert Hall Meeting," The Labour Leader, 5 April 1917, p. 6. More generally on the demonstration at the Albert Hall, see Jo Vellacott, Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War (Brighton, 1980), pp. 156-158.

renunciation of tsarist territorial ambition. Brailsford was afraid that the Provisional Government might press for an expansionist peace and thus reduce the prospects of an early, just settlement. But the less sanguine views of this celebrated pre-war critic of the international arms trade were not widely shared.⁵⁷ It was soon appreciated that the labour and socialist factions which exerted leverage over the Provisional Government were not at all pro-war. The commitment to peace of these forces, however, created a different kind of apprehension in some dissenting ranks. MacDonald was worried that Lenin's Bolsheviks, who were widely seen as peace-at-any-price pacifists, would discredit the Revolution and lead Russia into a separate and dishonourable peace with Germany, thereby permanently entrenching militarism in Germany. He favoured the political leadership of Alexander Kerensky, the moderate pro-war Minister of Justice in the Provisional Government. In MacDonald's view, disclosed to a meeting of the UDC executive on 29 March, only Kerensky could be trusted to resist both Allied pressure to adopt a fight-to-the-finish stand and leftist pressure for an immediate, unilaterally negotiated peace. The Provisional Government had to work towards peace within a broader, Allied framework in order to secure a lasting settlement and also to ensure that Russia's democratic example exerted the maximum international influence.⁵⁸ Snowden's formula for peace, which he aired publicly, was rather more straightforward. If the proletariat won control over the "middle-class imperialists" responsible for the fighting, then the war would be ended by a truly people's peace.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Brailsford, "The Russian Revolution," The Herald, 24 March 1917, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, pp. 207-209. Also in attendance were Angell, Morel, Trevelyan, Ponsonby, Hobson, Massingham and Brailsford. Despite the notes of disquiet struck by MacDonald, the UDC executive still "urged all branches to hold 'meetings of sympathy' for the Russian Revolution."

⁵⁹ The Labour Leader, 29 March 1917, p. 1. For Snowden, Dr. Paul Miliukov, the Russian Foreign Minister, and Kerensky were examples of 'middle-class imperialists'.

Conclusion

The drift of the United States towards intervention and Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare were setbacks for British dissent. But the plausibility of the peace-by-negotiation position was enhanced during the important two-month-period of February and March 1917. Dissenting efforts at convincing the Government to reconsider its 10 January proposals were not without some reward. Under dissenting pressure, the Government distanced itself from Walter Long's aggressive posture towards Germany's colonies. The dissenters themselves also regarded certain indistinct signals--from the Rossendale by-election, the debating of war aims in Parliament, and Buxton's meeting at the Central Hall--as firm evidence of the gradually growing popularity and prestige of their ideas.

The single most important boost to dissenting fortunes came from the revolutionary breakthrough in Russia. The dissenters believed that nothing short of a new age had begun, with new avenues of approach to a negotiated settlement quickly opening up. The Revolution, it was hoped, heralded a more general, European-wide crisis of political reaction. Dissenters looked forward to a British Government, imbued with the generous ideals and faith in humanity that seemed to define the Revolution, and a democratic Germany similarly equipped, forging together a liberal and lasting peace. The optimistic expectation that "if the Russian revolution succeeds democracy has won," could even be shared by those, such as Fabian socialist, Beatrice Webb, who were firmly in the pro-war camp.⁶⁰

Revolutionary Russia was supplanting President Wilson as the main focus of dissenting hopes.⁶¹ This trend undoubtedly was strengthened by America's steady movement towards

⁶⁰ MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, p. 278 (18 March 1917).

⁶¹ Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 118.

military intervention. But the dissenting confidence that only Russia could broker a liberal international settlement was bolstered by the apparent sincerity of the Provisional Government's commitment to domestic freedoms. The latter's celebrated Charter of 16 March stood out in sharp contrast to the censorship and other dictates of DORA to which the British Home Front was subject. As regards the kind of peace Russia should help shape, dissent was divided. Snowden and Bertrand Russell, for example, hoped that the weight of popular pressure would force an immediate cessation of hostilities. Buxton and MacDonald, meanwhile, looked to a moderate Russian regime to persuade Allied leaders into granting generous terms to the Central Powers. These divisions corresponded loosely with the dissenters' differences of opinion on the question of American intervention. Those favouring an early Russian peace were most likely to view America's entry as a prelude to the protraction of the conflict. Others remained confident that even a belligerent United States would be a moderating influence in Allied counsels. Buxton, for one, continued throughout 1917 to look to the United States to provide a lead to peace negotiations. Yet, the main significance of the American decision for war in mid-April was, indeed, the counter-balancing strategic effect it exerted upon a declining Russian war effort. The dissenting dream of a British Government being pressed into a moderate settlement by revolutionary Russia and Wilsonian America was beginning to fade at the very moment when it became a possibility.

Chapter 3: "Untrustworthy Guides To Follow"—APRIL 1917 TO MAY 1917

Overview

In April 1917 Philip Snowden expressed his mystification at what he judged to be the popular mood.

It is difficult to account for the general feeling of pessimism which prevails about the war. One would have thought that the military situation in the West, the entry of America into the war, and the newspaper stories of grave unrest in Germany would have created a feeling of optimism.¹

But the prevailing "stalemate" mentality of the public, and its reflection in the broader strategic picture, provided a certain reassurance for dissenters such as Snowden--the reassurance that their longed-for negotiated settlement might be close at hand. Notwithstanding Snowden's cautious but optimistic assessment of Allied prospects on the Western Front, British gains in April around Arras were more than offset by the ineffectiveness of the main French thrust. Also, unbeknownst to the dissenters, there were ominous signs of collapsing discipline and morale in the French Army. These problems, which escalated into the Nivelle Mutinies, peaked in May 1917.²

Regarding the onset of American intervention, many dissenters were profoundly uneasy. Yet they were at least encouraged by Wilson's pledge to Congress of 2 April that the United States would accept only a liberal peace. This perception of the American President as a moderating influence on Allied diplomacy was the crucial factor behind the maintenance of

¹ The Labour Leader, 26 April 1917, p. 1 .

² Rod Paschall, The Defeat of Imperial Germany, 1917-1918 (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 48.

dissenting support for Wilson in the spring of 1917.

The dissenters were also buoyed by the continuing development of the Russian Revolution. Early in April, the Provisional Government promised the Russian people a moderate settlement, known as the Petrograd Formula, consistent with the principles enunciated in their famous slogan of "no annexations and no indemnities." The Russian adoption of this peace position ensured that, for dissenters, the new revolutionary régime would eclipse the United States as the leading external promoter of a negotiated peace. The new Russian foreign policy, which heralded for the dissenters the beginning of the second phase of the Russian Revolution, was the most important driving force behind their push for a revision of Allied war aims.

Mr. Wilson Goes to War

Wilson's 2 April request to Congress for a declaration of war stressed three themes: the barbarity of the German submarine campaign, the lawlessness of the German Government, and the idealism of American war aims. The German Government had "put aside all restraints of law of humanity" by resuming unrestricted submarine warfare. Wilson attributed this intensification of German aggression to the autocratic nature of a German Government which was "backed by organized force...controlled wholly by their will [and] not by the will of [the] people." The idea of a distinction between the German people and the German Government was central to Wilson's position. The United States was waging war only against the latter. It was America's duty to "exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war." The United States had no choice because "no autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith...or observe its covenants." Not surprisingly, Wilson was intent on replacing Germany's existing Government with a more genuinely democratic régime. In addition, the United States would fight for open diplomacy in all countries, for the liberation of

the peoples of Europe, for freedom of the seas, and for the defence of the rights of all nations. Above all, Wilson wanted to assure his audience that the United States was not going to war for selfish aims.

We must put excited feelings away. Our motive will not be revenge or victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion... We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make.³

Wilson's special congressional address was significant for two main reasons. First, the President had explicitly stated that the extension of democracy abroad was a vital concomitant of a liberal peace. This implied, first and foremost, significant change in the constitutional arrangements of Imperial Germany. But, by rejecting secret diplomacy, Wilson also intended to promote the democratic control of foreign policy in the ostensibly more liberal states with which the United States was now aligned. Second, Wilson's insistence that this was a war of democracy against autocracy, demonstrated to dissenters that America approved the new Russian Government and the Russian Revolution.

Most dissenters extended a cautious welcome to America's intervention. Morel hoped that the United States would be instrumental in framing a peace "in harmony with the wider claims inherent in the community of the world's peoples." He was encouraged by Wilson's outright rejection of a fight-to-the-finish mentality and such punitive post-settlement sanctions as an economic boycott of Germany. Indeed, American involvement meant that the centre of "political gravity" would shift from Europe to the United States, thereby fostering a healthy

³ Scott, ed., "Address of President Wilson Recommending the Declaration of a State of War between the United States and the Imperial German Government, Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress," 2 April 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 85-91.

internationalism.⁴ The Nation was impressed by Wilson's noble statement of war aims. The President's emphasis upon the "the re-establishment of public law, the safeguarding of national liberties, and the search for AN END TO WAR" signified a long-overdue embrace of diplomatic idealism within the Allied camp. There was no chance of Wilson being content with a status quo ante bellum peace because, in The Nation's view, there had been no true international justice in 1914.⁵ The expectation that American military pressure and diplomatic influence would hasten the end of the fighting was crucial to dissent's acceptance of American intervention. The United States was also regarded as a vital force for the maintenance of democracy and freedom in Britain:

We would put our suggestion plainly. In the close material and spiritual partnership between our country and America for the rescue of civilization, America, coming in late and with her own spiritual resources as yet intact, can perform an incomparable service in helping to revive the flagging spirit of British liberty at home...Now America, under Mr. Wilson's guidance, can show better than any European State how it is possible for a free nation to fight a war for freedom without losing its own freedom in the process.⁶

Such optimistic appraisals of the likely consequences of American intervention need to be balanced against the more sombre dissenting predictions. Morel had not completely discarded his view that American participation might impede a negotiated peace. He thought that Wilson's rigid differentiation between democracy and autocracy was dangerous. Moreover, he warned, "no nation submits to constitutional changes imposed upon it from without unless it is reduced to utter physical prostration." Snowden was more overtly hostile to Wilson's speech, which he saw as "nothing but a clever piece of special pleading and an elaborate excuse." He also blamed

⁴ Morel, "America in the War," The U.D.C., May 1917, pp. 73-76.

⁵ "Why America Has Come In," The Nation, 5 April 1917, p. 4. See also, "World War and World Settlement," The Nation, 14 April 1917, p. 28.

⁶ "An Appeal to American Liberalism," The Nation, 28 April 1917, p. 84.

America's entry into the war for the lamentable shift in the popular mood, believing that "there is a recrudescence of jingoism and hooliganism, and that the peace movement is for the moment helpless."⁷

The Petrograd Formula: Initial Reactions

On 9 April the Provisional Government announced to the Russian public that it would restrict its war aims to the defence of Russian territory and that it would establish a "durable peace on a basis of the rights of nations to decide their own destiny." The new Russian régime did not seek to dominate other nations, occupy foreign territory or humiliate the enemy.⁸ Although this Petrograd Formula for peace had an immeasurable impact on both British dissenters and international opinion generally, it was actually a product of the domestic power struggle in Russia between the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Council and the Provisional Government. The proclamation was drafted in response to a published interview by Paul Miliukov, the Russian Foreign Minister, in which he had declared that Russian war aims still included Constantinople, the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire and the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia.⁹ His position was not even shared by all members of the Provisional

⁷ Morel, "America in the War," The U.D.C., May 1917, pp. 74-76; The Labour Leader, 12 April 1917, p. 1; 19 April, p. 1. Snowden's concerns were shared by Russell, who voiced two overriding fears in the anti-conscriptionist Tribunal of which he was the main policy writer for most of 1917. First, the United States might get carried away with war hysteria and lose sight of its liberal foreign policy goals. Second, American military force would preclude a stalemate of "universal exhaustion" which Russell thought offered the best prospect for a lasting settlement ("America's Entry into the War," 19 April, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 27, pp. 129-130).

⁸ Scott, ed., "Provisional Government Proclamation on War Aims," 9 April 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, December 1916 to November 1918, p. 95.

⁹ Browder and Kerensky, eds., "Press Interview with Miliukov in Rech," 5 April 1917, The Russian Provisional Government of 1917, p. 1044.

Government, while the Petrograd Soviet was furious at this attempt to perpetuate a tsarist war policy. The opponents of an 'imperialist' peace successfully forced the Government into issuing a statement of liberal war aims. This declaration, following so closely on the heels of the Albert Hall demonstration in favour of Russian liberty, marks what can be usefully viewed as the second phase of the Revolution with dissent's emphasis on the international application of the Russian peace formula.

Snowden regarded the Petrograd Formula as a virtual "paraphrase of the declarations of the I.L.P. or U.D.C. upon the war and the peace settlement." For Morel, Russia's endorsement of a dissenting platform transformed the whole nature of the conflict into a "a war between the civilian extremists and the civilian moderates, between the Imperialists and the Democrats." He also equated the Petrograd Formula with Wilsonian liberal idealism:

The Russian Provisional Government has followed President Wilson in endorsing the principles of the U.D.C. No annexations, no humiliation or subjugation, no prolongation of the war for the pleasure of trampling upon the enemy's neck; but a settlement broad-based upon the rights of the peoples to decide their own destinies.¹⁰

The UDC had much to gain by tying their policy to Wilson's quest for a liberal peace and the Petrograd Formula. Wilson in particular was enormously respected outside dissenting circles. By connecting Wilsonianism and, to a lesser extent, the new Russian foreign policy, with the UDC, the credibility of the latter organization's policies could only rise in the public eye.

For many inside the pro-negotiation camp, Russia now represented an even greater force for peace than did the United States. It was "to the changed conditions in Russia rather than to the entry of America into the war," remarked Snowden, "[that] we must look for an early and

¹⁰ The Labour Leader, 19 April 1917, p. 1; The U.D.C., May 1917, p. 77. For The Herald too, the 9 April proclamation was comparable in effect to Wilson's congressional address. Both Russia and America had now chosen a "nobler doctrine" ("Russia, U.S. and Ourselves," The Herald, 14 April 1917, p. 9).

satisfactory peace."¹¹ The adoption of a moderate war aims policy by Britain's Russian ally also provided another signal for the dissenters to urge their own Government's modification of its war aims. Morel declared that the Provisional Government's acceptance of the Petrograd Formula drastically altered the Allies' 10 January note. Russia's revised diplomatic stance removed any rationale for continued Austro-Russian fighting, as the latter had no longer to fear a Russian seizure of Constantinople.¹² By May 1917, MacDonald was writing with some confidence in The Daily Citizen that Russia would not make a separate peace. However, he did warn the readers of his weekly column that continued Russian military participation seemed contingent upon either a full restatement of Allied war aims or the dispatch of a new peace note to President Wilson. Snowden thought that Allied acceptance of the Petrograd Formula might, indeed, force a reconsideration by Britain and France of their joint 10 January statement. In view of Russia's new position, The Herald insisted that the British Government revise its war aims in conformity with American and Russian objectives. Only then might Germany be encouraged to opt for peace.¹³

The Petrograd Formula: Implications

The Provisional Government's proclamation of 9 April fuelled a debate within the dissenting

¹¹ The Labour Leader, 12 April 1917, p. 1. The distinction which Snowden drew between Russia and America was sharpened by George Lansbury in The Herald: "President Wilson wishes for a people's peace; the Russian Government has declared for a people's peace" ("Keep the Red Flag Flying," The Herald, 14 April 1917, p. 5).

¹² Morel, "America in the War," The U.D.C., May 1917, pp. 75-76.

¹³ The Daily Citizen, 5 May 1917, p. 1; The Labour Leader, 12 April 1917, p. 1; "Russia, U.S., and Ourselves," The Herald, 14 April 1917, p. 9. Arno Mayer argues that the ILP accepted the Russian démarche because it fortified the Party's call for a revised British statement (Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, p. 164).

community, which would last until the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, over the practical implications of the new Russian policy. Morel presumed to his readers that an autonomous Poland, a restored Serbia, a protectorate over Armenia, plus the internationalization of Constantinople and the Straits were all congruent with the framework of the Petrograd Formula. The Nation oscillated between thinking that the Petrograd Formula had settled the details of Russian war aims and that the formula was inherently ambiguous.¹⁴ Brailsford, whom Buckler described as sharing "the 'Nation's' standpoint," argued that a policy of 'no annexation' would block certain "indispensable" adjustments but was nonetheless better than the wholesale redivision of Europe.¹⁵

MacDonald also voiced some dissenting concerns about the uncertain future direction of Russian policy, in an open letter of 25 April to "Russian leaders."¹⁶ The ILP leader was broadly correct in his judgment that the Petrograd Formula signified the growing leverage of the Petrograd Soviet over the Provisional Government.¹⁷ This perception, shared by other dissenters,¹⁸ could only have been reinforced by the publication on 13 April of the Resolution on War Aims of the All-Russian Conference of Soviets. This statement called on both the Provisional Government and Allied states to publicly renounce annexations and indemnities. The

¹⁴ Morel, "Exploiting the Russian Revolution," The Labour Leader, 5 April 1917, p. 6; The Nation, 14 April 1917, p. 26; 28 April 1917, p. 82.

¹⁵ Buckler to House, 27 April 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 5; Brailsford, "No Annexations?," The Herald, 6 May 1917, p. 8.

¹⁶ Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, pp. 211-212. See also, The Daily Citizen, 5 May 1917, p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁸ The Nation, however, took a less categorical view than MacDonald. It acknowledged the rivalry between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet but thought that the 9 April proclamation had not permanently settled the issue of Russian war objectives. The Nation, 14 April 1917, p. 26.

Soviets had expressly linked their domestic agenda with foreign policy reform:

The revolutionary people of Russia will persist in their efforts to bring about an early conclusion of peace on the basis of the brotherhood and equality of free peoples. An official renunciation of all programs of conquest on the part of all Governments is a powerful means of terminating the war on such conditions.¹⁹

Such was the prestige of the Russian Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in the eyes of British socialists that The Herald hoped for the formation of similar working class bodies in Britain, so as to ensure that the Government would respect "rank and file" support for the Petrograd Formula.²⁰

The persistent conflict between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet surfaced once again early in May. The Provisional Government was subject to increasing pressure from the Petrograd Soviet to issue its 9 April statement--originally for domestic consumption only--as a diplomatic note. Miliukov, leader of the more conservative Constitutional Democratic Party or Kadets, as they were known, duly proceeded with the note's dispatch but attached a covering letter extending unequivocal Russian support to the Allied quest for a decisive military victory.²¹ The Petrograd Soviet responded angrily, and four days later the Provisional Government issued a clarification of Miliukov's 1 May statement. By this second communiqué it was confirmed that Russia was still bound to the Allied programme. The Petrograd Formula implied nothing less. The important fact, however, was that the Government was resolved neither to dominate other nations nor to occupy foreign territory "by force." Furthermore, the

¹⁹ Browder and Kerensky, eds., "The Resolution on War Aims of the All Russian Conference of Soviets," (31 March, old calendar), The Russian Provisional Government of 1917, pp. 1083-1084.

²⁰ "The New Gang," The Herald, 21 April 1917, p. 9.

²¹ Wade, The Russian Search for Peace, February-October 1917 (Stanford, 1969), pp. 37-39.

Government's overriding objective was the promotion of national self-determination.²² The Soviet's pressure on the Provisional Government was nevertheless maintained. A new coalition was formed on 15 May, which included members of the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Council. Miliukov was conspicuous by his absence in the new Government and Kerensky, a Social Revolutionary, became Minister of War. The ascendancy of the much more radical Petrograd Soviet seemed complete when, three days later, the new coalition endorsed the Soviet's war policy position. The so-called L'vov Declaration signified for the first time the Russian Government's extranational assent to the framework of the Petrograd Formula.²³

Russia's formal acceptance of the Soviet's foreign policy bolstered dissenting demands for a statement of British war aims to match those of Russia. Moreover, they believed that the Russian example made such a statement attainable. Buckler reported MacDonald's position to Colonel House:

MacDonald who has some sort of direct communication with the Russian socialists, feels confident that "peace without annexation" will soon be put forward by their government as a proposition to which the other Entente Allies will be asked to say "yes" or "no". He is absolutely certain that Russia means somehow to get peace soon and that in attaining this object she does not propose to spare the feelings of French and British jingoes.²⁴

The adoption of the Petrograd Formula by the second Provisional Government also encouraged dissenters to pressure their own Government to adhere to Wilsonian ideals. The joint role of the United States and Russia in moderating British war aims was frequently stressed by dissenters.

²² Browder and Kerensky, eds., The Russian Provisional Government of 1917, pp. 1098, 1100. The Petrograd Soviet accepted the Government's explanation. It viewed the new note as a definite renunciation of forcible annexation (Browder and Kerensky, eds., "Soviet Acceptance of the Government's Explanation," 4 May 1917, The Russian Provisional Government of 1917, p. 1100).

²³ Ibid., pp. 1045, 1039-1041. Prince L'vov was Prime Minister of the reconstructed Provisional Government.

²⁴ Buckler to House, 18 May 1917, Buckler Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 9.

Before American intervention and Russian Revolution, argued The Nation, there had been no chance of peace. But these two nations had introduced vital "saving elements" which could only exert a beneficial influence on international statesmanship.²⁵

On 23 May the UDC Executive sent a letter to Wilson highlighting the new Russian Government's determination to end the war as soon as possible on the basis of no annexations. The UDC maintained that the Russian position was so close to the President's own that the other Allies should surely issue a formal statement of support for a 'no annexation' policy. The UDC assured Wilson that if the United States tried to persuade all warring powers to adopt such a view, "democratic" forces would then push for a permanent peace.²⁶ The organization may well have been trying to nail Wilson's colours to the 'no annexation, no indemnity' mast. Furthermore, the UDC probably hoped to link Wilson's moral authority to the Petrograd Formula. More clear is the degree of uncertainty within the UDC which the letter to Wilson revealed. On the one hand, the leading dissenting body appeared to believe that, notwithstanding American military intervention, Wilson still had the authority to pressure his co-belligerents into relaxing their war aims. On the other, the letter shows their loss of faith in Wilson as a dissenting force--hence this attempt to have him publicly affirm his commitment to a "peace without victory" along the lines of the Petrograd Formula.

The Petrograd Formula was enormously attractive to the dissenters because it mirrored and reinforced their own arguments for a negotiated peace. Crucially, the resolution supported their contention that if all Allied Governments issued public endorsements of the Petrograd

²⁵ "The Peace of the Peoples," The Nation, 19 May 1917, pp. 156-157. The Herald agreed that it was Wilson and Russia who had brought Britain "back to fundamentals" ("The League of Nations," The Herald, 19 May 1917, p. 9).

²⁶ The UDC to Wilson, 23 May 1917, House Papers, Series III, Box 182, Folder 1/24. Of course, for the UDC, a permanent peace could not be attained through annexation.

Formula, then the Prussian militarists would be undercut and moderate German elements able to end the war. The Petrograd Formula, in combination with Wilson's liberal pronouncements, were used by dissenters to highlight the punitive aspects of the Allies' 10 January statement. The Russian and Wilsonian stands now provided the dissenters with a solid platform from which to press the British Government into revising its war aims, or else risk alienating its allies.

Apparent Success

During April and May 1917 British dissent exhibited a heightened sense of its unstoppable momentum. These feelings were stimulated by the belief that America and Russia had adopted dissenting foreign policies and also by an outbreak of domestic labour strife. Just as Russia and America were expected to exert external pressure on Britain to embrace a UDC-style programme, the labour unrest, it was felt, would provide the necessary internal stimulus. The British Government's labour problems stemmed from trade union dissatisfaction with changes in the scheme for exempting skilled workers from military service. On 7 May a revised Schedule of Protected Occupations was introduced, reducing the number of workers covered by the union-run Trade Card Scheme implemented the previous November. The celebrated 'May Strikes' of 1917 which first hit Manchester, then Coventry, Barrow and Sheffield, were in direct response to the likely withdrawal of men from the engineering trades to the army. This dramatic wave of labour protest also released long-simmering grievances about the high cost of living and the wartime erosion of craft union privileges by the deskilling processes of 'dilution' and 'substitution'. The strikes were led by workshop militants in outright defiance of the official engineering union hierarchy. The Government altered its new Schedule of Protected Occupations, and although

these concessions only partially satisfied the rank and file, the strikes ended on 21 May.²⁷

The British Government had been alarmed both by this potentially debilitating labour unrest and by the prospect of fusion between pro-negotiation forces and discontented workers led by revolutionary shop stewards in the engineering trades. Commissions of Industrial Unrest were appointed to assess the unstable labour situation. The commissioners' hastily assembled reports drew an alarming picture of working class discontent, fuelled by rising prices, perceptions of profiteering, overcrowding and management insensitivity on the shop floor. Many rank and file workers appeared to distrust both their own union executives and government promises. Lord Milner was not the only governmental figure who believed by late May that there was a distinct possibility of revolution in Britain.²⁸

In addition to feeding official anxiety, the May Strikes led the dissenters to the somewhat dubious conclusion that the labour rank and file, by contrast to their union and party leaders, was fully converted to the concept of a negotiated peace. There were some signs that the dissenting view was spreading, but not necessarily to the working class. On 14 May the League of Nations Society staged a meeting at Central Hall which was addressed by General Jan Smuts, the leading South African delegate to the Imperial War Conference and future War Cabinet member, Lord Hugh Cecil, the libertarian Conservative backbencher, and Lord Buckmaster, the Liberal former

²⁷ Keith Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911 (London, 1979), p. 102; Chris Wrigley, "The First World War and State Intervention in Industrial Relations, 1914-18" A History of British Industrial Relations vol. II 1914-1939 ed. Chris Wrigley (Brighton, 1987), p. 46; Hugh Armstrong Clegg, A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, vol. II 1911-1933 (Oxford, 1985), pp. 171-173.

²⁸ Turner, British Politics, pp. 168, 192-193. He warned Lloyd George that action must be taken to "counteract the very systematic and active propaganda of the Pacifists, and to prevent their capturing the Trade Councils and other bodies, who profess to represent though they often misrepresent the working classes" (Milner to Lloyd George, 26 May 1917, quoted in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, p. xxxvi). Also see J.O. Stubbs, "Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918," English Historical Review 87 (1972): pp. 255-277.

Lord Chancellor. The dissenting reaction to the Central Hall meeting reveals a growing confidence that their ideas were gaining wider acceptance. Certainly Smuts and Cecil had no prior connections with dissent and, according to Gerda Crosby, "many prominent M.P.s and others not associated with the negotiated peace movement" were in attendance.²⁹ The presence of Smuts suggested that even the Government might be preparing to accept a negotiated settlement. The Herald thought that none of the three keynote speakers would have talked in such conciliatory terms only a few months previously and was particularly impressed by Smuts's expression of interest in the subjection of diplomacy to the control of public opinion. The South African politician also said that conciliation provided the way to a peaceful future and that territorial changes had to reflect the wishes of the peoples affected. Smuts was regarded by The Nation as a convert to "constructive pacifism," and the same liberal paper also praised Cecil's plea for "universal benevolence."³⁰

It was the tacit acceptance of a moderate peace rather than the spread of support for an international league that was the important revelation to dissent from the Central Hall meeting. As A.J.P. Taylor has argued, the League idea was very much an afterthought to dissenters of the UDC stamp. Also, many dissenters began to worry about the likely character of such a post-settlement institution as soon as supporters of the Government began to promote it.³¹ Dissent, however, did use the meeting to put across its own view that any future league must embody a liberal, as opposed to conservative, internationalism, that it must certainly include a leniently-

²⁹ Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, p. 44.

³⁰ "The True Remedy for the War," The Nation, 19 May 1917, pp. 157-158; "The League of Nations," The Herald, 19 May 1917, p. 9.

³¹ Taylor, The Trouble Makers, pp. 141-144; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 129.

treated Germany as one of its leading members.³²

The 'No Annexations' Debate in the House of Commons

Two days after the Central Hall meeting, the dissenters staged their most successful war aims debate of 1917. It was started by Snowden moving the following amendment to the Government's Consolidated Fund Bill:

This House welcomes the declaration of the new democratic Government of Russia, repudiating all proposals for imperialistic conquest and aggrandizement, and calls on His Majesty's Government to issue a similar declaration on behalf of the British democracy, and to join with the Allies in restating the Allied terms in conformity with the Russian declaration.³³

The ensuing "No Annexations Debate"³⁴ was followed by the first wartime parliamentary division on the subject of war aims. Snowden's gesture came two days after the Petrograd Soviet announced its intention to join the Provisional Government and just over a month after the All-Russian Conference of Soviets called upon the Allies to redraft their war aims. Another international dimension, stressed by Snowden, Trevelyan and Wedgwood, was added by the statement to the Reichstag of German Majority (pro-war) socialist leader, Philip Scheidemann, that there would be a German revolution should Germany refuse, and the Allies accept, a no annexation and no indemnity policy.³⁵ If, as A.J.P. Taylor argues, the dissenters' reluctance to divide the House prior to May 1917 was one sign of their political isolation, Snowden's

³² The Nation, 19 May 1917, pp. 157-158; The Herald, 19 May 1917, p. 9.

³³ PD (Commons), 16 May 1917, 93, col. 1625.

³⁴ This was MacDonald's description of the proceedings in The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 85.

³⁵ PD (Commons), 16 May 1917, 93, col. 1917; The Labour Leader, 24 May 1917, pp. 1, 3; Wedgwood, Memoirs of a Fighting Life, p. 128; Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, p. 44.

amendment indicates the growth of dissenting confidence that they were on the verge of the crucial breakthrough so eagerly anticipated since December 1916.

The dissenting MPs focused on several interrelated themes: the changed international situation, the need to revise British war aims, and the precise shape of an ideal peace settlement. For the dissenters, the international picture had been irrevocably altered not only by the Russian Revolution and the American intervention but by the combined effect of these two dramatic developments. Snowden, H.B. Lees-Smith, a Liberal and UDC member, and Philip Morrell, a Liberal and former UDC member, all pointed out the close similarity between Wilson's concept of 'peace without victory' and Russia's Petrograd Formula.³⁶ As a consequence of the now overwhelming Allied weight in favour of a moderate settlement, the British and French response to Wilson of 10 January was clearly unsatisfactory. Ponsonby admitted that either a moderate or an extreme reading of the 10 January note could be made. But it was now incumbent upon the Government to place an unambiguously moderate construction on this earlier statement. Snowden argued that a new declaration had to be made because the secret, pre-war treaties which had been struck with the old Russian régime had been repudiated by the new Government.³⁷

There were sporadic references to the United States throughout the 'no annexations' debate. But the primary focus of the dissenters rested upon the intentions of the Provisional Government and the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. Snowden was emphatic that the Revolution "has given us new hope in democracy and revived our faith in internationalism." Furthermore, the announcement that the Petrograd Soviet was going to join the Provisional Government confirmed that Russia was bent on peace. For Snowden, by eschewing annexations, "the Russian

³⁶ PD (Commons), 16 May 1917, 93, cols. 1628, 1641, 1693.

³⁷ Ibid., cols. 1726, 1631. Although the dissenters had long suspected that such treaties had been signed, their existence was not confirmed until May 1917 and their texts not released until the Bolshevik seizure of power in November.

democracy [was] expressing the desire and the will of the democracies of all belligerent countries."³⁸ MacDonald believed that the Petrograd Soviet wanted more direct, people to people, negotiations. As the future leader of European democracy, Russia obviously wanted "a real voice in the settlement after the war" and had boldly embarked upon the political route to reach objectives which war could not achieve.³⁹

Although Snowden's motion did not use the word 'annexation', the debate centered on its meaning. Ponsonby maintained that the Petrograd Formula precluded both the status quo ante bellum and any rights of conquest. Trevelyan thought that annexation for the Russians denoted seizure of Constantinople and the forced break-up of the Habsburg Empire.⁴⁰ MacDonald argued that annexation implied even bolder schemes of territorial aggrandizement, of the kind that tsarist Russia might have envisaged. He and Lees-Smith noted that Kerensky, one of the principal opponents of annexation, was nevertheless opposed to Turkish domination of Armenia. But the Russian desire to guarantee Armenia as a self-governing state clearly fell far short of the "imperialism" which MacDonald equated with "annexation."⁴¹ Snowden, by contrast, dwelt upon the connotations of 'no annexations', by which he presumed the Russians to mean that no conquered territory would be kept by victorious powers after the war and that no land would be transferred between states without a popular vote.⁴²

The dissenters also used the 'no annexation' mantra to attack existing British war aims once again. Lees-Smith urged Britain to relinquish its claims on Germany's African colonies and

³⁸ Ibid., cols. 1626, 1628.

³⁹ Ibid., cols. 1658, 1661, 1662.

⁴⁰ Ibid., cols. 1728, 1707.

⁴¹ Ibid., cols. 1659, 1642.

⁴² Ibid., col. 1634.

to approach its Allies to do likewise. Ultimately, he looked for the Government to make a declaration similar to the Petrograd Formula, which he believed would signal a return to the war aims of August 1914--the restoration of Belgium, France, Serbia and other occupied territories, plus the exacting of "proper" reparations.⁴³ MacDonald urged the Government to refrain from destroying Germany, because such aggression would not resolve such tricky issues as the partition of Turkey, or the Austro-Hungarian question.⁴⁴ Wedgwood rejected the overthrow of the Hohenzollern dynasty as a prerequisite for peace. He wanted international supervision for all colonies in tropical Africa, preferably under American leadership. This solution, said Wedgwood, would conform to Russian guidelines.⁴⁵

The dissenters were not averse to fear-mongering in order to convince the Government that a refusal to support their motion might jeopardize the Allied cause. Wedgwood, Morrell, Trevelyan, Ponsonby all reiterated MacDonald's point that continued diplomatic intransigence might drive Russia into seeking a separate peace.⁴⁶ Persuading the Russian Government of British goodwill would also require the War Cabinet to approve the upcoming conference of European socialists in Stockholm.⁴⁷ MacDonald and Snowden enthused about the convening of

⁴³ Ibid., cols. 1640, 1642.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col. 1657.

⁴⁵ Ibid., cols. 1631, 1683.

⁴⁶ Ibid., cols. 1642, 1661, 1680, 1696, 1707, 1709, 1729. See also, Wedgwood, Memoirs of a Fighting Life, p. 129.

⁴⁷ Early in May, the executive of the Labour Party had received a call from the Dutch section of the International Socialist Bureau for a meeting of the International in Stockholm. At the same meeting, the executive decided not to attend but authorized Henderson to go to Russia. It also moved to convene an Allied socialist conference in London. A few days later, on 10 May, the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Council invited both minority and majority socialists to Russia to define war aims. The following day the ILP applied for passports to go to Russia (Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, pp. 212, 213). While the ILP was supportive of the Petrograd invitation, The Nation had significant reservations. The paper argued that a conference in Stockholm would

this meeting and requested that their Government allow British delegates to attend.⁴⁸ The dissenters also highlighted the likely effect on Germany of their amendment's rejection. Both Snowden and Wedgwood claimed that properly revised Allied war aims would assist the moderate and democratic elements in Germany. The latter even argued that an honourable Allied peace offer would lead to revolution in Germany and that such an outcome was far more desirable than the acquisition of Germany's East African colonies.⁴⁹

The 'no annexations' debate, like the war aims debate of 20 February, highlighted the ground shared by the different representatives of the Parliamentary dissenting camp. The most conspicuous common bond was the massive amount of faith invested by dissent in the new Russian régime. There was by comparison, a paucity of sympathetic references to Wilson during this debate. Russia was increasingly seen as the vanguard of the search for a negotiated peace. There was also a broad dissenting consensus on the wisdom of open and democratic foreign policies, the futility of war and militarism, and the beneficence of free trade as an agent of a sturdy internationalism. The dissenting speakers all approved the international socialist conference and seemed to think that such a meeting would endorse their peace programme.

Yet the debate did not conceal the divisions within dissent. First, the dissenters were not in complete agreement over the definition of annexation. Some, such as Ponsonby, did not even think any definition was necessary. Second, there were subtle differences between the ILP and

be acceptable if it were called for by neutrals. The neutrals would have to meet first and only then meet each belligerent separately. After this, The Nation stated, a joint sitting might be possible (The Nation, 12 May 1917, p. 130; 19 May 1917, p. 156).

⁴⁸ MacDonald was convinced that, "at the present moment the only great international movement that can begin a real peace movement is the International Socialist Party." Snowden referred to the impending Stockholm event as "the embryo of the parliament of man" (ibid., cols. 1635, 1663).

⁴⁹ Ibid., cols. 1632, 1681, 1682.

