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MODERN DIPLOMACY AND BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION¹

By THE HON. HAROLD NICOLSON, C.M.G.

I MUST begin with a few definitions and a few axioms. I shall be using the word "diplomacy" in its most general sense, meaning thereby the practice, rather than the theory, of international relations. I shall be using the term "democratic or modern diplomacy" as signifying a system under which the execution of foreign policy is subjected to the immediate, rather than to the ultimate, concurrence of the sovereign electorate. I shall proceed from the axiom that democratic diplomacy has in Great Britain superseded professional or oligarchic diplomacy. I shall thus take it as agreed that public opinion has now become a constant, rather than an intermittent, factor in the conception and execution of foreign policy; that the system of democratic diplomacy thus created has many virtues and several faults; and that, whereas its virtues are obvious and I hope enduring, its faults are obscure and, I earnestly believe, transitional. If, therefore, I concentrate my remarks upon the dangers and weaknesses of democratic diplomacy, I do not wish it to be supposed that I have failed to appreciate its safeguards, its inevitability and its strength.

My central theme, therefore, will be that of modern diplomacy and public opinion. My contention is that democracy, while claiming complete and constant sovereignty in foreign affairs, has not as yet learned how to exercise that sovereignty in a responsible manner.

Many members of this Institute have had occasion to address popular audiences on subjects connected with diplomacy and foreign affairs. Their experience has probably been similar to my own. They have found unexpected interest in the subject,

¹ Address given at Chatham House on May 28th, 1935, with the Right Hon. Sir Horace Rumbold, Bart., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., M.V.O., in the Chair.

considerable but wholly unco-ordinated knowledge, potential good sense, much unnecessary suspicion; and beneath it all a really alarming degree of perplexity.

I have been at some pains to analyse that perplexity, since it seems to lie at the root of popular incompetence in foreign affairs, at the root of that uncertainty of intention, or irresponsibility, which I consider the most serious weakness of the modern system. I would suggest that it is possible, while keeping within the area of practical argument, to separate that perplexity into causes and effects.

Of the causes of public perplexity in Great Britain, some are inevitable and some are not. Among the inevitable classes I should mention, first, the popular Press and, secondly, the multiplicity of British external preoccupations.

A popular Press depends for its subsistence upon a vast circulation: that circulation can only be maintained by alternating processes of appeasement and of stimulation: the appeasement is conveyed by varying forms of flattery, whereas the stimulation can only be provided by sensationalism and excitation. The patient judgment which is the essential basis of any sane appraisal of foreign affairs does not offer, and will never offer, even the most rudimentary form of news value. Our popular Press, therefore, only carries foreign news when some sensation is available. Yet even under this heading I am not really pessimistic. I observe, for instance, that the foreign correspondents of the secondary American newspapers are of a far higher quality than the correspondents of our own secondary newspapers. And since our popular newspapers have learnt most of their lessons from the United States it may well be that they will learn this lesson also. Yet for the present we must face the fact that the popular newspapers are apt to blur by atmospherics the correct transmission of information from abroad.

The second, and even more inevitable, cause of public perplexity is the multiplicity of British external commitments and preoccupations. There is Europe, there is the Empire, there is America, there is the Far East and there is the Pacific. The very diversity of such preoccupations arouses confusion and public lassitude.

I do not wish, however, to deal with inevitable causes. I wish only to discuss the evitable. And I should define the two main evitable causes of popular perplexity as lack of knowledge and lack of direction. I should define its two most damaging

effects as lack of confidence and lack of responsibility. Under the heading of "Causes" I shall concentrate mainly upon diplomatic theory: my examination of diplomatic practice will be postponed to my subsequent section, which I have called "Effects." Let me begin with the first of my two causes and examine the nature of popular ignorance of foreign affairs, or, as I prefer to call it, "general lack of knowledge."

I. *Causes: (a) Lack of Knowledge.*

You will agree that if the public are to be educated to a higher competence in foreign affairs it is necessary that we should be quite clear in our own minds regarding the nature and effects of public ignorance. Such ignorance can be divided into ignorance of foreign facts and ignorance of foreign mentality. Neither of these seems to me extremely important in itself. It is not ignorance that matters so much as the psychological effect produced upon the public themselves by the consciousness of ignorance. It matters very little, for instance, whether the electorate are aware of the precise location of Jehol or Yap, but it matters very much that the minds of millions should be distressed and disconcerted by a belief that they ought to know these things.

