The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War

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The Age of Anxiety

Peter Neville

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By Peter Neville

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To my parents

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My debt to a large number of academic colleagues, was expressed in the first edition, and in this second edition I have been fortunate to have the great expertise of Doctor Zara Steiner of Murray Edwards College, Cambridge University at my disposal.

I am grateful to Pauline Scatterty for her technical expertise, and to my wife Phuong Anh for her forbearance while I was working on this new edition.

PREFACE

In the twelve years since the first edition of this book appeared, new material has inevitably appeared on the subject. Especially prominent has been the work of Zara Steiner, Frank McDonough, Vít Smetana and Gabriel Gorodetsky (with his editing of the *Maisky Diaries*). The chapter on Munich has benefitted from Smetana's *The Shadow of Munich*. Although A J P Taylor's classic work on the Second World War was at last translated into Czech in 2005, Smetana's more nuanced book showed that Czech historians too could show an understanding of the real difficulties that Appeasers faced.

In the first edition I touched on the links between Appeasement and the military disaster of 1940, a theme developed in an article in the US Journal World War Two Quarterly in 2009. Chapter Twelve has expanded on this theme, with its focus on catastrophic French high Command decisions, which links up with the re-evaluation of British aerial rearmament in the 1930s in Chapter Eight. An interesting feature of recent historiography is the way aviation historians, like James Holland, have been far more positive about the achievements of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain in this sphere.

All this goes to show that the assessment of the Appeasement years, far from being a closed book as has sometimes been suggested, continues to evolve.

Peter Neville, Cambridge 2018

INTRODUCTION

Appeasement has become one of the most emotive words in historical literature. Its practitioners in the 1930s have become bywords for blundering incompetence and lack of resolution, and have been held up to ridicule. Even now, over sixty years on, it is difficult to shift this stereotypical view. In 1940 Robert Graves and Alan Hodge wrote that, at the time of the Munich Agreement in 1938, 'the umbrella had been mightier than the sword',[1] and there is still a strong perception in the Anglo-Saxon world that appeasement was and is dishonourable and craven. One only has to remember the numerous misleading and ill-informed analogies with the thirties which were made by British and American politicians in the lead up to the recent Iraq War to see this. In 2004, the democratic decision of the Spanish people to vote their government out of office, after having been seriously misled by the previous administration about who had carried out a terrible bombing outrage, was unsurprisingly described by tabloid newspapers as 'appeasement' of terrorism.

Grotesque studies of British policy between 1933 and 1939 still appear that completely ignore or misunderstand the great weight of research done since the 1970s. This has shown that appeasement was, in fact, a rational response to the very difficult position in which successive British governments found themselves.[2] Standard texts, while often offering a more plausible analysis of British policy, are sometimes forty years old and are not updated to take revisionist literature into account.[3] This is not to argue that there is no case against the appeasers, merely to say that the argument is a good deal more sophisticated and evenly balanced than anti-appeasers, who now have the advantage of a great weight of available scholarship and documentation unavailable immediately after the war and in the 1950s, have been prepared to allow.

In part, the problem is about personalities. Winston Churchill is a more colourful and glamorous hero than Neville Chamberlain or Stanley Baldwin. Churchill was also able to influence the historical record in a remarkable way through the first volume of his war memoirs, *The Gathering Storm*. On his own admission, Churchill set out to write his own version of history, and he is the one that has remained with the man and woman in the street, and indeed the media.[4] It is this Churchillian

critique which has survived outside academic circles and, to a degree, within them to this day. It has made British, and even more strongly American, society peculiarly unwilling to forgive the appeasers of the 1930s. Societies which have quickly developed amnesia about the Rwandan genocide, when 800,000 people were massacred in a hundred days while the international community stood by, have been extremely unforgiving about the mistakes made in dealing with Hitler. This may also be related to the centrality of the Jewish Holocaust, the single most catastrophic genocide of the twentieth century in Europe, to the feeling of collective guilt about appeasement. Yet Baldwin and Chamberlain could not have foreseen the unprecedented horrors of Auschwitz and Treblinka where the full evil of National Socialism was exposed.