Liberal treatments of the question of world government. The ILP members were more vigorous in their support of the International, the Stockholm conference and the Petrograd Soviet than of the putative League of Nations on which many liberal internationalist hopes were pinned. Finally, not all dissenters were captivated by Russia. Buxton, though present during the debate, did not speak in favour of the amendment, nor even vote in the division. It is possible that the debate was UDC-orchestrated and that Buxton chose not to participate for this reason. The more convincing explanation is that Buxton had still not lost faith in President Wilson as the best hope for a negotiated peace. At the time of the 'no annexation' debate Buxton was trying, through the trusted Buckler, to establish a basis for closer co-operation in the Near East between Wilson and Lloyd George.⁵⁰

Though Snowden's amendment was rejected by the large margin of 238 votes to 32, the dissenters believed that the debate would force the Government to modify its war aims position. MacDonald was disappointed by the overall thrust of the Government's parliamentary rebuttal of the Snowden amendment. The ILP leader was encouraged, however, that Lord Robert Cecil had expressed his support for both a neutralized Straits settlement, and a federal constitution for the Habsburg Empire. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had even hinted that the Government might be prepared to redefine its 10 January note in the spirit of 'liberation' rather than 'annexation'. H.N. Brailsford regarded Cecil's speech as the most conciliatory official

⁵⁰ On May 22 Lloyd George had a breakfast meeting with Buxton, Buckler and Commander Pirie-Gordon, former editor of The Near East and currently engaged in secret service work in Salonika. The discussion centered on the details of territorial redistribution in the Balkans and the prospect of detaching Bulgaria from the Central Powers. More significant than the Prime Minister's surprisingly moderate Balkans policy (he wished Austria-Hungary to remain intact) was his frank admission that he already counted Russia out of the war. Moreover, he promised that neither he nor any other Allied leaders would accept a compromise peace on the lines of the Petrograd Formula, which had been formally adopted by the Russian Provisional Government just four days before (Buckler to House, 22 May 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6. See also, Buckler to House, 18 May 1917, Buckler Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 9).

statement to date and that, if peace were struck in such a spirit, there would be few territorial changes. The latter's contention that Cecil was trying to satisfy certain demands of the international socialists, however, seems rather dubious.⁵¹

The dissenters appeared to be making further headway a week after the 'no-annexations' debate when, under questioning from Trevelyan about the poor reception of his statement in Russia, Cecil replied:

I made it clear that British aims in the war were in complete harmony with those of our Russian Allies, and I laid special stress on the fact that our aims and aspirations were dictated solely by our determination to secure a peace founded on national liberty and international amity, and that all imperialistic aims based on force or conquest were completely absent from our programme. I would emphasize the fact that the most recent declaration of the reconstituted Government of Russia is in complete harmony with this policy.⁵²

Morel's U.D.C. believed that Trevelyan's question had elicited from the Government "a notable modification in the hitherto expressed British attitude." Even Snowden, while denying that Cecil had changed tack completely, sensed a significant shift on the Government's part. Cecil had actually discussed terms, and the Government appeared to be admitting that the dissenters had a strong case. In fact, the Government had even said that it agreed with the Russian position, although Snowden thought the 10 January statement and the Petrograd Formula to be poles apart.⁵³ Snowden also made the remarkably prescient point that, notwithstanding the more favourable climate for dissenting ideas, the Government would soon do its utmost to marginalize the dissenting movement.

⁵¹ MacDonald, "The 'No-Annexations' Debate," The U.D.C., June 1917 p. 85; Brailsford, "No Conquests," The Herald, 26 May 1917, p. 7. The Nation also drew encouragement from Cecil's 16 May speech ("The Peace of the Peoples," The Nation, 19 May 1917, p. 154).

⁵² PD (Commons), 23 May 1917, 93, col. 2274.

⁵³ "A Step Nearer towards Peace and a Tribute to the Statesmanship of the Union of Democratic Control," The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 86; The Labour Leader, 31 May 1917, p. 1.

The bitter attacks they made upon us arise from the fact that they know our advocacy of peace is gaining adherents rapidly, and that before long the Government will have to surrender to the popular demand to end the war. Their policy, in view of this, is to try to discredit us, and to cover their retreat to the peace Party in the near future by creating the impression that those who have opposed the war, and who, when the cause was unpopular, demanded peace by negotiations are untrustworthy guides to follow.⁵⁴

Indeed, the pro-war press condemned Snowden and the debate. The New Statesman derided Snowden, stating that "to denounce the proclaimed and obvious aims of the Allies as aggressive, and their territorial policy as a policy of grab, is to betray a degree of suspicious prejudice which amounts almost to a disease." The Times' response was less vitriolic, but no more supportive when it said "the tone of Mr. Snowden's speech made dispassionate discussion difficult," followed by "he could find nothing too vile to say of the [10 January] note." The daily newspaper concluded that Cecil had presented an admirable defence of British policy.⁵⁵

On 29 May MacDonald met privately with Angell, Morel, Trevelyan, Ponsonby, Massingham, Hobson, and Brailsford to discuss the Russian Revolution. Whereas Lloyd George appears to have calculated that the Allied war effort could withstand the blow of Russia's withdrawal, the dissenters anticipated, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that a Russian departure would foster European-wide revolution. MacDonald hoped that Kerensky would be able to end the war and that, if he could, real international democracy might be established.⁵⁶ Morel was one of the more fervent supporters of following the Russian example. After May 1917, when the Provisional Government moved toward the left, a shift that can be said to usher in the third phase, his writings adopted a distinctly revolutionary edge, his Liberal-Radical idioms

⁵⁴ The Labour Leader, 24 May 1917, p. 1.

⁵⁵ The New Statesman, 19 May 1917, p. 146; The Times, 17 May 1917, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 207. According to Arno Mayer, in light of America's insignificant military weight before 1918, "Russia continued to be a vital military and economic factor in "stalemated" Europe," (The Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, p. 66).

being replaced by a new quasi-Marxist vocabulary. The war was a struggle between internationalism and slavery, by which Morel meant the oppressive and dangerous forces of capitalism and nationalism. Of all the belligerent states, only Russia was heading in the appropriate, internationalist direction.

To-day mankind is sundered between two opposing ideas struggling for mastery—the idea of a material victory, and the idea of a moral victory. The former is still in the ascendant, and the war goes on.

Internationalism or Slavery? That is the supreme issue, and if mankind cannot decide it by evolution, it will have to decide it by revolution.⁵⁷

MacDonald, showing the sort of pragmatism which would later make him a pariah within the Labour Party, also continued to press for a revision of British war aims. In a speech in Swansea on 22 May, he made the claim, surprising for a dissenter, that nothing could be worse than a peace based on war-weariness. Such a peace would leave the country's objectives unfulfilled. He argued instead for a set of clearly stated war aims, not peace aims, to which both people and Government could agree. These war aims should promote "liberation" in a general sense, but the only territory to be freed would be that which had changed hands since 1914. Britain's basic goals were the restoration of an independent Belgium, the extension of democracy "in the important powers of Europe," as a guarantee against a recurrence of aggression, and the establishment of an international "League of the Democratic Organization of Parliaments," guided by popular opinion.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ E.D. Morel, Thoughts on the War: The Peace and Prison (Westminster, 1920), pp. 47-49. This article was originally published in The Labour Leader, 31 May 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁸ H. Hessel Tiltman, J. Ramsay MacDonald Labor's Man of Destiny (New York, 1929), pp. 112, 113.

Conclusion

The period from the beginning of April to the end of May marks the widening of the peace-by-negotiation movement from its relatively narrow and exclusively dissenting origins into a larger, more diverse force. The most significant and hopeful sign for dissent during these two months was the growth of foreign support for a negotiated and lenient peace. In requesting Congressional approval for a declaration of war, Wilson also pledged the United States to a moderate peace. Events in Russia provided a second external stimulus to dissenting efforts. The Provisional Government's formal adoption of the Petrograd Formula in the second half of May was the most important foreign pronouncement from the perspective of the British pro-negotiation forces. It defined for the dissenters the central purpose of the Russian Revolution and created the image of an unaggressive, anti-war revolutionary Russia which was to remain with the dissenters throughout the inter-war years. Indeed, for many dissenters the Petrograd Formula and the Russian Revolution became synonymous.

The dissenters could also be optimistic about their domestic progress. While the British Government did not appear to be embracing the Russian position, the dissenters could still look to the 14 May League of Nations Society meeting, to the respectful hearing given dissenting MPs on 16 May and to Lord Robert Cecil's official statements, as evidence that their strategy of persuasion was gradually succeeding. Furthermore, in light of acute working class social and economic grievances, it was not entirely fanciful to presume that links could be forged between discontented labour and the pro-negotiation movement. The Nation thought that "the fire is kindled; in a few weeks or months it will run from shore to shore and destroy the entire resisting fabric of ambition and purely nationalistic interest."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ "The Peace of the Peoples," The Nation, 19 May 1917, p. 156.

From June until August the peace-by-negotiation campaign would reach a peak of intensity. But not all developments favoured the dissenters. The fear that American intervention would adversely affect Wilson's moderate position would soon become more widespread and justified. The power of the Petrograd Soviet, while to many dissenters a good sign, would ultimately undermine not only the Provisional Government but also the dissenters' chances of persuading both the British Government and the Labour Party to emulate Russia's foreign policy initiatives. The rapid weakening of the Russian war effort undercut the dissenters by upsetting the military stalemate that was an essential precondition of a negotiated peace. Ironically, the same Russian Revolution which seemed to hold such promise for supporters of a negotiated settlement, actually strengthened the hand of those who sought a knock-out blow through massive American involvement. On the Home Front, the Government resolved to soothe the most potentially explosive working class grievances and was largely successful in preventing the dreaded fusion of peace and labour movements. At a superficial level, the new-found moderation on war aims of various non-dissenting politicians represented an enormous boost for the peace-by-negotiation forces. As 1917 progressed, however, these governmental and labour movement figures began to challenge dissent's guardianship of progressive foreign policy ideas. Moreover, the destination of these new moderates was very different from the one to which dissenters like Ponsonby, Morel and MacDonald were heading.

Chapter 4: DISSENT'S FALSE DAWN—JUNE 1917 TO AUGUST 1917

Introduction

The British peace-by-negotiation campaign peaked during the summer of 1917. "As the last great wave [Imperialism] culminated in a world war," observed an unsigned article in The Tribunal, "so must this wave culminate in world peace."¹ The mouthpiece of the CO movement was not the only organ of dissenting opinion that was moved to strike such a note of optimism early in June 1917. Nearly every dissenting body and journal had been buoyed by the Provisional Government's conversion to the Petrograd Formula and by the May Strikes in Britain. In the summer of 1917 the ranks of the pro-negotiation forces were still comparatively thin. Although only a small minority of the British people as a whole, the proponents of a negotiated settlement seemed, however, to be growing as a result of the Russian Revolution.

Early in June dissenting hopes were further boosted by the famous Leeds Convention. This labour-pacifist meeting seemed to confirm that a broadly based, unified peace-by-negotiation movement was, indeed, taking shape. Leeds reinforced the dissenters' belief that their movement for peace had gained momentum since the official Russian endorsement of the Petrograd Formula. Their confidence was sustained by the Reichstag Resolution of 19 July 1917 which, they were convinced, signified Germany's acceptance of the Russian peace plan. The German resolution, like the Petrograd Formula before, provided another valuable external stimulus to the dissenters' own campaign to transform the British Government's war aims. Dissent's position was also

¹ "Leeds and Revolution," The Tribunal, 7 June 1917, p. 1.

bolstered when Arthur Henderson, leader of the pro-war Labour majority, decided to embrace the Russian peace proposals. After Henderson persuaded a special party conference to endorse the planned meeting of European socialists at Stockholm, it appeared that British labour was indeed abandoning its hitherto entrenched anti-negotiation stance.

Paradoxically, as dissenting hopes were rising, their position was being eroded by five separate but related developments, each of which will be examined during the course of this chapter. First, the dissenters sensed that the internal difficulties of the Provisional Government threatened to result in a separate Russian peace--a peace that would jeopardize all their efforts to achieve a balanced and durable settlement. These concerns were heightened by the Allies' unwillingness to adopt the Petrograd Formula. Second, the dissenters were distressed by Wilson's refusal to adopt the Petrograd Formula and by his apparent acceptance of the need for outright military victory. Third, the peace-by-negotiation movement was further weakened by the propaganda and repressive measures of the British Government. Fourth, the apparent conversion of the Labour Party to a negotiated settlement was somewhat illusory given that the special conference of 10 August expressly excluded anti-war socialists from the list of delegates eligible for the Stockholm meeting. Dissenters were now being attacked by a more determined Government and rejected, or at least disregarded, by a labour mainstream which remained committed to winning the war before negotiating with the enemy. Finally, the British strategic situation seemed to be improving in the summer of 1917. The limited and moderately successful offensive at Messines in June was followed on 31 July by the launching of the much grander Passchendaele offensive, or Third Ypres. More importantly, the institution of the convoy system in the North Atlantic enabled the Allies to counteract with increasing effectiveness the German U-boat threat.

The Leeds Convention: Peace by Revolution?

The Leeds Convention was undoubtedly the most significant anti-war meeting between 1914 and 1918. Although the May Strikes had provided sufficient reason for dissenters to convene at Leeds, the meeting was called principally to celebrate the Russian Revolution. The organizers had been so elated by the Albert Hall meeting of 31 March that Leeds seemed like a logical sequel.² The conference was organized by the United Socialist Council (USC), a joint ILP-BSP group. By dissenting standards, the meeting was well attended, attracting nearly 1200 people even without the Labour Party's stamp of approval.³ The thirteen convenors of the conference represented the heart of anti-war Labour: Alexander, Ammon, Anderson, Despard, Fairchild, Fineberg, Jowett, Lansbury, Quelch, Smillie, and Williams. Inkipin and Johnson were the Joint Secretaries of the Convention. Mann, Russell, Pethick-Lawrence, Gallacher and Maxton were among the other dissenting luminaries involved with the conference.⁴ According to Alan Bullock, the conference offered "a preview of the British Left between the wars, anarchical,

² "What Happened at Leeds," The Herald, 9 June 1917, p. 8. F. Seymour Cocks MP (and UDC member) made the connection somewhat less explicitly. The Albert Hall demonstration, he said, was the first example of the "British Democracy" awakening and the Leeds Convention, the second ("The Leeds Conference," The U.D.C., July 1917, p. 103).

³ Stephen White, "Soviets in Britain: The Leeds Convention of 1917," International Review of Social History 19 (1974), p. 170; Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 209; Graubard, British Labour, p. 36.

⁴ What Happened at Leeds, p. 18. H. Alexander was the National Treasurer of the BSP; Charles G. Ammon was a leading NCF member; Catherine Despard was the President of the Women's Freedom League. J. Fineberg and E.C. Fairchild were on the executive of the BSP, to which body Tom Quelch and Albert Inkipin also belonged. Robert Smillie was the President of the Miners' Federation and Robert Williams was President of the Transport Workers' Union. Francis Johnson was attached to the ILP; Sylvia Pankhurst was the most radical member of the famous Suffragist family; Tom Mann was an old pre-war syndicalist; Pethick-Lawrence, a UDC executive member and Willie Gallacher (BSP member and, later, Britain's first Communist MP) was a leader of the Clyde Workers Committee. James Maxton was a prominent post-war ILP leader.

Utopian, already fascinated by and profoundly ignorant of Russian experience."⁵

The Convention discussed four resolutions. MacDonald sponsored the first which congratulated the Russian people for casting off tyranny, for removing "the standing menace of an aggressive imperialism in Eastern Europe" and for taking the lead in emancipating the working class from oppression. The second resolution, moved by Snowden and seconded by Fairchild, applauded the Russian Government for adopting the Petrograd Formula. The motion also called upon the British Government to match Russia's offer of a just settlement to the conflict. The third motion, from Ammon and Despard, called for the British Government to adopt the Russian Charter of Freedom of 15 March. The fourth and most controversial resolution, moved by Anderson and seconded by Williams, called on the "constituent bodies" of the Convention to establish Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils to "work strenuously for a peace made by the peoples of the various countries, and for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour." Even more forcefully, the resolution intended these Councils to "resist every encroachment upon industrial and civil liberty."⁶

The text of the fourth resolution has provoked significant historical debate. Stephen Graubard has argued that the resolution envisaged "extraparliamentary Soviets with sovereign powers." Jo Vellacott, however, maintains that, although the wording was imported from Russia, the proposed councils were not conceived as instruments of revolution. Her principal contention is that all the resolutions were essentially moderate and reformist. The substance of even the contentious fourth resolution, for example, addressed such mundane matters as the welfare of soldiers and their dependents. Along similar lines, Stephen White has argued that both the fourth resolution in particular and Leeds in general are "better understood in a pacifist than a

⁵ Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, pp. 74-75.

⁶ The Herald, 9 June 1917, pp. 9-11.

revolutionary perspective." The intended creation of British Soviets was not a challenge to the authority of the British state. Rather, the Convention reflected an undoubtedly provocative, but not revolutionary, "opposition to the continuation of the war for a 'knock out' victory which was becoming increasingly manifest through 1917."⁷

The conference resolutions were actually the product of a variety of frustrations. Williams, for example, supported the motions for socialist not pacifist reasons. He called for an immediate dictatorship of the proletariat and brushed aside questions of constitutionality.⁸ The Tribunal reported that the "keynotes of the Conference were Revolution and Internationalism." The International was the only power capable of giving Europe "a permanent and democratic peace." The correspondent also embraced revolution but, in keeping with the pacifism of the NCF, this was to be a non-violent revolution effected by destroying the "inertia of the great mass of the people." Indeed, Russell was very enthusiastic about the resolutions because he saw the possibility of a bloodless revolution "to bring the reign of violence to an end."⁹ Snowden hoped that Leeds would result in the fulfilment of both broad and narrow objectives: the promotion of peace, the protection of civil liberties and of trade unionism as well as the control of profiteering in foodstuffs and the promotion of veterans' welfare. He saw the Convention as a sign that British opinion now opposed a fight-to-the-finish and even asserted that the pro-war union leaders could no longer claim to speak on behalf of British labour as a whole. The Herald regarded the main purpose of Leeds as the overthrow of tyrannical governmental regulations instituted since

⁷ Graubard, British Labour, p. 39; Vellacott, Bertrand Russell, p. 163; White, "Soviets in Britain," p. 166.

⁸ "What Happened at Leeds," The Herald, 9 June 1917, p. 8.

⁹ "Leeds and Revolution," The Tribunal, 7 June 1917, p. 1; R.A. Rempel, "Pacifism and Revolution: Bertrand Russell and Russia, 1914-1920," in The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective, ed. Harvey L. Dyck, (Toronto, 1996), p. 353.

the onset of war and the institution of a "people's peace" on the lines of the Petrograd Formula.¹⁰ Alongside these 'moderate' conclusions there was also a potentially revolutionary edge, for example, to W.C. Anderson's demand for the creation of British Soviets and for a peace to be made by the "people," and not by union bosses and an oligarchic War Cabinet. The ambiguous impression left by the Convention adds weight to Stephen Graubard's contention that rank and file labour responded warmly to Leeds only because it knew little of Russia or of the plan for British Soviets.¹¹ If The Herald's correspondent was right to view Leeds as a sequel to the Albert Hall meeting, then the connecting thread was surely belief in Russia as a symbol of freedom. Different delegates, however, placed different constructions on the word "freedom."

Perhaps because of the ambiguous nature of the conference resolutions, the Convention was seen by its participants as an unmitigated success. The assumption that peace-by-negotiation sentiment was growing was never more widespread in dissenting circles than in the summer of 1917. "Even some of the most vigorous of the U.D.C.'s critics," wrote Morel, "are beginning to realize that the U.D.C. programme and the U.D.C. programme alone can save this country from ultimate ruin." Even The Nation, far less strident than Morel, also held that support for a negotiated peace was growing, in the army, the civilian population and the intelligentsia as well.¹² Even though Leeds was but an *ad hoc* gathering of only seemingly united fringe caucuses, dissenters regarded the meeting as a pivotal event. They believed that the Convention was truly representative, as Snowden summed up, "of all sections of the Labour and Socialist movement and all shades of Democratic opinion." The same flawed assessment is implicit in

¹⁰ Cross, Philip Snowden (London, 1966), p. 158; The Labour Leader, 7 June 1917, p. 1; "Leeds Leads: Who Follows?," The Herald, 9 June 1917, p. 7.

¹¹ Graubard, British Labour, p. 40.

¹² The U.D.C., July 1917, p. 102; "A Time-Limit to the War," The Nation, 30 June 1917, p. 312.

Stephen Graubard's description of the Convention as "a characteristic expression of British Labour sentiment in the summer of 1917."¹³

The view that Leeds was all inclusive was skewed, however, by Snowden's and other dissenters' profound underestimation of the enduring power and influence of the pro-war union leaders who had boycotted Leeds and of Labour Party insiders like Henderson.¹⁴ The dissenters were also wrong in concluding that Leeds provided a mirror of working-class sentiment generally or even dissenting opinion. The UDC was not officially present at Leeds though the extent of UDC participation was blurred because of the involvement of many prominent ILP/UDC members, particularly MacDonald and Snowden. Indeed, some UDC members such as Morel were not at Leeds but were very supportive. Others, namely Ponsonby, were not present at the Convention and were less obvious in their endorsement of Leeds. Many non-UDC dissenters emulated Buxton and remained silent on the subject of British Soviets, preferring to press for more backing from Wilson.

Leeds did not voice the sentiments of British labour but merely those of the peace-by-negotiation enthusiasts who looked to Russia for support and inspiration. In fact, Leeds provided a perfect illustration of the incestuous nature of dissent. British dissent was a small but amorphous grouping of people who shared many of the same hopes, who were in constant contact with each other, and who read each other's articles in the same newspapers, convincing themselves that their dissenting viewpoint was gaining ground. It is hardly surprising, then, that those who had attended Leeds departed with illusions of an unshakeable dissenting-labour unity and an unstoppable momentum for a peace without victory. According to Snowden's biographer, however, the Leeds Convention is more appropriately labelled as "one of the great pseudo-events

¹³ Graubard, British Labour. p. 40.

¹⁴ The Labour Leader, 7 June 1917, p. 1.

of British left-wing history."¹⁵

So, Leeds probably does not warrant the mythical standing it has sometimes achieved in traditional labour historiography. But the Convention was nonetheless of considerable importance to the history of wartime dissent, first, merely by virtue of the (albeit misplaced) optimism which the meeting reflected and generated. Second, the motions meant different things to different participants, although many who were present on 3 June did not realize that these conflicting interpretations could be placed on the conference resolutions. Thus, the peace-by-negotiation movement entered the crucial summer of 1917 with a unity that was more apparent than real. Third, as we shall see immediately below, the Leeds Convention frightened the British Government into a much tougher stand against organized dissent.

After Leeds

Despite the "mentally drunk"¹⁶ mood induced by the Convention, the dissenters retained sufficient political awareness to try and capitalize immediately on the pro-negotiation momentum to which they believed Leeds had added. Snowden stressed that the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils would have to be established quickly, lest "the decisions of the Convention...become farcical." He seemed to have sensed that the moment of opportunity would be short-lived and the imperative importance of channelling the pro-negotiation, pro-Russian tide now that it had peaked. The Herald, by detecting the "promise of action" behind the conference resolutions, also

¹⁵ Cross, Philip Snowden, p. 158. "Once famous, now long forgotten," observes Alan Bullock of the Convention in The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, vol. 1, p. 63.

¹⁶ MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, p. 281 (7 June 1917).

understood the importance of moving forward at full speed.¹⁷

As a result of such concerns, a Provisional Committee, composed of the original thirteen sponsors of the Leeds Convention, was hastily set up to organize the establishment of soviets in each of the thirteen districts into which Britain was divided. Each district was to hold an inaugural meeting to select representatives to the Provisional Committee. The National Committee met from 13 to 15 July, while the district meetings were to take place between 28 July and 18 August.¹⁸ Some dissenting groups, however, hesitated to endorse these new bodies. On 27 July, the Executive Council of the UDC resolved to cooperate with the British Soviets only on matters raised by their own foreign policy programme. The National Committee of the NCF voted for future ties with the Soviets only by a narrow margin of six votes to five.¹⁹ The London district meeting, scheduled for 28 July at the Brotherhood Church, Southgate, became a focus of sorts for dissent's post-Leeds euphoria. This gathering of about 250 delegates was violently disrupted by an angry mob of approximately one thousand rioting servicemen and civilians. Most disturbing for dissenters was that this attack, said to be "one of the worst riots in years," seemed to have had the active support of the authorities. Russell observed the "organized" nature of the marauding crowd and noted the distribution of meeting announcements, the attendance of semi-official pro-war organizations and the failure of the police to intervene to protect the conference attendees. Such was the impact that he saw the riot as marking the end

¹⁷ The Labour Leader, 7 June 1917, p. 1; "Leeds Leads: Who Follows?," The Herald, 9 June 1917, p. 7.

¹⁸ Vellacott, Bertrand Russell, p. 166.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 167; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 140.

of his hopes for soviets in Britain.²⁰ Though slightly more successful district meetings were staged in Leicester, Swansea and Norwich, the Brotherhood Church Riot signalled the end of any serious effort to establish British Soviets.²¹

On one level, as Stephen White notes, when the idea of the Petrograd Formula was "absorbed into the attempt to convene the Stockholm Conference...and became that of the Labour Party as a whole, the Councils lost their raison d'être."²² That is, the British Soviet idea had no underlying revolutionary purpose and its pacifist purpose looked likely to be fulfilled by other means. On another level, the mob violence in evidence at Southgate provided a stark reminder to British dissent of the powerful pro-war forces, both official and unofficial, which they still confronted. Subsequently, district conferences in Birmingham and Glasgow were banned under Regulation 9A of DORA, and municipal authorities in Leeds, Manchester and Southampton withheld permission from local dissenters to use council property for the same revolutionary pacifist purpose.²³

Quite apart from incitements to violence against the 'pro-Germans' in the jingo press, the evidence suggests that, at Southgate at least, the authorities connived in manufacturing the serious

²⁰ Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, pp. xxxix-xl, 278; Russell, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" 2 August 1917, in Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 61, pp. 285-286; Vellacott, Bertrand Russell, p. 171. Also see R.A. Rempel, "Pacifism and Revolution: Bertrand Russell and Russia, 1914-1920," p. 356. Ray Monk, in his very recent biography of Russell, emphasizes the very great impact of the 28 July riot on Russell (see Ray Monk, Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921 [London, 1996], pp. 501-502). The Nation also noticed that the meeting was broken up "by an evidently organized mob" and that there was no rebuke from the authorities to the organizers of the riot. The editorial thought that it was bad policy to allow soldiers to interfere with a civilian meeting (The Nation, 4 August 1917, p. 443).

²¹ Vellacott, Bertrand Russell, p. 171; The Herald, 4 August 1917, p. 5; The Nation, 4 August 1917, p. 443.

²² White, "Soviets in Britain," p. 166.

²³ Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," pp. 191-192.

breakdown of public order.²⁴ Ever since Leeds, the Government had been afraid that the dissenters were on the verge of linking their campaign to the gripes of a disgruntled labour rank and file. The War Cabinet had even seriously considered prohibiting the Convention, anxious that such a gathering would spread revolutionary fervour through the ranks of labour and perhaps even those of the army. Already alarmed by the May Strikes, the Government had become even more apprehensive. Lloyd George and his colleagues knew that the organizers of the Convention hoped to link the peace-by-negotiation coalition with disaffected labour militants and, hence, to force the Government to negotiate a settlement.²⁵ Although the meeting was ultimately allowed to proceed the Cabinet decided at the same time "to undertake an active campaign to counteract the pacifist movement."²⁶ One result of this War Cabinet decision was the formation of the National War Aims Committee (NWAC), which "sponsored local meetings at which prominent speakers stressed the necessity of victory and the importance of a unity on the homefront."²⁷ Lloyd George himself launched this new domestic propaganda agency with a speech at the inaugural meeting of the NWAC at the Queen's Hall in London on 4 August.

Revising British War Aims

The dissenters had three overriding and closely related objectives in the aftermath of Leeds. Their first goal was to extract from the British Government at last a revised war aims statement. For the most part, conventional means of mobilizing public and parliamentary opinion were

²⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

²⁵ Wrigley, David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement, p. 197.

²⁶ CAB 23/3/154(22), 5 June 1917.

²⁷ Lorna S. Jaffe, The Decision to Disarm Germany: British Policy towards Postwar German Disarmament, 1914-1919 (Boston, 1985), p. 74.

employed to this end, although the brief and tentative flirtation of some dissenters with the idea of British Soviets can itself be understood as a stratagem for persuading the Government to agree to a more moderate settlement. Second, they wished to prevent the Russians from striking a separate peace with the Central Powers and, third, they endeavoured to convince President Wilson belatedly to back the Petrograd Formula, or, at the very least, to return to his earlier 'peace-without-victory' position. Once these objectives had been secured, it was expected, Germany too would accept the wisdom of a compromise peace.

British dissent's urgent desire to moderate their government's war aims certainly leaps out from Morel's published writings in June and July 1917. Focusing initially on Russia, Morel thought that the revolutionaries faced a dilemma. The leaders were not interested in a separate peace, but they were nonetheless obliged to make peace in order to preserve the Revolution. To that end, Russia had renounced conquest, a magnanimous policy which he believed Germany and Austria-Hungary had matched. He maintained that any rationale for war would completely disappear just as soon as Russia and Austria-Hungary stopped fighting, which was almost the case.²⁸ In effect, the Russian Revolution, by rejecting Russian expansionism, had destroyed the raison d'être of the Junkers. In order to promote the Petrograd Formula, Morel also pointed to the "all Russia" congress which had met in late June. This meeting of all political factions in Russia had resolved that all Europe's rulers were to blame for the War and that any attempt to prevail by a decisive military victory and a punitive peace would only plant the seeds of future conflict. For Morel, the representative nature of this meeting further enhanced Russia's authority as the leading international force for peace.²⁹

In the heady days after Leeds, Morel was even able to write that the Revolution

²⁸ The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 87.

²⁹ Ibid., July 1917, p. 100.

constituted a "new religion" that "Free Russia" was using against "the worship of force." This "new religion" was based on "no conquests, no annexations, no indemnities, no subjugations, no humiliations." There were two roads Britain could take. In one direction was "Destruction," to which policy of the 'knock-out' blow pointed; the other was the route taken by revolutionary Russia towards the peaceful co-existence of nations.

[The] ultimate goal [of this road] is a council of nations, henceforth united in war, cultivating intellect for the enrichment of humanity, turning the gifts of science to the betterment, not the destruction, of mankind; nations free at length to bend their energies upon expelling the devils which cumber their hearths, the devils of social injustice, of poverty and preventable disease...³⁰

Morel castigated the British Government for failing to appreciate that the situation described above was within reach. Britain's political leadership, like Russia's, would have to compromise.

The termination of the war and the future security of the British people, perhaps the future existence of the British Empire, depend upon the British nation compelling their Government to reach the same level of statesmanship [as Russia].

Such compulsion was necessary for two reasons: to assist Russia and to prevent the humiliation of Germany and, hence, another war. Indeed, Germany continued to appear far more flexible than Britain in Morel's writings. He did not blame Germany for failing to issue the war aims statement for which Allied Governments had been pressing since December 1916. Instead, he said that, every time the Germans made an overture, they were insultingly rebuffed and told they would be crushed which, in turn, strengthened their extremists. "The more the situation is studied," he stated, "the more apparent it is that the key to peace is at this moment in London, and not Berlin."³¹

The Herald referred to the Russian Revolution as "a moral and spiritual force of

³⁰ Morel, Thoughts on the War, pp. 31, 32-33.

³¹ Ibid., p 88.

incalculable import."³² In reviewing the Leeds Convention, Lansbury's labour weekly observed that Russia had provided in the Petrograd Formula an unambiguous answer to the puzzle of peace, although one which had yet to be solved by any other country. The Herald called upon Britain to accept the policies affirmed at Leeds. Only if Germany continued to take an imperialistic stand could the current position of the Allies be vindicated and the fighting carried on with a clear conscience.³³ C.P. Trevelyan's review of Morel's Africa and the Peace of Europe can also be seen as part of the dissent's effort to publicize alternatives to British war policy. Before praising Morel's book for supporting the creation of a free trade zone in central and tropical Africa, Trevelyan rather pointedly contrasted the increasingly radical complexion of Russia's Provisional Government with the belligerent inflexibility of Britain's War Cabinet.³⁴

Buxton also entered the fray of the debate to revise British war aims, proposing once again internationalization of the Straits. Although Russia had renounced its earlier claims on Constantinople and had even endorsed internationalization, the other Allies had said nothing. Ultimately, Buxton thought that peace would be fragile if it were based on imperialist claims, for such expansionist policies would only produce fresh conflict.³⁵ Unlike his allies in the UDC, who said that they sought real international reform but who only paid lip service to the world government ideal, Buxton saw the League of Nations as a panacea. He claimed that the plan to create such a body was the main issue of the war:

³² "Our Editor," The Herald, 9 June 1917. p. 2.

³³ "Leeds Leads: Who Follows?," ibid., 9 June 1917, p. 7.

³⁴ Trevelyan, "Vital Problems of the Hour," The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 92.

³⁵ Buxton, "The Destiny of the Turkish Straits," The Contemporary Review, June 1917, vol. III, pp. 679, 682. In this article Buxton went into considerable detail, first examining the precedents for international administration such as that of the Danube and of the Ottoman debt. He also developed at length the physical size of the area to be internationalized. He still wanted any Straits settlement to be guaranteed by the United States.

Such a League, once it is formed, will automatically remove the reasons for national rivalry and intrigue. The Entente claims to be fighting to secure the future peace of Europe, but unless this war results in the establishment of an international league of peace it will have been fought in vain.³⁶

Buxton's next attempt at persuading the Government to assume a pro-negotiation posture was to despatch a detailed memorandum to the Foreign Office, entitled "The Entente and the Allies of Germany." Referring to a recent parliamentary statement by Bonar Law in which the Leader of the House had talked about the "detachment" of Germany from its Allies, Buxton outlined a proposal which he believed would create just such a rift within the Central Powers.³⁷ Ideally, Buxton's detailed and moderate peace plan would entice Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey away from Germany. But the advantage of his scheme, Buxton stressed, was that, at the very least, such Allied overtures would induce Germany to moderate its own war aims out of deference to her allies. The key to peace, he continued, was "to recognize local desires and to frame a settlement on that basis." He suggested that pre-war Austro-Hungarian frontiers be recognized, with the exception of the Trentino. Disgruntled minority nationalities would be assuaged by domestic reforms rather than by the creation of new states. Serbia would receive Montenegro and purchase Spizza.³⁸ Bulgaria would be restored to her former boundaries but

³⁶ Ibid., p. 689.

³⁷ "The Entente and the Allies of Germany," no date, House Papers, Series III, Box 181, Folder 1/94. The Government's copy of the memorandum is in FO 371/3083/138609 and was received on 12 July 1917. Buckler also sent it to House on 26 July (Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 3) and, according to Victor Rothwell, "to as many public figures he could reach on the future settlement in eastern Europe" (British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 118). Bonar Law had stated in the House of Commons on 14 May that "no blow would seem so fatal to the Germans as the detachment of one of their allies" (PD [Commons], 14 May 1917, 93, col. 1374).

³⁸ In typical dissenting fashion Buxton espoused the virtues of national self-determination but then called for the forcible transfer of Spizza and its population to Serbia. Buxton was aware of the contradiction but wanted to bridge the gap between the Government's position that some territorial changes were necessary and radical dissenting advocacy of an undiluted nationality principle.

would have to withdraw from Serbia. Salonika would be internationalized, and Romania and Transylvania would achieve autonomy. Alternatively, the Entente could encourage Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary to put forth their own terms through American diplomatic channels.