I say that this ignorance is unimportant in itself, since the requisite knowledge both of foreign facts and of foreign mentality should, under any reasonable system, be provided by the experts or professionals to whom is entrusted the actual conduct of affairs. On the other hand, it is the mental uneasiness created in the public mind by the unfamiliarity and complexity of foreign facts and feelings which precludes them from placing in the expert that confidence which is essential if he is to work with certitude, patience and calm. The average Englishman is exceptionally prone to uneasiness in face of the unknown. That mental indolence, which is one of the most valuable components of our stability, has its disadvantages. When faced with the unfamiliar, when obliged to make the mental effort of acquiring exotic knowledge, the average Englishman is assailed by feelings of distaste. These feelings create an instinctive desire to escape from intellectual effort, and this desire in its turn assumes such strange disguises as derision, suspicion and dislike. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of the average Englishman escaping from the effort of understanding a work of modern art by condemning it as comic, immoral or affected. He tries, in other words, to dismiss from his consciousness the unfamiliar object

and the disquiet which it occasions by pretending that it is neither serious, nor reputable, nor true. Something of the same sort happens when the average Englishman contemplates a problem in international affairs. He tries to escape from the effort of such contemplation by ridiculing Hitler's moustache, by regarding all diplomatists as his ethical inferiors, or simply by exclaiming, "No! I never read the foreign news. One cannot believe a single word those people say," or in other words by convincing himself that foreign politics do not, in any necessary manner, exist.

Our first task, therefore, should be to assure the British public that their ignorance of the details of foreign affairs is not a vital disability. We should try to persuade them that, for the exercise of their sovereignty, all that is required is balance, patience, trustfulness and good sense. If we can once induce them to be less afraid of diplomacy we shall go far towards teaching them to accord to diplomacy a more responsible and less intermittent attention.

I cannot but feel, also, that we, who are constantly concerned with international affairs, are apt to increase rather than to diminish this popular diffidence. Every time we use the expression "Quai d'Orsay" or "Wilhelmstrasse" in place of the expression "the French (or German) Foreign Office," we are impressing the untravelled, not so much with reverence for our cosmopolitanism as with distaste for their own ignorance and the subjects which remind them of that ignorance. I feel that with this in mind all technical exponents of diplomacy should impose upon themselves a self-denying ordinance under which the Boulé should in future appear as "the Greek Parliament," and "Monte Citorio" as "the Italian Chamber." If the public are to attain to their essential confidence in these matters, we private publicists should avoid all gestures of expert vanity.

Yet it is not only by subordinating our personal desire for linguistic display to a social desire for group appeasement that we can still the hostility evoked in the British nervous system by references to the unfamiliar. We must also be very careful and courageous in the matter of red herrings. The British public, in its hatred of the incomprehensible, is terribly apt to grasp at the half-understood. We thus suffer much from red herrings which divert the appetite of the sovereign people from those quarries which they ought to pursue. Let me indicate a few of those red herrings which are at this moment being most fragrantly trailed across the scent of peace and order.

The most distracting of all these herrings is, in my opinion, the Treaty of Versailles. There are several million people in Great Britain to-day who believe sincerely that the main cause of existing international tension is to be sought in certain articles of the Versailles Treaty. They are not clear as to which articles are most to blame, but they are none the less prepared to make immense sacrifices, at the cost of other nations, in order that Germany may again become the rich and contented customer of, let us say, fifty years ago. They are especially generous in regard to the eastern frontiers of Germany and in regard to those of Germany's colonies which we did not seize ourselves. And they think it only fair that Germany should have an enormous army, provided, of course, that her navy and her air force are not allowed to become a menace to the British Empire.

I define this as a red herring, since it enables people, at small cost to themselves, to imagine that, in the way of international thinking, they have done their bit. In fact, of course, they have not thought at all. The territorial clauses of the Treaty of Versailles are perhaps its least assailable, and certainly its least alterable, features: most of the other and more flagrant anomalies of the Treaty have since 1919 righted themselves; what remains of the actual letter of the Treaty is either of secondary importance or else has, in the last sixteen years, hardened into shapes which it would be impossible, without immense disturbance, to shatter and remould.

I am myself a veteran among the revisionists, having formed one of that Light Brigade who became revisionists in the second week of January 1919. Yet I do not flatter myself that to change what is alterable in the Treaty will render the Teutons a race of grateful turtle-doves. Even if we accord them, as we ought to accord them, absolute equality of status, it will take many years before the habit of that equality heals the lacerated tendons of their self-respect. For the fundamental errors of the Treaty of Versailles were errors, not of mathematics or geography, but of morals. They were due to the fact that the victorious democracies were at the moment in a deplorable state of mind. The fundamental error was the spirit and not the letter of the Versailles Treaty. And if the democracies of 1935 are really to atone for the spiritual errors of the democracies of 1918, then they must start thinking, not in terms of the Polish Corridor, but in terms of extreme humility and self-sacrifice. Anything which diverts their attention from such severe moral atonement is to my mind a red herring.