The shattering Anglo-French defeat in 1940 has also been linked to the inadequacies of the appeasers (both in Britain and France). In fact, the battle was by no means the foregone conclusion that has commonly been suggested. It was, of course, a battle under the control of the French High Command, which made crucial and unnecessary strategic errors and not that of British politicians. Crucially, too, the French allowed their strong air force of 1919 to decline. For all the propaganda put out to the contrary, this was not allowed to happen in Britain.

Any objective study of British foreign policy in the 1930s must surely acknowledge the terrible problems facing the government at the time. Uniquely, Britain found itself facing a potentially hostile combination of three great powers, and trying to calculate what Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese might do at any given moment was an onerous and dangerous business. Sometimes British intelligence got its estimates wrong but then, as recent events in the Middle East have underlined, intelligence communities can and do get things badly wrong.

Historians who write about this period in British history may sometimes get the feeling that they are pushing a large boulder up a mountain. However, much research is produced, every schoolboy (and schoolgirl) knows that Neville Chamberlain was a silly old man with an umbrella who was duped by a wicked and unscrupulous German dictator. This legend is passed on from generation to generation. Hitler was undoubtedly wicked, but Chamberlain was far from being a foolish old man, as will be demonstrated.

The debate about appeasement is an ongoing one and historians change their minds. A recent example has found a distinguished Canadian scholar, Sydney Aster, moving away from the sympathetic view of appeasement he took in 1973 to a much more critical one by 1989. Another distinguished scholar, the late R.A.C. Parker, came through two studies of Chamberlain

and Churchill, both in their way sympathetic, to support the latter's view that a 'Grand Alliance' against Hitler ought to have been constructed but was not because of flaws in British policy.[5]

Nevertheless, the thrust of most work done since the seventies has been towards a more sympathetic appraisal of appeasement. We have to thank the work done by historians such as D. Cameron Watt, Maurice Cowling, Paul Kennedy and David Dutton in particular for this. In writing this book, I have become more aware of this debt, but also of the tremendous burden that fell upon British Prime Ministers at a time when Britain was a *real* great power with the most daunting of global commitments.

Appeasement, which involves conciliation and attempting to understand rival viewpoints in interstate relations, is in fact the norm in international affairs. Diplomatic services are created to allow relations with other powers to be conducted on a rational and equitable basis. Sometimes this is not possible, and ultimately dealing with the Hitler regime was a case in point. In the post-1945 era, however, the western democracies, with all their experience of pre-war appeasement, still opted to seek accommodation successively with Franco, Salazar, Marcos, Pinochet, Suharto and, lest it be forgotten, Saddam Hussein. They did so not because, as in the case of the former Soviet Union, governments felt inhibited by a nuclear threat, but because the stability offered by right-wing authoritarianism and militarism offered certain attractions. And attempts allegedly to learn the lessons of pre-war appeasement, notably over the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, have been spectacular disasters. Pre-emptive strikes or collusion (replicated in the recent Iraq War) have not always proved effective vehicles for solving international problems.

Britain historically had always been a great power which had preferred to settle disputes by diplomatic means (think of Gladstone paying the United States compensation for damage done by British-built commerce raiders during the US Civil War). In this sense, therefore, appeasement was 'a normal continuation of the British diplomatic tradition of attempting to settle disputes peacefully'.[6] Whether this effort was pushed to unreasonable extremes by British Cabinets in the thirties is a question which this book will attempt to answer.

CHAPTER ONE

ARMISTICE

At 6 a.m. on the morning of 11 November 1918 the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, was awoken by a phone call. The caller was Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, the First Sea Lord, a member of the British delegation to the Armistice negotiations with Germany. Wemyss told Lloyd George that the German delegation had signed the Armistice in a railway carriage provided by the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch.[1] The news came as a relief to Lloyd George. There had been some doubt about whether the Germans would agree to sign the Armistice terms and end the bloody carnage which had enveloped Europe for four years.

Lloyd George met his Cabinet colleagues at 9.30 a.m. The Cabinet authorised nationwide celebrations, with bells being rung, gun salutes and military bands. But, in this moment of great rejoicing, Lloyd George warned his colleagues about the need for magnanimity. 'The future peace of the world', he told them, 'will depend more on the way in which we behave after victory than upon victory itself.'[2] While he did so, massive crowds were forming outside 10 Downing Street and Lloyd George greeted them from the doorstep shortly after 11 o'clock. After a hasty lunch, he then went to the House of Commons to make a statement, telling its members that the stroke of eleven o'clock that morning had put an end to 'the cruellest and most terrible war that ever scourged mankind.' He went on to utter an immortal phrase, 'I hope that we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end all wars'.[3] Lloyd George then moved to adjourn the House, which went over to the church of St Margaret's Westminster for a service of thanksgiving.