Buxton was trying to strike a balance between Allied victory and an early, reasonable and lasting peace. Although he knew that achieving a mutually acceptable solution would be difficult, he believed that his plan provided a viable alternative to the fight-to-the-finish policy. His memorandum exemplifies the more pragmatic side of dissent, as opposed to the movement's visionary idealism. Schooled in the bloody ethnic rivalries of the Balkans, he knew that a settlement which permitted unbridled national self-determination would be unworkable. Buxton was adamant that a reformed and partially reconstructed Habsburg Empire must be preserved, although he appreciated that some of its territory would have to be redistributed on ethnic or economic grounds to satisfy the most intractable nationalist grievances. He was keenly aware that his memorandum would be greeted with scepticism by the Government and tried to anticipate their criticisms by defending his separate peace plan as a sensible, practical approach to a potentially insoluble problem.³⁹

The Fate of Russia

As they were pushing the Government towards a less inflexible position, the dissenters were also exhibiting their concern over the possibility of a separate Russian peace. With Russia out of the

³⁹ Ibid. Buxton's fears were duly confirmed. His memo was dismissed by Robert Cecil who informed his Cabinet colleagues that "This scheme would not content Bulgaria, would complete the demoralization of Serbia, and would play into the hand of Germany and the magyars in Austria-Hungary." The memorandum was evaluated by Leo Amery, an enthusiastic imperialist, Conservative MP and junior member of the Government. He rejected it but added that Buxton's proposals "are far more likely to be acceptable to the Powers concerned than any which have yet been suggested in any quarter." For Cecil's observations and Amery's report, see FO 371/3083/138609.

war the preconditions of a Petrograd-type peace would be irretrievably undermined. Even before Leeds, Lord Robert Cecil had been able to report to the Prime Minister that MacDonald "regarded a separate peace with absolute horror, as it would mean the destruction of every thing he cared for in Europe, and he would do his utmost to prevent the Russians taking such a step."⁴⁰ The UDC worried that the Government would lose its chance of assisting Russia.

Our chief desire now lies in the hope that the conversion may be rapid enough to prevent the Lloyd-George-Milner-Northcliffe combination from leading the country into disaster, which the continued mishandling of the Russian situation is only too likely to do if it is persisted in much longer.

If the Government helped Russia and if the Russians did not sign a separate peace, The U.D.C. announced, "the principles of the Russian democracy as to the termination of the war must prevail in this country."⁴¹ The Nation maintained that without a revised Allied war aims statement, Russia was bound to opt for a separate peace. Bertrand Russell affirmed that "all parties...are united in hoping that the Russians will not make a separate peace" because 'pacifists' needed Russia to help make peace.⁴²

To win further approval of the Petrograd Formula and also to lend support to Russia, the dissenters formulated proposals which they believed were congruent with both the Provisional Government's peace plan and Britain's fundamental war aims. On 2 July the UDC issued a detailed blueprint for a negotiated settlement which focused on territorial change, the League of Nations, open diplomacy, disarmament and reparations.⁴³ Other MPs tried to bolster the

⁴⁰ Lord Robert Cecil to Lloyd George, 29 May 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/163/3/3.

⁴¹ The U.D.C., July 1917, p. 102.

⁴² "The Revision of War-Aims," The Nation, 23 June 1917, p. 288; Russell, "The Price of Vengeance," 21 June 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 44, pp. 189-190.

⁴³ For the full manifesto, see Appendix C. For pro-war labour criticisms of the UDC proposals, see The New Statesman, 7 July 1917, p. 915.

Provisional Government with a non-parliamentary show of support. They published open letters both to the Provisional Government and to the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' delegates, expressing their pleasure at the success of the Revolution and announcing their complete agreement with the 9 April statement. As if to reassure the Russian Government and to encourage its continued participation in the war until a just peace was secured, the MPs promised to urge Britain to adopt the Russian policy in full. The letter also assured the Provisional Government that British newspapers did not reflect the views of the British public as a whole on the Russian Revolution.⁴⁴ The second letter to the Soviet was signed by the "Radical and Socialist members of the British House of Commons." Praising the work of the Soviet, especially its 15 March Declaration, the MPs tried to create an impression that Britain would adopt the Petrograd Formula:

Your example will make our own efforts incomparably easier in demanding a settlement which shall not be based on mere conquest, but upon national desires, and which shall lay the foundation for a League of Nations to secure the peace of the world.⁴⁵

Following his aborted trip to Russia early in June, MacDonald wrote to the Petrograd Soviet independently, telling them, presumably, what he had intended to say in person.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Open Letter to the Provisional Government from the House of Commons," The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 96. The letter was signed by thirty-one MPs, including Buxton, MacDonald, Ponsonby, Snowden and Trevelyan.

⁴⁵ "To the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, Petrograd," The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 96. Percy Alden, Sydney Arnold, Joseph Bliss, W. Clough, F.W. Gladstone, Richard Holt and Arnold Rowntree signed the letter to the Provisional Government but not the letter to the Soviet. There were twenty-five signatories in all to the second letter. Philip Morrell was the only MP to sign the second but not the first communication.

⁴⁶ MacDonald had planned to go to Russia to learn more about the Revolution and to convince the Provisional Government that British dissent was close to securing a revision of its Government's war aims. Arriving in Aberdeen on 10 June, however, the ILP leader was prevented from boarding the Petrograd-bound vessel by a ship's crew acting at the behest of the jingoistic leader of the Seamen's and Firemen's Union, Havelock Wilson. See Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, pp. 213-215.

Echoing his allies in the Commons, MacDonald too spoke of the immense contribution which the Soviet had made to the burgeoning peace-by-negotiation movement. But, he also expressed concern over the future direction of Russian policy.

The thought of a separate peace, which not only in Germany but in other lands would mean the establishment of militarism and the acceptance of imperial conquest, is alien and offensive. We strive, not so much for the mere ending of the war as for the bringing of peace to Europe...⁴⁷

MacDonald's correspondence conveyed a certain dissenting disquiet over the ambiguities of the Petrograd Formula. He told the Soviet that it was necessary to tell oppressed peoples "who wish to be free that we know who they are, and that we are prepared to support their claims."⁴⁸ In this regard, MacDonald was one of the few dissenters who grasped the dangers of the Petrograd Formula's unclear treatment of such issues as the rights of minority nationalities.⁴⁹ More importantly, the letter reflected MacDonald's fear of a separate peace. His public expressions of support for the Revolution belied his private anxieties about the direction in which it was taking Russian foreign policy. MacDonald's disquiet only added to his sense of urgency that the British Government must quickly be led to the negotiating table. MacDonald and others also wanted to avoid further delay because of Russia's deteriorating military effort. They knew that a Russian collapse would result either in a German victory or, alternatively, the protraction of the present stalemate. In either eventuality, the Allies would be able to ignore Russian sensibilities and the hand of the militarists would be strengthened. In short, the dissenters needed

⁴⁷ MacDonald to the Workmen's and Soldiers' Council, Petrograd, 15 June 1917, PRO 30/69, file 1161.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *The Nation* also had difficulty interpreting the Formula's application to the question of national self-determination. The Russian plan was unacceptable if it sanctioned "transferences of territory which registers nothing but the successful use of force." Any oppressed nationality "which found its allegiance irksome" must be granted some form of redress ("The True Remedy for the War," *The Nation*, 19 May 1917, p. 158).

Russia just as much as Russia needed them.

The dissenters' efforts may have provoked Lloyd George into responding to their calls for a restatement of British war aims. The Prime Minister focused on this theme in his Glasgow speech of 29 June, which began by praising the Russian Revolution for making Allied victory more certain and for easing the struggle for democratic objectives at the peace conference. Lloyd George also proclaimed that Britain was fighting for the same goals as President Wilson and that they would not end the war until these had been achieved. If the dissenters thought that Lloyd George was considering Russian proposals, they were sadly mistaken. The price of a 'German' peace would be servitude, he told his audience. The Prime Minister also derided the Petrograd Formula as "the doctrine of the status quo," stating that "indemnity is an essential part of the mechanism of civilization in every land."⁵⁰

"They Look in Vain": President Wilson's Betrayal of Dissent

Of Lloyd George's speech, The Nation observed that it had been addressed not only to domestic and Russian opinion, but to American as well.⁵¹ The dissenters too had one eye turned towards the United States. In fact, the fervour with which they had been campaigning since June was only partly the product of their post-Leeds euphoria. The perception that President Wilson was abandoning Liberalism in foreign affairs provided a second great motivation. On 26 May Wilson

⁵⁰ Scott, ed., "Address of Prime Minister Lloyd George at Glasgow on Peace Terms," 29 June 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 107-112. Lloyd George also spelt out certain of the details of a future settlement, vowing, for instance, not to return Mesopotamia and Armenia to Turkey on the grounds that these regions were not ethnically Turkish. As regards Germany's colonies, he pledged that native, rather than German, interests would be considered first. He appreciated that the Allies could not force democracy on Germany, but the Allies could make it clear that a better peace would result from the banishment of Prussian militarism.

⁵¹ "A Step on the Road," The Nation, 7 July 1917, p. 340.

replied to the Provisional Government's call for Allied Governments to adopt the Petrograd Formula. His note argued that the German socialists were being exploited by their Government in order for the latter to bolster its authority in the face of a worsening war situation. He took a firm line on American war aims:

The meshes of [German] intrigue must be broken, but can not be broken unless the wrongs already done are undone; and adequate measures must be taken to prevent it from ever again being rewoven or repaired.

In other words, Wilson was committed first and foremost to the defeat of Germany. He revealed his sceptical attitude not only to the Petrograd Formula but also to the entire thrust of Russian foreign policy. "We ought not consider remedies," he said, "merely because they have a pleasing and sonorous sound." Wilson favoured wresting territory from the enemy if its inhabitants so wished and also supported indemnities "for manifest wrongs done." In a striking departure from his earlier 'peace-without-victory' position, Wilson continued:

The day has come to conquer or submit. If the forces of autocracy can divide us, they will overcome us; if we stand together, victory is certain and the liberty which victory will secure. We can then afford to be generous...⁵²

The dissenting reaction to Wilson's note indicates further their growing disillusionment with the American President since his institution of armed neutrality in March 1917. Snowden was concerned that "war fever seems to have attacked many Americans very badly." He wanted to believe that Wilson's actions on the Home Front were designed to effect an early peace but,

⁵² Scott, ed., "Message from President Wilson to Russia on the Occasion of the Visit of the American Mission," 9 June 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 104-106. The British replied to the Russian Note on 11 June, professing to be in agreement with the Russian Government and denying that Britain had entered the war for conquest. Britain was not fighting for selfish aims but for the liberation of Belgium, respect for international agreements and, more recently, the liberation of oppressed peoples. The British Government believed that secret treaties were in conformity with "the principles laid down by President Wilson in his historic message to Congress" (Scott, ed., "Reply of the British Government to a Russian Note in regard to Allied War Aims and their Revision," 11 June 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 106). The British reply did not specify which address to Congress, but it was probably Wilson's 2 April call for a declaration of war.

he added, "the evidence on which to do so is not at all convincing." In particular, the introduction of conscription in the United States was hardly consistent with the above objective.⁵³ Criticizing Wilson directly, Snowden stated that, if the President now insisted upon the overthrow of the Hohenzollerns prior to any peace agreement then "he has taken a step which indicates that he is not a statesman, but an amateur in practical politics."⁵⁴ In discussing the evolution of American war aims, The Herald noted that "President Wilson too, has suffered a change." Not only did the institution of conscription without a conscience clause deprive Wilson of the right to protest Prussianism, but the principle of national self-determination now appeared to have different implications for the Central Powers on the one hand, and the Entente on the other. Lansbury commented sardonically upon the speed of Wilson's transformation from "peace without victory" to "conquer or...submit."⁵⁵

If Snowden was disappointed by Wilson's apparent insistence on the destruction of the German dynasty, then the latter's Flag Day speech of 14 June could only have confirmed the ILP figure's worst fears. Particularly galling for Snowden must have been Wilson's denunciation of the Stockholm Conference as a tool "to deceive all those who throughout the world stand for the rights of peoples and the self-government of nations."⁵⁶ Reviewing why the United States had entered the war, Wilson concluded that "the extraordinary insults and aggressions of the Imperial

⁵³ The Labour Leader, 7 June 1917, p. 1. On the dismay which the latter decision engendered inside the British dissenting camp, see also The Herald, 9 June 1917, p. 2; The Tribunal, 23 August 1917, p. 2. In his weekly editorial in the latter publication, Lansbury wrote that "we shall await with interest an explanation from President Wilson of how the conscription of unwilling Americans to support the war aims of European Powers is reconcilable in his philosophy with principles of freedom and democracy." For background to the conscription controversy in the United States, see Knock, To End All Wars, p. 122.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "The World at Stake," The Herald, 16 June 1917, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Clements, Woodrow Wilson, p. 168.

German Government left us no self-respecting choice." He further displayed his belligerent anti-Germanism in blaming the Imperial Government for filling "our unsuspecting communities with vicious spies and conspirators." The President clearly believed that Germany had long standing plans for conquest, although his enemy remained its Government, not the German people.⁵⁷

Dissenters generally were becoming increasingly doubtful of Wilson's commitment to liberal internationalism. Buxton worried privately that the tough language of the 14 June speech would weaken the supporters of a negotiated settlement. On 26 June, the UDC executive qualified its earlier support for Wilson by adding a preliminary note to Angell's UDC pamphlet on the parallels between Wilson's policy and the UDC programme, stressing "that the leaflet dealt with those utterances of President Wilson with which the U.D.C. is in agreement and no others." By 3 July, the UDC executive had decided to delay the publication of Angell's leaflet.⁵⁸

The British Government might also have contributed to the erosion of Wilson's credibility in dissenting circles. According to Sterling Kernek, the Government too had noticed a significant change in both the substance and tone of Wilson's war aims pronouncements. The Foreign Secretary, A.J. Balfour, even concluded that American and British aims were essentially the same. Consequently, the Government worked to identify British war aims with Wilson's, and Lloyd George's Glasgow speech of 29 June speech can certainly be placed in such a light.⁵⁹ But Wilson had not forfeited all his Radical credentials. Many dissenters still hoped that the American President would lead them from war. They alleged that his recent actions had been forced upon him by the intransigence of his Allies. There was a flurry of contact between

⁵⁷ President Wilson's State Papers and Addresses (New York, 1918), pp. 412-415.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 137, 138; Buxton and Whitehouse to House, 28 June 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730.

⁵⁹ Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, pp. 51-52, 44.

dissenters, anxious that the President cease to be manacled by Allied pressure, and sympathetic members of Wilson's entourage in the second half of June. The meetings and correspondence were the 'behind-the-scenes' counterpart of the dissenters' public campaigning.

The dissenters pressed Wilson to support Russian foreign policy, or at least to continue pushing his own brand of liberal internationalism. Via Colonel House, Buxton and Whitehouse urged the President, whom they still viewed as the only man capable of brokering a fair peace, to take action on the basis of his 22 January address. Should the Allies accept the proposals of the Provisional Government and issue a new statement of war aims, they believed, then a negotiated settlement was distinctly possible.⁶⁰ Also, on 28 June Trevelyan wrote to Buckler, identifying the United States with Russia and stressing that Wilson could "compel" the Allies to accept "his policy" of renouncing all conquest. Trevelyan wanted Wilson to use the Allied dependency on American military might as a moderating influence on Allied war aims. He was no doubt aware that if Wilson failed to moderate Allied war aims then American intervention would only strengthen the fight-to-the-finish forces.⁶¹ Trevelyan associated Wilson's policy very closely with the "proper kind of peace" and went so far as to express his "deep-seated confidence in President Wilson." At the same time he struck a warning note.

But I see a danger of one of the most tragic reverses in history if he finds himself isolated with the Western European powers who have not adopted his policy, and sees Russia, which has adopted it, forced into anarchy or a separate peace by its inability to get more than insincere phrases from the other Allies. The President can't afford to assume indefinitely that Russia and Great Britain mean the same thing. They do not. And he will have to choose.⁶²

⁶⁰ Buxton and Whitehouse to House, 28 June 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730.

⁶¹ Trevelyan admitted that it "may be true still that [Wilson] can't force Germany to reason except by fighting."

⁶² Extract of Letter from Trevelyan to Buckler, 28 June 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6. Trevelyan's prescient message was passed from Buckler to House.

Morel's July editorial in The U.D.C. was also indicative of the confusion surrounding Wilson in dissenting ranks. Having previously stressed the close connection between Wilson's foreign policy, the Petrograd Formula and the UDC programme, Morel could now only state that "free" Russia was endorsing Wilson's previous programme. The editorial expressed its outright contempt for Wilson, in saying that the President could not erase his earlier endorsement of the UDC programme.⁶³ Morel clearly voiced the UDC's disillusionment with Wilson even as he hoped to transfer some of the President's lost credibility to the Russian peace plan.

Any lingering dissenting hope that Wilson would still force a negotiated peace was more or less completely extinguished by mid-August. The depth of disappointment was graphically illustrated by MacDonald who wrote to Buckler about the effects on Britain of America's entry into the war. A minority of dissenters had opposed American intervention, the ILP leader had remarked, because of the enhanced prospects for peace that the continued neutrality of the United States would have ensured. MacDonald clearly articulated dissent's growing disapproval of the recent drift of Wilson's foreign and domestic policies.

Amongst political sections mis-called 'pacifist' President Wilson's recent pronouncements have been regarded with disappointment and they are interpreted here by all sections as marking a complete reversal of his old views regarding the war and its settlement...⁶⁴

MacDonald wanted Wilson to issue a public reiteration of his view that military force could only achieve certain political goals and that true peace could only come without victory. He also

⁶³ The U.D.C., July 1917, p. 102. It was official UDC policy that the Petrograd Formula was synonymous with UDC policy. To reinforce this perceived link, the July edition of The U.D.C. announced the release of a new UDC leaflet. It was entitled "Free Russia and the Union of Democratic Control" and presented extracts of Russian and UDC statements to show that there was "identity in principle" ("U.D.C. Literature," The U.D.C., July 1917, p. 105). See "Free Russia and the Union of Democratic Control," UDC Leaflet 37B, (London, 1917), passim.

⁶⁴ MacDonald to Buckler, 17 August 1917, Buckler Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 5. This record of the meeting was written up at Buckler's request, who then forwarded it to House on 21 August (Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 7).

pressed Wilson to allow American socialist participation at the impending conference of the "international movement" in Stockholm.

Despite MacDonald's expectation that Wilson's damaged credibility would ultimately be restored, the record of his conversation with Buckler captures with utmost clarity British dissent's almost complete loss of faith in the American President.

They look in vain for indications that Mr. Wilson is still aware that this war will have to be settled by political agreement, however long it is fought, and are in consequence driven to the conclusion that the effect upon Europe of America's entry into the war has been to strengthen aggressive Jingoism and to set back the moral and political movements that had become strong in consequence of the Russian revolution.⁶⁵

The weight of despair carried by the phrase, "they look in vain" was heavy indeed. When Wilson withheld passports from American socialists wishing to travel to Stockholm, the dissenters' sense of abandonment by the President was only heightened further.

Attempts at 'reaching' Wilson were not confined to those who supported Leeds. On 12 June Buckler reported to House that he had recently met Buxton, Massingham, Whitehouse, and Richard Holt, who all wanted the United States to help elicit from Britain a restatement of war aims along Russian lines. Just over a week later, Buckler referred to the continuing pressure exerted by the same four moderate dissenters for a "full restatement of British war aims."⁶⁶ Perhaps to spur on the United States Government, Buxton passed on to Buckler a draft of his "Decisive Settlement Committee" leaflet.⁶⁷ This document demonstrates Buxton's penchant for producing settlement proposals which acknowledged German responsibility for the war but

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Buckler to House, 12 June 1917; 21 June 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6.

⁶⁷ "Draft of the Decisive Settlement Committee," Buckler Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 7A. Buckler forwarded this proposal to House on 14 June 1917 (Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6). See Appendix D for the "Decisive Settlement Committee" draft.

without completely disregarding the "no-annexation" thrust of the Petrograd Formula. Buxton was attempting to bridge the gap between British dissent and their Government, while still adhering to the essentials of the Russian proposals.⁶⁸ Late in June Buxton and Whitehouse called on Wilson to endorse a 'Russian' war aims statement and to draft peace proposals with a view to stimulating negotiations. This was, after all, only what Wilson had earlier urged, they said. They noted how the President's recent speeches had undermined pro-negotiation forces in Britain and Germany. Nonetheless, Wilson ought to drag the European powers towards a "rational diplomacy," while his influence remained strong.⁶⁹

Although Buxton and other dissenters even less visible and more distant from the UDC-ILP nexus than he, many continued to cling onto the hope that Wilson had not deserted them entirely. Dissent's more general change of heart about Wilson obviously worried Colonel House. He even asked Buckler to reassure "our liberal friends...that when the time comes for action, they will find him [Wilson] on the right side."⁷⁰ The emerging view of Wilson as an apostate provides a recurrent theme of dissenting speeches and writings in the summer of 1917 and, indeed, throughout the remainder of the year (--and forever after). The changed dissenting perspective on Wilson is crucial to any understanding of their great fear that the movement

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 139-140 for discussion of the other memorandum which Buxton passed to Wilson during the summer of 1917.

⁶⁹ Buxton and Whitehouse to House, 28 June 1917, House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 730.

⁷⁰ House to Buckler, 1 July 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 3. These assurances were certainly accepted at face value by Buxton. Responding to Lord Bryce's criticisms of his own opposition to the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, Buxton rejected the "no annexation" model in favour of Wilson's international negotiation stance. A stable settlement, he maintained, could only be reached "by applying the principle of self-determination--that is, as advanced by America." In Buxton's view, only by following Wilson's model could Britain enlist American support for any settlement, and Britain needed this support in order to establish a League of Nations, the only guarantee of post-war stability (PD [Commons], 30 July 1917, 96, cols. 1831-1832, 1836, 1837 and 1838-1839).

towards peace was being reversed in favour of the "Never Endians"⁷¹ and that the Russian Revolution might have created only a fleeting opportunity. It was, therefore, doubly imperative for Wilson to secure a negotiated peace before the 'window of opportunity' opened by Russia was firmly and permanently closed.

The Reichstag Resolution and the 26 July Peace Debate

The most significant international event for dissent in July 1917 was the Reichstag peace resolution.⁷² This action on the part of the German legislature reinforced the dissenters' quest to force their own Government to adopt a pro-negotiation stand. The Reichstag Resolution also provided the impetus for the first peace debate in the British Parliament since May. The Resolution, which was passed on 19 July, had been preceded by an important speech from Dr. Georg Michaelis, the newly appointed German Chancellor. Michaelis had stated that Germany would not negotiate with an enemy which planned to annex parts of the German Empire or intended to institute a post-war economic boycott. But Germany was prepared to open discussions on the basis of the proposed Reichstag Resolution. As though addressing a British audience, he said that the German Government was committed to democratic constitutional reform and longed for peaceful co-existence with Germany's neighbours. However, he stressed that Germany would brook no interference in her constitutional affairs by outside powers, nor would

⁷¹ H.W. Massingham coined this term to denote the mentality of the fight-to-the-finish enthusiasts.

⁷² The resolution appeared in the British press on 21 July. It was the product of a high political crisis in Germany which culminated with the Supreme Command forcing the resignation of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. With his disappearance, argues Gerda Crosby, came overthrow of the hopes for moderate [German] policies (Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, p. 47).

she be humiliated at the negotiating table.⁷³

The Reichstag Resolution passed by 212 to 126 votes; it was carried by a coalition of Social Democrats, Progressives and the Catholic Centre Party.⁷⁴ The Resolution proclaimed that Germany had gone to war for defensive purposes. So long as her enemies were bent on conquest, Germany would remain united and "unconquerable." Yet, almost as if it had been tailored deliberately to fit dissenting sensibilities, the motion also employed more conciliatory language:

The Reichstag labours for peace and mutual understanding and lasting reconciliation among nations. Forced acquisitions of territory and political, economic, and financial violations are incompatible with such a peace.⁷⁵

The Chancellor's speech and the Reichstag Resolution prompted a riposte from Lloyd George. Charging that any construction could be placed on the Chancellor's speech, the Prime Minister chose to criticize the address for its neglect of specific issues and the conspicuous absence of any detailed reference to Belgium. He agreed that Germans were entitled to choose their own Government but "what manner of government we can trust to make peace is our business."⁷⁶

Dissenting reactions to the speeches of Prime Minister and Chancellor were predictable: Lloyd George's statement was unacceptable, first, because the British Government must also shoulder responsibility for the war and, second, because it was impossible to force democracy upon Germany. Michaelis, meanwhile, had provided a welcome sign of a new flexibility inside

⁷³ Scott, ed., "Address of Chancellor Michaelis to the Reichstag on Peace Terms and the Reichstag Resolution," 19 July 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 115, 116.

⁷⁴ Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Scott, ed., "The Reichstag Resolution," 19 July 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 115, 114.

⁷⁶ Scott, ed., "Address of Prime Minister Lloyd-George in London in Reply to Chancellor Michaelis," 21 July 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 117, 118.

Germany. According to The Nation, the Prime Minister was now "following Mr. Wilson's lead" by adding German democratization to his list of war aims. The German Government, meanwhile, as indicated by a second speech by the Chancellor, on 26 July, now supported the Reichstag Resolution--that is, a peace based upon the status quo ante bellum.⁷⁷ Bertrand Russell claimed that Michaelis' address signified the German Government's renunciation of conquest and its willingness to be flexible. Lloyd George's pronouncement, however, was judged hypocritical. The Prime Minister was unable to see beyond the "inevitable rhetoric" of the German speech. Instead, he had made unsupported assertions regarding German intentions for Belgium. Furthermore, the Prime Minister, by insisting on dealing only with a democratic Government, had put up the "most serious obstacle to negotiations."⁷⁸

Morel's position was consistent with that taken by The Nation and Bertrand Russell. The UDC secretary was not concerned by the Chancellor's omission of guarantees for Belgium. He also detected in the Reichstag Resolution a rejection of "commercial war" and a portent of German constitutional reform. The Chancellor's address,⁷⁹ seen alongside the Reichstag Resolution and the prospect of future changes to the Reich constitution, provided a sufficient guarantee that Germany would evacuate Belgium and introduce real democracy at home. At the same time, Morel pilloried the British Government's insistence that Germany was bent on a war of aggression. He regarded this mistaken assumption as the principal obstacle to peace. In fact, Morel agreed with Michaelis that Germany was fighting a defensive war. He particularly disliked the Prime Minister's view of the 'knock-out blow' as the only viable alternative to the imposition

⁷⁷ The Nation, 28 July 1917, p. 417.

⁷⁸ "Chancellor and Premier," 28 July 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 55, pp. 217-219.

⁷⁹ It is not clear whether Morel was referring to the Chancellor's address of 19 July or the speech which he delivered seven days later.

of a 'German' peace. Morel's flawed understanding of German war policy led him to believe that the British Government had not gone nearly as far towards peace as had its German counterpart. His main objection was to Lloyd George's pledge to continue fighting until Germany was democratic. For Morel, a truly democratic Germany could not be imposed by an Allied military victory.⁸⁰

The Reichstag Resolution was interpreted by dissent as equivalent to the German legislature's adoption of the Petrograd Formula, although Arno Mayer has pointed out that the motion did not mention national self-determination and that, as such, it was considerably different from the Provisional Government's 18 May statement.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Morel thought that the Reichstag Resolution went "a very long way" towards acceptance of the Petrograd Formula. The UDC General Council thought likewise and also detected German support for post-war freedom of trade and a League of Nations. The organization urged British MPs to pass a motion similar to that carried by the Reichstag and also to draft a resolution of their own condemning forced annexations and penal reparations.⁸² The Nation ventured that the Reichstag Resolution represented Germany's acceptance of the Allies' minimum terms. The New Liberal weekly wanted the Government to drop its planned post-war boycott of German trade and to issue a new war aims statement.⁸³ The dissenters were perhaps especially gratified by the Reichstag Resolution because of the proof it provided pro-war labour of the pacific inclinations of the German socialists. Earlier, at Leeds, Ernest Bevin, who was on the executive of the solidly pro-

⁸⁰ The U.D.C., August 1917, p. 113.

⁸¹ Mayer, Political Origins, p. 133.

⁸² The U.D.C., August 1917, p. 112; Ninth General Council Meeting of the UDC, 27 July 1917, UDC Papers, DDC 1/1. See also, Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 159; Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 138.

⁸³ "Peace by Conference," The Nation, 28 July 1917, p. 420.

war Dockers' Union, had spoken against Snowden's motion of support for the Russian formula.

Supposing this resolution becomes the policy, we will say, of a large majority of the Labour movement of this country and that it is then forced upon the Government. Where do our fatuous friends of the I.L.P. stand? When we have arrived at this policy and have associated ourselves with our Russian friends, and there is no response from Germany, will they join us in the vigorous prosecution of the war until Germany does respond? Our experience of the German Social Democrats in the past was not altogether a happy one. Has any evidence come to this country that the German Social Democrats are prepared to reverse their policy?⁸⁴

In the Commons on 24 July, Buxton made no reference to the Reichstag Resolution, but did allude to the Chancellor's recent speeches. Notwithstanding his unsatisfactory treatment of Germany's future constitutional arrangements, Michaelis had by his other words ushered in a new phase of the war.⁸⁵ Two days later, following the UDC General Council's lead, dissenting MPs tried to encourage the Commons to follow the Reichstag's example. MacDonald moved the amendment which he noted was remarkably similar in substance and spirit to the Reichstag Resolution.⁸⁶

In view of the resolution passed by the representatives of the German people assembled in the Reichstag to the effect that, putting aside the thought of

⁸⁴ Quoted in Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, p. 75.

⁸⁵ PD (Commons), 24 July 1917, 96, col. 1173.

⁸⁶ PD (Commons), 26 July 1917, 96, col. 1481). MPs were rather pointedly reminded of the similarities by the translation from the German which MacDonald delivered for the benefit of the House: "Declining all thoughts of the forcible acquisition of territory, the Reichstag strives for a peace by agreement, and a permanent reconciliation of nations. With such a peace, political, economic, and financial oppression are incompatible. The Reichstag equally rejects all plans which aims at economic exclusion and enmity between peoples after the War. Only such economic peace, with freedom of the seas, will after the conclusion of the War prepare the ground for a permanent friendly community of life between nations. Led by these considerations and aims, the Reichstag will energetically further the creating of international organisations for the promotion of international law. So long, however, as the hostile Governments reject such a peace and threaten Germany and its Allies with conquest and violent oppression, the German people is determined unshakenly to stand together and endure for the defence of its own and its Allies' right to live and develop. The German people know that in unity and defence it is invincible."

acquisition of territory by force, the Reichstag is striving for a peace of understanding and lasting reconciliation of nations, that with such a peace political, economic, and financial usurpation are incompatible, and that the Reichstag repudiates all plans which aim at the economic isolation and tying down of nations after the War, this House declares that this statement expresses the principles for which this country has stood throughout and calls upon the Government, in conjunction with the Allies, to re-state their peace terms accordingly; and further it declares that the Allies should accept the Russian proposal that the forthcoming Allied conference on war aims shall comprise representatives of the peoples and not solely spokesmen of the Governments.⁸⁷

Keith Robbins plays down the significance of the ensuing debate. The amendment was supported by only nineteen MPs, a drop from the already low level of support garnered by the motion put forward during the 'no annexation' debate of 16 May.⁸⁸ This further shrinkage of dissent's parliamentary support can be explained by the differences between the two motions. The first was a demonstration of dissenting solidarity with Britain's Russian ally, whereas the second, more controversial, amendment applauded the actions of an enemy legislature. Yet, if viewed in an extra-parliamentary context, the failed amendment can be seen to have fulfilled three vital purposes for dissent. First, the motion addressed their need somehow to support the Reichstag. Although the Reichstag was not the democratic equivalent of the House of Commons, MacDonald conceded, its resolution should not be treated, as the British jingo press had, as a mere "theatrical play" staged by a hopelessly unrepresentative institution.⁸⁹ Trevelyan followed MacDonald's lead closely, stressing the representative nature of the Reichstag and claiming that the German socialists mirrored the sincere desire for peace of the German working class as a whole. Adopting the amendment would, in Trevelyan's eyes, send the right signal to the German masses. Likewise Ponsonby too pushed for acceptance of the amendment as a gesture to the

⁸⁷ PD (Commons), 26 July 1917, 96, cols. 1479-1480.

⁸⁸ Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 138. The previous amendment attracted thirty-two sympathetic votes.

⁸⁹ PD (Commons), 30 July 1917, 96, cols. 1482, 1486, 1487, 1489.

German people.⁹⁰

The second purpose of the amendment was to exhibit the dissenters' continuing admiration for Russia. MacDonald, Lees-Smith and Ponsonby all linked their support for the motion with their support for Russia.⁹¹ As the dissenters equated the Reichstag Resolution with the Petrograd Formula, any parliamentary recognition of the German motion would equal de facto acceptance of the Russian policy.

The third rationale for MacDonald's motion was to refocus attention on British war aims. MacDonald himself called upon the Government to repudiate the proposed post-war economic boycott of Germany, while Trevelyan urged the rejection of annexations and future aggression in a new official statement of British war aims.⁹² Dissenters had taken the Reichstag Resolution as evidence that Britain had the most hardline government of all the belligerents, and they wished to use this evidence to force the War Cabinet to adhere to the Petrograd Formula. This stratagem, in turn, reflected their escalating fear that any failure to make a satisfactory statement of British war aims would soon lead to a Russian military capitulation to Germany. The dissenters were comparatively unconcerned that their Government's insistence on a retributive peace might offend President Wilson.

Buxton, who closed the 26 July debate, expressed surprise that no one had countered the dissenters' criticism with a single persuasive argument for annexations or the break-up of the Habsburg Empire. Nonetheless, in keeping with Buxton's discretion, he refused to back the amendment because of his own, qualified support for annexationism, namely the annexation by

⁹⁰ Ibid., cols. 1499-1500, 1579.

⁹¹ Ibid., cols. 1480-1481, 1490-1492, 1518, 1579.

⁹² Ibid., cols 1480, 1498, 1499.

Russia of part of Armenia.⁹³ With the contorted logic which sometimes characterized dissenting initiatives, Snowden pressed for a division which he fully expected to be a rout. But failure on such a grand scale would at least "disclose the fact that the majority of the Members of the House of Commons do not want, do not strive for, a peace with understanding and a lasting reconciliation with the nations." Moreover, the motion's rejection would also demonstrate that Parliament favoured the "economic isolation of Germany," that it did not want a reasonable peace and that it lacked any sympathy for Russia. Snowden further alleged that the "British Government more than any other of the belligerents now at war...is standing in the way of an early settlement."⁹⁴

Stockholm

By the end of July 1917, the dissenters believed that their push for a revised war aims statement had reached its critical stage. First, throughout the summer they believed that public opinion was becoming more favourably disposed towards a UDC-type programme. Second, they may well have been aware that the Government planned to launch another military offensive in the near future.⁹⁵ Third, the stability of the Provisional Government was clearly threatened by impending military collapse and rural anarchy, not to mention the political extremes of both Right and Left. The Kerensky Offensive, launched early in July, was undertaken at least in part to

⁹³ PD (Commons), 26 July 1917, 96, col. 1586. Although still distancing himself from his dissenting colleagues, Buxton's subsequent letter to The Nation was markedly different in tone: "I hold that Parliament ought to demand a statement from the Government, showing specifically what annexations, if any, it requires" (The Nation, 4 August 1917, p. 455).

⁹⁴ Ibid., col. 1531.

⁹⁵ On the strategic decision taken by the War Cabinet, see Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 98-99.

convince Allied Governments that Russia was still effective militarily and to undercut the position of the anti-war Bolshevik faction. But the offensive turned into a catastrophic rout. A Bolshevik takeover almost occurred in July and the political turbulence resulted in the replacement of Prince L'vov as Prime Minister by the ill fated Kerensky.⁹⁶

From this highly flammable Russian situation, the War Cabinet's Labour representative, Arthur Henderson, returned to Britain from Russia on 24 July. He was now convinced of the necessity of supporting the Provisional Government and that one way of reinforcing the Russian moderates was to despatch a British socialist delegation to the impending Stockholm Conference.⁹⁷ To this end, he persuaded the Labour Party's NEC to convene a special conference to determine whether or not Labour representatives should travel to Stockholm.⁹⁸ He even visited Paris with MacDonald and George Wardle, acting Chairman of the Labour Party, to discuss arrangements for the international socialist meeting with French socialists and delegates from the Petrograd Soviet. On returning, Henderson attended the War Cabinet of 1 August but only after he was kept waiting outside while his colleagues discussed the unofficial Paris trip without him.⁹⁹ This celebrated 'doormat incident' and Henderson's subsequent resignation from government are staples of institutional labour historiography. The episodes are invariably portrayed as crucial steps on Labour's march towards truly independent political power and influence. Henderson's departure from the War Cabinet was also of enormous import in the

⁹⁶ Wade, The Russian Search for Peace, pp. 88-92.

⁹⁷ Mary Agnes Hamilton, Arthur Henderson (London, 1938), p. 120; J.M. Winter, "Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party," Historical Journal, 15 (1972), pp. 760, 765.

⁹⁸ For the background to the Stockholm Conference, see above p. 118 n. 47.