Other red herrings are more fragrant but less important. Some of them, I am glad to notice, are already losing their distracting scent. The issue, for instance, between the new and the old diplomacy, between secret and open negotiation, is daily becoming a less ardent issue, since people have learned that, in fact, it means little and leads to nothing at all. The expression "National Honour," which is a terrible red herring on the Continent, is, I rejoice to say, coming more and more to be interpreted in Great Britain as synonymous with "National Honesty." There is, however, one small and very pungent red herring which seems to possess to-day a curious capacity for distracting attention from essential objectives. I refer to the private manufacture of arms. I am prepared to believe that occasionally, during the course of the nineteenth century, certain small countries were enabled, and perhaps encouraged, to make war owing to the generous terms offered to them by one or other of the great armament firms. But I am totally unable to believe that the judgment of Grey and Asquith, of Delcassé and Poincaré, of Tirpitz and Bethmann-Hollweg was influenced by any single member of the board of Vickers, Creusot or Krupp. Nor do I see myself how the danger of war would in any sense be diminished by obliging small countries to manufacture arms themselves. The prospect of State Armament Factories from China to Peru fills me, I confess, with grave disquiet. The balance of advantage may, and I think does, incline towards a more elaborate regulation of arms traffic than that at present provided by our Foreign Enlistment Act; yet the problem cannot rightly be stated in sensational and dramatic terms, and I think efforts should be made to discourage public opinion from being diverted from the main quarry of militarism by a red herring which, if followed too credulously, would allow militarism to escape chuckling to its lair.

Let me at this stage recapitulate my argument to the point which has now been reached. I started from the premise that the uncertain and irresponsible attitude adopted by public opinion towards democratic diplomacy was due to two main causes, of which the first was ignorance. I contended that the electorate's lack of knowledge regarding foreign facts and foreign mentality was not so important in itself as important in its effects. I defined these effects as mental uneasiness and suspicion. And I suggested that efforts should be made to decrease public diffidence in such matters, to diminish not so much their ignorance as their consciousness of ignorance, and above all to prevent their attention

being diverted from the main quarry of peace by such red herrings as textual revisionism and the private manufacture of arms. I feel indeed that if we could induce the people to see that what is essential to the right exercise of their sovereignty is not knowledge of facts but habits of correct and fundamental thinking, we should have done much to diminish the unfortunate disturbance in public psychology which is caused by their almost morbid sensitiveness to their own ignorance. Yet even then we shall be left with the problem of mitigating the second main cause of perplexity. Having examined "lack of knowledge," I shall now pass to "lack of direction."

(b) *Lack of Direction.*

I use the word "direction" both in its objective meaning of "guidance" from above, and in its subjective meaning of an inner sense of destination. The British public to-day are not explicitly told what are the basic purposes of British foreign policy, nor do they themselves possess any instinctive awareness of such purposes. It is this absence of any generally accepted purpose, as of any generally accepted standards, which differentiates (and not in foreign policy alone) the twentieth from the nineteenth century.

The average Englishman, let us say of 1886, felt instinctively that the purpose of British diplomacy was to safeguard the security of the Empire and to open new markets. The former could be achieved by overwhelming naval superiority; the latter, so he imagined, could be furthered by imperialism. Because of this general unanimity of purpose he was willing to leave the conception and execution of foreign policy to the Government and their trained advisers; and they, in their turn, took it for granted that the treaties which they negotiated would automatically be ratified and that, if a crisis arose, they could rely upon a sufficient homogeneity of public opinion, even if they demanded war. The dislocation of this central purpose and the consequent disunity of opinion has robbed the electorate as well as the Government of any basic conviction. Policy seems suspended between the two poles of nationalism and internationalism, flitting alternately to right and left. It is not surprising that in such circumstances the public should feel perplexed.

Nor is it the old purposes only which have become blurred; there has been a simultaneous dislocation of former standards.

In the nineteenth century the average standard was what

was vaguely known as "patriotism," namely, a belief in power mitigated by efficiency and good conduct. It was the old Roman theory of a chosen people exercising authority in the interests of peace and order. Those who held this theory, and throughout the nineteenth century they represented an overwhelming majority of the electorate, were thus able to reconcile their appetites with their conscience and to fuse into a generally accepted policy both the ideal and the real. The great problem of the twentieth century is that, to all appearances, the ideal and the real have become contradictory and even mutually exclusive.

It is, I think, this very gulf between the desirable and the practicable which is the cause of so much public and private uncertainty. Are there no means by which this gulf can be bridged?

Logic, so far from furnishing assistance, presents us with a dilemma which is to all appearances insoluble. In strict logic, those who adhere to the power doctrine must accept the ultimate justifiability of war. In logic, those who are opposed to the power doctrine must also be opposed to the force implicit in our imperial system. Logically, no individual can be a sincere supporter of both doctrines at the same time, nor can we hope in logic to exploit the peace doctrine in order to obtain collective security, while adopting the power doctrine in order to maintain our Empire.