It was Lloyd George's supreme moment. Becoming Prime Minister in the dark days of 1916, he had re-energised Britain's war effort and had become, in the parlance of the day, 'the man who won the war'. Two days before, at the Lord Mayor's Banquet on 9 November, he had been cheered to the echo by those present, who stood on chairs 'yelling and waving as he advanced along the aisle of the Guildhall'.[4] Yet, even in this moment of triumph, Lloyd George had planted the seed of the tree that was to become

the notorious appeasement of Germany of the 1930s. For the moment, his plea for magnanimity was drowned amidst the government's stated intention during the December 1918 election that Germany should be squeezed 'until the pips squeaked', and that its fallen Emperor Wilhelm II should be hanged. Nevertheless, a marker for the future had been laid.

Few observers at the time would have guessed that, within four years, Lloyd George himself would fall from power forever when his Conservative coalition partners turned upon him in the autumn of 1922. Or that seemingly insignificant figures on that day in November 1918 would eclipse Lloyd George (who never held political office after his fall) in the struggle to ensure that the horrors of the First World War would not be repeated.

One of these seemingly grey men was Stanley Baldwin, who in November 1918, was the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a post he had obtained in 1916 after eight years of solid, if uninspiring, service as a Tory backbencher. Baldwin born in 1867, had been too old for military service in the war and was acutely aware of the price Britain had paid for victory, writing on the day of the Armistice, 'The strain of the last few days has been great, and I think a good many people are nearer tears than shouting today'. He, too, attended the service at St Margaret's Westminster and found three impressions strongest in his mind: 'thankfulness that the slaughter stopped, the thought of the million dead and the vision of Europe in ruins'.[5] Baldwin, who was a sensitive and humane man, was never to forget the impact of the catastrophe on Britain.

In Birmingham, as in London, the rejoicing was loud and long on Armistice Day. This was the city of the Chamberlains: 'Radical Joe', who had founded the family's fortunes in the nineteenth century, and his son, Austen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1918 and a future Foreign Secretary. But the least promising of the trio (or so it seemed to contemporaries) was to outshine father and half-brother alike. Neville Chamberlain had been Lord Mayor of Birmingham, building upon his father's power and influence in the city, and this role, together with Austen's recommendation, had caused Lloyd George to appoint him as Director General of National Service in 1917. On Armistice Day, Birmingham Council declared a general holiday in the city. The Armistice happened to coincide with the installation of the new Chancellor of Birmingham University, Sir Robert Cecil. Afterwards he and Neville Chamberlain, who had been a strong supporter of the university since its inception, went to Edgbaston to inspect university buildings there which had been taken over by the medical authorities to help house the wounded. Chamberlain observed 'many of the men with white faces and closed eyes,

while the organ peeled out a cheerful fantasia and the church bells were ringing.[6] At this very time, when the nation rejoiced over its military victory, Chamberlain lost his own sister, Beatrice, who died in the cruel influenza epidemic which carried off so many in the last months of 1918. His favourite cousin, Norman, had been killed on the Western Front in December 1917, and as an older man, like Baldwin, Chamberlain was acutely aware of the sacrifice the younger generation had made in the conflict. The only book the future Prime Minister ever wrote was a memoir of his cousin Norman,[7] who had written to him from the Front saying that the horrors of trench warfare should never be allowed to happen again. It was a plea which Neville Chamberlain never forgot, but in November 1918, at the age of fifty, he had yet to enter Parliament. Back in Whitehall, Robert Vansittart, then a junior official, but later to be Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, was at work in his office on 11 November. He wrote later that 'someone let off loud crackers outside my office, and girls fainted before they could take cover… A vast elation reigned; Mafeking Night was nothing to it'.[8] Vansittart was, like everyone, affected by the loss of friends and family in the war, but he was soon as he noted, to be 'smitten by *mea culpism*' where the subsequent treatment of defeated Germany was concerned.[9]