⁹⁹ WC Special Minutes (199a), 30 July 1917, CAB 23/13/47-48; Wrigley, David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement, pp. 211-214.

wartime history of British dissent. Buckler foresaw an impending altercation between moderates and extremists at the highest level of government:

It is evident that Henderson...has returned from Russia partly converted to the Russian point of view, and that he took MacDonald with him [to Paris] for the reason that he wanted MacDonald to come to Russia. This is what, not unnaturally, alarms the 'knock-out' advocates, and we are perhaps approaching the moment when a struggle between them and the pro-negotiation forces will break out within Cabinet. Henderson's defence on his return from Paris to-day should be significant.¹⁰⁰

The Labour Party special conference assembled at the Central Hall in London on 10 August, where an overwhelming majority voted to send delegates to Stockholm. The Miners' Federation then successfully moved to block minority (i.e. anti-war) socialist representatives from the British delegation. The special conference reconvened on 21 August, and the question of minority participation was reconsidered. The Miners' Federation and other large unions now opposed Stockholm because they did not wish to risk giving a voice at the meeting to anti-war socialists of the ILP and BSP. The original decision to attend was upheld but only by the slimmest of margins.¹⁰¹ Immediately after Labour's commitment to Stockholm was reaffirmed, the Miners' Federation carried a motion that stripped societies affiliated to Labour of any representation at Stockholm. This motion passed by 2,124,000 votes to 175,000.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Buckler to House, 1 August 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6.

¹⁰¹ Brand, The British Labour Party, pp. 47-49; Van Der Slice, International Labor, Diplomacy, and Peace, 1914-1919 (Philadelphia, 1941), p. 104; Graubard, British Labour, p. 33. The vote tally for the 10 August motion to support the Stockholm project was 1,846,000 for and 550,000 against (Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 218). The 21 August vote was 1,234,000 for and 1,231,000 against ("Labour Must Keep the Stockholm Fires Burning," The Herald, 25 August 1917, p. 5). According to The Herald, the closeness of the vote on 21 August obliged the upcoming Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Blackpool to review the matter once more. The TUC duly upheld the special conference decision ("The Trades Union Congress," The Herald, 1 September 1917, p. 9; "The Trade Union Congress at Blackpool," The Labour Leader, 6 September 1917, p. 5).

¹⁰² Brand, The British Labour Party, p. 49.

Notwithstanding the violation of the affiliated societies' rights, the dissenters were elated. Labour's support for Stockholm and its new draft foreign policy programme were trumpeted as turning points in the transformation of the party from a sycophantic prop of the Government to a genuinely independent political alternative. Ponsonby's response captured dissent's jubilation. He held that people would now rush to join the revitalized Labour Party and be forced into adopting a dissenting platform.¹⁰³ If the Government still refused to budge on war aims, a "pretty hot agitation" would ensue, involving the international socialist movement, the domestic peace-by-negotiation forces and the recently converted Labour Party.¹⁰⁴ Snowden pointed out that Labour had completely changed its stance on the issue of an international socialist meeting since the party conference at Bristol of January 1916. He immediately seized on the Stockholm decision as "a fundamental change of view in regard to the war policy. It is a repudiation of the fight to a finish method of bringing this war to an end."¹⁰⁵

The special conference was also significant because it spawned Labour's Draft Memorandum on War Issues. This document, approved on 10 August, was taken by dissent as an additional sign that the Labour Party had swallowed the entire UDC programme. They saw proof of Labour's new boldness in such specific objectives as a League of Nations, the restitution of Belgium and Serbia, the neutralization of Constantinople, the protection of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey, international control of tropical Africa, and post-war freedom of trade.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 140.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 165.

¹⁰⁵ The Labour Leader, 16 August 1917, p. 1. For similar expressions of dissenting support for Labour's volte-face, see "How to Play the German Game," The Nation, 11 August 1917, p. 468; "To Stockholm!" The Tribunal, 16 August 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Van Der Slice, International Labor, pp. 102-103. See also, "The Peacemakers," The Nation, 18 August 1917, pp. 496-497.

The ILP certainly regarded the draft memorandum as an acceptable starting point for discussion. Snowden claimed that Labour's new foreign policy programme constituted a wholesale embrace of the ILP position, aside from a few dubious additions and occasionally inconsistent applications of the no annexation, no indemnities principle. But these minor flaws paled into insignificance beside the Labour Party's endorsement of a peace-by-negotiation.¹⁰⁷

Yet, at best, the August special conference was only a pyrrhic victory for dissent. Many dissenters reacted with bitterness to their exclusion from Stockholm. Snowden complained that Labour's snub to minority socialist opinion "in a large measure, rendered the first decision [to attend Stockholm] nugatory."¹⁰⁸ The Herald castigated Miners' Federation President, William Adamson, for attempting to limit "socialist" representation at Stockholm. Affiliated societies of the Labour Party had always had separate representation at meetings of the International.¹⁰⁹ Although such bastions of pro-war labour opinion as the Miners' Federation were committed in principle to Stockholm, their opposition to any dissenting presence is the prism through which the evolution of Labour Party policy must be seen.¹¹⁰ For ILPers in particular, this bifurcation of the official Labour view of Stockholm represented a striking denial of their leadership.

The dissenters' response to this rebuff by the Labour mainstream highlighted the dilemma

¹⁰⁷ The Labour Leader, 16 August 1917, p. 1. The ILP specifically rejected the draft memorandum's position on the fate of certain minorities in Turkey, its treatment of Italia Irredenta, and the proposed restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France without a plebiscite. Of greater concern, however, was the clause assigning to Germany responsibility for starting the war. Such a clause, the ILP believed, would prevent negotiations from even beginning (The Labour Leader, 30 August 1917, pp. 2, 4). Among the Liberal dissenters, Trevelyan expressed concern to Ponsonby about parts of the draft programme, especially its plan for Alsace-Lorraine (Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 167).

¹⁰⁸ The Labour Leader, 23 August 1917, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ "The Stockholm Meeting," The Herald, 18 August 1917, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Brand, The British Labour Party, p. 49.

they faced. After trumpeting Labour's acceptance on 10 August of their foreign policy position, dissenters could hardly complain that the vote against minority representation at Stockholm signified the party's sudden repudiation of all UDC/ILP influences. Moreover, dissent could not fight their exclusion without undermining the Labour Party and putting the entire Stockholm project at risk. The UDC tried to limit the damage by reducing the significance of the second motion to a "minor question of minority representation on the delegation."¹¹¹ The Labour Leader blamed the exclusion of dissenting forces from Stockholm on the suddenness with which the issue had been raised inside the labour movement and on the "unprecedented press campaign of misrepresentation and calumny."¹¹²

The adjustment of the Party's war aims was also grossly overemphasized. In essence, the draft was a blunt statement of patriotic, pro-war Labour feeling which contained only a few elements that could be construed as 'dissenting'. The central thrust of the document was much more traditional, if not downright retributive. Labour called for a court to assign blame and determine the compensation for acts committed during the war. An indemnity fund would be created out of contributions from warring nations "in proportion determined among other things by their responsibility, in the eyes of an international commission, for the damage done." The proposed establishment of a court to settle compensation payments provides a clear example of Labour's co-option of dissenting language to further anti-German purposes. The Party also wanted the full indemnification of Belgium by Germany, complete independence for the nationalities of south-east Europe, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the satisfaction of

¹¹¹ The U.D.C., September 1917, p. 129. Robert Williams took a similar line, arguing that the denial of ILP, BSP and Fabian Society representation must not distract undue attention from Labour's commitment to a peace-by-negotiation ("Labour Must Keep the Stockholm Fires Burning," The Herald, 25 August, 1917, p. 5).

¹¹² "The Adjourned Labour Conference," The Labour Leader, 23 August 1917, p. 5.

Italian irredentism.¹¹³ Lloyd George would have been hard pressed to disapprove this document. But the dissenters faced the same predicament as they did with regard to the Stockholm Conference motion—to attack Labour's war aims publicly would expose their real impotence.

The dissenters also failed to benefit from Henderson's departure from government. His support for Labour representation at Stockholm had, not unexpectedly, incurred the wrath of the War Cabinet. According to Keith Robbins, Henderson's resignation on 11 August was for dissent "a major turning point in the war."¹¹⁴ His move was undoubtedly important but more for the institutional development of the Labour Party than for the fortunes of British dissent. Labour continued to be represented in the War Cabinet, but Henderson's replacement, George Barnes, former secretary of the ASE, was even regarded by pro-war labour elements as a mere lackey of Lloyd George. As Snowden pointed out, Barnes and the other Labour men in Government could hardly claim to speak for a party whose policy was now different (however subtly) from that of the administration to which they belonged.¹¹⁵

The pro-Stockholm campaign reveals much about both the condition of the Labour Party and dissenting opinion in the summer of 1917. "At this time," as Marvin Swartz observes, "political discontent, which the Union of Democratic Control tried to encourage, reached a climax in the controversy over the proposed meeting of the Second International in Stockholm."¹¹⁶ But the dissenters failed to recognize the real significance of Labour's endorsement of Stockholm. Whereas the dissenters saw the Party's move as an acceptance of

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Robbins, The Abolition of War, p. 139. See also, The U.D.C., September 1917, p. 129.

¹¹⁵ The Labour Leader, 23 August 1917, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 162.

their leadership, the opposite was, in fact, much closer to the truth.

The very fact that Henderson appeared to have been converted to the policy of MacDonald and the U.D.C. made it all the more necessary for him to defer, wherever possible, to the trade-union leaders whose support he would need if he was to carry that policy into effect, and who still looked upon the I.L.P. as a nest of subversives.¹¹⁷

Stephen Graubard largely agrees with the verdict of MacDonald's biographer.

The mood of the conference was revealed in an instant. Composed overwhelmingly of trade union delegates, it was prepared to accept a major policy change recommended by one of its own trusted leaders, but its feelings remained unchanged about pacifist socialist groups...The decision to go to Stockholm represented a vote of confidence in an individual, Arthur Henderson, it did not indicate a more basic alteration of sentiment.¹¹⁸

From the end of August the dissenters were on the defensive, their momentum having been exhausted by the rock of Stockholm. Henceforth, the Government would dominate the debates over peace, to which the Labour Party, with its, at best, shallow commitment to dissenting objectives, offered the only effective opposition. Ultimately the debate over the goals and probable effectiveness of the Stockholm Conference was moot. The Government refused to issue passports to the Labour delegation and the trade unions were not prepared to fight the Government on the issue.¹¹⁹ British dissenters were also hampered by divisions among foreign socialists. The Inter-Allied Socialist Conference was held in London on 28-29 August to hammer out a common position for Stockholm.¹²⁰ The Conference voted in favour of Stockholm but

¹¹⁷ Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 220.

¹¹⁸ Graubard, British Labour, p. 30.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

¹²⁰ The ILP delegates were MacDonald, Henderson, Jowett, Brailsford, Miss Margaret Bonfield, H. Dubery and R.C. Wallhead. The Labour Leader, 30 August 1917, p. 2.

could not agree on a set of war aims.¹²¹ The Nation even referred to the meeting as "a fiasco," and Brailsford blamed the French and Belgian socialist leaders for destroying "the dwindling hopes that we had built on Stockholm."¹²² There was little point in dissent pressing the Government for permission to travel if they could not agree among themselves as to what should actually be accomplished at Stockholm. As a result of the disagreements aired at the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference, the Labour Party executive decided to form a national platform on war aims that would be suitable for the Allied socialists.¹²³

Conclusion

The dissenters' primary objective throughout 1917 was to obtain a negotiated end to the war. The Russian Revolution was so immensely popular in the dissenting community precisely because it believed that acceptance of the Petrograd Formula would lead directly to a negotiated peace. This was dissent's position at the time of the Leeds Convention. However, it is a measure of the dissenters' declining fortunes that, as the summer progressed, they were forced to press the Government to accept positions and policies that were increasingly removed from their original objective--a negotiated settlement. The dissenters' attempted conversion of the Government to the Petrograd Formula was imperceptibly transformed into a campaign of support for the

¹²¹ Labour Party executives incorporated into the draft some amendments suggested by affiliated societies. The resulting document was presented to the 28 August conference. Following the failure of this meeting, it was decided at the TUC conference in Blackpool to fashion a war aims statement on which all Allied socialist parties could agree (Van Der Slice, International Labor, p. 104; "The Trade Union Congress at Blackpool," The Labour Leader, 6 September 1917, p. 5).

¹²² The Nation, 1 September 1917, p. 547; "What Does Mr. Wilson Mean?," The Herald, 8 September 1917, p. 8.

¹²³ Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 218.

Reichstag Resolution. This second quest gave way to the push for Stockholm and, finally, to the very narrow drive to persuade the Government to issue passports to the conference delegates.

Labour's endorsement of Stockholm was a hollow victory for dissent. After eight months of frenetic activity they appeared to have convinced the conservative Labour leadership to support both the Russian Revolution and a dissenting foreign policy. However, the lingering mistrust of dissent implicit in Labour's rebuff to the UDC, ILP and other dissenting bodies at the special conference on 21 August was an enormous setback for the peace-by-negotiation forces. While British Labour would be represented at Stockholm, it would not be by the likes of MacDonald or Snowden, despite the ILP's constitutional right to representation. This blow was all the more significant because it undermined dissent's meagre power base and distracted much of its potential audience too. Just as they seemed to be gaining ground, the Labour Party had stripped the dissenters of future legitimacy.

The last and perhaps most serious blow to befall dissent in the summer of 1917 was the arrest, trial and imprisonment of E.D. Morel. On 31 August Morel was charged under DORA for arranging for someone to convey his pamphlet, Tsardom's Part in the War, to a French colleague in neutral Switzerland.¹²⁴ Sentenced shortly afterwards to six months imprisonment at the Bow Street magistrates' court, the Government had effectively silenced dissent's most prolific and astute spokesman. The ease with which the Government arrested and tried him in camera and dissent's inability to stop the Government showed the dissenters' weakness. The prosecution and the withholding of passports for Stockholm demonstrated the Government's determination to counter dissent's campaign for a negotiated peace based on the Petrograd Formula. The hounding of Morel might have been less critical had it not followed so closely Labour's exclusion of dissenting organizations from Stockholm. British dissent was in the late

¹²⁴ Cline, E.D. Morel, pp. 111-112; Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," pp. 161-163.

summer of 1917 under attack from both Right and Left.

Chapter 5: IN THE DOLDRUMS--SEPTEMBER 1917 TO NOVEMBER 1917

Introduction

The fall 1917 was disastrous for two of Britain's Allies, Russia and Italy. In the East, the Russian Armies continued to retreat and crumble from within. On the domestic front, the Bolshevik overthrow of the Provisional Government suggested the likelihood of a separate Russian peace. The situation was almost as perilous in the South, where late in October, the Italian Second Army was routed by German and Austrian forces at Caporetto. Indeed, it appeared that Italy had been immobilized by a 'knock-out blow'.¹ Britain's military situation from September through November was not nearly so grim, although it was still a source of considerable concern. General Allenby was making steady progress in Palestine, and the Passchendaele offensive on the Western Front continued sporadically until mid-November.²

¹ Ironically, though, Caporetto actually steeled the Italian will to continue the war (see John Schindler, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "A Hopeless Struggle: The Austro-Hungarian Army and Total War, 1914-1918" [Hamilton, McMaster University, 1995]).

² The strategic significance of Passchendaele, or Third Ypres, is still hotly disputed. In the majority of historical accounts the massive human cost of the minimal territorial gains represented not only the height of the Generals' folly but also almost destroyed the morale of the British Army (see, for example, Trevor Wilson, The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918 [Cambridge, 1986], pp. 477-484; Bourne, Britain and the Great War, pp. 76-78). Passchendaele was undoubtedly a grisly affair. But while in progress, the battle was seen even by The Nation and The Herald as a huge success that would compel the Germans to evacuate Belgium. Some recent scholarship has also portrayed Passchendaele as a significant victory, crucial to the defeat of the German Army in the West in 1918. According to this revisionist position, even though a decisive breakthrough had remained elusive, the campaign had sapped German morale, obscured the weaknesses of the French and demonstrated Britain's mastery of the techniques necessary to overcome the Germans' defensive system (see, for example, Paschall, The Defeat of Imperial Germany, pp. 79-80; John Terraine, The Western Front, 1914-1918

Dissenting hopes for a peace-by-negotiation had not improved, though a conclusive end to the fighting seemed almost as distant as ever in the fall of 1917. Indeed, the prospect of such an outcome to the war was more remote than ever before. Although Germany sent tentative peace feelers through Spanish and Swiss channels,³ the only initiative of real significance in these months was the Papal Peace Note. It is an indication of how far their aspirations had fallen that the dissenters devoted so much attention to this, at best, fleeting papal intervention. September to November, therefore, was a comparatively quiet period for dissent that resulted in a further loss of momentum. Their lack of support in the 6 November Commons peace debate illustrated dissent's continuing political isolation. Even worse, the dissenters had to counteract the Government's determined effort to marginalize and discredit them, to which ends the prosecution of Morel, the generous funding of the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) and new censorship regulations under DORA all made telling contributions. The news of the Bolshevik Revolution on 7 November represented perhaps the greatest setback for dissent in this three-month period. The ousting of the moderate socialists in the Provisional Government by Lenin's overtly anti-war Bolsheviks further diminished Russia's credibility in the eyes of the British Government. Events in Russia made a restatement of British war aims even less likely.

The Papal Peace Note

On 10 August, the same day that the Labour Party moved to attend the Stockholm Conference,

[London, 1964], pp. 153-156).

³ The first of these overtures, which sought guarantees that would have effectively nullified Belgian sovereignty, was a virtual non-starter. The second, Swiss brokered approach, envisaged a trade-off between German gains in the East and concessions in the West. Neither *démarche* received more than the cursory consideration of the War Cabinet (see Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 105-110 and Turner, British Politics, pp. 235, 249).

the War Cabinet became aware of Pope Benedict XV's peace initiative. The pontiff's note of 1 August had called for bilateral disarmament, international arbitration, freedom of the seas, virtually no indemnities, the withdrawal of enemy troops from Belgium and France, the return of Germany's colonies, and an "examination of territorial questions...in a conciliatory spirit, taking account of the population as far as is just and possible."⁴ According to Dragan Zivojinovic the Vatican wished to prevent the collapse of the Catholic Habsburg dynasty and was profoundly disturbed at the possible ramifications of Russia's socialist peace policies.⁵ Notwithstanding the perfectly valid reasons to suspect the Pope's motives and the fact that "Socialism and the Papacy stand in Continental politics at the opposite poles of thought,"⁶ most dissenters reacted with enthusiasm to the papal initiative. Brailsford sensed that the Pope was driven by the same desire to end the bloodshed and misery as were the socialists, and The Herald praised the Bishop of Rome as "this great Christian internationalist."⁷

The dissenters approved the Pope's actions for a number of reasons. First, the initiative satisfied their desire to stimulate negotiations. Second, it incorporated certain essentials of the dissenting position. Third, the Pope's timing was good; the offer came less than a month after the Reichstag Resolution and coincided almost exactly with the drafting of the Labour Party's war aims programme. Fourth, the papacy was now seen by the dissenters as an important international backer of their ongoing campaign to force the British Government to revise its war aims. Snowden insisted that the Pope's "concrete and practical proposals afford the basis of a

⁴ Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 54.

⁵ Dragan R. Zivojinovic, The United States and the Vatican Policies, 1914-1918 (Boulder, 1978), pp. 76-78 and, more generally, chs. 6 and 7.

⁶ "The Pope's Intervention," The Herald, 25 August 1917, p. 9.

⁷ Ibid., "A Peace of Reconciliation," The Herald, 18 August 1917, p. 2.

just and lasting peace." He expressed his particular approval of the pontiff's reported support of a worldwide ban on conscription and of popular control of governmental discretion to declare war. Such proposals were already integral to ILP policy and would greatly benefit "free political institutions."⁸ The Nation saw a workable peace proposal in a combination of Labour's war aims programme and the Papal Note. The newspaper further argued that, if the Pope compelled the German Government to declare for the majority in the Reichstag, then much would have been accomplished.⁹

Against the grain of dissenting praise for Benedict, President Wilson dismissed his diplomatic intervention. In his 27 August reply, the President rejected the Pope's plan because, if implemented, it would amount to a peace based on the status quo ante bellum.¹⁰ Furthermore, the settlement envisaged by the Pope would not alter the fundamentally undemocratic nature of German politics. Consequently, a permanent military coalition would be necessary to thwart the military ambitions of an inherently untrustworthy German Government. Wilson concluded by declaring against a punitive peace in general and a post-war economic boycott of Germany in particular, a re-exposition of the 'peace without victory' formula which, according to Thomas Knock, revealed the President's displeasure with the position on war aims of his Allies.¹¹

⁸ The Labour Leader, 23 August 1917, p. 1; 27 September 1917, p. 1.

⁹ The Nation, 18 August 1917, p. 497; 29 September 1917, p. 653.

¹⁰ Scott, ed., "Reply of President Wilson to the Peace Appeal of the Pope," 27 August 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 133. Throughout August Britain and the United States had discussed their possible replies to the Pope. On 21 August, the British Government informed the Vatican that the Central Powers would have to state their war aims before any move towards peace could be made. Informed four days later that Wilson was on the verge of replying, the War Cabinet decided that an American note alone would suffice and that any further action on their part was unnecessary, at least at present (Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 55, p. 58; Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 104; Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, p. 49).

¹¹ Knock, To End All Wars, p. 131.

The dissenters were ambivalent about the President's response to the Pope. Snowden regarded the answer as either helpful to dissent or subject to manipulation by the Allies. Its most likely effect would be to expose the wide gulf that separated Wilson not only from his Allies but also from the Central Powers.¹² According to the UDC,

it is most disappointing to find the President playing with the idea of 'no peace with the Hohenzollerns' and making the error which has been proved in history to be fatal, of attempting to dictate to the enemy what form of Government they should adopt.¹³

The organization was consoled only by the impression that Wilson's reply did not seem final, although Helena Swanwick recalled in 1924 that the President's reply to the Pope had made it clear at the time that he no longer intended a negotiated peace. Russell too noted that the situation vis-à-vis the United States was not encouraging. America was "still thoroughly enjoying the war" and its ruling class was committed to the continuation of the war.¹⁴

The dissenters were even more dissatisfied with the British Government's brief response to the Pope of 21 August. In the Commons two months later Trevelyan and Joseph King, another Liberal MP, requested the Government to contact the papacy once more. The Nation had also urged the Government to formulate a more detailed reply, particularly as the United States was apparently opposed to an outright military victory. Unlike the Central Powers, who had responded favourably to the Pope, complained The Herald, the British Government did not even

¹² The Labour Leader, 6 September 1917, p. 1.

¹³ The U.D.C., September 1917, p. 129.

¹⁴ Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 87; "The International Situation: The Pope's Peace Note," 23 August 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 64, pp. 294-296.

deem a reply worthwhile.¹⁵

The dissenters were not completely convinced by the German reply. Snowden was aware that the German note had put forth no specific war aims, but it had at least accepted "the general principles" of the papal plan. Hence, it would be difficult for "Allied Imperialism to keep up its big game of bluff."¹⁶ The Nation regarded Germany's 21 September reply as an "ill-proportioned and unsatisfactory document," notwithstanding its acceptance of the Papal Peace Note and the Reichstag Resolution as a joint basis for talks. In particular, there was concern that Germany had not promised to guarantee an independent Belgium.¹⁷ Yet, Massingham's weekly remained hopeful that the moderate Reichstag Majority¹⁸ was poised to prevail once and for all over the jingoes, thus resolving this issue in favour of the Belgians. Without an unambiguous endorsement of the Petrograd Formula, the German reply was for The U.D.C. "almost valueless." The journal could only hope for a more encouraging Allied answer.¹⁹

The dissenters were sorely mistaken in their expectation that Germany's rejoinder would widen the breach which they perceived between the Reichstag Majority and the German jingoes. Snowden was pleased that the new Chancellor, Count von Hertling, had had to secure Majority

¹⁵ PD (Commons), 22 October 1917, 98, cols. 468-469; The Nation, 22 September 1917, p. 627; The Herald, 3 November 1917, p. 9; "Let Labour Try Its Hand and Clear Out the Bunglers!," The Herald, 17 November 1917, p. 9.

¹⁶ The Labour Leader, 27 September 1917, p. 1.

¹⁷ The Nation, 29 September 1917, p. 653. On this point, both The Herald and Russell echoed The Nation's disappointment with Germany ("Our View of the Kaiser's Note," The Herald, 29 September 1917, p. 9; "The Kaiser's Reply to the Pope," 27 September 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 71, pp. 314-315).

¹⁸ "Clearing the Road to Peace," The Nation, 29 September 1917, pp. 656-657. The term 'Majority' refers to the group of parties which voted in favour of the 19 July Reichstag Resolution.

¹⁹ The U.D.C., October 1917, p. 140.

approval before taking office. He was even more elated that von Hertling had agreed to promote, inter alia, a foreign policy based on the German reply to the Pope. Other dissenters, such as Edward Bernard, author of The Labour Leader's weekly "International Notes," claimed that von Hertling's appointment signified that Germany's Government now derived its authority from the Reichstag. Regardless of official policy, then, Germany had become democratic, thereby fulfilling one of President Wilson's principal war aims.²⁰

Many dissenters were becoming disillusioned, however, by the vacillations of the Reichstag Majority. Early in September The Nation warned that the political success of the German moderates remained "valuable just so long as the combination which secured it subsists." But this very combination was already crumbling. Four weeks later, the same newspaper noticed that Georg Michaelis, von Hertling's predecessor, had told the Reichstag on 27 September that Germany would have a free hand in future peace talks. For The Nation, this statement effectively rendered the Reichstag Resolution meaningless. The disillusionment was almost palpable: "If no explanation and no crisis follows this revelation of stupid Machiavellianism, then we had better face the facts and wash our hands of the German Majority and its ways."²¹ A week later, The Nation reported that Michaelis seemed to have shifted back to supporting the Reichstag Resolution, although without modifying his insistence that Germany retain Alsace-Lorraine. Massingham's weekly took further heart when it appeared that Michaelis' likely replacement, Richard von Kühlmann, would have to receive the backing of the Reichstag. This obligation

²⁰ The Labour Leader, 15 November 1917, p. 1; Edward Bernard, "International Notes," The Labour Leader, 22 November 1917, p. 3.

²¹ "Will Germany Become Democratic?," The Nation, 1 September 1917, p. 548; "The Reichstag Majority, the German Government, and Belgium," The Nation, 6 October 1917, p. 5.

represented the partial and long overdue assertion of true parliamentary sovereignty in Germany.²²

The Government's Offensive Against Dissent

The War Cabinet had decided as early as June 1917 to combat dissenting propaganda more energetically. These efforts were stepped up in the fall and took several forms--the tightening of DORA regulations, the harassment of dissenting groups by condoning anti-war riots, the placement of the NWAC on a sounder financial footing and a still firmer response to dissent's calls for war aims revisions. The most dramatic example of heightened official vigilance was the trial and punishment of E.D. Morel. Morel's incarceration had been keenly awaited for some time by Foreign Office officials especially and he had only escaped prosecution thus far because the Director of Public Prosecutions feared that Morel would turn any trial into a public forum from which to spread his dissenting message. Although the Metropolitan Police Special Branch had compiled a weighty dossier of Morel's frequent 'seditious' lapses in The U.D.C., he was ultimately charged with a more technical breach of DORA, thus removing the prosecution's need to challenge his writings in court.²³

Some of Morel's supporters could accept that he was technically guilty but were

²² The Nation, 13 October 1917, p. 54; The Nation, 10 November 1917, p. 175. The Reichstag Majority received assurances from von Kühlmann that he would support their 19 July resolution and Prussian franchise reform.

²³ On the nature of Morel's alleged offence, one of illegal conveyance of printed matter (as opposed to the publication of something in contravention of the censorship regulations), see above p. 168. For the involvement of, respectively, the Foreign Office, the Director of Public Prosecutions and Scotland Yard, see FO 395/15/169424 (20 September 1916); Sir Charles Mathews to Lord Newton, 10 October 1917, FO 371/2828/3255/202398; and FO 395/140/168072 (28 August 1917). I am indebted to Andrew Bone for these references. See also, Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 127-129; Cline, E.D. Morel, pp. 111-113; Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," p. 162.

nevertheless shocked by his sentence. MacDonald made much of "the skinny little thing" which the Government had used to act against him. Lord Courtney expressed outrage at Morel's treatment and the "arbitrary law" under which he had been prosecuted. The U.D.C. was scandalised that its editor would have to serve his sentence in the second division of the British penal system; Morel was a political prisoner and certainly no common criminal.²⁴ Pethick-Lawrence thought it "disgraceful" that Morel was being handled in such contemptible fashion, and Helena Swanwick referred to the "unworthy spite" of the decision to imprison the UDC leader in the second division. According to Catherine Cline, the rigours of Morel's confinement had traumatic effects from which he never fully recovered. Shortly after his release at the end of January 1918, a month early for good behaviour, he "experienced both a psychic and a physical collapse."²⁵

The dissenters attributed Morel's persecution to the Government's fear of truth. A number of ILP branches passed motions condemning the silencing of Morel by imprisonment rather than by rational debate. The U.D.C. and The Labour Leader argued that if the Government had had anything more serious with which to charge Morel they would surely have done so. But they had been obliged instead to rest their case on a minor infraction of DORA.²⁶

The Government's confidence that dissent could be checked without attracting much adverse criticism was further displayed in the implementation of two controversial measures

²⁴ "Open Letter to E.D. Morel," The Labour Leader, 13 September 1917, p. 5; quoted in Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 103; The U.D.C., October 1917, p. 139.

²⁵ "Second Division Treatment," *ibid.*, p. 138; Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 100; Cline, E.D. Morel, p. 113.

²⁶ Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 101; "Mr. Morel's Imprisonment," The Labour Leader, 20 September 1917, p. 2; 6 September 1917, p. 2; "The Moral of the Morel Case," The U.D.C., October 1917, p. 138. See also, "Six Months for Spreading the Truth," 6 September 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 68, pp. 308-309.

during November 1917. Its first move was to seek funding for the NWAC directly from the Vote of Credit. Its motion passed after an unusual debate during which reservations were voiced on both sides of the House. Some MPs objected to the likely cost as much to the implications for civil liberties of this enlargement of the British propaganda machine. The dissenters, including Buxton, Ponsonby and Trevelyan, further claimed both that the NWAC was ineffective and yet questioned the propriety of using public money to advance what they considered to be a partisan position.²⁷ Outside Parliament dissenters also articulated concern about the implications of Treasury funding for the NWAC. The U.D.C. saw a "new precedent" in the use of national revenues to undermine a political opposition.²⁸

The Government's second manoeuvre was to extend the censorship of anti-war propaganda. Sir George Cave, the Home Secretary, wanted to restrict the circulation of such 'undesirable' literature. The result was DORA regulation 27C, issued on 16 November, which required all pamphlets to carry the name and address of the publisher and the prior approval of the Official Press Bureau.²⁹ The regulation was preceded by a series of police raids on dissenting organizations in a failed attempt to establish a connection between the British peace movement and German money. The dissenters were alarmed by both these attacks on their civil liberties, and their fears were heightened when on 21 November the Commons voted to disenfranchise COs. Ponsonby believed that the Government had launched a broad offensive

²⁷ See PD (Commons), 13 November 1917, 99, cols. 288-348. The dissenters' motion was defeated by 22 votes to 132. Their hostility to the NWAC belies Swartz's judgment of this propaganda agency as incompetent and that it "did not succeed in its attempts to counteract the Union of Democratic Control and other dissenting groups" (Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 188).

²⁸ The U.D.C., December 1917, p. 164. See also, "Suppressing the Pacifists--and Freedom: Blank Cheque To Boost the Government," The Labour Leader, 22 November 1917, p. 5.

²⁹ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 189.

against dissent, noting that the Government had enhanced both its propaganda and censorship powers.³⁰ Snowden thought regulation 27C extremely sinister because it amounted, in his opinion, to censorship of peace-by-negotiation debate. He blamed the stringent new measure on "a section of the London press," but pro-war newspapers too frowned on this tightening of DORA and feared its extension from pamphlets to newspapers. Although he urged a vigorous popular response to throw off this new "dictatorship of opinion," Snowden was disappointed that the necessary forty MPs could not be mustered to force a debate on this latest restriction of the written word.³¹ The UDC warned its readers of the "drastic character" of the regulation, and The Nation hoped that it would be challenged in court.³² Even more seriously, The Herald charged, these changes rendered impossible any democratic peace because the terms of such a settlement could no longer be discussed freely.³³

The 6 November Peace Debate

Far from submitting to the dissenting hue and cry over Morel's imprisonment, the finances of the NWAC and DORA regulation 27C, the Government continued to stand firm against the peace-by-negotiation forces. On 26 October, Louis Barthou, Clemenceau's new Foreign Minister, had declared that the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France was not negotiable. This

³⁰ PD (Commons), 19 December 1917, 100, col. 1999.

³¹ The Labour Leader, 22 November 1917, p. 1; Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," pp. 194-197, 203-205.

³² The U.D.C., December 1917, p. 164; The Nation, 24 November 1917, p. 259. Actually, the hostility of the mainstream press and of a phalanx of about 70 Liberal and Labour MPs was sufficient to secure a relaxation of regulation 27C. After 21 November, pamphlets no longer needed the Press Bureau's seal of approval, although they still had to be submitted to this office ahead of their publication (Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," pp. 205-206).

³³ The Herald, 1 December 1917, p. 28.

statement, along with the cancellation of the planned Allied war aims conference,³⁴ prompted on 6 November a Commons debate on British policy on Alsace-Lorraine. Lees-Smith led off the discussion by proposing the following amendment to the Consolidated Fund Bill.

That this House is of the opinion that, provided that satisfactory guarantees can be obtained with regard to the independence and restoration of Belgium and the evacuation of other occupied territory, no obstacle should be placed in the way of preliminaries towards negotiations for a peace settlement which ought to embody an equitable solution of the problem of Alsace-Lorraine, and the devising and enforcement of effective international machinery for the avoidance of future wars.

Lees-Smith highlighted the inconsistencies of Allied war aims at present, the obvious clash, for example, between the Paris Resolutions and support in principle for a League of Nations. He then focused on the nature of Britain's commitment to France.³⁵

MacDonald approached the amendment more broadly, claiming that a war aims statement would stabilize a public opinion caught between war weariness and patriotic euphoria. He also returned to the old dissenting tenet that the return of Alsace-Lorraine had not been one of Britain's initial objectives. Moreover, an official clarification of this point would, he conjectured, strengthen the British war effort both politically and militarily. Somewhat unusually, MacDonald suggested that, following a settlement based on the Petrograd Formula, a tribunal might be established to hear accusations from the belligerents and that, its evaluation completed, guilty parties could be punished. More characteristically, he also held that a display of "statesmanship," presumably a moderate war aims statement from Britain, would strengthen the Reichstag Majority and, in turn, consolidate democracy in Germany.³⁶ MacDonald also highlighted the idea of a League of Nations, as a way of establishing once again his subtle distinction between war aims

³⁴ See below, p. 185.

³⁵ PD (Commons), 6 November 1917, 98, col. 2007.

³⁶ Ibid., cols. 2030, 2031-2033, 2034, 2029, 2035-2036.

and peace aims. The only legitimate objectives under the former category were the liberation of areas that had fallen under foreign control since the war had begun. Such a controversial matter as the French desire for Alsace-Lorraine, meanwhile, was a peace aim, which needed to be discussed in the liberal arena of a league of democratic Parliaments.³⁷

From the short debate it was obvious that the mood of the Commons had changed in the past few months. The dissenters had earlier received a fair hearing, but this latest amendment elicited a far less tolerant parliamentary response. Whitehouse, the last dissenting speaker, was even shouted down. Snowden complained that "in no Parliament in Europe is the question of war aims and peace terms treated with such indifference and intolerance as in the British House of Commons." The Labour Leader's parliamentary report noted with exasperation that "The Peace Debate in the House on Tuesday produced the worst exhibition of stubborn will to military conquest that our government has yet given to the world." The Herald found it hard to believe that anyone "could read into such a resolution anything even remotely 'pro-German' or 'peace-at-any-price.'" The Nation reacted more temperately. While observing that the Government had still not clarified its war aims, the newspaper surmised that Britain did not intend to annex German territory or dictate the character of its Government.³⁸

The disappointing outcome of the debate confirmed the effectiveness of the Government's battle to contain dissent. The vote of 282 to 31 in favour of closure revealed once more the pathetically insignificant level of parliamentary support for such dissenting initiatives as the Alsace-Lorraine amendment. Although the dissenters received only one less vote than the first

³⁷ Ibid., col. 2037. This portion of MacDonald's speech was virtually identical to that which he had delivered at Swansea on 22 May. See above, p. 122.