The average Englishman finds himself, therefore, in an appalling quandary. He hesitates to subscribe unreservedly to the power doctrine since he feels that such a doctrine, if pushed to its ultimate conclusion, would end in the worst war that the world has ever witnessed. He hesitates to subscribe unreservedly to the peace doctrine, partly from fears regarding his own security, and partly owing to a dim dread that the abolition of force would entail the abolition of all authority which is based on national power, to the consequent collapse of Empire, and to the reduction of Great Britain to the status of a small and possibly disunited island. Finding no middle course between two such unpleasant alternatives he endeavours to compromise by half adopting both. And he thereby loses all sense of direction.

Yet is there no weak link in the logical chain which so fetters popular judgment? I think there is. The error arises, I think, from the habit of regarding war and peace as two absolute opposites of equal validity. This error, this absolutism, is increased by the ethical associations aroused by the word "peace,"

which is "good," and the word "war," which is "evil." Yet if we take the analogy of economics we shall agree that, although some extremists regard "capitalism" and "socialism" as two mutually exclusive opposites, there is a vast middle range of opinion which recognises that during the present transitional phase through which civilisation is passing it is prudent and possible to retain the safeguards and stability of the one as a familiar base from which to conduct experiments in the other. How can the public be brought to adopt a similar attitude of reasoned relativity towards the apparent antithesis between war and peace, between militarism and pacificism, between authority and consent?

It would first seem necessary to persuade them that war and peace, that militarism and pacifism, are not, as they imagine, two contradictory and mutually exclusive ethical systems, but that they represent two different stages in human progress. The fact that universal peace will only be attained after the passing of many human generations does not detract from its validity as an objective; it merely means that two or three more centuries will be required before that objective can be reached. All that we of the present generation can hope to do is to advance an inch or two closer towards this far-off divine event, and I contend that in comparison with previous centuries we have made amazing progress in that direction within the last fifteen years. If, therefore, the public could be taught to approach the problem in terms of history rather than in terms of actuality, in terms of gradualness rather than of impatience, in terms of evolution rather than in terms of immediacy, they would come to see that we are not engaged to-day in a conflict between two equally valid principles, but are passing through a transitional stage in which the principle of war is slowly dying and the principle of peace is slowly gathering life.

Once we could impart to them some such conviction it would be easier to persuade them that the middle course is far more logical, more necessary and more practicable than they suppose. One could point out that at the present moment certain non-expansionist countries, such as France, Russia, Great Britain and the United States, are, in fact, making great progress towards the ultimate objective, whereas less static countries, such as Germany and Italy, are still at the stage of dynamic discontent. One could argue that the static countries are compelled to protect themselves against the dynamic countries even when such protection implies the use of force. And one could insist that the

distinction between defence and aggression is a distinction which is legitimate, recognisable and extremely useful.

From such an argument the middle course would, I think, emerge with a certain distinctness. The formula would be as follows:—The human race is progressing by gradual stages towards the abolition of violence; at the present moment certain Powers believe in violence and certain Powers do not; it is not possible for the pacifist countries to convince the militarist countries in terms of theory, but only in terms of fact; it will thus become necessary for the pacifist countries to restrain the militarist countries in terms, not of pacifism, but of militarism; they are fortunately able to do so since they possess a preponderance of power; yet in so doing they must not confuse immediate expedients with ultimate purposes; thus, while demonstrating clearly that if it comes to violence the preponderance of power is on the side of peace and not on the side of war, they must avoid both menaces and moral superiority, which can only provoke fear and indignation; they are enormously aided in this stratagem by the existence of the League of Nations and by that brilliant device of modern diplomacy (due almost entirely to the initiative of Sir Austen Chamberlain) which is known as collective guarantees. Here, assuredly, is the middle course. And that, assuredly, is the course which the British Government, although with insufficient explicitness, is now adopting. If only we could persuade the public that the present policy is a consistent and logical pursuit of an ultimate aim, we might create a sense of direction and thereby diminish uncertainty and distrust.

You will question, however, whether any such simplification of issues could ever be placed before the electorate in a form which would capture their confidence and win their assent. I should recommend to those of you who feel pessimistic on this point a study of the history of duelling in the United Kingdom. You will find in the pages of that history many familiar arguments: duelling, it was said, would continue so long as human nature remained human nature; no man, it was argued, would ever consent to submit an affair of personal honour to the judgment of the courts; besides, it was contended, if you abolish duelling you also abolish those high human qualities of courage, loyalty, chivalry and self-sacrifice. How came it, therefore, that in spite of these overwhelming arguments duelling actually disappeared? It disappeared because in process of time more and more people came to regard it as an unintelligent, illogical and

uncivilised method of settling disputes. It gave to the professional dueller, who was admittedly an inferior type, advantages which were not possessed by the unprofessional dueller. It exposed valuable lives to wholly unnecessary danger, as when Castlereagh and Canning fought in 1809. And thus, very gradually, it came to be regarded, in Great Britain at least, as stupid, uncivilised, feudal and a trifle absurd.