Miles to the south in the Sussex countryside, Vansittart's colleague, Nevile Henderson, later to be Ambassador to Berlin, was out shooting rabbits on the family estate at Sedgwick when the church bells rang to signal the end of the war. 'I went home at once', Henderson wrote in the second of his two memoirs,

> packed my bag, and travelled up to London that evening. One felt one must be there to see how the people reacted after the long strain of war. I went to a music hall and to a restaurant. It was an unforgettable experience, and I felt myself more like crying than laughing.[10]

Henderson had tried to join the army during the war but the Foreign Office had refused to let him enlist. Nevertheless, like many contemporaries, he became convinced that war was an appalling evil which must be prevented at all costs.

These men had had not actually fought in the great conflict, but one who had was Anthony Eden, the son of a minor baronet in County Durham, who had been made the youngest brigade major in the British army in 1918. Eden had lost his younger brother, Nicholas, at only sixteen years old, in the battle of Jutland, just as he was to lose his own son in the closing stages of the Second World War. Looking back at the end of his life in a memoir entitled *Another World*, Eden described how he 'had

entered the holocaust still childish and I emerged tempered by my experience, but with my illusions intact to face a changed world'.[11] He even considered a career as a professional soldier before opting for a political career in the Conservative Party.

Eden emerged physically unscathed from the war, but another man with whom his political career was closely linked was not so fortunate. Harold Macmillan was a publisher who had joined the Grenadier Guards in 1914. He was seriously wounded on the Somme in 1916 and invalided out of the army, the wound never healed properly and Macmillan suffered pain from it for the rest of his life. Shell fragments remained in his pelvis and it is probable that only his mother's decision to have him moved to a private hospital in London saved his life. On Armistice Day, Macmillan was still on crutches, having seen out the last two years of the war from a hospital bed.[12]

Macmillan was linked loosely in the thirties to Winston Churchill, who had made an extraordinary comeback by Armistice Day, after the failure of the Gallipoli landings in 1915-16 had seen his removal as First Lord of the Admiralty. He owed his reinstatement as Minister for Munitions to his pre-war friendship with David Lloyd George, but was regarded with distrust by both Liberals and Tories (whose party he deserted in 1904). The war had excited Churchill, who alone amongst government ministers had actually served in the trenches in France, but, at the point when it ended, his political future was uncertain. He recorded the scene at eleven o'clock on 11 November in his usual vivid prose as he looked down from the window of the Hotel Metropole in London's Northumberland Avenue. 'Victory had come after all the hazards and heartbreaks in an absolute and unlimited form',[13] he noted, but, like Lloyd George, he inclined to magnanimity in victory.

Meanwhile, many hundreds of miles away in Germany, an embittered soldier heard in his hospital ward in Passewalk that the war had come to an end. Corporal Adolf Hitler was an Austrian by birth who had left his homeland in 1913 and joined the German army when war broke out. In October 1918 he had been badly gassed near Ypres in Belgium, and spent the last month of the war recovering from this experience, which left him temporarily blinded. He learnt that the German Empire of the Hohenzollerns had fallen on 10 November and that Germany was now a republic. Already a rabid German nationalist at the age of twenty-nine, the news traumatised him. He recalled his emotions in his book *Mein Kampf* published in 1924:

> I could stand it no longer. It became impossible for me to sit still one minute more, so it had all been in vain… Did all this happen only so that a gang of wretched criminals could lay hands on the Fatherland?[14]

Hitler could not accept either at the time, or subsequently, that the German army had been genuinely defeated, and this belief was to be central to his whole political philosophy. No one would have believed, however, in November 1918 that this cranky, eccentric individual, whom his comrades in the army had deemed to be a misfit, would haunt all these British politicians and bring about a war more terrible than that which had just ended.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIRTH OF APPEASEMENT

The euphoria surrounding the Allied victory in November 1918 put Lloyd George in a position of electoral invincibility. He soon decided to go to the country in an atmosphere of passionate anti-Germanism. The popular call for Germany to be squeezed 'until the pips squeak' and made to pay for the cost of the war resonated throughout the land and throughout the campaign, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Lloyd George coalition government. Despite his initial reservations, Lloyd George, consummate politician that he was, never forgot that his mandate was now based on the premise that Germany must be punished for starting the war. The message in the right-wing *Daily Mail* was typical of the sentiment expressed during the December 1918 general election. It was that 'The Huns must pay'.[1] Lloyd George would have agreed. Who else would?