³⁸ The Labour Leader, 15 November 1917, p. 1; 8 November 1917, p. 5; The Herald, 10 November 1917, p. 2; The Nation, 10 November 1917, p. 173.

peace debate, the number of 'noes' was proportionately higher than on 16 May.³⁹ Dissent's share of the Commons vote was falling just as the movement was arguing that support for them was growing. The dissenters may have been aware of the growing parliamentary hostility but reasoned that the chance to speak out could not be missed. Parliament had been in recess from mid-August until mid-October so they had had little opportunity to use the Commons as a platform recently. No doubt the Lees-Smith motion was also intended to encourage the Reichstag Majority, by demonstrating the kind of good faith about which Russell had written in discussing the German reply to the Papal Peace Note.⁴⁰ Forcing the debate was also consistent with the dissenters' desire to brace the Provisional Government for a revision of British war aims.

The dissenters' isolation in Parliament forced them once again to stress the growth of an invisible opposition to the Government's fight-to-the-finish policy. Buxton told House that a number of MPs who, while not part of the "Pacifist Section," had changed their opinions. He felt that the 'knock-out blow' enthusiasts were strengthening the extremists in Germany. But he was also reassured by the burgeoning of "British democratic opinion," as evidenced by recent shifts in the editorial line of the two leading Liberal dailies, The Manchester Guardian and The Daily News from support for a military solution to endorsement of a negotiated settlement. Buxton was concerned, however, that Asquith's refusal to attack the Government directly was inhibiting many Liberals from endorsing a negotiated peace. For Buxton, the degree to which the former Prime Minister and President Wilson were prepared to use their influence were critical

³⁹ For a list of the amendment's supporters, and also for the vote tallies in the two earlier peace debates, 26 July as well as 16 May, see Appendix F.

⁴⁰ "The Kaiser's Reply to the Pope," 27 September 1917, in Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 71, pp. 314-315

factors in pushing the Government towards negotiations.⁴¹

The Bolsheviks

An even more crucial prerequisite for a negotiated peace, all dissenters would have agreed, was the survival of the Provisional Government in Russia. On 8 October, the Russian Government was again reshuffled, although Kerensky was retained at its head. This Government, seen by some historians as the weakest administration since the overthrow of tsarism, was overthrown by the Bolsheviks on 7 November. The next evening Lenin issued an appeal to warring countries to begin negotiations immediately on the basis of the Petrograd Formula.⁴² Although there was no explicit suggestion of a separate peace, Lenin was determined to end the war. He was certain that by fermenting revolution, the new Russian régime could precipitate the collapse of all capitalist Governments. Russia would then be able to reach satisfactory arrangements with the new revolutionary states. All early Bolshevik pronouncements and diplomatic initiatives were

⁴¹ Buxton to House, 12 November 1917, Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Box 3 Letter E-H, House File. This letter is also in the House Papers, Series I, Box 23, Folder 729 and in the Massingham Papers, MC 41/93/7.

⁴² Wade, The Russian Search for Peace, p. 121. The 8 November document, sometimes called "Proclamation to the Peoples of All the Belligerent Countries" or, simply, "The Decree of Peace" called for an immediate peace on the basis of the Petrograd Formula and an end to secret diplomacy. It also pledged to publish all secret treaties struck by the tsarist Government. As well, a three-month armistice was proposed to allow for negotiations to begin (see John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace, March 1918 [New York, 1971], pp. 375-378). Bolshevik efforts to start negotiations were reinforced by Leon Trotsky, until recently chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and now Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, who on 20 November informed Allied ambassadors of the Decree of Peace. It is unclear exactly when the contents of this appeal became public knowledge in Great Britain. The Labour Leader published the decree as late as 29 November and, even then, it stated that it had had to translate it from a French newspaper of 12 November ("Towards Peace and Liberty! Full Text of the Russian Appeal to Belligerents," The Labour Leader, 29 November 1917, p. 5). On 22 November, Allied ambassadors met in Petrograd to discuss possible courses of action. It was decided to ignore Trotsky and the Decree of Peace and to recommend that their Governments not communicate with the new régime (Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, pp. 70-71).

intended to widen any divisions between the foreign masses and their Governments.⁴³

The dissenters, like so many other contemporaries, had not anticipated the collapse of the last Kerensky Government. Following its reconstruction early in October, Snowden sensed that "something like a definite conclusion as to the immediate future of the Government of Russia" had been reached. The Labour Leader even maintained that the reorganization of the Government gave Kerensky more power.⁴⁴ The Nation responded to the formation of another Russian coalition in the same way that it had reacted to previous political changes since March; it called for a restatement of Allied war aims to reinforce the new Russian administration.⁴⁵ The dissenters' public expressions of confidence in Russian political stability, belied their private anxieties. They grasped that a Russian withdrawal would gravely weaken their hand, either by strengthening jingo resolve in the face of a crisis or by assisting a German military victory. Either outcome reduced the likelihood of a satisfactory settlement.

The dissenters had hoped that the British Government would oblige both them and the Provisional Government by issuing a new war aims statement. Their wish seemed to have been fulfilled when, at the Albert Hall on 22 October, Lloyd George declared that the Allied leaders would meet to discuss both political and military affairs. A week later, however, the Government reversed this decision, Bonar Law telling the Commons that, "as far as he knew," the proposed conference would only discuss the military conduct of the war.⁴⁶ On 5 November he confirmed that Allied war aims were not on the agenda of the upcoming conference. Snowden considered

⁴³ See Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War, pp. 246-248; Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, chs. 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ The Labour Leader, 11 October 1917, pp. 1, 2.

⁴⁵ The Nation, 13 October 1917, p. 54.

⁴⁶ See PD (Commons), 29 October 1917, 98, col. 1187.

this volte-face a "bombshell," and The Nation expressed its profound dismay at this failure of British statesmanship. The Herald too regretted the narrowed focus of the conference, arguing that Russia was only interested in the question of war aims. After the Bolsheviks had grasped power, Brailsford followed the line of Philip Price, The Manchester Guardian's Petrograd correspondent, who had reported that Britain's stubborn refusal to discuss war aims had persuaded the Bolsheviks to stage their coup d'état.⁴⁷

The dissenters reacted ambiguously to the Bolshevik take-over and peace proclamation. Most realized that Bolshevik Revolution meant that Russia would soon be out of the war.⁴⁸ A separate peace, according to an editorial in The U.D.C., would be the most likely outcome now even if the Bolsheviks were quickly replaced by another Government.⁴⁹ Russia's departure from the war had been feared by dissent ever since the advent of March Revolution. Its apprehension was heightened because of the increasingly low regard in which most dissenters held the Bolsheviks. As early as May 1917, The Nation had characterized the Petrograd Soviet as a moderating influence between Monarchist and Bolshevik extremes. Lenin was seen as the leader of "the fanatical and violent 'Majority Social Democrats'" and a 'peace at any price' man. The Bolsheviks' image was further tarnished by their failed coup of 16-17 July. The Nation doubted whether the "Leninites" were in German pay, preferring to believe that such unpardonable,

⁴⁷ The Labour Leader, 8 November 1917, p. 1; "The Failure of the Government," The Nation, 3 November 1917, p. 148; "How To Thank the Fighting Men," The Herald, 3 November 1917, p. 9; Brailsford, "A Separate Peace?," The Herald, 1 December 1917, p. 20.

⁴⁸ For some indication, however, of dissenting confusion as to Bolshevik intentions, see The Nation, 10 November 1917, p. 173; 17 November p. 230; "The Offensive and the Revolution," The Herald, 28 July 1917, p. 8; Brailsford, "Forces in the Russian Chaos," The Herald, 24 November 1917, p. 8; Bernard, "International Notes," The Labour Leader, 15 November 1917, p. 3.

⁴⁹ The Labour Leader, 29 November 1917, p. 1; The U.D.C., December 1917, p. 163.

treasonous actions were the product of fanaticism.⁵⁰ Brailsford's denunciation of the attempted July uprising was equally severe. "It is a mercy for Russia," he wrote, "that the painful but necessary taste of suppressing this anti-democratic disorder has been undertaken."⁵¹

The only encouraging aspect of the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin's decree was that the dissenters could use them to discredit the Government and press for negotiations. En masse they denounced the Government for abetting the Russian collapse by not agreeing to the Petrograd Formula.⁵² The exclusion of war aims from the now aborted Allied conference also featured in the dissenters' attacks on the Government. When the Russian peace initiative was confirmed in late November, The Labour Leader predicted that the German Government would reply carefully, thereby forcing Allied Governments (in the face of working-class pressure) to make an equally conciliatory gesture. The Nation was less charitable, deriding the Bolshevik plan as "hopelessly impractical." But the newspaper at least agreed that the Government should tell Russia that a war aims conference would take place as soon as Russia had a new Government.⁵³

The dissenters' capacity to produce insightful political analysis at this moment of crisis and uncertainty was limited because events in Russia were hidden behind a "curtain of darkness."⁵⁴ Much reporting in the immediate aftermath of the November Revolution was incomplete or unreliable. The confusion explains dissent's surprisingly uncertain reaction both

⁵⁰ "Diplomacy and Revolution," The Nation, 12 May 1917, p. 133; "The Peril of Russia," The Nation, 28 July 1917, p. 421.

⁵¹ "The Offensive and the Revolution," The Herald, 28 July 1917, p. 8.

⁵² The U.D.C., December 1917, p. 163; The Nation, 10 November 1917, p. 173; The Labour Leader, 15 November 1917, p. 1.

⁵³ "Towards Peace and Liberty! Full Text of the Russian Appeal to Belligerents," The Labour Leader, 29 November 1917, p. 5; "How to Help Russia", The Nation, 24 November 1917, p. 264.

⁵⁴ The Nation, 17 November 1917, p. 230.

to the Bolshevik take-over and Lenin's peace decree. The Bolshevik Revolution was in a sense anti-climactic. There was nothing for dissent to say that had not been said before. They had prophesied ad nauseam that Kerensky would fall if the Allies withheld a moderate war aims statement. But vindication provided only cold comfort, given dissent's mistrust of the Bolsheviks and their evident willingness to strike a separate peace. Yet strident criticism of the Bolsheviks had to be held in check because it would have only undermined dissent's effort at persuading the Government to negotiate on the basis of the Petrograd Formula or to issue a moderate war aims statement.⁵⁵

Conclusion

By contrast to 1917's summer of hope and promise, the fall was disappointing at best. If the Italian military defeat and Russian Revolution did anything to stimulate pro-negotiation feeling, the beneficiaries of the changed international climate were not dissenters. Their loss of ground and momentum can be attributed to a range of factors. There was a dearth of diplomatic initiatives for dissent to fuel their drive for a new British war aims statement. The fact that the dissenters accepted the interventions of the Pope with such fanfare was in itself significant. It was a measure of the dissenters' narrowed horizons that they felt compelled to endorse the Vatican initiative. Indeed, the Papal Peace Note was important only because it provided a vehicle for the transmission of dissenting views of British, American and German peace policy at a time when Parliament was not in session. The dissenters also had to contend with growing governmental repression and the eclipse of the Russian model for peace.

⁵⁵ See the following attacks on the Bolsheviks' violent and anti-democratic tendencies: Brailsford, "Russia, Peace and Bread," The Herald, 17 November 1917, p. 7; "How To Help Russia," The Nation, 24 November 1917, p. 263.

Perhaps the dissenters' greatest handicap was themselves. The peace debate of 6 November showed that parliamentary support for dissent was minimal and perhaps even declining. If, as Buxton suggested, pro-negotiation sentiment was growing in the Commons, then the recent converts were clearly rejecting dissent's leadership. It follows that new advocates of a negotiated peace were not necessarily desirous of a comprehensive dissenting settlement. Therefore, they should not be seen as augmenting the ranks of dissent. The dissenters had largely exhausted their political credibility. Since December 1916 they had made various predictions, including, most importantly, that negotiations were imminent--yet none had been borne out. Any stature which dissent enjoyed inside the labour movement and with the wider public had been squandered by late August. Indeed, thereafter, the Government clearly felt secure enough to openly harry dissent with renewed purpose and vigour.

Chapter 6: THE DAYS OF OLD—DECEMBER 1917 TO JANUARY 1918

Introduction

Late in 1917 there was a widespread feeling on the British Home Front that the Allied war effort was faltering. Beatrice Webb captured the public's anxieties in her private estimation that Germany was, indeed, winning the war, given its continued submarine successes, the invasion of Italy, the collapse of Russia and the deteriorating morale of the French Army.¹ The year had been one of heavy sacrifice. Hence, Tory aristocrat Lord Lansdowne's celebrated appeal for an end to the fighting, published in The Daily Telegraph on 29 November, added some legitimacy to dissent's still insistent demands for a negotiated peace. The Government was obliged to deal with the repercussions from the Lansdowne Letter. At the same time Ministers also had to respond to the war aims programme issued by the Labour Party on 28 December and to the resistance of the trade unions to the latest 'comb out' of men from the factories for the army.

Notwithstanding these encouraging signs for dissent, within two months they had witnessed their supersession as the leading advocates of a negotiated peace. Their radical foreign policy programme was diluted and co-opted by more cautious elements. Russo-German peace talks were partly responsible for this reversal of dissenting fortunes. Originally the Brest-Litovsk negotiations had looked like a bold precursor of a negotiated settlement. By the end of January, however, the punitive actions of the Germans had made this optimistic view impossible to sustain. Russia was eliminated from the peace equation and, therefore, also as an ally of dissent. Lloyd

¹ MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, p. 290 (11 December 1917).

George, meanwhile, in a brilliant tour de force, was successful not only in negating the impact of the Lansdowne Letter but also in gaining the leadership of moderate pro-negotiation sentiment which he led back to a 'knock-out blow' position. Support for negotiations was spreading but most new adherents were not converted to the viewpoints of dissenters like Morel, Ponsonby and MacDonald. They were attracted instead to the rather different perspectives on a moderate peace espoused by either Lansdowne or Henderson.

The Lansdowne Letter

The central theme of Lord Lansdowne's famous letter to The Daily Telegraph was the pressing need for an early, negotiated peace. To members of Asquith's last administration the letter would have been familiar; it was a modified version of a document Lansdowne had submitted to Cabinet at the Prime Minister's request in November 1916. Before despatching his letter for publication over a year later, Lansdowne showed it to his erstwhile ministerial colleague, Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary. The Government, however, denied any foreknowledge of Lansdowne's foray into peace politics.² Lansdowne began by lamenting both the length and human costs of the war. He believed that the Central Powers had acknowledged Allied security needs by agreeing to the creation of an international league for arbitration. Moreover, Lansdowne argued that moderate forces in Germany needed to be strengthened by the reformulation of Allied war aims. He urged the Government to state categorically that its objectives did not extend beyond the following guiding principles of its peace policy. First, that Britain wanted Germany to remain

² For the text of the Letter and background to its publication, see Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne: A Biography (London, 1929), pp. 464, 466-468. For reactions to Lansdowne's Cabinet Paper of November 1916, see Robbins, The Abolition of War, pp. 109-110. General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had been particularly contemptuous of Lansdowne's pessimism.

a Great Power. Second, that Britain did not want to force a new Government on the German people. Third, that Britain did not want to destroy post-war German commerce. Fourth, that there would be a post-war inquiry into freedom of the seas. Last, that Britain was prepared to join an international league to settle disputes peacefully.

The Letter was vehemently denounced in pro-war circles. Before an audience of 1,500 at a conference of the National Unionist Association of Conservative and Liberal Unionist Associations at Kingsway Hall, Bonar Law labelled the Letter a "national misfortune."³ The Northcliffe Press was especially strident in its criticism of the former Foreign Secretary. The principal objection of The Daily Mail, The Evening News and The Times, as well as of other popular patriotic papers, was to the pessimistic tone of Lansdowne's communication.⁴ Russell observed that Lansdowne was being portrayed as an ante-diluvian aristocrat who feared democracy and was prepared to compromise with Prussian militarism as a result.⁵

Not only dissenters were heartened by the timely intervention of Lord Lansdowne in the peace-by-negotiation debate. John Turner argues that many Army officers shared Lansdowne's concerns about the wartime disruption of the social order and his conviction that the warring parties were deadlocked. Some Unionist backbenchers, if not the Party leadership, were also cautiously welcoming.⁶ On the Labour side, Arthur Henderson sensed that the solid conservative credentials of Lansdowne would ease the burden of shifting "moderate opinion" towards a pro-negotiation position. Moreover, the Lansdowne Letter was a vindication of the views he had

³ The Daily Telegraph, 1 December 1917, p. 7.

⁴ Harold Kurtz, "The Lansdowne Letter," History Today XVIII/2 (February 1968), p. 86; Turner, British Politics, pp. 249-250.

⁵ "Lord Lansdowne's Letter," 6 December 1917, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 86, pp. 370-371.

⁶ Turner, British Politics, p. 249.

been propagating himself since returning from Russia in July.⁷

The dissenters greeted the Lansdowne Letter with a predictable outburst of enthusiasm. Buxton thanked Lansdowne personally and offered to assist his future efforts for peace.⁸ "How can we make him Prime Minister?" Ponsonby wondered to Lady Courtney. He too expressed his gratitude to Lansdowne for the encouragement and hope which his letter had sparked.⁹ Ponsonby later voiced his satisfaction with the timing of the Letter, as it seemed to undermine the Government's attempts at "manufacturing false opinion" through the NWAC and new DORA regulations.¹⁰ MacDonald also welcomed the spirit of a letter which "sets the balderdash of the 'knock-out' blow on one side; it subordinates military success to reasonable diplomacy."¹¹ The Nation gave extensive coverage to the Letter beside which "no utterance of British, or even European, statesmanship since the war began compares in importance." As "the father of the Anglo-French Entente," Lansdowne's judgments as to the preconditions of peace were "of the first consequence." The UDC formed a committee to disseminate Lansdowne's "views" and, although not until the following spring, the Letter led to the creation of special Lansdowne

⁷ Henderson, "No Sliding Peace!," The Herald, 8 December 1917, p. 5; Turner, "British Politics and the Great War," in Britain and the First World War, John Turner, ed. (London, 1988), p. 129.

⁸ Lansdowne to Buxton, 6 December 1917, Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Box 4, Lansdowne File.

⁹ Ponsonby to Lady Courtney, 29 November 1917, quoted in Turner, British Politics, p. 228; Ponsonby to Lord Lansdowne, 5 December 1917, Ponsonby Papers, C.666. Lady Courtney was a member of the UDC General Council (Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 193).

¹⁰ Forward, 29 December 1917, p. 1.

¹¹ The Daily Citizen, 5 December 1917, p. 1.

Committees which became nexuses of dissenting and non-dissenting opinion.¹²

The Letter was warmly received in dissenting circles because of the belief that Lansdowne's respectability and formidable political stature would legitimate their own peace-by-negotiation arguments. In thanking Lansdowne, Ponsonby also hoped that the Tory elder statesman would not be embarrassed by dissent's support for him. MacDonald worried that Lansdowne would be vilified and tarred falsely as an ILP supporter. The UDC refrained publicly from affiliating with either Lansdowne or the Lansdowne Committees for fear of smearing the former Foreign Secretary with the taint of pacifism.¹³

Although the Letter would have to be handled carefully, it had provided dissenters with an unexpected opportunity to regain some of their lost momentum and to reassert their control over the peace-by-negotiation movement. Buxton felt that there was "a pro-negotiation and pro-Lansdowne movement" in Parliament. He also claimed that the public would support a Liberal or Labour leader who espoused such views, so long as he was not an open associate of the UDC.¹⁴ So, in conjunction with Wedgwood, Buxton wrote an open letter urging all Liberals to persuade Asquith to take charge of these pro-negotiation forces. The two Liberal MPs stated that "conservatives with Prussian traditions" had heretofore dominated the settlement debate and that moderates could only look to the United States "to ensure a settlement on really liberal

¹² The Nation, 1 December 1917, p. 289; Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 88; Kurtz, "The Lansdowne Letter," p. 87; F.W. Hirst, "The War and the Approach to Peace--The Policy of Lord Lansdowne," London, [1918]. Hirst was the principal organizer of the Lansdowne Committees.

¹³ Ponsonby to Lord Lansdowne, 5 December 1917, Ponsonby Papers, C.666; The Daily Citizen, 5 December 1917, p. 1; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 193.

¹⁴ Buxton to Hirst, n.d., Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Box 3, Letters E-H, Hirst File. Buxton later credited Lansdowne with inspiring Wilson's Fourteen Points speech of 8 January 1918. However, he also thought that the Letter was ill-timed, that it should have been released a year earlier when the Allied strategic position was stronger (Buxton, "Lost Opportunities of the Last War," n.d. [1940?], Buxton Papers, Box 35, pp. 4-5).

lines." They spoke of Conservative divisions and the desertion of Liberals from the Party. The letter seemed to propose a status quo ante bellum peace, which would offer Germany no gains. Faced with the "vast losses" already incurred, the militarists would forfeit all support if they rejected such a plan. Moreover, the Liberal MPs' scheme ruled out the humiliation and subjugation of Germany and would therefore provide the basis of a lasting settlement.¹⁵ Asquith was reluctant to break with the Government completely, adopting a position on Britain's war policy in Birmingham on 11 December that was remarkably similar to that taken by Lloyd George three days later when the Prime Minister unequivocally rejected a peace-by-negotiation.¹⁶

There were superficial similarities between Lansdowne's proposals and those of the dissenters. Both saw negotiations as a talisman to ward off bloody revolution, the destruction of Western civilization and social collapse. For example, The Nation had earlier noted that "we are in the fourth year of a world-war which is fast wearing out the material stock and the moral power of civilization." Late in October The Herald declared that "if the world is worth saving, let us save it! It is idle to talk about rebuilding after the war if we contemplate going on to exhaustion-point."¹⁷ Unlike the majority of dissenters, however, Lansdowne lacked the vital corollary of this fear of disorder--the vision of a new order. The omission was not at all surprising because, in essence, the Weltanschauung of Lansdowne was antithetical to everything for which dissent stood. As thrice imprisoned CO, Clifford Allen, commented, the tone of the Letter spoke volumes about Lansdowne's social and political anxieties, particularly his acute "fear

¹⁵ Wedgwood and Buxton, enclosure with 1 December 1917 letter to Asquith, Pringle Papers, Section II/56.

¹⁶ Turner, British Politics, p. 251.

¹⁷ "Clearing the Road to Peace," The Nation, 29 September 1917, p. 656; "The Hope for the Future--The Real National Party," The Herald, 27 October 1917, p. 9.

of Labour." Indeed, the Tory aristocrat did not want to create a new world order based on international cooperation. He wished, first and foremost, to preserve a social system at the apex of which stood his own class but which was now crumbling under the strain of total war.¹⁸

Dissenting hopes for the future, however naively idealistic, were at least constructive. Lansbury looked for "a redeemed and regenerated world" to emerge from the carnage.¹⁹ The Nation argued that "this final battlefield may well become the scene of the death of Christian civilization, and that democracy is the only force of rescue left to us." Negotiations were regarded as a necessary first step towards the regeneration of both society and international politics. Comparing the "Never-Endians" unfavourably with the "Endians," the leading Liberal weekly defined the latter as people for whom

the war is not an ordinary war; it is hors concours: it is the collapse of a system, the end of the world. Nothing like it has ever happened before, or should ever be allowed to happen again. Therefore they seek a better country; examining the whole diplomatic and political structure and seeking to rebuild it in harmony with the all-pervading human need.²⁰

The Lansdowne Letter ultimately hurt the dissenters' campaign to obtain a peace-by-negotiation. At first, the Letter ensured a postponement of any war aims revisions by the Government. Any such official action might have appeared inspired by Lansdowne and, therefore, as defeatist.²¹ Lloyd George's 14 December speech to the Masters of the Bench of the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn reaffirmed his Government's commitment to a fight-to-the-

¹⁸ Quoted in Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 391. See also, Turner, "British Politics and the Great War," p. 129.

¹⁹ Lansbury, "Christmas, 1917," The Herald, 1 December 1917, p. 5.

²⁰ "The Growth of Public Opinion," The Nation, 15 September 1917, p. 600; "Endians and Never-Endians," The Nation, 20 October 1917, p. 83.

²¹ Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 146; Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 27.

finish policy. The Prime Minister denied that there existed a "half-way house between victory and defeat"; the only solution he saw was victory followed by a comprehensive treaty settlement.²² In the longer term, the Letter and the 'movement' which it triggered robbed dissent of potential recruits who chose instead to follow Lord Lansdowne, a Conservative whose moderation owed nothing to dissent.

Exit Russia

The Bolsheviks had taken two bold foreign policy steps after their takeover of power in November 1917--the release of the Allied secret treaties and the commencement of armistice negotiations with Germany. By the end of November, Germany and Austria had accepted Russia's conditions for a preliminary cease-fire, and armistice negotiations began on 2 December in Brest-Litovsk. Four days later Trotsky announced a one-week suspension of negotiations so as to "inform" Allied Governments of their progress. This announcement also urged the Allies to join the negotiations or to "declare and define definitely...the aims for which the peoples of Europe may lose their blood during a fourth year of war."²³

The Russo-German armistice was signed on 15 December; peace negotiations started a week later. On 22 December, the Russians put forward their six-point programme.²⁴ On

²² Scott, ed., "Address of Prime Minister Lloyd-George on War Aims," 14 December 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 210-215. Asquith, under great pressure to endorse the Lansdowne Letter, nevertheless backed Lloyd George.

²³ Scott, ed., "Proclamation of Foreign Minister Trotsky on the Armistice and Urging Allied Participation and a Statement of War Aims," 6 December 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 202, 203.

²⁴ I. No forcible appropriation of any territories taken in the course of the war. The occupying armies to be withdrawn from those territories at the earliest moment.

II. Complete political independence to be given to those nationalities which had been deprived of it since the beginning of the war.

Christmas day, somewhat surprisingly given their position of strength vis à vis Russia, the Central Powers accepted the Bolshevik programme as the basis of a general settlement. Germany and Austria attached only two provisos to their assent, first,

All Powers now participating in the war must within a suitable period, without exception and without reserve, bind themselves to the most precise adherence to the general conditions agreed upon.

and second,

With respect to point No. III of the Russian proposal, the question of self-determination for national groups which possess no political independence cannot, in the opinion of the Quadruple Alliance, admit of international settlement, but must, if necessary, be solved by each State independently together with the nationalities concerned, and in accordance with the constitution of that State.

But neither Germany's military leaders nor its civilian politicians at Brest-Litovsk had any intention of implementing a peace consistent with the Petrograd Formula, to which the Bolshevik conditions bore a distinct resemblance. The German delegation admitted frankly that their plan was to offer a general peace on the basis of the Petrograd Formula solely because of their expectation that the Anglo-French Entente would decline such a proposal. Thus could their punitive, separate peace with Russia be fully justified.²⁵ Indeed, later on Christmas Day the Germans clarified their position, stating that, since the Bolsheviks had published their Decree on the Self-Determination of Nations on 15 November, Poland, Courland and Lithuania had chosen

III. Nationalities not hitherto enjoying political independence to be allowed the right to decide by means of a referendum whether they elect to be united to other nations or to acquire independence. The referendum to be so arranged as to ensure complete freedom of voting.

IV. In the case of territories inhabited by several nationalities, the rights of minorities to be safeguarded by special provisions.

V. None of the belligerent Powers to pay any war indemnity. War requisitions should be returned, and sufferers by war should be compensated from a special fund levied on all belligerent countries in proportion to their resources.

VI. Colonial questions to be settled in conformity with points I, II, III, and IV. Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, pp. 117-118.

²⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, pp. 108-111, 120, 127.

to pursue a course separate from Russia. Late in December the Bolsheviks proposed the simultaneous withdrawal of Russia from Persia and Turkey in conjunction with the Central Powers from Courland, Lithuania and Poland. Local plebiscites would then determine the destiny of the peoples in the latter three territories. The German delegates rejected the Russian proposal.

Events at Brest-Litovsk had a profound impact on the dissenters. They had long been afraid of a separate Russian peace, believing that a Russian withdrawal would galvanize popular jingoism in Britain to confront a more aggressive and partially victorious Germany. In addition, they feared that the Allies would be defeated in the field before American military force really began to count. Such a defeat would likely force on Britain the kind of disastrous, punitive settlement they believed would be imposed on the Central Powers. These nightmare scenarios conjured up apocalyptic images in dissenting minds, of famine, social dislocation, revolution and renewed warfare. For the majority of dissenters the best alternative was for their Government to join the Russians at Brest-Litovsk.

The altered position of Russia in dissent's strategy was made easier for many by the publication of secret treaties revealing the imperialist nature of Allied war aims. The dissenters had long suspected that these treaties bound the Allies to an annexationist policy and had pressed the Government throughout 1917 to reveal their contents.²⁶ The Labour Leader hoped that the Bolshevik revelations would provide "a complete justification" of the ILP position.²⁷ For Brailsford the treaties showed "that the holy crusade against militarism was, in fact, a sordid struggle to annex German coal mines and partition Turkey." Trevelyan later dated Labour's

²⁶ See, for example, The U.D.C., June 1917, p. 87.

²⁷ "Towards Peace and Liberty!" The Labour Leader, 29 November 1917, p. 5. Although the text of the first treaty was released on 23 November, word of their contents did not reach Britain until the end of the month and really only after The Manchester Guardian began publishing them in full on 12 December.

conversion to a quasi-dissenting foreign policy to the publication of the secret treaties. "For the first time," he recalled, "the conviction became widespread that the war was, after all, an imperialist war."²⁸ The Nation struck a more cautious note, maintaining that secret diplomacy was wrong, but that publishing treaties which the Bolsheviks had obtained only by coup d'état was even more reprehensible. Such actions would serve only to further discredit the Bolsheviks in the eyes of European Governments and ruin their slim chance of securing a negotiated peace.²⁹

Nonetheless, the dissenters endeavoured to use the treaties to embarrass the Government into issuing a new war aims statement. This objective certainly seems to have inspired Ponsonby during the short Commons debate of war aims on 19 December. He attacked a Government which had "prostituted the original disinterested motives for which this country entered the War, and substituted for them a mean craving for vengeance and punishment, a sordid desire for gain." For Ponsonby, the secret treaties attached dishonour to Britain; he demanded an official clarification of the Government's position.³⁰ The Nation, too, regretted Lloyd George's refusal to restate British war aims, particularly after the Bolsheviks' disclosures had "reduced the war to a game of grab, and abolished the clear moral distinction which existed between the [sic] Germany and the Alliance of 1914." A new war aims statement was required from the Government in order to set the record straight. On the very day that Lloyd George made his

²⁸ "The Secret Treaties," The Herald, 8 December 1917, p. 10; Trevelyan, From Liberalism to Labour, p. 36. Despite Trevelyan's retrospective claims regarding the significance of the treaties, Labour's war aims programme of 28 December had been agreed to in principle as early as the special conference of 10 August.

²⁹ "The Secret Treaties," The Nation, 1 December 1917, p. 294.

³⁰ PD (Commons), 19 December 1917, 100, cols. 1998-2009. Buxton, Trevelyan and Pringle were among some of the dissenters that spoke during this debate. Some of the non-pacifists who spoke during the debate were Sir W. Collins, and Walter Runciman, both described by The Times as "Asquith supporters" (see "Spirited Debate," The Times, 20 December 1917, p. 7).

famous war aims speech to Britain's union bosses, The Herald was demanding the statement of "detailed terms."³¹

The dissenters' desire to force a reformulation of British war aims by discrediting Allied secret diplomacy was complicated by the opening of Russo-German negotiations. Despite the potential benefits of the treaties' publication, some dissenters feared that the Brest-Litovsk talks would undermine any new support for a negotiated peace. Brailsford was categorically against Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the war. The reprehensible nature of the secret treaties notwithstanding, Russia had "an overwhelming moral obligation, deeper and stronger than any treaty." By renouncing their debt to the peoples of the Allied countries, the Bolsheviks were "putting themselves outside the pale of our Internationalist Socialist Society."³²

So reluctant were dissenters to admit that the Bolsheviks were concluding a separate peace that many simply refused to do so. Not until early in December did The Nation acknowledge that the Bolsheviks were committed to ending the war. But even then Massingham's weekly remained unclear as to whether that end would be through a separate or a general peace. The same journal later surmised that the Bolsheviks were "playing alternatively for a general peace or a general revolution," or perhaps just a German revolution. Brailsford denied that the Bolsheviks were seeking a separate agreement but warned that they might be forced into one unless Britain moved on the question of negotiations.³³ The Herald talked of Russia holding out against a separate peace in the hope that the Allies would eventually help settle an overall

³¹ "The Power of Darkness," The Nation, 22 December 1917, p. 400; "What then Are We Fighting for?" The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 7.

³² "A Separate Peace?" The Herald, 1 December 1917, p. 20.

³³ The Nation, 1 December 1917, p. 289; The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474; Brailsford, "Towards a General Peace," The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 8.

agreement.³⁴

A Bolshevik brokered general peace was acceptable to dissent because their war aims were regarded as disinterested. Ponsonby thought the "Bolshevists...simply splendid and I hope they will teach the world that military victory is not necessary for a good settlement." MacDonald, who thought the Russian armistice manifesto a "remarkable document," believed that

above all, there was Russia, driven by her own condition to think of a separate peace, and yet striving valiantly to make peace democratic, general and secure--a peace which might embody the original and virgin political and moral aims of the Allies.³⁵

The Nation praised the "general honesty" of the Bolsheviks. Following Trotsky's 29 December declaration, The Herald proclaimed that "the Bolsheviks stand for everything for which Great Britain has professed to stand in this war, and for which our men have died and are dying."³⁶

In the event of a separate Russian peace, the dissenters would hold Britain responsible for any future catastrophe. MacDonald still insisted that Russia would be forced to leave the war only if the Allies failed to back a compromise peace. He blamed the latter for obliging the Bolsheviks to negotiate with Germany.³⁷ The Herald painted a bleak picture of a resource rich Russia, alienated from its erstwhile Allies, being drawn towards an accommodation with Germany in the aftermath of a separate peace. The war would then "stretch on into a black and dubious

³⁴ "What then Are We Fighting for?" The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 7.

³⁵ Ponsonby to Trevelyan, 5 January 1918, Trevelyan Papers, Box 79; Forward, 29 December 1917, p. 1. The manifesto to which MacDonald was referring was the 22 December six-point programme. See also "Ramsay MacDonald in Glasgow," Forward, 12 January 1918, p. 3.

³⁶ The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474; "Now or Never--A People's Peace," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 7. Trotsky's 29 December declaration urged "all the peoples and Governments in the Allied countries" to join with Russia and the Central Powers in a Petrograd Formula-type settlement.

³⁷ Forward, 29 December 1917, p. 1.

future" with ever lengthening casualty lists. Alternatively, in the event of a separate peace, the German reinforcement of the Western Front would, for the foreseeable future, outweigh the effects of American military intervention on the Allied side. As it was the British Government which had refused to negotiate a general peace, Germany was not to blame for abandoning the Petrograd Formula.³⁸ Yet, the dissenters still held to their view that the Petrograd Formula remained a viable policy option for the British Government. Particularly after Germany's temporary acceptance of the Petrograd Formula on 25 December, the dissenters hoped that a general settlement would lead to the formula's universal application and the fulfilment of national self-determination inside the British Empire.³⁹

While the dissenters were urging a supposedly intransigent British Government to revise its war aims, they continued to portray Germany as moderate and flexible. Trevelyan told the Commons that German democrats had consistently demanded a non-annexationist peace. He cited the Minority Socialists' sweep of municipal elections in Leipzig as proof of the German people's war weariness. Brailsford decried the strict censorship of foreign news and the false impression left of the militarists as the ascendant political force inside Germany. He even foresaw a German revolution should the Government opt for annexations in the East.⁴⁰ The Herald maintained that such a grave miscalculation by the German Government, especially if Britain agreed to negotiate

³⁸ "What then Are We Fighting for?" The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 7; "Now or Never--A People's Peace," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 7; "Peace or the Comb-Out?" The Herald, 19 January 1918, p. 7.

³⁹ See, for example, The Herald, 5 January 1918, pp. 2, 6; The Nation, 19 January 1918, p. 503.

⁴⁰ PD (Commons), 19 December 1917, 100, col. 2067; "On Public Diplomacy," The Herald, 19 January 1918, p. 8; Brailsford, "Tearing off the Mask," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 8. Trevelyan was referring to the Independent Social Democratic Party which was a splinter group from the Social Democratic Party. Unlike the other Social Democrats, the "Minority Socialists" voted against war credits.

a general peace, would destroy the German Army's will to fight. If the German people knew that British imperialism had been curbed, the same newspaper predicted boldly in mid-February, they would refuse to fight.