Now is not this analogy a quite pertinent analogy? We have reached a stage in international opinion analogous to the stage of opinion attained in Great Britain regarding duelling in the year, let us say, 1820. It was a stage at which most people thought duelling wrong but inevitable; and a few people contended that something which was admittedly wrong ought never to be regarded as inevitable. In the succeeding two decades the realists diminished and the idealists increased. And thus in 1844, with the powerful backing of the Prince Consort, a stage had been reached when it was found possible to abolish duelling by law.

Yet I have dealt sufficiently with theory and must now pass to practice. I have quite arbitrarily chosen my causes of public perplexity as pegs on which to hang my suggestions as to how democratic theory might be improved. With equal lack of logic I shall now employ the effect of those causes as pegs whereon to hang an examination of modern diplomatic technique.

II. *Effects : (a) Lack of Confidence.*

I have already defined, for the purposes of this argument, the effects of public perplexity as lack of confidence and lack of responsibility. I shall first examine lack of confidence.

I do not wish to deal with the many considerations which tend to diminish public confidence in Cabinet Ministers responsible for the conception and execution of foreign policy. I feel myself that the ideal Foreign Secretary should be a man of the utmost simplicity and one who reflects the character, as well as the intelligence, of the race. But it would be invidious and unfair to pursue such examination any further.

I prefer to deal specifically with the relation between the professional member of the Foreign Service, in fact the diplomatic civil servant, and the sovereign people. I am under the impression that an unnecessary and very damaging misunderstanding exists in this respect between the public and its most valuable servants.

There are, I should imagine, some Englishmen who still

suppose that the European War was contrived by the machinations of the professional diplomatist. The number and quality of those who hold this opinion is, I rejoice to believe, rapidly diminishing. Yet there still remains a residue of impression that the professional diplomatist is a member of an exclusive caste, detached from the main currents of public opinion, ignorant of economics, speaking several foreign languages with an exquisite accent, and as such unworthy of confidence. The electorate have therefore felt that greater security is provided for them if the negotiation of all vital affairs is entrusted to ambulant politicians. I may be prejudiced in favour of the professional diplomatist, but I cannot regard this belief on the part of the electorate, if it really exists, as anything but imprudent.

The diplomatic service acts as a filter in the turgid stream of international affairs. Direct contact between British and foreign statesmen dispenses with that filter. I admit that the rush of water is thereby rendered more potent and more immediate: yet the conduct of foreign policy requires no gush or rush; it requires deliberation, experience and detachment. The politician, unlike the diplomatist, has no time to be deliberate, has little experience of foreign psychology, and is always more sensitive to immediate triumph rather than to ultimate interests. Should personal vanity or ambition intrude upon his judgment, should he be tempted to approach his negotiations from the angle of intellectual brilliance rather than from the more solid bases of character and tradition, then indeed he exposes his country to the terrible dangers of immediate personal success. The professional diplomatist is subject to no such hurried temptations: he is permanent, patient, persevering, and above all anonymous. I regard his comparative displacement under democratic diplomacy with the gravest disquiet.

I do not mean by this that I am opposed in principle to all diplomacy by conference. Obviously situations of acute and immediate seriousness must occur in which it is essential that those responsible to Parliament for the conception of foreign policy should take a direct part in its execution. I suggest only that gratuitous personal contacts between British and foreign statesmen should if possible be avoided. Many of us, during the last few months, have had occasion, either directly or indirectly, to learn the impressions of those responsible or irresponsible statesmen who have seen Adolf Hitler. Some of them have come to the conclusion that the Führer is demonstrably insane. Others have come to the conclusion that he is a man of immense modera-

tion asking only to be treated as a civilised being. The very diversity of such impressions indicates how dangerous it is for the directors of our foreign policy to indulge in personal, momentary and superficial contacts with those with whom they have to deal. In the atmosphere of Geneva such personal confrontations are valuable enough. But specific contacts, in that they entail publicity and therefore public expectation, should whenever possible be avoided.

Did I suppose that such continental contacts really increased public confidence, I should admit that their merits far outweighed their defects. I hold no such belief. I know too well that all such conferences entail fallacious communiqués, half-truths, speculation, and eventual suspicion and misunderstanding. It is not from foreign capitals or resorts that public confidence can be strengthened, it is from Westminster and Whitehall. We are apt to under-estimate the trust which the British electorate reposes in its civil servants: we are apt to over-estimate the reverence with which it regards its elected representatives. I believe that the nerves of the public are irritated rather than soothed by these frequent ambulations. I am convinced that what the public really desires is the maximum of democratic control coupled with the maximum of expert efficiency. And that desire, if only we are sensible about it, is what can quite easily be satisfied.

