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Open Diplomacy at the Washington Conference of 1921–2: The British and French Experience

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The widespread reaction against secret diplomacy which followed the First World War led to demands that statesmen conduct their affairs openly and be responsive to public opinion. The specific forms that Open Diplomacy might take in the post-war world were hard to envision, even for the most ardent advocates of change. At the Paris Peace Conference several hundred newsmen discovered that 'open covenants openly arrived at' did not mean that negotiations would be held in public. Similarly, the whole process by which governments were supposed to determine domestic or world opinion on a given issue and then formulate policies in accord with it was easier to talk about than to implement. If supporters of Open Diplomacy wanted simplicity, they were in fact getting a host of new complexities in their quest for a more democratic foreign policy.

Perhaps the most predictable complexity of all was that, given the increased emphasis on public opinion, governments would try to manipulate that opinion, making propaganda a concomitant feature of modern diplomacy. Attempts to influence public opinion and win support for policies were hardly a twentieth-century innovation. Only with the First World War, however, did systematic efforts to sway mass opinion assume great importance in international relations. Traditionalists saw propaganda as the most objectionable feature of the New Diplomacy which the war had introduced. With Harold Nicolson they could lament that 'even the British (who are a truthful race) gradually acquired a taste for propaganda, and proved that they also could tell deliberate lies'.[1]

This essay examines the role of public opinion and propaganda at the conference which came as close to Open Diplomacy as any major conclave of the interwar period. The Conference on the Limitation of Armament held in Washington from November 12, 1921, to February 6, 1922, was the first of several attempts at naval disarmament made after the First World War. It was also an effort to stabilize the unsettled Far Eastern situation and provide for the development of an independent Republic of China.

[1] Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London, 1939), p. 169.

Historians have studied many facets of American participation in the conference, including the way domestic newspapers and pressure groups influenced our disarmament program.[2] This essay is concerned with reactions to the conference in Britain and France and the contrast between British and French efforts to win public support for their policies.

The historian, even of an event as recent as the Washington Conference, cannot hope to measure the influence of public opinion on policy with any precision. He can never prove the relationship of cause and effect between an editorial and a government action and is on dangerous ground if he assumes that the press is a reliable barometer of public sentiment. Paris newspapers in the 1920s, for instance, were frequently the tools of politician-journalists who slanted the news to suit their cause. During the conference they issued constant warnings against concessions, against disarmament without solid guarantees, and these warnings could not be ignored by the French Government. The historian must also be wary in accepting the claim of the politician who says he is pursuing a course of action in deference to public opinion. At the Washington Conference such claims were made so frequently on such obscure and technical issues that they appear ludicrous. If the public record furnishes a poor gauge of the influence of opinion on foreign policy, it is nonetheless apparent that in modern democracies such influence exists. At Washington, public opinion not only helped determine the direction of each nation's policy, it also played a more direct role in shaping day-to-day tactics.

The British Government of 1921 was alert to the increasing interest of the public in foreign affairs. Prime Minister David Lloyd George had been foremost among the war-time leaders who had deftly manipulated mass opinion. He had sponsored and attended the post-war conferences which were supposed to reform the practice of diplomacy, and he was second to none in the importance he attached to the press. To the American Ambassador, George Harvey, Lloyd George appeared to be 'not merely the head of the British Government' but 'in full and absolute control'.[3] He overshadowed and often ignored his traditionalist Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, who was as maladroit in public relations as the Prime Minister was adept.[4]

[2] Charles Leonard Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness* (Washington D.C., 1941) describes the influence of American public opinion on the Harding administration's disarmament policy at the conference. John Chalmers Vinson, *The Parchment Peace: the United States Senate and the Washington Conference* (Athens, Ga., 1955) and Harold and Margaret Sprout, *Towards a New Order of Sea Power* (Princeton, 1940) deal with some aspects of press and public opinion about the conference.

[3] Harvey to C. E. Hughes, September 1921. Cited in Willis Fletcher Johnson, *George Harvey* (London, 1930), p. 325.