Germany's foreign policy was even portrayed in a favourable light. The Herald had already concluded that the German Government had accepted a settlement based on the Petrograd Formula.⁴¹ The Nation, amazingly, also interpreted Germany's conditions for peace as tantamount to an acceptance of the Bolshevik programme. As late as February 1918, The Nation was still depicting the German Chancellor as a conciliatory figure, likely to push for a compromise peace just as soon as the Allies' pacific intentions were revealed.⁴² The dissenters were convinced that Germany wanted a moderate peace with Russia so that the latter would be amenable to establishing a mutually advantageous economic relationship. By eschewing annexations Germany would win the gratitude of the Russian people.⁴³ The dissenting press also saw the German socialists as the vanguard of moderate peace sentiment. The Herald mourned the plight of the German Social Democrats, asserting that they had been lied to by the militarists.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding their rose-tinted views of Britain's enemy, the dissenters still had to

⁴¹ "Peace or the Comb-Out?" The Herald, 19 January 1918, p. 7 "The Murder of Democracy--Who Is Preventing the Peace?" The Herald, 9 February 1918, p. 3; "Trotsky To the World," The Herald, 12 January p. 3.

⁴² The Nation, 5 January 1918, p. 449; "The Dove and the Ark", The Nation, 2 February 1918, p. 557. See also "The Power of Ideas," The Nation, 5 January 1918, p. 452.

⁴³ "What then Are We Fighting for?" The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 7; "The Test for Germany," The Nation, 5 January 1918, pp. 445-454. Conversely, the British refusal to join negotiations at Brest-Litovsk was seen as proof of a short-sighted foreign policy ("Wanted, a Peace Offensive," The Nation, 26 January 1918, p. 528).

⁴⁴ "The Murder of Democracy--Who Is Preventing the Peace?" The Herald, 9 February 1918, p. 3; "The Intervention of Labour," The Nation, 2 February 1918, p. 556.

explain the increasingly obvious collapse of Bolshevik diplomacy at Brest-Litovsk. Rather than admit that a Bolshevik peace was unworkable, the dissenters chose to blame the setbacks on the rising strength of the German military party.⁴⁵ A British statement, therefore, was needed to force the German Government to reveal its own perfidy to the German people.⁴⁶ By mid-February though, The Herald in particular was lamenting the British Government's lost opportunity to have strengthened the German moderates. Both Lansbury's weekly and The Nation now felt able to state categorically that the German Government was the enemy.⁴⁷

The Labour Peace Programme

Allied socialists had failed to agree on a war aims statement at their 28 August meeting in London. In light of this failure, a joint committee of the Labour Party's NEC and the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC was formed on 26 September to draft "a working agreement as to Peace and War Aims between the working classes of the Allied nations."⁴⁸ Webb, MacDonald and Henderson headed this committee, which was to use the Labour Party's 10 August draft War Aims Memorandum as its point of departure. The final text was adopted by the NEC on 12 December. This was the document passed by the Special Joint Conference

⁴⁵ The political successes of the German militarists were frequently blamed on Allied intransigence or aggression. See, for example, "The Murder of Democracy-- Who Is Preventing the Peace?" The Herald, 9 February 1918, p. 3.

⁴⁶ "Now or Never--A People's Peace," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 6; "Wanted, a Peace Offensive," The Nation, 26 January 1918, p. 528.

⁴⁷ "The Murder of Democracy--Who Is Preventing the Peace?" The Herald, 9 February 1918, p. 3; "Wanted, a Peace Offensive," The Nation, 26 January 1918, p. 528.

⁴⁸ Quoted in J.M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-1918 (London, 1974), p. 262; Margaret Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism (Stanford, 1961), p. 170.

of the Labour Party and the TUC on 28 December.

The Labour Memorandum on War Aims, however, differed substantially from the 10 August draft. First, the memorandum stated that the fate of Alsace-Lorraine would have to be decided by plebiscite. Swartz claims that it was the UDC/ILP presence on the sub-committee which substituted this stipulation for the assumption in the 10 August document that the two provinces would automatically revert back to France.⁴⁹ Second, the newer document took a less pro-Allied line on the question of Italian irredentist ambitions. This section of the memorandum now insisted that any transfers of territory be preceded by plebiscitary sanction. Third, the most salient feature of the 10 August draft, its harsh tone toward Germany, was not removed, although it was now muted somewhat. The 28 December memorandum contained several imputations of Germany's war guilt.⁵⁰ Finally, the memorandum called for the "complete democratisation of all countries" and even borrowed Wilson's famous phrase about "making the world safe for Democracy." Much to the UDC's dismay, Wilson had made German democratization a precondition of any peace negotiations. Presumably, by using the American President's language, the sub-committee agreed with his position.

Stephen Graubard claims that the Labour programme was written in an "atmosphere of growing disillusion and recrimination" engendered by The Manchester Guardian's publication of the secret treaties. Yet, by the time the treaties were published, the programme had already been written.⁵¹ There is also some debate over the authorship of the programme. The Memorandum

⁴⁹ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 168.

⁵⁰ One clause referred to the German "wrong admittedly done to Belgium" and another spoke of "the crime against the peace of the world by which Alsace and Lorraine were forcibly torn from France in 1871." The Labour memorandum called for a war crimes tribunal to investigate governments and individuals with a view to attributing blame and receiving reparations.

⁵¹ Graubard, British Labour, p. 46. See also Cline, Recruits to Labour, p. 20.

has been attributed variously to Henderson, Morel, Leonard Wolfe (a Fabian and League of Nations specialist), Brailsford, the ILP, and MacDonald. Swartz gives the UDC sole credit for the programme, but the contemporary record of Beatrice Webb's diary suggests the keynote contributions were those of her husband. Both Austin Van Der Slice and J.M. Winter agree that Sidney Webb was the principal author, the former observing that the programme was based on the "Draft Memorandum on War Issues" passed at the Special Labour Party Conference in August and that the draft approved by the NEC on 24 October was similar to Webb's 10 August document.⁵²

Labour's war aims programme was seen by most dissenters as charting a radically new course for the Party, away from a fight-to-the-finish and towards a peace based on the Petrograd Formula. In Snowden's view "the British Labour Party had become widely infected with the rapidly growing desire for peace." Lansbury too saw the 28 December conference as a sign of Labour's momentous shift in favour of a negotiated settlement. The Nation interpreted the programme as Labour's demand for an immediate restatement of war aims and as a declaration of the Party's belief in a settlement based on an international league, "disarmament, economic peace, and no forcible annexations." Prior to the 28 December conference, The U.D.C. had predicted that, if the Labour Party endorsed the new programme, "then at last Mr. Snowden and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald will become part leaders of an acknowledged majority."⁵³

Historians too have tended to see the document in this light. Swartz argues that "the

⁵² Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 166-167; MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, p. 283 (5 August 1917); Van Der Slice, International Labor, p. 102; Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War, p. 262. See also, Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, p. 77; F.M. Leventhal, Arthur Henderson (Manchester, 1989), p. 142; Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 221.

⁵³ Quoted in Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 200; "Labour's Lead for Peace," The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 12; The Nation, 5 January 1918, p. 451; The U.D.C., January 1918, p. 176.

Union of Democratic Control could rightly assert that British Labour was following its lead in foreign policy."⁵⁴ Yet, contrary to both contemporary and historiographical assumptions, the Labour Party remained staunchly patriotic and pro-war. Henderson's understanding of Labour's foreign policy was not, and could not, be harmonized with the dissenters' conception of a negotiated peace. Howard Weinroth observes that Henderson and the executive committees of the Labour Party and the TUC never accepted 'peace without victory'.⁵⁵ As early as September 1917, Henderson had outlined the general shape of his ideal peace settlement. Like the dissenters, he called for a democratic, negotiated peace reflecting the popular will. He believed that the manifold contribution of British workers to the national war effort "clearly established their right" to have a say in the peace settlement. He had also urged the Government to issue a new war aims statement in line with Britain's 1914 objectives.⁵⁶

Henderson's position, however, actually diverged quite sharply from that of dissent. Whereas a key article of the dissenting faith was that war guilt must be apportioned equally among belligerents, Henderson explained the war's origins solely in terms of German expansionism. His advocacy of revised British war aims was designed to create a 'win-win' situation--perhaps a negotiated peace but, in the event of a German refusal, a strengthening of the "determination and moral passion of the Allied peoples to prosecute the war in a military sense to a successful issue." He also insisted that "the democratisation of the Government of Germany must be accomplished before, not after, the peace negotiations." Moreover, not all legitimate British war aims had yet been won. Henderson stressed that the international socialist

⁵⁴ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 169. See also Graubard, British Labour, p. 48 and, more recently, Clegg, British Trade Unions, p. 233.

⁵⁵ Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 388.

⁵⁶ Henderson, "A People's Peace," The Daily News, 28 September 1917, p. 2. This article was subsequently reprinted by the Labour Party.

conference for which he called would only be a "consultative conference" and not part of any drive towards an "inconclusive peace." As far as Henderson was concerned, Britain had entered the war as

the champion of the rights of small nations and the sanctity of treaties; to frustrate Germany's plans of military aggression and world domination; and to obtain a just and honourable, durable peace.⁵⁷

These are not the words of one who had apparently been converted to the dogmas of the UDC or the ILP.

Despite the apparently dissenting nature of the 28 December programme, many dissenters had, or would develop, serious reservations about the Labour Party's new policy. Buxton regarded the proposed internationalization of German colonies without "equivalent compensations" as tantamount to crushing Germany. Compared with Wilson's policy, Labour's demands for the freedom of Belgium, Romania, Montenegro and Serbia were far less conciliatory.⁵⁸ MacDonald thought that the "document might have been a little more sagaciously written." He wanted a clearer outline of both minimum conditions and those issues which might be resolved by negotiations. He also reiterated his belief that nationalities could not be freed by war. Brailsford appreciated the memorandum's general spirit and applauded its stand on an international league, post-war economic peace and disarmament. But he also complained of "too many clauses which might be twisted to justify a prolongation of the war." The Nation was critical of the Memorandum's African provisions, particularly its proposals for direct international government of tropical Africa, which the newspaper thought less wise than international

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Buxton, "Labour's War Aims," The Labour Leader, 14 February 1918, p. 5.

"supervision."⁵⁹

The dissenters nonetheless sought to take advantage of the momentum they perceived to have been generated by the 28 December conference. Many urged Labour to force the Government's hand on negotiations. Russell argued that the Labour Party should insist that the Government adopt its plan and begin negotiations which, he believed, could reach a settlement inside a month. Lansbury called upon Henderson to tell the Government that Labour would not stand for a "war" policy and also to press Lloyd George to substitute the Labour Party's policy for its imperialist course.⁶⁰

The seventeenth Annual General Conference of the Labour Party, which convened in Nottingham on 23 January 1918, appeared to many dissenters as further evidence of Labour's conversion to their foreign policy platform. Snowden thought the "temper and tone" of the meeting completely different from that of the conference of January 1917. He claimed that the delegates were "of the I.L.P. point of view on all questions" but did not adopt more radical resolutions because of "the restraining influence" of the executive and a few large unions. Snowden chose to believe that if the delegates had had their way they would have demanded that the Government join the Russo-German negotiations and accept a war aims programme based on "the demands of international democracy." The Herald rejoiced at the apparent rejection of jingoism and proclaimed that delegates were firmly behind a "'People's Peace' based on the

⁵⁹ "Ramsay MacDonald in Glasgow," Forward, 12 January 1918, p. 3; "Towards a General Peace," The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 8; "The Territorial Settlement," The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 478.

⁶⁰ Russell, "The German Peace Offer," 3 January 1918, in Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 92, pp. 398-399; "Labour's Lead for Peace," The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 12. See also Brailsford, "Towards a General Peace," The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 8.

Russian formula of no annexations, no indemnities, 'disarmament,' and a 'League of Nations.'"⁶¹

In actuality, however, attempts at the Nottingham conference to push the Labour Party towards such a radical position had been thwarted by the cautious resolution moved by Henderson and seconded by MacDonald which delineated Labour's future course of action on war aims. The resolution welcomed the recent statements of Lloyd George and Wilson "in so far as they are in harmony with the war aims of the British Labour Movement." It also called for a joint Allied declaration of war aims. One clause proposed convening a meeting of Allied socialists to discuss a war aims programme based on British Labour's 28 December declaration. Other elements of the motion called on German socialists to formulate their aims and to press their Government to state its objectives prior to the holding of an international conference of socialists in Switzerland.⁶²

Why MacDonald would second such a cautious motion remains mysterious. Probably the Labour Party executive wanted to convey the impression of unanimity and therefore needed MacDonald's endorsement in order to win the support of the ILP delegates.⁶³ However, MacDonald's support for the resolution markedly differed in substance and in tone from that of Henderson. When the latter put forward the resolution, he was prepared to compromise on certain points in order to speak to the conference on the war aims question "with the full effect

⁶¹ The Herald, 2 February 1918, p. 2. See also "Nottingham Labour Conference," The Labour Leader, 31 January 1918, pp. 4-5.

⁶² Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 23 January 1918, pp. 105-106.

⁶³ The Chairman of the conference succeeded in getting the ILP to withdraw its amendments to the resolution. These abortive amendments deleted the references to the programmes of the British Prime Minister and the American President, demanded facilities to attend an international conference (as opposed to a mere request to allow facilities) and substituted Stockholm for Switzerland ("Nottingham Labour Conference," The Labour Leader, 31 January 1918, p. 5).

of organised Labour and Socialism in this country." Henderson wanted statements of socialist opinion to measure any gulf between the peoples of belligerent countries and he pressed for an international conference to reconcile the differences. MacDonald did not address this question of unanimity. He stressed the importance of establishing an Allied position in the hope of repudiating the secret treaties. Like Henderson, MacDonald argued that a socialist conference would entrench a meaningful democratic presence in the 'new diplomacy' of the future peace settlement and prevent a return to 'old diplomacy'. He advanced this point, however, more forcefully than did Henderson.⁶⁴

The dissenters' drive to radicalize the Labour Party had failed. Following the Party's approval of the War Aims Memorandum, the NEC and the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC called an Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference for 20-23 February at the Central Hall in London. The purpose of the conference was to get all Allied socialists to accept Labour's war aims statement. Henderson had on 10 January invited Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labour (AFL), but he was unable to secure AFL approval in time to attend.⁶⁵ According to Henry Pelling, the invitation was an important concession to Gompers' pro-war position. In extending his welcome to Gompers, Henderson accepted the AFL leader's request that all anti-war American socialists be excluded from the conference.⁶⁶ MacDonald's efforts to entitle ILP delegates to advance positions to Allied socialists different from those agreed at the Central Hall on 28 December were also "dealt with firmly" by Henderson. Thus, the

⁶⁴ Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 23 January 1918, p. 105-106.

⁶⁵ Report of the Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Labour Party, Central Hall 26-28 June 1918, pp. 7-8; Report of the Executive Committee [January-June, 1918]. The call for the conference also coincided with the Bolshevik moves toward a separate peace.

⁶⁶ Pelling, America and the British Left, p. 115.

Labour Memorandum became the war aims programme of Allied socialists.⁶⁷

The dissenters had an inkling that their attempted radicalization of the Labour Party had, indeed, been stymied. MacDonald noted that Labour's position was quite different from that of January 1917. Nonetheless, the Party "was still hesitating regarding the higher policies which it ought to pursue, and uncertain of its grip on the deeper problems of war and peace." Snowden admitted that the Labour Party was not yet completely converted to the dissenting point of view, although he was pleased that it now, at least, supported a negotiated peace and an international socialist conference. Only in that light could Henderson's motion be judged satisfactory. Yet Snowden was insistent that, given what he perceived as the conciliatory pronouncements of the Central Powers, peace diplomacy had achieved about as much as it ever could without a formal peace conference--a peace conference towards which the Labour Party was not prepared to push.⁶⁸

Lloyd George at Caxton Hall

On 20 December 1917 Lloyd George had tried to regain the political initiative on the war aims question. Responding to parliamentary criticism that he had never embraced Wilsonianism, the

⁶⁷ Wrigley, Arthur Henderson (Cardiff, 1990), p. 123. Some minor amendments to the 28 December programme were made at the 20-23 February meeting. The new document included a stronger statement on the league, declaring that all potentially troubling issues would be submitted for arbitration, that all members would be committed to taking action against states which refused to submit to such arbitration and that Alsace-Lorraine would be ceded to France prior to a plebiscite. There were contradictory statements with regard to the minority nationalities in Austria-Hungary and the stated intention of leaving the Empire intact. Overall, the claims of nationalists in central Europe were given greater prominence. The Labour Party's proposal for international administration of formerly German Africa was replaced by a mandate system that was to operate under the auspices of the League (Brand, The British Labour Party, p. 53).

⁶⁸ Forward, 2 February 1918, p. 1; The Labour Leader, 31 January 1918, p. 1.

Prime Minister repeated several key elements of the speech that he had delivered in Glasgow on 29 June.⁶⁹ He called on Germany to relinquish the territories which it had conquered and to make reparations to the peoples affected by German aggression. The fate of Mesopotamia, Armenia and the German colonies would be determined by a post-war peace conference. In addition, Lloyd George stressed that Britain sought a guaranteed peace based on equitable foundations that could only be built after victory in the field and "the destruction of Prussian military power." The third precondition of peace reiterated by the Prime Minister was the democratization of German Government which, in itself, would rid Germany of its militarism. He reaffirmed to the Commons that Britain's central reason for entering the war had been to liberate Belgium. But the German Government had never acknowledged "the indisputable rights of Belgium." Ominously for dissenters, Lloyd George warned that, because Russia had begun separate negotiations, Russia would have to fend for itself.⁷⁰

Some dissenters thought Lloyd George's statement of 20 December more conciliatory than his speech of 14 December. MacDonald thought that the Prime Minister had highlighted the best elements of his Glasgow speech, which represented a marked improvement over his earlier statements of British war policy. The Nation was most laudatory, calling the 20 December speech a "good and promising plan" that would be accepted by most of the country. The same

⁶⁹ Kernek, Distractions of Peace during War, p. 72.

⁷⁰ See Scott, ed., "Statement of Prime Minister Lloyd-George in the House of Commons on Peace Terms," 20 December 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 216-225. There is a certain element in the address, however, which seems to indicate that Lloyd George was specifically reacting to Trotsky's appeal for a new war aims statement. The Bolsheviks had recently defined annexation as "any seizure of alien territory by force and...the conquest by force of alien nationalities" ("Towards Peace and Liberty! Full Text of Russian Appeal to Belligerents," The Labour Leader, 29 November 1917, p. 5). Without referring to the Bolshevik appeal, Lloyd George stressed in his 20 December speech that the Allies had not conquered a single piece of territory inhabited by "the ruling race," German or otherwise. He implicitly justified the conquest of territory through the fulfilment of national self-determination.

paper urged Lloyd George to present his programme to Germany. A baffled Labour Leader called his speech "a contradiction of the oration he delivered less than a week ago."⁷¹ The Herald, however, took a harder line, counselling that, if Britain was fighting to liberate the peoples of these colonies, as Lloyd George had suggested, then the Government should take the same position on Ireland, India and Egypt. Brailsford saw a Prime Minister who was prepared to sacrifice Russia in return for Germany's colonies. The UDC was of a like mind, a January 1918 editorial in its monthly publication clearly implied that Lloyd George's speech had been lame.⁷²

Notwithstanding Lloyd George's minor political triumph, developments on the diplomatic front made a more definitive statement of British war aims imperative. On 15 December, the Bolsheviks announced that an armistice had been reached.⁷³ Ten days later, Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister, stated that the peace talks at Brest-Litovsk had commenced on the basis of the Petrograd Formula. Faced with the huge British losses of 1917 and a probable German offensive on the Western Front early in 1918, the British High Command and the War Cabinet intensified their discussions on the strategy and manpower requirements for 1918. It was clear from these talks that the Government would have to break certain of its promises to the craft

⁷¹ Forward, 29 December 1917, p. 1; "A Straight Road to Peace," The Nation, 29 December 1917, p. 428; "The Year-End Outlook," The Labour Leader, 27 December 1917, p. 2. The Labour Leader was, of course, referring to Lloyd George's speech of 14 December.

⁷² "Labour's Chance: An Appeal to the Congress," The Herald, 29 December 1917, p. 9; "What then Are We Fighting for?" The Herald, 5 January 1918, p. 7; Brailsford, "The Bolshevik Adventure," The Herald, 29 December 1917, p. 7; The U.D.C., January 1918, p. 176.

⁷³ Following the signing of the Russian armistice on 15 December the Cabinet was encouraged by secret discussions with Austria which indicated that a more liberal war aims statement might help end the war (Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 28).

unions in engineering in order to obtain the necessary recruits.⁷⁴ After the War Cabinet discussion of war aims on 28 December, Lloyd George decided to respond to the bluff which he perceived the enemy to be making and also to persuade the trade unions to throw their support behind the Government's manpower policy. By 3 January he was firmly resolved that the enemy's Petrograd Formula pledge and the delicate issue of domestic manpower requirements could only be answered by a unilateral declaration of British war aims.⁷⁵

There has been much historical discussion of both the origins and objectives of Lloyd George's 5 January speech at Caxton Hall. The dissenters' influence on the Prime Minister's thinking has almost certainly been exaggerated. Marvin Swartz maintains that it was the UDC handling both of the Lansdowne Letter and the published secret treaties that forced Lloyd George to produce a new war aims statement. This is a serious exaggeration of the influence of the UDC or of dissenters generally. Stephen Graubard points to the new Labour memorandum, the commencement of negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the Germans, and the revelation of secret treaties as reasons the government opted for a new war aims statement. W.B. Fest adds the popularity of the Lansdowne Letter and the manpower shortage as reasons why Lloyd George considered the war aims question.⁷⁶ The evidence that suggests that the Government was primarily concerned with the manpower question is much more compelling.⁷⁷ Yet, at the same

⁷⁴ See David R. Woodward, Lloyd George and the Generals (Newark, 1983), ch. 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-32.

⁷⁶ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, pp. 192, 196; Graubard, British Labour, p. 47; W.B. Fest, "British War Aims and German Peace Feelers during the First World War, December 1916-November 1918," The Historical Journal 15 (1972), p. 304. Also see Turner, "British Politics and the Great War", p. 129; David R. Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech", pp. 22-27, 37.

⁷⁷ In mid-November the new Director of National Service, Neville Chamberlain, had announced that more men would have to be drafted into the Army, and in December the Government decided to conscript 108,000 men from the engineering trades. The Government

time as the Government was obliged to confront the perplexing matter of military manpower, it had also to consolidate its leadership of the war aims debate. Such consolidation was particularly important as the Lansdowne Letter had greatly strengthened that segment of pro-war opinion which sought to modify the fight-to-the-finish position. In John Turner's opinion,

there was a broad consensus at the end of 1917, inside and outside the government, that a fresh declaration of British war aims, leaving open the possibility of a negotiated peace, was both desirable and necessary.⁷⁸

So, on 5 January 1918, Lloyd George delivered one of his most important speeches of the whole war. Seeking the validation of mainstream labour, the address was delivered to a TUC conference on manpower at Caxton Hall in London.⁷⁹ The outcome of a confluence of several related themes and events, the speech was spectacularly successful in restoring the Government's leadership of the war aims debate. The ineffectiveness of dissent was further confirmed as Labour and moderate opinion generally rallied to the Prime Minister's new policy. Lloyd George's speech was essentially the same as that which he had delivered to the Commons on 20 December. He opened by expressing his confident expectation that the full support of "organized

had informed the unions on 3 January 1918 that it wished to allow the cancellation of exemption certificates, revise the Schedule of Protected Occupations and introduce a "clean cut" with no guarantee that dilutees would be drafted before the skilled men. A manpower bill was duly presented to Parliament on 14 January and passed on 6 February, by which time the Government had reached agreement with all unions affected save the ASE. Following the onset of the German offensive on 21 March, however, the Engineers decided against resisting the latest Military Service Act. See Chris Wrigley, "The First World War and State Intervention in Industrial Relations, 1914-18," p. 49; Clegg, British Trade Unions, pp. 189-190. Both these accounts and the influential study by James Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement, see the dilution of the skilled trades by semi-skilled or unskilled workers as the root cause of labour unrest in wartime Britain. See, however, the revisionist view of Alastair Reid who attaches more weight to wage restriction than opposition to dilution ("Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State in Britain in the First World War," in Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, eds. Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin [Cambridge, 1985], pp. 66-67).

⁷⁸ Turner, British Politics, p. 269.

⁷⁹ Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 22.

labour" for the British war effort would be maintained. He sought their acceptance of the Government's new manpower programme. To demonstrate that the Government's war policy reflected a broad consensus of views, the trade union leaders were informed that a wide range of political opinion, including the Labour Party, had been consulted.⁸⁰ The Prime Minister set out British aims in lofty terms. Britain was fighting for "a just and lasting peace" based on the sanctity of treaties, the right of self-determination and for the establishment of an international organization to prevent future wars. He specified that Britain had no intention of dismembering Germany, Austria-Hungary or Turkey, nor of revising Germany's constitution. More generally, Lloyd George rejected Old Diplomacy in favour of a new diplomacy based on the promotion of justice and stability. Yet, the sovereignty of Belgium, occupied France and Italy, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia would have to be restored and reparations levied for the damage inflicted, rather than for recouping the costs of the Allied war effort. But breaking up Austria-Hungary was not a British war aim, even if he did advocate a kind of home rule scheme for the Empire's minority nationalities. He supported the territorial claims of the Italian irredentists. He wanted to internationalize Constantinople and to separate the fringes of the Ottoman Empire from Turkey itself. The fate of the German colonies would be determined at a conference and by reference

⁸⁰ Indeed, Lloyd George had searched widely for ideas to inject into his speech. Asquith and Grey had met with the Prime Minister to discuss his upcoming address. He spoke with a Labour delegation on 28 December and also sought out MacDonald, who wrote a long letter to Lloyd George on 1 January. In it he called for national self-determination in Europe, possibly a change in the German Government and the retention of Germany's colonies. Lloyd George discussed war aims with both Lord Buckmaster and C.P. Scott, the increasingly moderate editor of The Manchester Guardian. Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the War Cabinet, Philip Kerr, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, Jan Smuts and Lord Robert Cecil were very much involved in the drafting of the speech. Smuts, Kerr and Hankey agreed that a viable settlement could be achieved at Russia's expense while Cecil favoured a peace that did not leave Russia at Germany's mercy. In the end, the speech did signal a willingness to abandon Russia, as Russia had forsaken its Allies already. Cecil was acting Foreign Secretary at this time because Balfour was ill; Balfour, though, supported his subordinate's pro-Russian stand (Turner, British Politics, pp. 257, 268, 269; Wilson, ed. The Political Diaries, p. 326 [28 December 1917]; Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 35).

to the staunch anti-Germanism of their native peoples. Finally, the Prime Minister urged the creation of a supra-national organization to prevent war through arbitration.⁸¹

The speech should be seen both as an attempt to reach a genuinely moderate settlement and as an effort to bolster British resolve to defeat Germany. Stephen Graubard has said that Lloyd George, in effect, agreed to the Petrograd Formula at Caxton Hall. David Woodward regards the speech as Lloyd George's attempt to moderate British aims in an effort to formulate a viable peace settlement. W.B. Fest thinks that Lloyd George skilfully produced something calculated to satisfy both conservative and Labour opinion.⁸² According to Lloyd George himself, the speech ought to be "regarded rather as a war move than as a peace move." He told Asquith that, because the objectives outlined were more than the Germans could accept, the address was a war aims speech.⁸³ The dissenters had long demanded a clear restatement of moderate, noble war aims as a way of refocusing the national war effort. If the enemy failed to respond satisfactorily, then the British people would fight with renewed vigour, knowing for sure that they faced an aggressive and expansionist foe. Lloyd George intended to give the dissenters exactly that for which they had been asking.⁸⁴

Initially, dissenters saw the Prime Minister's address as a victory for the pro-negotiation forces. It was believed to represent a compromise position that was open to adjustment by negotiation. The dissenters were particularly impressed with the tone of a speech which seemed

⁸¹ Scott, ed., "Statement of British War Aims by Prime Minister Lloyd-George," 5 January 1918, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 225-233.

⁸² Graubard, British Labour, p. 49; Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 22; Fest, "British War Aims," p. 305.

⁸³ Quoted (from a War Cabinet meeting) in Woodward, "The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech," p. 35; Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 153.

⁸⁴ Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 152-153.

to have dispensed with the fight-to-the-finish. Ponsonby urged continued criticism of the Government but told Trevelyan that

I do not go as far as Brailsford nor do I think that the speech is just a trap for labour with a view to easing the situation with regard to manpower--because I really believe that the little man [Lloyd George] is definitely changing his line.

MacDonald, in a Glasgow speech of 6 January, also saw Lloyd George's language as "an improvement."⁸⁵ Snowden, indirectly attributing the Prime Minister's dramatic move to the momentum for peace started by Lansdowne, appreciated that the statement was at least "clear definition and open publicity." Trevelyan and Brailsford attributed the speeches of both Lloyd George and Wilson to pressure from the Bolsheviks, whilst Buckler regarded "the working class volcano" rumbling inside Britain as the Prime Minister's chief spur to action.⁸⁶

Snowden saw the Government's new stand as identical to the Labour Party's. Henderson too, although not a dissenter, held that there were similarities between the two positions. The latter was satisfied that British war aims were now much clearer than before and that Lloyd George's gambit had created a new, hopeful situation. On 9 January the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC and the NEC of the Labour Party "welcomed" both Lloyd George's 5

⁸⁵ Ponsonby to Trevelyan, 11 January 1918, Trevelyan Papers, Box 79; "Ramsay MacDonald in Glasgow," Forward, 12 January 1918, p. 3. Ponsonby was referring to a recent article by Brailsford. He probably objected to Brailsford's contention that Lloyd George's "detailed terms make a new programme for a bitterly protracted war" (Brailsford, "Tearing off the Mask," The Herald, 12 January 1917, p. 8). For further commentary on Lloyd George's address, see The Nation, 12 January 1917, p. 473; "The Coming Peace," The Nation, 12 January 1918; Russell, "The Bolsheviks and Mr. Lloyd George," 10 January 1918, in Rempel *et al* eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 93, pp. 400-401.

⁸⁶ The Labour Leader, 10 January 1918, p. 1; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 201; Brailsford, "Tearing off the Mask," The Herald, 12 January 1917, p. 8; Buckler to Arthur Hugh Frazier, 16 January 1917, quoted in Turner, British Politics, p. 270. Frazier was the Counsellor to the American Embassy in Paris.

January speech and Wilson's 8 January address.⁸⁷ By endorsing the Government's new position, argues Stephen Graubard, British Labour "found new reason for believing in the justice of the Allied cause." John Turner asserts that the only difference between Lloyd George's war aims speech and the Labour Party's Memorandum on War Aims was Labour's rejection of a post-war economic boycott of Germany.⁸⁸

Some dissenters, however, either immediately opposed the 5 January platform or turned against it later. By late January The Nation was calling for a new British statement of aims because the ambiguities in the Caxton Hall programme were seen as aggressive by the average German.⁸⁹ Brailsford declared that there was "no hope of peace in these terms. They are a programme for an Imperialist war." He considered the declaration suspect because of its endorsement by people of incompatible viewpoints. Moreover, insufficient emphasis had been placed on the League of Nations. Brailsford was also concerned that Lloyd George had neither promised freedom of the seas nor ruled out a post-armistice trade war against Germany. He saw these omissions as proof of the Prime Minister's determination to crush Germany. The Herald immediately expressed the profound misgiving that the new programme might be an "irreducible minimum" which would prolong the war and later denounced the 5 January statement as "not satisfactory, not reasonable, not democratic. It did not repudiate the secret treaties; it did not

⁸⁷ The Labour Leader, 10 January 1918, p. 1; "Labour and a Clean Peace," The Manchester Guardian, 7 January 1918, p. 7; "Mr. Henderson and the Next Stage--Special 'Herald' Interview," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 4; The Manchester Guardian, 10 January 1918, p. 50.

⁸⁸ Graubard, British Labour, p. 51; Turner, British Politics, p. 269. For expressions by contemporaries of the view that the Government had adopted the Labour Party's policy, see also The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 473; "The Coming Peace," The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 476; Russell, "The Bolsheviks and Mr. Lloyd George," 10 January 1918, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 93, pp. 400-401.

⁸⁹ "Wanted, a Peace Offensive," The Nation, 26 January 1918, pp. 528-529.

agree with the terms officially put forward by the Labour Party." Russell's appraisal was particularly prescient. He appreciated that, armed with Labour support for its war aims, the Government would probably insist that only its new programme offered the essential preconditions of peace. If so, then these objectives would remain unfulfilled without two more years of war.⁹⁰

With Lloyd George seemingly coming round to their position, the dissenters were anxious to force the Government into immediate negotiations. Ponsonby told Trevelyan that "our line I think should be to insist that we join in the Russo-German negotiations at once." But, he warned that it could be dangerous to move too quickly to a negotiated settlement.⁹¹ MacDonald wanted to bring the Government down in order to elicit from "the democracy of Germany" a statement comparable to the Prime Minister's. Specifically, he proposed the Labour Party's withdrawal from the Government. This action would force an election. The Party would then prevent the contest from being staged before the new electoral registers had been drawn up. He sensed that the vote could be stalled by moving public opinion to demand the installation of a new Government firmly committed to Labour's 28 December programme. This Government would then obtain Allied agreement for its war policy and hold a meeting of the International where the German socialists could put forth their own moderate position. Later, MacDonald anticipated,

⁹⁰ Brailsford, "Tearing off the Mask," The Herald, 12 January 1917, p. 8; "Now or Never--A People's Peace," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 7; "Labour's Peace Ultimatum to the Government," The Herald, 2 February 1918, p. 7; "The Bolsheviks and Mr. Lloyd George," 10 January 1918, in Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, paper 93, pp. 400-401.

⁹¹ Ponsonby to Trevelyan, 11 January 1918, Trevelyan Papers, Box 79. Pro-war Labour's Henderson, however, thought that the Labour Party could ask the Government to join the Brest-Litovsk negotiations only if the Central Powers announced officially that their position was sufficiently close to both Russian principles and key elements of the Lloyd George programme ("Mr. Henderson and the Next Stage--Special 'Herald' Interview," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 4).

the German socialists would carry their country with them. Snowden urged an immediate campaign for peace negotiations. He wanted to compare British proposals with pronouncements from the Central Powers, to show that the belligerents' positions were now fundamentally the same. The Herald called on Labour to "take control," but without elaborating.⁹²

When events did not unfold as hoped or predicted, the dissenters blamed the British Government. Snowden was livid at Lloyd George's apparent reversion to a knock-out blow position in his speech to a TUC conference discussion of Government manpower policy on 18 January. He castigated the Prime Minister for destroying any good impressions left by his 5 January address, claiming that he had betrayed "in a dozen passages the imperialist designs of the Allies." The Nation also accused Lloyd George of undermining any beneficial effect which his earlier words might have exerted on German public opinion.⁹³

The dissenters' hope for comparison of the belligerents' terms was quickly disappointed. Although the German Government did not reply officially to Lloyd George's and Wilson's speeches until 24 January, leaks in the German Press appeared to indicate the uncompromising nature of the German response. The Nation was alarmed by the hostile reaction of the moderate German press, which had found the British and American proposals to be too aggressive. The official response was no more encouraging. Chancellor von Hertling's 24 January reply to Lloyd George and Wilson, in effect rejecting British and American overtures, showed that the German

⁹² Forward, 2 February 1918, p. 1; The Labour Leader, 10 January 1918, p. 1; "We Accept Lloyd George's Challenge: Labour Must Take Control," The Herald, 26 January 1918, pp. 8-9.

⁹³ The Labour Leader, 24 January 1918, p. 1; The Nation, 26 January 1918, p. 526. Lloyd George had told the TUC that no civilian of import in Germany had responded to his 5 January speech. The silence implied that the military there were still firmly in control politically. This being the case, the only alternative was to fight on. Robert Williams, President of the National Transport Workers' Federation, was incensed that, in response to the trade unionists' questions, Lloyd George had expressed his mistrust of German democracy and claimed to be noncommittal about assisting an international socialist conference (The Manchester Guardian, 19 January 1918, p. 4; "Nottingham Labour Conference," The Labour Leader, 31 January 1918, p. 5).