Such vengeful attitudes went against Lloyd George's earlier inclination, for in January 1918 he had renounced any right to impose a financial indemnity on Germany in a speech. As later as the autumn of 1918, the Prime Minister was still saying that the peace settlement must 'not be dictated by extreme men'.[2] But the post-Armistice attitude in Britain changed all that because Lloyd George was above everything a realist. A meeting of the Imperial Cabinet on 26 November decided that a Special Cabinet Committee should be set up to consider the size of any indemnity to be imposed upon Germany. It was, it has been observed, 'a startling change of policy',[3] but one which allowed Lloyd George to win his electoral victory, even if he was still a Liberal leader who relied on Bonar Law's Tory masses in the House of Commons to keep him in power. And the setting up of the Indemnity Committee showed that Lloyd George was in tune with public opinion which demanded German gold instead of more German blood. The last months of 1918 were not a time when generosity to a defeated enemy was likely to prosper.

Yet within just a few years, and certainly by January 1923, when France invaded Germany's key industrial centre in the Ruhr, the British government and British public opinion had made a complete volte-face on

the German question. This was despite the fact that France had taken action because Germany had defaulted on some of its reparations payments, which entitled it to respond. The Treaty of Versailles had created a reparations regime and the French were observing the letter of the law. But the British government disassociated itself from French (and Belgian) action in the Ruhr.

How did such a change come to pass? It began imperceptibly in 1919 when, even before the Treaty of Versailles was signed, British leaders began to doubt the wisdom of a punitive approach. As early as March 1919, for example, Lloyd George's government strongly resisted French attempts to continue to blockade Germany (which had contributed significantly to its defeat) until the peace treaty was signed. Instead, Britain forced the French to agree to suspend the blockade permanently. Already British opinion was swayed by a humanitarian response to reports of German civilians starving because of the blockade.[4] To continue a blockade in such circumstances seemed immoral, and morality was at the heart of the genesis of appeasement.

The real dividing of ways with France came when the terms of the treaty itself were announced in Paris. The immediate reaction inside the British delegation was that these terms were manifestly unfair. The Germans had been given the right to plead their own cause at a later stage, but there was a widespread British perception that the French were being ruthless and unforgiving. Germany was deprived of its colonies and forced to give up territory to France, Belgium and Poland, as well as having to accept a military clause which restricted its army to 100,000 men and prevented its use of military aircraft and submarines. Worse still for some members of the British delegation was the infamous article 231. This obliged Germany to accept responsibility for starting the war and the threat of punitive reparations that might, in the eyes of British critics, cripple the German economy for years to come.

The first and best known of these critics was John Maynard Keynes, the brilliant Cambridge economist, who was disgusted by the way in which the treaty terms had ignored the Fourteen Peace Points produced by President Woodrow Wilson in 1918 (Keynes was equally disgusted by what he saw as Wilson's betrayal of his own principles). These included the principle of self-determination for national and ethnic groups, which Keynes and others believed had been thrown aside by a treaty which deprived Germany of territory in the so-called Polish Corridor and control of the German-majority city of Danzig. (Curiously Keynes opposed the breaking up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire).

The difference between Keynes and the other British delegates in Paris

was that he, unlike his colleagues, was prepared to make his criticisms public. These appeared in his book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published six months after the Treaty of Versailles was signed in the famous Hall of Mirrors on 28 June 1919. It was a devastating critique of the treaty, especially its reparations clauses. No individuals were spared. Wilson was scathingly dismissed and Lloyd George was described, not entirely flatteringly, as 'this siren, goat-footed bard, this half-human visitor to our age from the hag-ridden magic and enchanted woods of Celtic antiquity.[5] This view has been recently dismissed as 'romantic nonsense',[6] for Lloyd George was, as he proved during the negotiations, a hard-headed realist. Britain's war aims were achieved with the confiscation of the German High Seas Fleet (subsequently scuttled at Scapa Flow in a last act of German defiance) and colonies, and Lloyd George's adroit insistence that Germany should foot the bill for Britain's war pensions. Only then did he join Woodrow Wilson in criticising France's financial and territorial exactions with their pro-Polish bias in the east.