How, therefore, are we to create in the public mind the same degree of confidence in the experts of our Foreign Service as is readily accorded to the experts of the Treasury or to the rulers of our dependencies overseas? How are we to prevent any wastage of that traditional sanity, that balanced experience, that loyal integrity, that complete modesty and unselfishness which, to foreign observers, renders this particular branch of our Civil Service so worthy of admiration? There are many different methods by which this wholly unnecessary, and to my mind wasteful, gap in confidence can be bridged.

It would be useful in the first place if the public could be induced to realise the distinction which exists between policy and negotiation. At present they are all too apt to confuse these two branches, as I confess I have confused them in this paper, under the general title of "diplomacy." The effects of this confusion are damaging. Thus, whereas negotiation must always be secret and policy should never be secret, the public use the phrase "secret diplomacy" as applying to both, with the result that confidence, owing to what is little more than a

verbal confusion, is seriously diminished. It should be possible, by patient persuasion, to assure the public that British policy can never again be secret, in the sense that the men and women of Great Britain can never again be committed to the loss of life or property by treaties and agreements which have not been published and on which the representatives of the people have been given no opportunity to debate and vote. Once they are convinced of this, and it will be a slow and difficult task, then they may become more inclined to leave the conduct of negotiation in professional hands. I should go even further. I should like to see those unfortunate words "diplomacy" and "diplomatist" disappear from our political vocabulary, and to see them replaced on every occasion by such more accurate terms as "foreign policy," "negotiation," and "the Foreign Service."

A second expedient which would in the end go some way to remove public suspicion of our Foreign Service would be to place it exactly on the same level as other branches of the Civil Service. Except in one respect this has already been done, but this solitary exception, although in practice quite unimportant and ineffective, looms all too largely in the public mind. I refer to the rule by which candidates for the Foreign Service have to appear before a Board of Selection before they are admitted to the Civil Service Examination. I should wish to see this requirement abolished, since, while proving of small efficacy in the selection of candidates, it perpetuates in the public mind the illusion that the Foreign Service is composed of members of a privileged caste. My own experience is that social qualifications play a quite trivial part in the equipment of the younger members of the Foreign Service; to insist upon them merely creates public suspicion and ridicule.

A third expedient would be to publish from time to time some of the sane and brilliant memoranda which are daily written by members of the Foreign Office staff. At present the public are wholly unaware of the amount or quality of the work which the Foreign Service performs. From time to time Treasury memoranda have been published, as on the American Debt question, with very excellent effect. I should welcome it if from time to time similar memoranda were published from the Foreign Office. By such methods the public would acquire some idea of the overwhelming importance of facts in all negotiation, and would thus come to realise that negotiation, as distinct from policy, is a business which in ordinary circumstances the trained professional can handle better than the most gifted amateur.

I should wish you to believe that I am not influenced in these observations by any sentimental loyalty to my old profession. It is true that I consider the British Foreign Service the most reliable in the world. But I should ask you to trust me that this belief, that this conviction, is derived, not from any emotional loyalty, but from a perfectly hard-headed process of what I might call "comparative experience."

I shall now pass to the terrible, and I fear insoluble, problem of irresponsibility.

(b) *Irresponsibility.*

My main contention has been that public ignorance and public distrust have created lack of confidence. The ultimate result of this confusion is irresponsibility. I need scarcely emphasise the resultant dilemma. You will all agree that good diplomacy, whether as policy or as negotiation, necessitates something consistent, certain and precise. Yet now that democracy is sovereign in foreign affairs, policy becomes inevitably inconsistent, uncertain and vague.

I do not think we are even yet aware of the appalling unreality introduced into international negotiation by the system of democratic control. I do not question that control, I am in fact one of its most ardent partisans, but I regret that its dangers are not fully apprehended. There are moments, it is true, when we Europeans become aware that the promises and demands of American negotiators are all too often cheques which may be dishonoured. We must realise as an inevitable factor in democratic diplomacy that, in respect of contractual obligations, all countries have "gone off the gold standard." There is a great danger of the inflation of international contract-paper, and any treaty concluded to-day is worth little more than forty per cent. of its face value. Before that historic moment when the United States repudiated the signature of its own President it was worth some sixty per cent. We have to admit this depreciation. And our whole efforts, therefore, should be concentrated upon the stabilisation of diplomatic promissory notes. Locarno is a perfect instance. At the time of their signature, the Locarno Treaties were worth some eighty per cent. of their face value. They then dropped to forty. They are now worth somewhere about fifty-two. Such fluctuations of value are clearly damaging to international, and national, credit. Yet by what means is stabilisation to be secured?