Government still had confidence in Germany's military capabilities. Moreover, von Hertling refused to accept Belgian independence as a precondition of negotiations, thereby undercutting the pro-negotiation forces in Britain.⁹⁴ The dissenters sought to conceal this setback by playing down the significance of the German reply. Snowden lamented the Chancellor's neglect of specifics but, surprisingly, lauded the tone of a speech which he considered a conciliatory follow-up to those of Lloyd George and Wilson. Snowden reminded his readers that the German Government's stand was to be expected, given the belligerent character of Allied pronouncements and that Germany remained undefeated. The Nation also interpreted von Hertling's reply favourably, detecting somewhere a partial acceptance of Wilson's programme.⁹⁵

By February it was clear that the dissenters had failed to moderate the war policy of their own Government. The Nation conceded reluctantly that the Government's 'peace offensive' had ended with the inter-allied communiqués issued after the four-day meeting of the Supreme War Council in Versailles that had ended on 2 February. Massingham's weekly criticized the Allied Governments for dismissing the change of temper in Germany (and Austria). It cited von Hertling's 24 January speech and the recent labour protests as proof of Germany's growing moderation. The Nation wondered whether the Supreme War Council's statement really enjoyed American support. The Herald was left to bemoan the "triumph of Prussianism" within the British Government.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "The Open Sesame to Peace," The Nation, 19 January 1918, p. 504; Fest, "British War Aims," p. 306.

⁹⁵ The Labour Leader, 31 January 1918, p. 1; The Nation, 2 February 1918, p. 554. See also "The Dove and the Ark," The Nation, 2 February 1918, p. 557.

⁹⁶ The Nation, 9 February 1918, p. 581; "The Murder of Democracy--Who Is Preventing Peace?" The Herald, 9 February 1918, pp. 2-3; "The Diplomacy of the Knock-Out Blow," The Nation, 9 February 1918, p. 584. After the conference ended Wilson declared his full support for the military decisions of the Supreme War Council.

Wilson's Fourteen Points

On 4 December President Wilson had asked Congress to declare war on Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria. The speech also included an important, often overlooked, statement of American war aims. Wilson called for the dismantling of Germany's aggressive autocracy, the restoration of Belgium and freedom of the seas. He paid lip service to the Petrograd Formula as a noble and just idea but believed that the Formula was subject to the very kind of manipulation that the Germans were demonstrating in their negotiations with Russia. He rejected the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary and Turkey, stressing that he only wanted to free these two empires from Prussian dominion. He pledged not to punish Germany or to interfere in its internal affairs, although how he planned to remove the German autocracy without such meddling was left unclear. He stated that the high purposes for which the United States were fighting applied both to the Allies and the Central Powers. Indeed, the object of his statement was to strengthen the resolve of "free peoples of the world" to continue on with the fighting, by reiterating the "irreproachable" objectives of the war.⁹⁷

As was Lloyd George, Wilson was concerned that his foreign policy was being overtaken by events in Russia and Germany. House also sensed the urgent need for a dramatic intervention and pressed Wilson on 18 December to deliver a liberal war aims statement. Wilson agreed to make a speech in which he would address three different constituencies: the Russian people, the

⁹⁷ Scott, ed., "Address of President Wilson Reviewing American War Aims and Recommending the Declaration of a State of War between the United States and the Austro-Hungarian Government, Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of the Congress," 4 December 1917, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, pp. 195, 196-197, 201. Snowden's reaction to the address was typical. He deplored its tone, but insisted that Wilson had not changed his policy. The Nation too supported Wilson's address, concluding that the American President's programme was the same as Lansdowne's (The Labour Leader, 13 December 1917, p. 1; The Nation, 8 December 1917, p. 317. See also The Labour Leader, 6 December 1917, p. 2; The Herald, 8 December 1917, p. 3).

German Socialists and the Allied Governments. The outcome was the celebrated Fourteen Points address which Wilson made to Congress on 8 January 1918.⁹⁸ Of the fourteen points, some were more central to dissenting concerns than others. Wilson promised open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, post-war free trade, arms limitation agreements, impartial redistribution of colonies, evacuation of Russian territory by foreign troops and the right of Russia to decide its own fate, the complete restoration of Belgium and all of occupied France, including Alsace-Lorraine. His position on the break up of Austria-Hungary was ambiguous but seemed to veer toward a federal solution. Most crucially, he advocated a League of Nations to guarantee the security of its member states.⁹⁹

Wilson's statement was welcomed by the pro-war leadership of the Labour Party and the TUC. The Fourteen Points, in addition to Lloyd George's 5 January message, were seen as enhancing the chances of peace.¹⁰⁰ The Herald supported Wilson's message but warned that the war must not continue until all fourteen points were secured. Such a prolongation of the

⁹⁸ Walworth, Woodrow Wilson, pp. 146-147. Wilson was composing his address when news reached him of Lloyd George's 5 January speech. The President was offended at not having been consulted and felt that Lloyd George had taken up his own ideas (*ibid.*, p. 151). To ensure that Britain was in step with the President, House wrote to the War Cabinet, notifying it of Wilson's impending speech, which would be a more detailed version of his 4 December address. House wanted to ensure that "no utterance is in contemplation on your side which would be likely to sound a different note or suggest claims inconsistent with what [Wilson] proclaims the objects of the United States to be" (House to Balfour and Lloyd George, 5 January 1918, House Papers, Series I, Box 70A, Folder 2341). Kendrick Clements has gone even farther than House, claiming that Wilson's 8 January programme was essentially the same as his 22 January 1917 "Peace Without Victory" address (Clements, Woodrow Wilson: World Statesman [Boston, 1987], p. 164).

⁹⁹ Scott, ed., "Address of President Wilson on the Conditions of Peace Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress," 8 January 1918, Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, p. 234.

¹⁰⁰ "The President's Terms Warmly Welcomed by British Labour," The Manchester Guardian, 10 January 1918, p. 5. Chris Wrigley is essentially correct in saying that Henderson was trying to link the Labour memorandum with Wilson's programme in order to attach more respectability to the Party (Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, p. 125).

fighting would be an injustice in itself. Most dissenters, however, applauded the President's latest contribution to peace diplomacy with few such reservations. His address corresponded with their own desire for a dramatic presidential initiative. The UDC approved the Fourteen Points as consistent both with UDC policy and the Petrograd Formula. The Nation thought Wilson's tone even better than Lloyd George's and this was taken as a sign of the more serious intent on the President's part. It made sense, then, to move closer to Wilson's foreign policy. As Wedgwood told the Commons, the Allies were beholden to American policy. The United States had a free-hand concerning diplomatic agreements and would impose an anti-annexationist peace on its Allies regardless of the latter's belligerent posturing.¹⁰¹

The Fourteen Points were seen as a counter-balance to Lloyd George's programme. The dissenters were loath to admit, however, that Wilson either agreed with, or was being led by Lloyd George. Three days after Wilson's Congressional address, Ponsonby told Trevelyan that unless Wilson "corrects" some of the "bad" points of Lloyd George's war aims, the Germans would not accept them.¹⁰² The Nation acknowledged that Wilson had repudiated a post-war economic boycott of Germany, sought freedom of the seas, urged reform rather than destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and that he had "supplemented" Lloyd George's demand for security by advocating a League of Nations. Moreover, Wilson had called for a settlement based on principle, a position which was not clear in Lloyd George's speech. Brailsford praised Wilson

¹⁰¹ "Now or Never--A People's Peace," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 7; Swanwick, Builders of Peace, p. 109; The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474; PD (Commons), 19 December 1917, 100, cols., 2020-2021. See also "The Coming Peace," The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 476.

¹⁰² Ponsonby to Trevelyan, 11 January 1918, Trevelyan Papers, Box 79.

for advancing the cause of freedom of the seas when Lloyd George had not.¹⁰³

Wilson's programme countered Lloyd George's apparent willingness to abandon Russia to its fate. The President was lauded for his determination to extend any eventual settlement to the East. The Manchester Guardian praised Wilson's sensitivity to Russian feelings and for refusing to accept the German conquest of the East as inevitable.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Wilson's speech was also seen as a corrective of some of his own lapses in judgment. The Herald stated that the Fourteen Points finally gave up "the nonsensical idea of refusal to negotiate with the German Government." Equally, The Nation claimed that Wilson now recognized the power and legitimacy of the Reichstag by disclaiming any desire to modify German institutions.¹⁰⁵

In the heady days early in January 1918, dissenters were entitled to think that the President once again favoured a 'Peace without Victory'. But too much had transpired since January 1917. The idealistic assumptions behind the Fourteen Points, if ever they were realistic at all, were so only fleetingly in the special circumstances that prevailed early in 1918. By February, these circumstances had changed; Russia was moving inexorably toward a separate peace, and Germany was firmly in the grip of the militarists.

Conclusion

Six separate developments had provided great hope for the dissenters in the December-January

¹⁰³ The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474; "The Coming Peace," The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 476; Brailsford, "Tearing off the Mask," The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 8. Brailsford believed that the Germans could not accept any settlement that did not guarantee freedom of the seas. The Herald echoed The Nation on the Turkish question (The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 2).

¹⁰⁴ The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474; "President Wilson's Russian Policy," The Manchester Guardian, 10 January 1918, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ The Herald, 12 January 1918, p. 2; The Nation, 12 January 1918, p. 474.

period: the Lansdowne Letter, the publication of the secret treaties, the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, the Labour Party's War Aims Memorandum, Lloyd George's 5 January address and Wilson's Fourteen Points speech. The dissenters' attempts to exploit each of these opportunities were either blocked, as in the case of the secret treaties, or were turned against them, as was Lansdowne's intervention, the Labour war aims programme and Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech.

The Lansdowne Letter, in fact, further reduced dissent's influence. Although the Letter did popularize the idea of a moderate peace, the dissenters did not really benefit from the fresh interest in negotiations which it triggered. The dissenters continued to be debilitated by their lack of credibility, a problem which the Lansdowne Letter actually exacerbated. Lansdowne had co-opted pro-negotiation sentiments and transferred them to more conservative and respectable individuals and interests. The dissenters were left only with their extremist image.

Dissent's focus on Russia proved to be its most damaging weakness. Stephen Graubard, believing that the Labour Party had adopted a dissenting foreign policy, notes that, after the speeches of Lloyd George and Wilson, the trade unions stopped pressing the Government to join the Russo-German negotiations. Graubard presumes that British Labour missed an ideal opportunity to have imposed a truly dissenting peace on Europe as a whole. He criticizes Henderson for failing to realize that Russia was not negotiating with Germany on an equal footing.¹⁰⁶ Yet this criticism is more appropriately directed at the dissenters than at Henderson. Granted, the dissenters chastised the Government for abandoning Russia by not joining the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, but they underestimated the annexationist ends of German policy and overestimated the Bolsheviks' power either to coerce Allied and enemy Governments or to spread revolution.

¹⁰⁶ Graubard, British Labour, pp. 49-50.

Dissent's fixation on Russia, moreover, meant that they deluded themselves on other questions. This was apparent from their reaction to Lloyd George's 5 January speech. The dissenters were pleased that Lloyd George had adopted a more flexible position on Alsace-Lorraine but were unable to take advantage of the apparent concession. Buckler noted that "Trevelyan and his friends" had acknowledged that Lloyd George used the word "reconsideration" with regard to the contested territory. They were too absorbed, however, with their campaign to support Russia's position of self-determination for the Baltic "provinces." According to Buckler, the dissenters believed that if they were successful on this issue, then the precedent would have been set for Alsace-Lorraine.¹⁰⁷

The Bolshevik Revolution was an unmitigated disaster for the dissenters. Pelling is largely accurate in pointing out that the Bolshevik determination to conclude a separate peace eliminated the rationale of the putative Stockholm conference.¹⁰⁸ Henderson had wanted Stockholm to bolster Kerensky and to keep Russia in the War. The Bolshevik coup d'état and the opening of the Brest-Litovsk talks therefore reduced the urgency of the Stockholm project from pro-war Labour's perspective. The dissenters still tried to influence public opinion by stressing the dangers of a separate Russian peace, but to little effect. They could only refer to what might have been—hardly an effective rhetorical strategy. They were now forced to argue for a 'no annexations' statement so that Britain could join Russia at the negotiating table. The dissenters believed that Russia was integral to any fair settlement. Russia was their greatest ally. So with the advent of Russo-German peace negotiations, the dissenters had little choice but to support Russia in its rush to a separate peace, especially given their misguided view that the Germans were intent on implementing the Petrograd Formula.

¹⁰⁷ Buckler to House, 15-16 January 1918, Buckler Papers, Box 5, Folder 8.

¹⁰⁸ Pelling, America and the British Left, p. 115.

Despite its apparent adoption of a dissenting programme, the Labour Party remained steadfastly patriotic. Henderson's and MacDonald's 23 January peace motion is an example of the dissenters' predicament. On the one hand the motion can be seen as a culmination of MacDonald's work--the adoption of a statement of war aims which might induce the enemy to reply and serve as a prelude to negotiations. But the passage of the motion was a pyrrhic victory. MacDonald and the dissenters did not succeed in convincing Allied Governments to issue the war aims statement they desired. The Labour Party continued in Government,¹⁰⁹ endorsed Lloyd George's 5 January address and took no action when the Government's war policy returned to its earlier pursuit of outright military victory. By appearing to don the peace-by-negotiation mantle, however, the Labour Party denied the dissenters a power base from which to challenge both the Government and pro-war Labour. Dissent's attempted conversion of the Labour Party to a genuinely radical foreign policy course was firmly rebuffed. The dissenters were prevented from revising Labour's war aims memorandum at the special conference of 28 December, at the Annual Labour conference at the end of January and at the conference of Inter-Allied Socialists late in February. Similarly, dissent's calls from inside the Labour Party for the exertion of continued pressure on the Government fell on deaf ears.

Lloyd George was successful in regaining the leadership of, or at least denying leadership to, those non-dissenters who had begun to believe that a genuine effort to reach a negotiated peace should be made. His programme diverted criticism of the secret treaties and re-established the legitimacy of the British cause. The Government had only to respond to the demands for another war aims statement; it was not necessarily obliged to adopt dissent's view of peace. As

¹⁰⁹ This fact irritated MacDonald, particularly when the Labour ministers voted with the Government against an increase in the minimum wage for agricultural labourers in spite of their abandonment of Labour Party policy. The ministers were censured by the membership but were not ordered to leave the Government. Forward, 2 February 1918, p. 1.

John Turner states,

The content and the provenance of Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech both support the argument that after the initial flurry of irritation, the issue of a negotiated peace, as raised by Lansdowne, was not allowed to become a threat to the domestic political structure at the end of 1917.¹¹⁰

Wilson's Fourteen Points also turned into a reverse for dissent who were firmly committed to a programme of support for Russia. Not only did Wilson's speech fail to affect the drift of negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, but the scope of his programme meant that Wilson's vision could be enforced only through a military victory. As did Lloyd George, Wilson awaited a satisfactory reply from the German Government. When one was not forthcoming, he was free to support the Supreme War Council's insistence on a fight-to-the-finish.

In the second half of January and throughout February, the dissenters suffered an unbroken string of setbacks: the appearance of a much more openly belligerent German Government, a Labour movement clearly not committed to a radical interpretation of its war aims programme, a British public and a Government insistent once again on the achievement of a decisive battlefield triumph. By mid-February, the dissenters were even further removed from political influence than they had been before December 1916.

¹¹⁰ Turner, British Politics, p. 270.

Chapter 7: EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

In her celebrated chronicle of the war years, Vera Brittain remembers the chill which Germany's March 1918 offensive sent through the civilian population in Britain.

However long I may be destined to survive my friends who went down in the Flood, I shall never forget the crushing tension of those extreme days. Nothing had ever quite equalled them before--not the Somme, not Arras, not Passchendaele--for into our minds had crept for the first time the secret, incredible fear that we might lose the War.¹

This sense of foreboding had already been heightened by the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March. Although the terms of the treaty were not broadcast immediately, it was soon apparent that the Bolshevik regime had accepted the punitive peace imposed on it by Germany. Thus, Russia was suddenly removed from dissent's peace calculations and the fallacy of German 'reasonableness' was completely exposed. The subsequent launching of the Ludendorff offensive (on 21 March) not only all but broke through British lines on the Western Front, it completed the destruction of dissent's badly damaged credibility. Field-Marshal Ludendorff's attack undermined several key supports of the dissenting platform, especially the arguments that a decisive military victory was for all sides unattainable and that the German Government would assent to a moderate settlement.² There was no chance thereafter of British dissent regaining the peace-by-negotiation initiative.

The early successes of Ludendorff's forces obliged the Lloyd George administration to

¹ Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925 (New York, 1933), p. 411.

² Rempel et al eds., The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, vol. 14, p. 389.

hastily extend the scope of conscription. In the desperate circumstances of spring 1918, and in the face of Haig's 11 April Special Order of the Day declaring "with our backs to the wall...each one of us must fight to the end,"³ even the ASE refrained from opposing the Government's attempts at whittling away the occupational exemptions hitherto enjoyed by much of its membership. At all levels of British society, the nervous apprehension recalled by Vera Brittain soon stiffened into a determined resolve to continue a fight-to-the-finish policy.⁴ The Government was roundly condemned, indeed almost defeated, over its alleged bungling of military manpower requirements.⁵ But as the Allied strategic situation improved through the summer, the Coalition's political position became increasingly secure. In this regard the Coalition further benefitted from the end of fighting in November. Indeed, the Government went on to win the infamous, post-Armistice 'Coupon' Election of December 1918.⁶

Frequently regarded as a disaster for organized Liberalism, the election results were perhaps even more disappointing for dissent. Most Liberal dissenters, including Buxton and Ponsonby, ran as independents, lost, and migrated to the ILP shortly thereafter. In many cases the switch to Labour followed rejection by patriotic constituency committees. But most of these converts to the ILP had also lost faith in the effectiveness of the Liberal Party as a standard bearer of a dissenting foreign policy. The ILP did not fare any better. Of the fifty ILP candidates, a mere three gained entry to the Commons. Morel, running as an ILP candidate,

³Martin Gilbert, The First World War: A Complete History (New York, 1994), p. 414.

⁴ Turner, "British Politics and the Great War," p. 129; Wrigley, Arthur Henderson, p. 125.

⁵ This challenge to the Coalition was started by the former Director of Military Operations, General Maurice, who sent a letter to the Press disputing Lloyd George's and Bonar Law's recent statements regarding the numerical strength of British forces on the Western Front.

⁶ So called because of the letter of authentication, or coupon, signed by party leaders Lloyd George and Bonar Law and carried by all Coalition candidates to distinguish them from their Asquithian Liberal and Labour Party challengers.

MacDonald and Snowden were all out.⁷

Many such dissenters soon established a foothold inside the wider labour movement. In May 1918 the Labour Party had set up an Advisory Committee on International Questions (ACIQ). This body was deputed to articulate progressive ideas for internal party discussion and to publicize in pamphlet form Labour's foreign policy position. Many prominent dissenters--Buxton, MacDonald, Morel, Ponsonby and Snowden included--worked on this Committee which became a focal point of foreign policy formulation in the decade after the war. The leverage of the dissenters over Labour was by no means confined to the sphere of committee work on such policy making bodies as the ACIQ. Many would go on to hold office during the short-lived Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929-31. There was no bigger testament to the political clout now exercised by dissenters than the return of the once vilified Ramsay MacDonald, first to the House of Commons in November 1922 and, second, to the Chairmanship of the Labour Party in the same month, and finally his ascension to the Premiership in January 1924. Snowden served as his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Buxton as Minister of Agriculture and Ponsonby as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The latter's name was already identified with a novel parliamentary convention providing for Commons scrutiny of international treaties twenty-one days prior to their ratification. The Ponsonby Rule thus signified a minor tactical triumph in the battle for democratic control of foreign policy which dissenters had been waging since August 1914.

⁷ Approximately 2000 Liberals made the journey to the ILP. Robert Dowse cites the other influences on this shift in party political allegiance: the ILP's seemingly superior electoral prospects, antipathy to Lloyd George, the ILP's "ethic of social responsibility" and its advocacy of an old Liberal staple--the single land tax--as the cornerstone of its fiscal policy. Only a "smaller number" of these former Liberals were converted to the doctrines to socialism. The majority simply regarded the ILP as more congenial to the Radical ideals for which the party of Gladstone had previously been the vehicle. See Robert E. Dowse, "The Entry of the Liberals into the Labour Party 1910-1920," *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research* [August 1961]: pp. 84-85.

Of the five dissenters singled out in this thesis only Morel was absent from the first Labour Government. Morel had expected his appointment as Foreign Secretary, but antagonism with MacDonald, as well as the latter's caution, kept him from this prestigious office.⁸ Moreover, MacDonald was personally determined to chart a progressive course for Labour internationally and served as his own Foreign Secretary in 1924.

Thus, the dissenters were extremely well positioned to shape Labour's foreign policy, although the ILP-UDC clique did have to contend with trade union indifference or hostility to their causes.⁹ In the immediate post-war period, the Party emulated dissent's implacable opposition to Versailles and called for extensive revisions to both the Treaty and the League of Nations. Dissent (and Labour) favoured the extension of League membership to the two international pariahs, Germany and Russia, as well as more aggressive promotion of disarmament, free trade and other internationalist objectives. Henry Winkler argues that, before forming a minority government in 1924, Labour's foreign policy was largely dictated by its ex-Liberal, ILP dissenters.

Their chief influence in the half-decade or so after the war was to crystallize and to verbalize the widespread pacifism which was perhaps the most important single factor bearing upon foreign-policy attitudes in Great Britain.¹⁰

There was a distinctly dissenting edge to the diplomatic recognition which the MacDonald administration extended to the Soviet Union, its negotiation of a trade agreement with the same régime and Labour's advocacy in office of armament limitations. Yet, Winkler notes that

⁸ See Trevelyan to MacDonald, 6 January 1924, MacDonald Papers--Rylands University Library, Envelope 6; Cline, Recruits to Labour, p. 85; Jones, Arthur Ponsonby, pp. 141-144.

⁹ On the dissenters' awareness of such resistance from organized labour, see Buxton to Hirst, n.d., Buxton Papers, Special Correspondence, Box 3, Letters E-H, Hirst File; Jones, Arthur Ponsonby, pp. 119, 133.

¹⁰ Henry R. Winkler, "The Emergence of a Labour Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1918-1929," The Journal of Modern History 28 [1956], p. 249.

dissent's more ambitious foreign policy prescriptions--the calls for the wholesale revision of Versailles, for example--were moderated by Party pragmatists like Henderson and J.R. Clynes. He goes further, detecting from the mid-1920s a diminution of dissent's influence inside Labour's counsels. Marvin Swartz agrees that dissenting ideas fall into decline in 1924 but attributes this to the burden of governmental responsibility.¹¹

Indeed, the Party increasingly abandoned its 'League of Victors' position and moved to its inter-war 'League of Nations policy' which accepted the legitimacy of French desires for security and the virtue of modifying the post-war settlement incrementally. The latter policy was, according to Winkler, defined by support for arms limitation agreements, the elimination of grievances through negotiation, arbitration and "pooled" security against aggression.¹² This change in emphasis was evident in the foreign policy of the 1924 government. Upon assuming the Foreign Office MacDonald sought to repair relations with France while at the same time securing the withdrawal of their army from the Ruhr which had been occupied since January 1923. As Alan Cassels states, MacDonald tried to establish friendly relations with French leaders through protestations of goodwill, despite strident calls from the ILP and many dissenters for an anti-French policy. His efforts were rewarded when, in August 1924, he persuaded France and Germany to accept the Dawes Plan for a revised reparation payment schedule and won assurances from the French that they would end their occupation of the Ruhr.¹³ MacDonald further reinforced the European status quo when he and Parmoor headed a Labour Government delegation to the League of Nations. The resulting Geneva Protocol, negotiated by Parmoor,

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 247, 253, 257; Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 221.

¹² Winkler, "The Emergence of a Labour Foreign Policy," pp. 247, 253, 257.

¹³ Alan Cassels, "Repairing the Entente Cordiale and the New Diplomacy," The Historical Journal 23, 1 (1980), pp. 133-153.

strengthened the arbitration provisions of the League Covenant and set a date for a disarmament conference.¹⁴ Unfortunately for the dissenters, the Geneva Protocol was not approved by League member Governments. By the end of 1924, the Labour Government's foreign policy record was hugely dispiriting for dissenters, premised as it now was on acceptance of war reparations and support for the (unreconstituted) League of Nations. The advent of Labour rule was, therefore, another false dawn for dissent, somewhat comparable to the succession of disappointments experienced by the dissenters during that crucial year of the war, 1917.

In a wider, more diffuse sense, though, the dissenters did win the peace after December 1918. Only recently have historians begun to challenge dissent's view of Versailles as unduly vindictive and excessively burdensome on a post-war Germany ill-equipped to indemnify its former enemies.¹⁵ The once 'pro-German' argument that no single Great Power was responsible for the outbreak of war had become historiographical orthodoxy by the mid-1920s. The interpretation remained largely unchallenged until Fritz Fischer's meticulous dissection of German war aims was published in the 1960s.¹⁶ Even the arch-opponent of dissent, Lloyd George, was forced to concede in his memoirs that the nations of Europe had in August 1914 "slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war."¹⁷

¹⁴ Charles Loch Mowat, Britain between the War, 1918-1940 (Boston, 1955), pp. 180-181.

¹⁵ The first detailed critique of the Treaty was that mounted by J.M. Keynes in The Economic Consequences of the Peace. For contrasting views of the influence of this famous polemic during the inter-war period, see Robert Skidelsky, John Maynard Keynes, vol. 1, Hopes Betrayed, 1883-1920 (London, 1983), pp. 397-400; Sara Moore, Peace without Victory for the Allies, 1918-1932 (Oxford, 1994), chs. 4 and 6. For a revisionist treatment of Versailles, see A. Lentin, Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson and the Guilt of Germany: An Essay in the Pre-History of Appeasement (Leicester, 1984), introduction.

¹⁶ See Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War (New York, 1967). Fischer's work was originally published as Griff nach der Weltmacht (Düsseldorf, 1961).

¹⁷ Quoted in James Joll, The Origins of the First World War (London, 1984), p. 203.

Late in 1917 Philip Snowden struck a characteristically optimistic note as he looked ahead.

The Statesmen of Europe and America have now the opportunity to prove the honesty of their professions of faith in democracy. If they fail to use the present opportunity they will in all probability, long before the close of the coming year, be swept away by the irresistible flood of a great democratic uprising in all the belligerent nations.¹⁸

Snowden's sanguine tone captures perfectly the myopia, flawed judgment and exaggerated expectations which British dissenters had frequently displayed during the preceding year. They had earlier rejoiced in, and taken credit for, Wilson's diplomatic initiatives of December 1916 and January 1917. They claimed to have forced Lloyd George into the statement of British war aims on 10 January 1917 which, however unsatisfactory, shaped dissent's agenda for the remainder of the year. The dissenters somehow saw in the disappointing result of the Rossendale by-election (held shortly after Lloyd George's speech) evidence that the British public shared their own dissatisfaction with the Government's annexationist war aims. Civilian morale certainly ebbed and flowed on the British Home Front, but war weariness never completely sapped a patriotic resolve that was by the end of the period under review somewhat more solid than it had been in the summer of 1917. Similarly, every occasional parliamentary debate of a peace issue was too blithely taken by dissent as evidence of the growing political support for their agenda.

The March Revolution in Russia was undoubtedly an enormous fillip for dissent. The Provisional Government's Freedom Charter enabled them to chide the Lloyd George administration for its increasingly wilful disregard of civil liberties in Britain. The enunciation of the Petrograd Formula for a peace without annexations or indemnities further boosted dissenting morale and, crucially, provided the model for a negotiated settlement. The Bolshevik seizure of power and the subsequent opening of negotiations for a separate peace between Russia

¹⁸ Snowden, "The Year-End Outlook," The Labour Leader, 27 December 1917, p. 2.

and Germany, however, were devastating. The Petrograd paradigm of peace with honour was rendered null and void and, given the uncompromising position adopted by the Germans at Brest-Litovsk, the proponents of negotiations were more than ever exposed to allegations of defeatism.

As the Russian Revolution unfolded in 1917, the dissenters seemed also slowly to be converting pro-war Labour to a peace-by-negotiation position. A Special Conference in August extended British Labour's support to dissent's hoped for international conference of socialists in neutral Sweden. Labour's commitment to a negotiated peace appeared to be strengthened further by its adoption of a War Aims Memorandum in December which enshrined various keynote articles of the dissenting faith. Yet the same Special Conference specifically guarded against any dissenting presence at the Stockholm Conference. The War Aims Memorandum, meanwhile, had been drafted by the solidly pro-war Sidney Webb and, in essence, signified a renewed, albeit qualified commitment of the Labour Party to the British war effort. The dissenters saw in the Labour Party a vehicle for a peace agenda which they still believed to be their own. By February 1918, however, the Party was effectively insulated against its permeation by dissent; it was firmly in the grasp of Arthur Henderson and the pro-war trade union heavyweights.

The dissenters also seemed by early January to have out manoeuvred Lloyd George and to have secured the support of President Wilson. Both the Prime Minister's Caxton Hall address of 5 January and Wilson's Fourteen Point programme, were naively assumed to mirror UDC policy. Lloyd George may have occasionally dipped into the dissenting lexicon, but his Government had for the past few months been engaged in a determined campaign against the peace-by-negotiation forces. Morel had been arrested and imprisoned for a violation of DORA, the censorship provisions of this legislation had recently been stiffened, and the NWAC was doing its utmost by propaganda to cast British war aims in a noble light. Likewise, the fulfilment of President Wilson's ambitious foreign policy initiatives had, from the American perspective,

to await a successful, decisive termination of hostilities against the Central Powers.

At a quick glance it might have appeared to an optimistic dissenting observer early in 1918 that their alternative foreign policy plans had been adopted by both Lloyd George and Wilson as well as by the Labour Party and idiosyncratic representatives of the establishment like Lord Lansdowne. Such assessments, however, were a grave distortion of the true position. The dissenters had in fact been supplanted, first by the Labour Party and, later, by the Government, as the foremost purveyors of 'new diplomacy'. In appropriating various dissenting ideas and objectives, though, the Labour Party and Lloyd George had softened or transformed them. Both the Government and Labour enjoyed a prestige and credibility that far exceeded that of the dissenters. It was hardly surprising that the deceptive 'conversion' of both to a 'progressive' foreign policy resulted in the subsequent marginalization of genuinely Radical peace thinking for the remainder of the war.

This study of British dissent's failed quest for a negotiated peace during 1917 is intended to shed light on the ideas and tactics of the 'troublemakers' engaged in this somewhat neglected episode in their turbulent and convoluted history. It is also hoped that the preceding pages have illuminated the peculiarities of British dissent in a more general way. Dissent was not a monolithic tendency, as was exemplified by the diversity of dissenting reactions to the Russian Revolution of March 1917. Ponsonby, Morel, MacDonald and Snowden henceforth thought that revolutionary Russia provided the best hope of securing a premature cessation of hostilities. Buxton, by contrast, continued to regard President Wilson's leadership as more crucial to forging a just, negotiated peace.

A more general point might, however, be made in this connection, namely the weight attached by dissent to 'external' forces of some kind, whether President Wilson, the Petrograd

Soviet, German Social Democrats, or Pope Benedict X. This emphasis on salvation from abroad is certainly an indication of the dissenters' weakness on the homefront. Howard Weinroth attributes the peace-by-negotiation leadership's dependence on outside stimuli to their refusal to mobilize the working-class from fear of inciting revolution.¹⁹ But however much dissenters were worried about instigating a bloody revolution, they nevertheless did expend much energy in persuading working men and women to consider the righteousness of their programme. In that sense the dissenters did not rely on external force at the expense of domestic. The relationship between the two was symbiotic. International developments were used on the one hand by dissent to give themselves more credibility in the eyes of the British public and, on the other hand, to coerce the Government into action. Dissent's ability to influence, in however limited a fashion, the Government in turn provided them with more visibility. The strategy, however, was a hostage to policies beyond their control. The dissenters benefitted in the first half of 1917 from the seemingly unqualified adherence to a peace-without-victory of Russia and America. Conversely, dramatic changes in Russian and American politics in the latter half of 1917 undercut their campaign. The extent of dissent's weakness was evident in their inability to influence the Government despite the considerable labour discontent and social dislocation of late 1917.

The thesis has been constructed largely, although not entirely, around the opinions and actions of five dissenting figures, each embodying a subtly different interpretation of, or response to, the issues of the moment thrown up in this most critical year of the Great War. Noel Buxton's role as a dissenting propagandist has been somewhat underestimated by historians generally.²⁰ He strove to project a moderate image and to convert the sceptics inside both

¹⁹ Weinroth, "Peace by Negotiation," p. 384.

²⁰ The exceptions to this rule are A.J.P. Taylor's The Trouble Makers and Noel Fieldhouse's "Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor's, 'The Trouble Makers'."

British and American Governments by a strategy of permeation. He was much less adversarial than most of his dissenting confrères but had more success in disseminating their message through official circles. Whether breakfasting with Lloyd George or submitting memoranda to Cabinet, Buxton was adept at making the dissenting case look respectable.

Arthur Ponsonby was, as he appeared, withdrawn and pensive. He frequently led the dissenting charge against the Government in the Commons and provided an intellectual anchor for the UDC executive. Outside these two roles Ponsonby was little known. The uncompromising nature of his views made him a dissenter of the first rank but also prevented him from gaining wide public acceptance.

E.D. Morel's impact on the peace-by-negotiation movement as a whole was pervasive. Unlike the other four, who had to divide their time between parliamentary duties and efforts at converting the people at large, Morel was free to concentrate on his public campaign. The study of his work reveals him as a tireless producer and co-ordinator of dissenting work. It was a testament to Morel's ability and reputation that he should have been singled out by the Government for prosecution. If his great strength was an unwavering commitment to the dissenting position, it was also his greatest weakness. The combination of his inordinate egotism and his inflexibility made him wholly unsuitable for office.

MacDonald's political contribution throughout 1917 exemplified his role as the UDC and ILP figure anticipating his involvement in creating the National Government in 1931. MacDonald, like Buxton, showed that it was possible to be a committed dissenter yet open to the need to compromise. He worked tirelessly for a negotiated peace and developed a large following. Partly as a result of his prominence and his efforts, the distinction between the UDC and the ILP was blurred.

Snowden, closely identified with the ILP, was a fiery debater and acerbic commentator

who managed to be both a dogmatic dissenter and to retain a popularity second only to MacDonald. An enthusiastic proponent of the Petrograd Formula, he was quick to discern what he viewed as Wilson's tenuous commitment to dissent.

It is tempting to see in the contrasting perspectives of the five dissenters a concrete illustration of the distinction which Roger Chickering draws between "utopian" and "ideological" strains of pacifism, including dissenting thought.

Utopian pacifism conceives war as an inseparable aspect of a social and political order that is utterly corrupt and beyond rehabilitation. Ideological pacifism rejects war because of the threat it poses to a social and political order that is basically sound and praiseworthy.²¹

The five dissenters fall into Chickering's 'ideological' vein. The differences between Morel, Ponsonby, MacDonald, Snowden and Buxton, however, and particularly those between the latter and the four other dissenters, lay more in the realm of tactics than ideas. As Martin Ceadel convincingly argues, all shades of British pacifism were 'ideological'.²²

This study of British dissent is meant not only to highlight the shortcomings of its arguments and its limited achievements during the First World War. Albeit less directly, the tribulations of the peace-by-negotiation movement illuminate a peculiar feature of British political culture. There existed in Britain a longstanding tradition of questioning authority generally and of quarrelling specifically with single issues such as the Corn Laws or the Government's handling of the Bulgarian Atrocities to the point of becoming crusades. This tradition, from which the dissenting predisposition emerged, can be traced at least as far back as to the growth of religious

²¹ Quoted in Martin Ceadel, "Ten Distinctions for Peace Historians," in The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective, ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto, 1996), p. 27. The original source is Roger Chickering, Imperial Germany and a World without War: The Peace Movement and German Society, 1892-1914 (Princeton, 1975), pp. 18-19.

²² Martin Ceadel, "Ten Distinctions for Peace Historians," pp. 26-27. Ceadel differentiates between "pacifism", the rejection of all war, and "pacificism", the acceptance of war in certain instances. See a more detailed discussion of the two terms, see footnote 20, p. 9.

pluralism in the seventeenth century and to changes in political theory postulating that a government's legitimacy must be derived from the consent of the governed. Kenneth Dyson sees the absence in Britain of a perennial risk of invasion from abroad as another formative influence on dissent. There was no real precedent for the theoretically draconian controls that were placed on dissent during the Great War by DORA. In continental Europe, by contrast, the constant threat of foreign conquest created "a perceived need for a vigorous response to the combination of enemies abroad with factionalism and threat of disorder at home."²³ The result in European societies was a more elevated, all encompassing conception of state power than ever developed in Britain before the First World War. Yet, even after the outbreak of war, and in spite of the expansion of DORA in particular and the British state generally, dissent was still able to function. Even in the latter half of 1917, when the Government became more interested in quieting dissent, they were still able to publicize opinions that were highly critical of the Government and the war.