Keynes dwelt on a higher moral plane. Not for him the sordid compromises that Lloyd George had to make with his allies, and his criticism carried all the greater weight because of his academic reputation and position as the Treasury's Chief Adviser at the Paris Peace Conference. His book, which can rightly be regarded as appeasement's founding text, was as much about morality as it was as about economics. Keynes believed that the reparations clauses represented economic insanity (although, as an adviser, he had himself suggested a reparations figure of twenty billion pounds sterling when asked to do so). They would ruin European trade because Germany was an integral part of the continental economy. He also thought that the Treaty of Versailles was immoral because it had flagrantly ignored Wilson's Fourteen Points, conniving in its final form with the old, corrupt secret diplomacy of the pre-war era which President Wilson had affected to despise. For Britain's chattering classes, Keynes soon became the hero of the hour, as much for his witty and insulting references to the 'Peacemakers' as for his devastating assault on the terms of Versailles. In the shadows, however, without the glare of publicity which Keynes had deliberately brought upon himself, was another equally influential figure. This was the South African leader, General Jan Christian Smuts, who has been described as an 'inspirational figure by virtue of his towering integrity, the principled consistency of his critique of Versailles and his ceaseless efforts to modify and humanise it'.[7] It was Smuts who persuaded Keynes to publish his criticisms of the treaty, and he who coined the memorable phrase that Versailles was 'a Carthaginian peace'. On 28 June, the very day that the

treaty was signed, Smuts had protested strongly against its terms to Lloyd George. Smuts had been a guerrilla leader in the Boer struggle against British imperialism between 1899 and 1902, but he admired the magnanimity which the British had displayed towards his people in the post-war settlement. It was for this reason that Smuts had joined the Imperial Cabinet during the First World War to become a trusted and admired colleague of Lloyd George. But he was also a tenacious colleague who led the Empire delegation's strong demand for treaty revision when it met Lloyd George on 31 May after the draft treaty terms had become available. It is with some justice, therefore, that he has been described as the 'leading appeaser' in the British and Empire delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.[8] When Lloyd George made a sarcastic reference to Smuts's eagerness to annex former German South-West Africa under the new League of Nations mandate system (which gave German and Turkish ex-colonies to Allied powers until they were deemed ready for independence), the barb failed to dent Smuts's belief in his mission to save world peace. In Smuts's view, South-West Africa was unimportant compared with the threat to global harmony posed by Versailles.[9]

Smuts, who had been sent by the British government on a mission to Central and Eastern Europe after the war was over, was appalled by the privation that he found there. In Vienna, he and colleague had eaten lunch at Sachers, a luxury restaurant, which Smuts thought to be a grossly insensitive error. He announced that in future his mission would 'not take anything from those starving countries'.[10] He bristled with indignation about conditions in Budapest but dismissed the threat posed by the new Communist leader, Bela Kun, describing him as a 'little oily Jew, fur coat rather moth-eaten –stringy green tie'.[11]

Smuts could be scathing about those members of humanity unfortunate enough to be outside the boundaries of the British Empire. Slavs in general he described as 'kaffirs', a pejorative term used for blacks in South Africa, and such prejudices certainly flavoured his attitude towards Versailles and its sister treaties of St-Germain, Trianon, Neuilly and Sèvres, which dealt with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey respectively. If Lloyd George became irritated by Smuts's moralism, to Smuts Lloyd George was a disappointment, a man too easily swayed by electoral considerations. Yet Smuts, too, whom Boer leaders nicknamed 'Slim [clever] Jannie', had a realistic streak that was deployed when it suited him. It was he who worked with Lloyd George to make an issue out of British war pensions and to insist that the defeated Germans should pay for them. Although Keynes resigned in disgust from the British delegation before the publication of his book, Smuts remained at his post. Though reluctant to

sign the Treaty of Versailles, he persuaded himself that it was his duty to do so while continuing to claim that it was a war treaty rather than a peace treaty. He was contemptuous of realists like the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, whom he accused of ruthless pursuit of British national interests. For Smuts, article 231, the war guilt clause, was an insult to German pride, and he refused to sit on an Austrian reparations committee because he thought it ludicrous to penalise a bankrupt state.[12]