The first principle, obviously, should be that no country should promise to pay more than its democracy is certainly

prepared to deliver. All blank cheques, such as the Kellogg Pact, which was mainly a forensic document, should be regarded with the utmost suspicion. The Locarno Treaties, admirable though they were, have depreciated in value to an extent which affects other securities. I should for this reason welcome deflation in all international treaties. A small treaty or contract which creates a belief in the certainty of its execution is far preferable to a vast treaty which at once slumps upon the exchange of international expectation.

Yet even should we reach a stage at which our negotiators would promise nothing which Parliament would not ratify and the electorate would not be willing to perform, we are still faced with the fact that the electorate do not themselves feel responsible for commitments undertaken in their name and with their tacit consent. We should be able to create a level of public awareness at which no popular newspaper could dare to advocate the repudiation of treaties of which, at the time of their conclusion, both Parliament and the people enthusiastically approved. We should be able to convince the people of their own sovereign responsibility, and to oblige them to admit that a commitment entered into with the approval and knowledge of their elected representatives represented a contract which must be accepted and maintained absolutely and without question. I should myself prefer a general election upon a definite treaty issue to the present inflation of the value of international credit.

And at this stage I return to my introductory arguments. The major disability of democratic diplomacy is that democracy regards foreign affairs as something detached from itself. This sense of detachment is created, partly by a consciousness of ignorance, and partly by a lack of direction. It manifests itself in lack of confidence in the professional diplomatist and creates a deplorable habit of irresponsibility. If we could only convince the public that their ignorance is immaterial, that their uncertainty is not justified, that their lack of confidence is misplaced, and above all that their irresponsibility is a national and an international danger, we might create habits of thought and feeling in Great Britain which would enable us to extract from democratic diplomacy every ounce of its value while eliminating from it that uncertainty which robs it of all its potential strength.

Summary of Discussion.

MR. S. B. COHEN said that he thought Mr. Nicolson was unduly optimistic in thinking that the desire for peace as opposed to war

was a new idea which would gradually gather strength. He would have thought that the idea of consent as opposed to power was one which certainly went back to the Middle Ages, to the ideal of the Papacy and the Empire, if not to Roman times, and that on the whole it was weaker to-day than at the end of the nineteenth century.

MR. NICOLSON, in reply, said that he was sure that, however serious a dispute arose between Great Britain and France, or Great Britain and the United States, the great majority of people in Great Britain and in France and in the United States would say, "The dispute is terrible but it cannot be settled by war." A belief had grown up in those three countries that war between them or any of them was not a possible or sensible thing whatever the provocation. But it was quite right to say that that state of mind did not exist in all other countries. He was convinced, however, that more had been achieved in the direction of peace as opposed to war during the last fifteen years than in the previous five hundred years.

SIR FRANCIS LINDLEY said that he thought that the lack of a sense of direction amongst the people of Great Britain was largely due to the enormous number of treaties which had been signed since the War. Treaties were international acts of law, and when laws were multiplied beyond a certain point no one had the slightest idea what the law was. The people knew about Locarno, but how much more did they know of Great Britain's treaty engagements? and yet none of them had been entered into without the people's full cognisance and approval. Moreover, there were some treaty engagements which had gone beyond public opinion. Foreign affairs and home affairs resembled each other and should be conducted on the same principles. A law which was far in advance of public opinion had no validity and, what was much worse, it brought other laws into contempt. He questioned whether the Kellogg Pact was not as far in advance of public opinion as Prohibition had been in America. He had consorted with foreigners almost exclusively during the latter years of his life and had never found one of them who even pretended to take the Kellogg Pact seriously. Treaties which went in advance of public opinion did much more harm than the British public realised. They not only were ineffective themselves but they brought into disrepute treaties on which the safety of Great Britain might depend.

MR. NICOLSON said that he agreed about the inflation of international paper and with what Sir Francis Lindley had said about the Kellogg Pact. But there had been a great many more treaties in existence before 1914, some of which were not even known of. The main point was that the democratic treaty was such a vague instrument and so full of "uplift" that nobody believed in it at all, whereas a treaty of the old diplomacy was given in return for some consideration of a definite character, and was not merely an idea. Nothing definite

was exchanged in the Kellogg Pact and therefore it was not "on a gold basis."

LORD HOWARD OF PENRITH said that Mr. Nicolson had said that Locarno was the one treaty which every Englishman understood and was ready to stand by. But he had also said that it was impossible to conceive that there could be a war between England and France or England and the United States, and that was probably true. But how did Mr. Nicolson reconcile the clauses in the Locarno Treaty which might possibly bring Great Britain into conflict with France with his statement that war between Great Britain and France was impossible?