Notwithstanding all the above, it is ironic that the dissenters compared Britain's civil liberties in wartime unfavourably to contemporary French and German standards. In actuality, the French and German Governments were much more successful and thorough in their suppression of dissent.²⁴ The absence of systematic persecution and the lack of sustained and life-threatening hostility to dissenters from the British people speaks volumes for British tolerance and forbearance. Even in the Second World War with a much greater threat of invasion and the

²³ Kenneth H.F. Dyson, The State Tradition in Western Europe: A Study of an Idea and Institution (Oxford, 1980), pp. 41, 36-37; Bone, "Beyond the Rule of Law," p. 5. See also, Robert Eccleshall, British Liberalism--Liberal Thought from the 1640s to the 1980s (London, 1986), pp. 8-11; A.J. Baker, Examining British Politics, 2d. ed., (London, 1984), p. 11; Ceadel, The Origins of War Prevention, *passim*.

²⁴ For detailed discussions on the restrictions faced by French and German dissent, see Jean-Jacques Becker, The Great War and the French People (New York, 1986), pp. 48-56, 153-168; Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Sceptre: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, vol. 2, The European Powers and the Wilhelmine Empire, 1890-1914 (London, 1972), ch. 7.

trauma of bombing, anti-war dissent was allowed to speak out, both inside and outside Parliament.²⁵

One of dissent's accomplishments was its implantation in the popular mind of the 1920s and 1930s of a mistrust of public authority. The dissenters managed to secure the moral high ground in the inter-war period. A contemporary historical survey produced by Walter Langsam in 1934 typifies the generally sympathetic contemporary portrayal of wartime dissent at this time. MacDonald, for example, is described reverently as a believer "in moderation and peace."²⁶ The dissenters' view of the war and the Government seemed to be confirmed by the flood of war memoirs published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Along with dissent's continued criticism of British foreign policy after the war, coupled with their retrospective attacks on wartime propaganda and manipulation of public opinion,²⁷ these autobiographical accounts served to erode governmental credibility and to arrest rearmament after 1933. This effect was intended and seen as a prerequisite for the inauguration of a democratic foreign policy which, in turn, would bring about international reconciliation and assure world peace.

While the dissenters 'won' the argument claiming that the peace was Carthaginian and influenced some popular attitudes in the inter-war period, they had only a marginal impact on the shape of future Governments and the direction of foreign policy. The dissenters did, though partially, realize one of their objectives when, on 21 May 1919, the Lloyd George Government announced that it was reforming the Foreign Service by dropping the property qualification for

²⁵ Yvonne Aleksandra Bennett, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "Testament of a Minority in Wartime: The Peace Pledge Union and Vera Brittain, 1939-1945" (Hamilton, McMaster University, 1984), especially chs. 4 and 5.

²⁶ Walter Consuelo Langsam, The World since 1914 (New York, 1934), p. 196.

²⁷ For a classic example of anti-war autobiography, see Brittain, Testament of Youth. For a post-war critique of foreign policy, see Dickinson, The International Anarchy. Pensonby's Falsehood in Wartime, published in 1928, is a model of the third genre.

new admissions, introducing salaries, changing the entrance examination, and altering the hiring process.²⁸ These reforms were regarded as vital first steps in the movement towards a more democratically conducted foreign policy. Yet, aside from these minor bureaucratic adjustments and two short-lived periods of Labour rule, the inter-war period was generally disappointing for dissent with the Government usually dominated by individuals and parties who were reviled in dissenting circles.

The dissenters had justified their assaults on British war policy as a defence of individual freedom and democracy--the very essence, supposedly, of British war aims. Moreover, they believed it was impossible to achieve a lasting peace by imposing a punitive settlement or by foisting a new constitutional system on the enemy or both. Perversely, they held themselves to be the true guardians of British interests--to be indeed the true British Patriots, rather than the flag-waving jingoes who disrupted their meetings and pilloried them in the press.

It is one of the great paradoxes that the dissenters' attempts to avert a future European conflagration helped to initiate one. By working to undermine public support for the Versailles Treaty, by striving to prevent the Government from carrying out its treaty obligations, such as for the permanent demilitarization of the Rhineland, and by fostering a climate of appeasement, the dissenters contributed to the war they so dearly hoped to avoid.

²⁸ Collins, Aspects of British Politics, pp. 342-343.

Appendix A: THE FOUR CARDINAL POINTS OF THE UDC¹

1. No Province shall be transferred from one Government to another without the consent by plebiscite or otherwise of the population of such Province.
2. No Treaty, Arrangement, or Undertaking shall be entered upon in the name of Great Britain without the sanction of Parliament. Adequate machinery for ensuring democratic control of foreign policy shall be created.
3. The Foreign Policy of Great Britain shall not be aimed at creating alliances for the purpose of maintaining the 'Balance of Power', but shall be directed to concerted action between the Powers, and the setting up of an International Council, whose deliberations and decisions shall be public, with such machinery for securing international agreements as shall be the guarantee of an abiding peace.
4. Great Britain shall propose, as part of the Peace Settlement, a plan for the drastic reduction, by consent, of the armaments of all belligerent Powers, and to facilitate that policy shall attempt to secure the general nationalisation of the manufacture of armaments and the control of the export of armaments by one country to another.

¹ Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control, p. 42. In May 1916 the UDC added a fifth point: "That the European conflict shall not be continued by economic war after the military operations have ceased, and that British policy shall be directed towards promoting the fullest commercial intercourse between nations and the preservation and extension of the principle of the open door" (Ibid., p. 78).

Appendix B: THE UNION OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL IN 1917²

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

H.N. Brailsford
Charles Roden Buxton
J.A. Hobson
F.W. Jowett, M.P.
F.W. Pethick Lawrence (Hon.
Treasurer)
J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P.

E.D. Morel (Secretary)
Arthur Ponsonby, M.P.
The Hon. Bertrand Russell
Philip Snowden, M.P.
Mrs. H.M. Swanwick
Charles Trevelyan, M.P.

GENERAL COUNCIL

Delegates from all Branches and Federations and the following:

C.G. Ammon
W.C. Anderson, M.P.
Norman Angell
The Hon. Lady Barlow
Harrison Barrow
Gilbert Cannan
Lady Courtney of Penwith
B.N. Langdon Davies
Miss M. Llewelyn Davies
The Hon. R.D. Denman, M.P.
Miss I.O. Ford
Alexander Gossip
Principal J.W. Graham
Edward Grubb
Major Maitland Hardyman
Carl Heath
J.H. Judson

William Leach
Miss Muriel Matters
Mrs. Morel
Roland E. Muirhead
Miss Paget (Vernon Lee)
M. Philips Price
Lady Margaret Sackville
Mrs. Salter
Mrs. John Scurr
Robert Shanks
Mrs. Philip Snowden
Sir Daniel Stevenson
R.C. Trevelyan
George Tweedy
Dr. Ethel Williams
Miss Cooper Willis
Israel Zangwill

² *Ibid.*, Appendix B, p. 225.

Appendix C: UDC WAR AIMS MANIFESTO³

1. Questions of Nationality and Territory.

As a preliminary to any rearrangement of territorial boundaries, it ought to be made perfectly clear that all claims based on conquest, imperialistic ambition or strategic considerations, such as a German demand for a revision of strategic frontiers in Belgium and elsewhere, an Italian demand for non-Italian dalmatia or a Russian demand for Constantinople, are ruled out on principle. There must be a complete acceptance of a policy of "no annexation."

Our Suggestions are:

(a) Belgium.

The complete re-establishment of the sovereign independence and integrity and the economic restoration of Belgium must be absolutely secured.

(b) France.

The invaded districts of France must be evacuated.

(c) Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania.

Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania must be evacuated and their independence restored.

(d) Alsace and Lorraine.

The disposition of Alsace and Lorraine should be decided on the principle of the right of the population to control; its own destiny. The decision would not necessarily imply the allocation of the whole provinces to either France or Germany. Neither should the policy of autonomy be excluded.

In this, as in other cases, where the views of a population are subject to dispute, the question ought to be decided, by a plebiscite or otherwise, under the supervision of an impartial International Commission and free from the interference of occupying armies.

(e) Trentino.

The claims of Italy to Trentino or other unredeemed districts ought to be decided by the same process.

(f) Poland.

Poland should be free and independent. The population of Austrian Poland and the Polish

³ Swanwick, Builders of Peace, pp. 81-85.

districts of Prussia should decide whether they wish to become part of Poland.

(g) Austro-Hungarian Empire.

An unfortunate impression was created by the Allied Note to President Wilson of January 10th that it is the fixed determination of the Allies to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire into independent States. This intention ought to be explicitly repudiated by all the Allies, as it has been by the Russian Democracy. But it must be made clear that freedom for the component populations of that Empire can be obtained by self-government within that Empire, as it can be secured for the Finns in Russia and for the Irish within the British Empire.

(h) Other Problems.

There are very complicated problems, such as the Polish claims on Dantzig, Bulgaria's claims on Macedonia, Rumania's claims on Transylvania, and the future status of Persia, which obviously cannot be settled by any military decision, but which ought to be referred to an International Commission appointed with the co-operation and authority of the nations of Europe.

(i) Turkey.

Russian democracy has repudiated the Imperialistic Policy of the Tsars to annex Constantinople. The way is therefore open for a proposal to neutralize, or inter-nationalize, the city and the Straits. It is against the interest of the world that the great trading waterways should be in the hands of single Powers.

The policy of international control over the Ottoman Empire should be maintained and extended so as to provide full security for the Christian peoples and freedom of development for other races under the suzerainty of the Sultan.

But no immediate settlement of the Turkish Empire could be regarded as final. The arrangements would necessarily have to be revised from time to time by the League of Nations.

The maximum of freedom for the various nationalities and freedom of trade between all parts, and equality of economic opportunity for the nationals of all European Powers should be the policy followed.

(j) German Colonies.

Great Britain should repudiate definitely any claim to annex German colonies by right of conquest. That, however does not imply the return of the status quo ante bellum.

As recently as 1885, by the General Act of the Conference of Berlin, an assignment of sovereign rights in Africa was made by the Great Powers. A shifting of the political frontiers in existence before the war has become inevitable. It may be that such territorial readjustments will involve political changes under which some part of the African territory hitherto administered by Germany may be transferred.

The principle of no annexations, however, requires a frank recognition that, in the interests of a lasting peace, Germany is not less entitled than other Great Powers to organize and develop over-sea Dependencies.

The great zone of Tropical Africa should be neutralized under an international guarantee, and absolute freedom of trade and enterprise established there.

A less exclusive trade policy enforced throughout Africa by international arrangement would greatly facilitate the adjustment of national territorial claims.

Under a general rearrangement of territories the Pacific Islands might be dealt with as well as Africa.

2. GUARANTIES.

(a) League of Nations.

The foundation of all future hopes of permanent peace lies in the establishment of a League of Nations. That will become a reality only in so far as all the peoples are led to see that such a League offers better hope of national security than the old system of competitive armament. We cannot hope to destroy militarism so long as there is a chance of Governments being able to persuade their people that the only means of national security lies in preponderant military power. Our first task is to convince the masses of every country that in a League of Nations they may find the means of defence which renders their old militarism unnecessary.

Such a League of Nations with a common undertaking to submit disputes to arbitration and to form an International Council or Parliament for dealing with international problems as they become critical has been proposed by President Wilson on behalf of the United States, and accepted in principle by the British, French, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and German governments.

(b) Open Door

The second condition indispensable to permanent peace is to persuade the German and Austrian populations that their right to equal opportunity for economic expansion and for access to raw material will be secure without their being obliged to fight for them. To secure this the nations should agree to reciprocal equality of commercial opportunity in all their dependencies. Upon the breaking down of commercial exclusiveness depends the good will of the future. The policy of economic warfare laid down by the Paris Conference should be repudiated as being opposed to international peace.

(c) Open Diplomacy.

The disappearance of secret diplomacy is essential to permanent peace. Secret treaties should be prohibited by international agreement, and should be regarded as void. All treaties should be sanctioned by the National Parliaments and subject to periodical revision.

(d) Disarmament.

The largest measure of agreement for the reduction of armaments on land and sea should be obtained at the settlement.

We suggest that while the removal of the motive for arming among nations will prove to be the only real guarantee for the effective reduction, a method might be adopted by means of international inspection of armament establishments, for controlling the execution of any agreement for immediate reduction which may be reached by the settlement.

Nations should agree to abolish private enterprise in the production of armaments.

(e) Freedom of the Seas.

This question should be surveyed in the light of the infringement of the rights of neutrals in time of war, and of the security of economic opportunity for all nations in time of peace.

3. REPARATION.

Belgium is entitled to relief from Germany owing to the circumstances under which she was forced into the war.

No indemnities should be demanded in the sense of payments to recover expenses of the war, but there should be a common fund provided by all the belligerent nations to assist recovery of the parts of the world most seriously devastated by the war. An International

Commission should decide the allocation of the common fund.

Appendix D: DRAFT PROGRAM OF DECISIVE SETTLEMENT COMMITTEE⁴

Defeat of Militarism

Since the repudiation by the Russian Revolution of all claims of conquest, the discussion over the real objects of this war has begun from one end of Europe to another. On one thing peoples and governments are united: the essential purpose of the Allies must be achieved.

The defeat of Prussian Militarism has several meanings, each of them important. It means first of all the indisputable defeat of the actual military purposes for which the German War Party fought in this war. These purposes were mainly three. (1) The schemes of the naval school, which aimed at acquiring control of the Channel by taking and keeping Antwerp or even Calais. (2) The allied demands of the industrial capitalists of the Six Economic Unions who wanted to annex Belgium and Northern France in order to possess their coal and iron fields. (3) The plans of the more moderate Eastern School which in order to dominate Turkey, wished to hold the road to Turkey and therefore to annex or dominate Serbia.

We shall have defeated these three purposes, when the independence of Belgium is absolutely restored (with an adequate indemnity), when the occupied territories of France are evacuated, and when Serbia once more stands free, independent and secure across Germany's military road to the East.

League of Nations

Our purpose is, however, more positive and constructive than this. We can destroy Prussian and every other militarism only by setting up in place of the armed peace and the competing alliances which cursed Europe for a generation before the war, such a League of Nations as President Wilson has proposed. It must provide for the settlement of all aggravated disputes in future by a permanent Council of Conciliation or by arbitration, and it must ensure, by the pledged co-operative force of the civilized world, a moratorium from war until this procedure has been applied.

Commercial Peace

Further, we are coming to realize that it can prevent trade wars and boycotts, only by organizing commercial (sic) peace within its ranks. This League, as General Smuts has urged, must be formed at the settlement of the war, and must provide for general disarmament; and, as Lord Buckmaster has argued, it will fail unless it includes Germany. When this League is set up, when Germany adheres to it (as the Chancellor has promised that she will), when further she has proved her sincerity by reducing her menacing armaments to an agreed level, then and not till then we may fairly say that Prussian Militarism has been destroyed. We look, as a consequence of this repudiation of militarism by the German people, for the democratic reform

⁴ Buckler Papers, Series II, Box 5, Folder 7A. This document has no date but Buckler referred to it and sent it to House on 14 June 1917. See Buckler to House, 14 June 1917, Buckler Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 6.

of the German Constitution. That process has already been sketched in part in the Kaiser's rescript. We can hasten it, not by threatening an intervention in the internal concerns of the German people, which would defeat our own ends by rallying the whole nation against foreign coercion, but rather by making it clear that a Germany, free at home and fixing her ambitions on peaceful enterprise abroad, will have nothing to fear from our hostility.

National Grievances to be avoided

The League of Nations must be no conservative Holy Alliance, making a death in life, by stereotyping the status quo. It must be prepared to organize by consent changes in the world, as changes become due. But its future will be wrecked if it starts handicapped by any of the graver problems which have made this war. The Socialist formula "no annexation" is a proper protest against schemes of conquest and aggrandisement, but to insist that the map must be left unaltered would be to leave Europe strewn with war-breeding anomalies and wrongs. The problem of meeting the many claims of Poles, Alsations, Czechs, Serbs and the rest may well seem to demand years of further (sic) war, until we recollect that the causes of war were not all on one side. Our aim, if we desire permanent peace, must be to leave no people, not even an enemy people, with a grievance which may tempt it oncemore (sic) to arm and intrigue and eventually to make war.

German Expansion

The provoking cause of the war on the German side was undoubtedly the sense that the economic and colonial expansion of a race which adds nearly a million to its population every year was hampered by the condition of the world in 1914. The excuse in no way diminishes the criminality of the war, but we must none the less desire to remove such causes of war in the future. The satisfaction of the various Allied claims of nationality will be immensely eased, if as part of a comprehensive settlement, which does justice to oppressed races, and prevents a return to the old armed peace, we concede to the Germans a share in the work of the colonizing Powers, permit the development of their purely economic activity in Turkey, and remove the threat of a boycott on their trade.

The possibility of making these economic concessions is, with our military successes in France and Turkey, our chief asset in the settlement. It must not be bargained away lightly. On the other hand, if we were to decide, for purposes of Imperial aggrandisement, to maintain all our Colonial conquests, to partition Turkey among the Allies, and to exclude German trade from the world's markets, it is clear that we must either abandon the hope of salutary changes in Europe or else wage war interminably.

The destruction of the Russian autocracy has reduced the list of Allied demands to manageable proportions. We may now begin by substituting the effective neutralisation and disarmament of the Turkish Straits under an international commission (over which America might preside) in place of the old demand for the annexation of Constantinople.

The new Russia has also declared that it will not fight for the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. On its merits we hold that the solution of the problem of nationality in the Dual Monarchy by the complete adoption of an honest federal constitution is preferable to dismemberment. Dismemberment must make several "Ulsters", subject minorities to the unchecked rule of majorities, and raise in the ports and on the railways difficult problems of communication. Nor could the little States to be created become effectively independent; they would have to lean on greater Allies for protection, and this implies the guidance of their diplomatic, military and commercial policy. The best solution is Home Rule all round, for Czechs, Rumanians and South Slavs as well for Germans and Magyars. To Italy, however, the

distinct and easily separable region of the Italian speaking Trentino ought to be ceded. Trieste should have the status of a Free (autonomous) city.

The Balkans

The details of a good Balkan Settlement might well be left to an impartial commission. The essential point is the complete restoration of Serbian and Rumanian independence. Albania might become an Italian Protectorate. The genuinely Bulgarian regions of Macedonia and the Dobrudja must be restored to Bulgaria. The compensation to Serbia should be the cession to her of at least one good port on the Adriatic (Ragusa or Cattaro) with as much of the intervening territory (all of it inhabited by Serbs) as is needed to ensure her access to it. Salonica and Kavalla (under Greek sovereignty) should both become free ports open to the use of the whole interior.

Turkey

The neutralisation of the Turkish Straits and the restoration of Serbia will mean that Turkey can no longer be used as a military pawn by the Germans. The whole civilised world will demand that the Armenian Provinces shall be reserved as a home for what is left of the massacred Armenian nation, and their protection may safely be confided to Russia. That, however, is the only indispensable annexation in Turkey. Dismemberment can here mean nothing but a scheme of conquest, inconsistent with the disinterested professions of the Allies. To give the region of Smyrna and Konia to Italy, for example, would be to deny the principle of nationality at the expense of its relatively advanced Greek and Turkish population. France would rule Syria well, but the demand of the Syrians was always for Home Rule. With India and Egypt in our possession can we justify to neutral opinion a claim to add Mesopotamia to our Empire? Strategy, it is said, requires us to take it: that is exactly why the German extremists claim Belgium.

International Solution

(a) in Asia For a positive policy in Turkey let us attempt to apply, not merely in Constantinople, but elsewhere the international principle. What was difficult without a League of Nations will be possible when we have formed it. There must be reforms in Turkey imposed and supervised by the whole League. Autonomy, even in the past, was a success in the Lebanon: this system might be extended to the whole of Syria and to the Jewish settlements of Palestine, for which America might assume responsibility. There must be an amicable arrangement over the capital undertakings (railways, irrigation, oil-wells etc) of the various powers, in which German enterprise will have its share. Arabia has won and must keep its independence.

(b) in Africa The same principle of internationalism will help us in Africa. The immense Congo area (including German East Africa) is already subject by Treaty to a system of free trade and is conditionally neutralised. The best way of ending colonial rivalries in Africa is to extend this system, improved as experience dictates, to the whole of tropical Africa (excluding of course the Dominion of South Africa and the Mediterranean colonies). The interests of the natives must everywhere be secured in a general charter, which, by recognizing their communal property in the soil and its products, will protect them against the system of exploitation which King Leopold carried out and certain groups of capitalists propose to revive. Territorial sovereignty within this tropical area needs some re-division. If our Colonies intend to keep German South-West Africa and her Pacific Islands, then it would be well to provide equivalents for them within this area, and the eventual sale or exchange of other districts might also be considered. An industrial

people like the Germans cannot be excluded from the raw materials of the Tropics without making it a permanently restless and aggrieved element, and a danger to the world's peace.

Poland and Alsace

We have left to the last the most difficult questions of all, those of Poland and Alsace. To alienate large portions of German territory would require a terrible extension of a war, which as General Smuts and Mr. Henderson have told us, has already cost Europe seven or eight million killed, if it were to be the result solely of military operations. With the aid of colonial and commercial re-adjustments, it may be feasible at a much earlier stage, and the resulting peace will be better than one which rested on force alone. The democratic case for a change in Alsace does not rest on race: the population is mainly German by race. If it is made to rest on history and the wrong done in 1871, we can not forget that these provinces were German till Louis XIV conquered them.

Popular will the criterion

They have been and will be again what someone has called "the challenge cup" of Europe, unless we recur to the only liberal test, the will of the population. Part of Lorraine would certainly wish to be French, but part of it has as decidedly German sympathies. The wishes of Alsace (apart from its demand for a better form of Home Rule) are very doubtful. A plebiscite in each area taken by neutral commissioners would be the only ideally satisfactory solution, and at this we must aim. Failing this the cession of the certainly pro-French portion of Lorraine (Metz & Thionville) might suffice to end the historical feud, if the status of Alsace were improved. Poland has been offered independence by both sides, but Germany does not offer re-union, and Russia is clearly unwilling to fight for it. The Poles themselves after a terrible experience of devastation and starvation dread a further conflict on their territory, and both the Provisional Polish Council in Warsaw and the Polish Socialist Party have issued manifestoes begging the world not to prolong the war on their account. Let us insist so far as we humanly can on the re-union with Poland of those portions of Prussia and Austria which have a substantial Polish majority, but we must not pursue this ideal, if its attainment would mean the extermination of the Poles. For the minority of this nation left under alien rule guarantees of tolerance must be secured. For the Polish State we must secure unqualified independence free from any German dictation. That is essential to a lasting peace.

Summary

Our proposals are summarily these:

(1) A League of Nations. Obligatory conciliation or arbitration in all disputes. United Defence against a lawless Power. Reduction of armaments. Commercial Peace within the League.

(2) Restoration of Belgian, Serbian and Rumanian Independence. Indemnity to Belgium. Evacuation of occupied parts of France and Russia.

(3) A Plebiscite to settle the destinies of Alsace-Lorraine.

(4) An Independent Poland.

(5) The adoption of a Federal Constitution by Austria-Hungary. Cession of the Trentino to Italy. Trieste to be a Free (autonomous) City.

(6) An International Commission for Balkan boundaries. Bulgarian Macedonia and Dobrudja to be restored. Serbia to acquire an Adriatic Port with connecting territory. Albania an Italian Protectorate.

(7) Internationalisation of the Turkish Straits. Armenia a Russian Protectorate.

Autonomy for Syria and Palestine. Arabia independent. Turkish Reforms under European control. Amicable arrangements of European capital enterprises.

(8) The extension of the Free Trade Zone of Tropical Africa. Equivalents to be found in it for annexed German colonies. This sketch is put forward as a tentative suggestion. We claim for it that while it meets the generous spirit of the Russian Democracy by excluding all Imperialist conquest, it does provide for the changes essential to a peaceful Europe. It would make an end of Prussian Militarism, but it would create no rival system of domination in its stead. On such a basis might be founded what Mr. Asquith called "a partnership of nations".

**Appendix E: NOEL BUXTON'S 12 JULY 1917 PROPOSAL TO THE
FOREIGN OFFICE⁵**

CONFIDENTIAL.

THE ENTENTE AND THE ALLIES OF GERMANY.

Since the Secret Session and the declaration of Mr. Bonar Law in the House of Commons on May 14th that "no blow would seem so fatal to the Germans as the detachment of one of their allies", the question whether the Entente Powers have an essential quarrel with Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey has been much debated. Discussion has been encouraged by the Russian demand for a revision of the Allies' aims, and by the knowledge that sections of Russian opinion now in authority held that the Allies ought to have recognised the Bulgarian claims.

The attitude of the Government is viewed as a highly important step towards defeating Germany's aims, whether by actual detachment of her Allies, or by bringing pressure from them to bear on the Berlin Government towards moderation. It is regarded also in the light of the future as being in harmony with a settlement which aims at being decisive. It is assumed that Turkey cannot break loose from Germany independently, but that either Turkey or Bulgaria, or Bulgaria and Austria, could act together, and that H.M.G. has in view the latter combination.

If this is so, the problem is to harmonise aims which apparently conflict, namely the satisfaction of Austria and Bulgaria with the defeat of aggression, and the discharge of the duty of the Allies to Serbia, Italy, Rumania and Greece.

The irreducible conditions on each side come very near to being incompatible, but a solution may be found on the following lines:-

The recognition of the Austro-Hungarian frontier, except as to the Trentino, the claims of the nationalities in the Empire being met by internal reforms. The restoration of Serbia, and the incorporation by her of Montenegro, the port of Antivari being made a genuine economic outlet by the purchase of Spizza from Austria. The recognition of Bulgaria's claims to her former frontiers, and, in addition, to the so-called Uncontested Zone, to the Bulgarian parts of the recent Greek acquisitions in Macedonia, and to the part of the Dobruja held by her in 1912; Bulgaria to abandon her present occupation of the contested zone and of every part of the Kingdom of Serbia; Salonica to be internationalised; Rumania to be restored and the rights of the Rumans in Hungary to be met by autonomy for Transylvania.

The arguments used in the controversy may be summarised as follows:-

- (1) The proposal is a practical one.

⁵ "The Entente and the Allies of Germany," no date, House Papers, Series III, Box 181, Folder 1/94. The Government's copy of the memorandum is in FO 371/3083/138609 and was received on 12 July 1917.

The probability of its success in one form or the other is sufficient to outweigh the possible risks to be adduced against it.

There are many signs of a change of feeling both in Austria and Bulgaria. For instance, American officials who have lately returned report the prevalence of great hostility to Germany in both countries, and there is no need to enumerate the various difficulties in which the Austrian and Hungarian Governments find themselves involved.

It is evident that Austria would desire peace if she were able to preserve her frontiers (except as regards the Trentino), whether the condition of peace were her adoption of a federal system or not.

As to Bulgaria, the fact that Russia ceased for a time to be a military power has not prevented the Bulgarian Government from facing the disapproval of Germany. This is conspicuously shown in its refusal to break off relations with America. The participation of the United States in the war is certainly a factor in the change of attitude, for Bulgarians regard that country as their educational creator. Again, the Russophil party in Bulgaria has organised itself in the form of a nominally cultural society. The Russian Revolution completely changes the Bulgarian attitude to Russia in many ways, especially since the abandonment by Russia of the policy of annexing the Straits. Its effect was seen in the serious anti-German disturbances at Sofia in April.

(2) The military advantage is evident.

If actual detachment is achieved, its advantages are obvious. Germany's main object in the war, the possession of a corridor to the East, would be thwarted and Turkey would be paralysed. The Entente would reap immediate benefits; our forces at Salonica would cease the offensive and the pressure of the submarine campaign in regard to transport and tonnage would be enormously lessened.

If detachment is not achieved, an advantage arises in the pressure put upon Germany by her Allies to reduce her claims in the direction of the terms which the Entente desires.

It is urged on the contrary:-

(1) That supposing a detachment actually took place, Germany would obtain increased supplies through the presence of neutral countries on her flank.

This, it must be assumed, is a factor which would be dealt with in any arrangement made.

(2) That Bulgaria would evidently be unwilling to join Austria in defecting from Germany, because she would lose large territories which she now holds

In reply to this it may be pointed out that she only holds them at the price of keeping her peasants from their farms. She has no security for doing so permanently. She sees that she may lose still more territory. The populations would be difficult to govern, and independence on good terms with the Allied Powers is more attractive than material prosperity as a German gangway without real political freedom.

(3) That there is a risk of alienating the small States.

To estimate justly the balance of risks requires a full knowledge of official information, but it may be observed that the risks of not adopting the policy suggested are also very great.

Provided that the Allies adhere to the policy of restoration, there is no equally

attractive prospect that the Central Powers can hold out.

- (4) That Bulgaria was "treacherous" and would be untrustworthy as a neutral. We must remark that Bulgaria was led to distrust the Entente at the beginning of the war. Allied diplomacy wavered between two rival policies and refused to recognise the importance of Bulgaria as a factor in the military situation. The strong pro-Ally party in Sofia received no encouragement; moreover, it had to contend with the overshadowing menace of Russian Imperialism. Today the aspect has changed. The new Russia has repudiated all ideas of conquest and has thus re-assured the Bulgarians. They were mainly Russophil even before the Russian Revolution, while friendship for democratic Russia is universal. It led to disturbances even before the friends of the Entente were able to show that the Entente was prepared to recognise Bulgarian rights.

- (5) That Serbia would be unjustly treated.

In reality the policy of detachment offers the only means of promoting Serbia's national aspirations. If satisfaction had been given to the legitimate national claims of Bulgaria at the beginning of the war, the disaster in the Balkans would have been averted. The only way to secure peace there in the future is to recognise local desires and to frame a settlement on that basis.

It may also be pointed out that it was Russia, who as the traditional champion of the Slav cause, first took up arms in the war for Serbian independence; and that we cannot go beyond Russia in active support of the irredentist ambitions of our Balkan Allies. Serbia would be adequately rewarded for the loss of the Uncontested Zone in Macedonia (without which Bulgaria will certainly not be tempted to abandon the war) by the achievement of union with Montenegro and by the acquisition through this means of access to the sea. It is evident that the restoration of Serbia cannot be adequate on less favourable terms. Unless the former ideal of Serbophils be adopted, namely the unification of the whole Serbo-Croat race as one of the component parts of Austria-Hungary, the basis suggested is the only one on which an arrangement is possible. It is sometimes urged that an adjustment with Bulgaria is impossible without taking large territories from Austria for the enlargement of Serbia, but while the restoration of Serbia and the grant of genuine freedom to the Trentino are essential, the extension of Serbia to include the Croats of Austria, Hungary, and of Italy to include Dalmatia, are not requisites of a good settlement. They are also incompatible with one another. The compensation of Serbia for the loss of Monastir by union with Montenegro would not only provide Serbia with access to the sea, but would lead to stability in the future. This arrangement would represent a substantial net (sic) gain to Serbia and an appropriate compensation for her sacrifices in the war.

Similar considerations apply to Greece and Rumania. It is impossible that the small States should gain all that they would have secured if they had not, by their refusal to make the concessions required by the Allies in 1915, made our victory immensely more difficult.

That a Federal Austria might remain pro-German.

On the other hand, the question whether a series of small independent States would be any greater barrier to German domination is problematical.

It may be thought desirable, even if the suggestions to be made are not yet agreed upon between the Entente Powers, to encourage the allies of Germany to put forward their ideas of possible terms of agreement. On the question of

procedure for this purpose it is well to remember the comparatively good feeling which exists between Austrian diplomacy and that of America, and the continuance of friendly relations, both official and unofficial, between America and Bulgaria.

Appendix F: THE DISSENTING VOTE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS⁶

Dissenter Support Following the 16 May Debate

Anderson, W.C.
Burns, Rt. Hon. John
Chancellor, Henry George
Clancy, John Joseph
Cullinan, John
Duffy, William J.
Flavin, Michael Joseph
Harvey, T. E. (Leeds, West)
Hayden, John Patrick
Hazleton, Richard
Keating, Matthew
Kelly, Edward
Lambert, Richard (Wilts Cricklade)
Lundon, Thomas
Lynch, Arthur Alfred
Macdonald, J. Ramsay (Leicester)
Martin, Joseph
Mason, David M. (Coventry)
Meehan, Patrick J. (Queen's Co., Leix)
Morrell, Philip
Nolan, Joseph
O'Leary, Daniel
O'Neill, Dr. Charles (Armagh, S.)
O'Sullivan, Timothy
Outhwaite, R.L.
Ponsonby, Arthur A.W.H.
Richardson, Thomas (Whitehaven)
Snowden, Philip
Trevelyan, Charles Philips
White, Patrick (Meath, North)
Whitehouse, John Howard
Whitty, Patrick Joseph

Tellers--H.B. Lees-Smith and F.W. Jowett

Total--32

⁶ PD (Commons), 16 MAY 1917, 93, cols. 1733-1734; 26 July 1917, 96, Cols. 1587-1590; 6 November 1917, 98, cols. 2055-2056.

Dissenter Support following the 26 July Debate

Anderson, W.C.
 Arnold, Sidney
 Baker, Joseph Allen (Finsbury, E.)
 Barlow, Sir John Emmott (Somerset)
 Burns, Rt. Hon. John
 Chancellor, Henry George
 Denman, Hon. Richard Douglas
 Harvey, T.E. (Leeds, West)
 King, Joseph
 Lambert, Richard (Wilts, Cricklade)
 MacDonald, J. Ramsay (Leicester)
 Mason, David M. (Coventry)
 Morrell, Philip
 Outhwaite, R. L.
 Ponsonby, Arthur A. W. H.
 Richardson, Thomas (Whitehaven)
 Snowden, Philip
 Trevelyan, Charles Philips
 Whitehouse, John Howard

Tellers--H.B. Lees-Smith and F.W. Jowett
 Total--19

Dissenter Support following the 6 November Debate

Anderson, W.C.
 Arnold, Sidney
 Barlow, Sir John Emmott (Somerset)
 Beale, Sir William Phipson
 Bryce, J. Annan
 Burns, Rt. Hon. John
 Buxton, Noel
 Chancellor, Henry George
 Harvey, T. E. (Leeds, West)
 Hogge, James Myles
 Holt, Richard Durning
 Jowett, Frederick William
 King, Joseph
 Lambert, Richard (Wilts Cricklade)
 Lynch, Arthur Alfred
 Macdonald, J. Ramsay (Leicester)
 Mallalieu, Frederick William
 Mason, David M. (Coventry)
 Morrell, Philip
 Nuttall, Harry
 Outhwaite, R.L.

Ponsonby, Arthur A.W.H.
Price, C.E. (Edinburgh Central)
Pringle, William M.R.
Richardson, Thomas (Whitehaven)
Runciman, Sir Walter (Hartlepool)
Smith, H.B. Lees (Northampton)
Snowden, Philip
Watt, Henry A.
Wilson, Rt. Hon. J.W. (Worcs., N.)
Wilson, W.T.

Tellers--J.H. Whitehouse and C.P. Trevelyan
Total--31

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FO 395 (General Correspondence)

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Norman Angell Papers (Bracken Library, Ball State University)

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C.R. Buxton Papers (Rhodes House Library, Oxford University)

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Lady Courtney of Penwith Papers (British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics)

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A.G. Gardiner Papers	(British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics)
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Colonel Edward M. House Papers	(Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University)
Walter Lippman Papers	(Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University)
David Lloyd George Papers	(House of Lords Record Office)
James Ramsay MacDonald Papers	(Public Records Office and John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester)
H.W. Massingham Papers	(Norfolk County Records Office)
Reginald McKenna Papers	(Churchill College, Cambridge University)
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Arthur Augustus William Harry Ponsonby Papers	(Bodleian Library, Oxford University)
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Walter Runciman Papers	(Robinson Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
Bertrand Russell Papers	(Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton)
Herbert Samuel Papers	(House of Lords Record Office)
Sir John Simon Papers	(Bodleian Library, Oxford University)
C.P. Trevelyan Papers	(Robinson Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
Union of Democratic Control Papers	(Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull)
Beatrice Webb Papers	(British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics)

Sidney Webb Papers	(British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics)
William Wiseman Papers	(Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University Library)

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¹This pamphlet was a revision of UDC Pamphlet No. 5.

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