Lloyd George refused to consider extensive revision of the treaty. He, after all, had to consider the views of Wilson and the doughty French leader, Clemenceau, whose abrasive response to Wilson's prized League of Nations concept based on his Fourteen Points was that 'the Lord God had only ten'. Nonetheless, Lloyd George's personal contribution to the genesis of an appeasement mentality was considerable. In particular, he provided the celebrated Fontainebleau Memorandum, which ranks alongside Keynes's *Economic Consequences of the Peace* as one of the founding texts of British inter-war appeasement. This document was actually drafted by Philip Kerr, another member of the British delegation and later (as Lord Lothian) a noted appeaser in the 1930s. In it, Lloyd George warned that:

> You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments to a mere police force and her navy to that of a fifth-rate power; all the same, in the end if she feels that she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919 she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors.[13]

Here was prescience indeed which entitles Lloyd George to be categorised as one of Britain's earliest appeasers, although his criticism of Versailles also opens him to the charge of hypocrisy. Britain, after all, had got precisely what it wanted from the treaty; only when it had done so did he castigate others for greed and vengefulness. Above all, the memorandum was a deliberate attack on French policy for deliberately trying to emasculate Germany and stir up trouble for the future.[14]

And yet, it can be argued that British policy was based on a fundamental misconception. Were the Germans being treated so harshly by the Treaty of Versailles? In March 1918, Germany had imposed a punitive treaty on Russia, which deprived their enemy of one third of their population, and one third of their industrial capacity. More pertinently, Germany had treated defeated France even more savagely in the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt, after the Franco-Prussian war. German nationalists complained bitterly about the burden of reparations, imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, which was eventually fixed, in 1921, at about 8 per cent of

Germany's national income. This was actually less than the 9-16 per cent that France had to pay each year for three years after 1871.

Yet the French managed to do so, securing the removal of German troops from their territory early in 1873, although Germany continued to occupy France's former provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. Prime Minister Clemenceau and his colleagues remembered their history, when they determined the reparations level for Germany.[15] Germany had not been generous in victory in 1871, why should it expect generosity in defeat? France, whose northern departments had been devastated in the Great War, thought Britain's movement towards sympathy for a defeated Germany hypocritical. Conversely, the British accused the French of being vengeful, and their delegation at Versailles contained several critics of French attitudes.

Lloyd George's apprentice Philip Kerr, a nephew of the Duke of Norfolk, was one of the most influential of the doubters in the British delegation in Paris. He had been a member of Lord Milner's famous 'Kindergarten' in South Africa, a group of young men (others were Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of the *Times*, and Lionel Curtis, both critics of Versailles) who worked for reconciliation in post-war South Africa, and believed that British magnanimity there should also be applied to Germany. He wanted a 'tough but not a vindictive peace',[16] but he reached this position only after thinking at first that it was impossible to revise the treaty. Such inconsistency has caused Kerr's mind to be compared with 'a weathervane'.[17]

In many respects, Kerr's experience was typical of the experience of those who became mainstream appeasers in the thirties. He had actually drafted article 231 of the treaty as well as its antithesis, the Fontainebleau Memorandum, while also being responsible in June 1918 for the refutation of the official German criticisms of Versailles. But back in London, Kerr came to see the evils of the treaty and its consequences for Germany. He changed his mind and, tormented by 'his own complicity in this blunder, he was burdened by his Versailles guilt complex ever after'.[18] Lloyd George was made of tougher stuff than Kerr. If he had doubts about the treaty, they were linked to the follies of others. He did not agonise in the watches of the night about the wrongs done to Germany.

Kerr came to believe that the French had been vindictive at the Peace Conference, and suspicion of the French and their motives was widespread amongst the Versailles sceptics in 1919. Indeed, there was more to it than that, for there lurked in British imaginations a primal fear of the reckless and over-emotional Gallic tendency to exaggerate the German peril. French civilisation itself was suspect, and Robert Vansittart (who was part

of the British delegation) told of how his great aunt, hearing that the young man was going to Paris for the first time, threatened to cut him off without a penny if he did so. 'She thought', Vansittart wrote many years later, 'Paris was a wicked place. The Victorian view was that the French practised all sorts of occult forms of sexual intercourse and were the wildest people on earth.'[19]

Nevile Henderson also feared entanglement in French designs. He was present when the Versailles Treaty was signed, being then Second Secretary at the Paris Embassy. Henderson wrote of how the 'Germans were left bitter and resentful' and complained of the numerous and 'violent attacks on us in the French press'. For Henderson, the future envoy of appeasement, 'Fear and Hate, those two worst of counsellors, were the guiding influences so far as the French were concerned'.[20] His view was shared by many others in the British establishment.