MR. NICOLSON said that if France knew, as she ought to know for an absolute certainty, that the British public would with complete immediacy and unanimity execute the Locarno Treaties, she knew that a breach of the Locarno Treaties must mean war with Great Britain, and as war with Great Britain was unthinkable, so a breach of the Locarno Treaties by France was unthinkable.

MISS FREDA WHITE said that what Mr. Nicolson had said about perplexity in the mind of the people was perfectly true, but she quarrelled with his subsequent conclusion about the distrust of the people for expert diplomacy and the irresponsibility of public opinion. She had never noticed any popular distrust of the Diplomatic Service. Everybody knew that ambassadors were agents carrying out orders and that they carried them out with great skill. The most people thought was that the experts had not themselves the power to commit their governments to any policy. They therefore felt that there were occasions when it was possibly better for the principals who could commit their countries to meet direct.

But the people did distrust the politicians who were the diplomats' masters. Lack of confidence in foreign affairs was due to there being no continuity of purpose in foreign policy. Before the War there had been no party division in international affairs. Living under a European system which rendered war inevitable, the people, as a whole, had accepted their fate. After the War there was a fundamental cleavage between those who believed that the world must be subjected to periodic wars and those who believed that war could be averted. Any government, whatever its policy, would find itself opposed by one of those two groups.

The Treaties of Locarno, unpopular in the Dominions, had been popular in Great Britain when they were signed. If the Governments had continually said that they meant to keep to their engagements people would have continued to back them. The moral validity of Locarno had been destroyed by statements of responsible ministers one day that they could not keep their commitments, the next that they would do so. The one Treaty which the British Government

consistently said it would respect was the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Covenant had a voting value; no Parliamentary candidate dared oppose it because the nation took it seriously as an obligation of honour and expected the Government to support it. But then the Government did not keep it, and the nation distrusted them in consequence. The British Government's attitude towards Manchuria, for instance, had caused deep popular distrust.

MR. NICOLSON agreed that the shilly-shallying about treaties was one of the things which had perplexed the public more than anything else. He agreed also that the public did not on the whole distrust the professional diplomats; his contention was much more that there was absence of confidence than existence of distrust.

THE CHAIRMAN, SIR HORACE RUMBOLD, said that the subject-matter of Mr. Nicolson's address must be of great interest both to members of the Diplomatic Service and to those who had left the Service. The methods of modern diplomacy were being much discussed. *The Times* had lately published letters from two distinguished ex-Ambassadors discussing the advisability of what might be called the ambulatory policy of the Government and pleading that the Government's representatives, who had been specially trained for that purpose, should be allowed to do their proper work. In Mr. Nicolson's book *Curzon: the Last Phase* there was a supplementary chapter which reinforced the letters in *The Times*. He wrote :

"Diplomatists should seldom be allowed to frame policy. Politicians should seldom be allowed to conduct negotiation. Policy should be subjected to democratic control : the execution of that policy should be left to trained experts."

And again, and he was convinced that Mr. Nicolson had no particular British Minister in view, he wrote :

"A British politician, unaccustomed to negotiation with foreign statesmen, is prone to disturbances of vanity. The fact that his general culture, as his knowledge of foreign languages, is generally below the level of that possessed by those with whom he is negotiating gives him a sense of inferiority to which he reacts in unfortunate ways. Either he will air his schoolboy French to the distress of his audience and the confusion of business, or else he will be truculently insular. Upon weaker minds the mere fact of being, although abroad, a centre of public interest, the lavish hospitality of foreign Governments, the actual salutes of people dressed in foreign uniforms, have a most disintegrating effect. Affability, gratitude and general silliness result."

He (Sir Horace Rumbold) had been brought up in the old diplomacy and had survived to experience the new, and it seemed to him that the War had brought about two great changes. In the first place it had increased the tempo of diplomacy, which meant a great strain on ambassadors who were expected to work at lightning speed. The other great change was the institution of the League of Nations, which ought in theory to have relieved an ambassador of a great deal of his work, inasmuch as it had created a clearing house for a great many questions, such as minorities, Memel, Danzig and various other matters of that kind. But in point of fact the work of agents

and ambassadors had been increased out of all proportion. There was a point which he would like to emphasise, and that was that the personality of an ambassador counted even more now than it did before the War. The relations between two big countries were never static. There were periods of coolness between them, and if an ambassador had been able to acquire the confidence and friendship of the Government to which he was accredited he could, to a certain extent, by his own personality tide over the period of coolness until relations of friendship were resumed.

An ambassador was by no means at the end of a wire or the telephone, the Government listened to him and asked his advice, and then, at a suitable moment, he would carry out his instructions, and that was where training was so necessary. The trained diplomatist would know the right moment at which, and manner in which, to carry out what were sometimes very difficult instructions, whereas an equally intelligent but untrained man might not realise the psychological moment for, and mode of, action.