There were a few dissenters. Harold Nicolson, whose book *Peacemaking 1919* became a classic account of Versailles, was another member of the British delegation who worried about the treaty settlement. But he could understand French anxieties. 'I quite admit', he wrote in his book, 'that the French cannot *see* beyond their noses. But clearly they are after all their noses: and my word what they *do* see, they see damned clearly.'[21] More typical was what the feline Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour said of the French at the time of their Ruhr adventure in 1923. They, Balfour believed, 'are so dreadfully afraid of being swallowed up by the tiger, that they spend all their time poking it'.[22] By 1923, indeed, the British were no longer convinced that it was not France that was the tiger and Germany the lamb. This was a process which had been underway since 1919, when the British delegation was alarmed not just by the substance of Versailles but also by the manner in which it was imposed, which Nicolson and others thought needlessly humiliated the German delegates during the signing ceremony. For Keynes, Smuts, Nicolson and Kerr, French arrogance was personified by the brusque way in which Clemenceau had conducted business during the framing of the treaty. Nicolson later recorded the French leader's technique, '"*Y-a-t-il-d'objections? Non… Adopté.*" Like a machine gun.'[23] For this reason, 'a wave of Francophobia swept up many influential people in public life in Britain'.[24]

The fact that there were so many concerns about the settlement led to the formation of what nowadays might be described as a lobby group for appeasement. On 30 May 1919, at about the time that the draft terms of the Treaty of Versailles were presented to the German delegation, a group of like-minded Foreign Office officials in Paris formed the Institute of International Affairs, better known today as Chatham House, the Royal

Institute of International Affairs. The Institute's members were Harold Nicolson, Allen Leeper, Arnold Toynbee and Edgar Abraham. Nicolson left the Foreign Office in 1930 to become a politician and writer (married to another distinguished writer, Vita Sackville-West) and Toynbee became an eminent historian, but Leeper stayed inside the Foreign Office. An important ally was Lord Robert Cecil, who had been Minister of Blockade in the wartime coalition and was another member of the British delegation in Paris. Another was James Headlam-Morley, an historical adviser at the Foreign Office.[25] Chatham House, as the institute became known, was an elitist, frequently pro-German organisation designed to enlighten 'other less discerning members of the same magic circle.[26] It also had very strong links with Oxford University, many members being Fellows of All Souls. If appeasement needed an intellectual forum, Chatham House provided it. Distrust of Versailles and its ills motivated most of the membership.[27]

It is important, however, to appreciate that revisionism as far as Versailles was concerned went well beyond the narrow confines of the Institute of International Affairs. For when the Imperial Cabinet (composed of members of the British Empire delegation plus members of the British Cabinet) met over the weekend of 30 May to 1 June 1919, everybody there was against the terms of Versailles as then put forward. Present at the meeting were not only the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian representatives (plus Smuts and Louis Botha for South Africa), but also Churchill (Secretary of State for War), Milner (Colonial Secretary), Lord Chancellor Birkenhead, Austen Chamberlain (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Edwin Montagu (Secretary of State for India). The consensus against Versailles at this meeting has rightly been described as 'remarkable'.[28] Yet most of these men did not, like Smuts, oppose Versailles on moral grounds. Their reservations were tactical, and they were swayed in particular by the existing international situation which involved problems outside the narrow perspective of the German peace settlement.

Churchill in particular was alarmed at the prospect of a vindictive peace driving the Germans into the hands of the Russian Bolsheviks, who had seized power in November 1917, following the overthrow of Tsar Nicolas II the previous March. He had argued for a swift end to the Allied blockade lest orderly government break down in Germany, thus creating a situation which could be exploited by revolutionary Communism (as it was, there were two Communist putsches in Berlin and Bavaria in 1919).

It was essential in Churchill's view that France should 'moderate her vindictive policy' towards Germany and accept British good offices in creating an improved Franco-German relationship.[29] In a characteristically