[4] Lord Vansittart, who assisted Curzon with the press at this time, wrote that 'Curzon expected me to influence newspaper-men to an extent impossible in the twentieth century. I had to receive them single-handed, for there was no press department in days so recent and

It certainly might appear to a foreign observer that the fiery Welshman was in complete control, a party in himself. But Lloyd George was a Liberal at the head of a coalition whose membership was chiefly Conservative, and by 1921 his position was far from secure. Instability stemmed partly from the nature of the issues he faced—reconstruction of a war-weary economy and world order—and partly from the man himself. Lloyd George sought triumphs overseas in order to improve his uncertain position at home. This search was to prove his undoing. His solution to the Irish question in December 1921 antagonized many coalition Conservatives, and his willingness to risk military involvement against Turkey in the Chanak crisis in September 1922 lost him the confidence of the British public.

The Washington Conference was a triumph of Lloyd George's final year in office. In later decades the conference, and the 'direct' approach to naval disarmament which it represented, was judged harshly. But to contemporaries in Britain it was a hopeful first step towards world recovery. At Washington the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which had been bedevilling Britain's relations with America, was replaced by the Four Power Pact. This political settlement in the Pacific made it possible for Japan to join the United States, Britain and other powers in an agreement which halted competition in building capital ships, the most costly items in armaments budgets. Where no political agreement could be reached at Washington—on 'freedom of the seas', submarines or Britain's role in Europe—tension persisted. The conference had not eliminated all rivalry between the Powers, but it still can be credited with improving relations in the Pacific and strengthening bonds between Britain and the United States.

The results of the Naval Conference seem less impressive now than in 1922 partly because it is easy to forget that the motives of economy which propelled the disarmament movement were largely satisfied there. Britain had to meet the direct costs of the war, and difficulties in adapting to new patterns of trade were making the economic situation critical. L. S. Amery, who was Financial Secretary of the Admiralty in 1921, described how an 'anti-waste' campaign in the press found 'only too ready a response in the middle class and on the Conservative and Liberal Coalition benches in the House of Commons'. In August 1921 the Cabinet appointed a 'Super-Axe' Committee on National Expenditure under Sir Eric Geddes to recommend where cuts in government spending could be made.[5] Faced with the need to trim unproductive expenses the government naturally turned to the war-swollen fighting services. After all, Britain faced no enemies; since 1919 her armed services were supposed to plan on the basis that no major

simple. . . . He did not understand that modern journalists had sources of information other than the Foreign Office.' *The Mist Procession* (London, 1958), p. 273.

[5] L. S. Amery, *My Political Life* (London, 1953), II, p. 217.

war was to be anticipated for the next ten years. The Washington Naval Treaty promised significant economies and was popular largely because of this. If it also confirmed the passing of traditional British supremacy at sea, that was almost ignored by the general public.

In France as in Britain the war had weakened the economy and created a heavy national debt. This financial problem lay at the heart of France's European policies and was linked to her efforts to guarantee military security. For if Germany were to pay the reparations which (it was hoped) could pave the way to recovery, then France had to be in a strong enough position to collect them. The refusal of the English and Americans to uphold the pledges made at the Peace Conference to guarantee France's security had alienated French opinion. Even more distressing to the French were the demands increasingly heard from the Anglo-Saxons that Germans should not be made to pay their debts, and that Germany should be strengthened as the key to a revived Europe.

When Aristide Briand assumed the premiership for the sixth time in January 1921, he stressed the need for 'the closest alliance' with Britain as the 'very basis of [his] foreign policy'.[6] But the rigidity of opinion on security issues in the Chamber of Deputies, which the conservative *Bloc National* had dominated since the 1919 elections, left him little room to maneuver. Briand's ministry ended after only a year when he seemed to be softening France's stand on reparations and following Lloyd George's lead on European reconstruction. The Washington Conference contributed to public dissatisfaction with Briand's policies at home and chipped away at his already weak position. Only weeks before Briand's fall, he had made what his countrymen felt was a significant concession by accepting the capital-ship ratio assigned to France at the conference. The concession in fact cost France nothing, because her navy was not planning to build more battleships than the ratio allowed, and Briand judged it a useful gesture towards Britain and the United States. Yet right-wing opponents taunted the Premier for having 'gambled and lost our money in London and our navy in Washington'.[7]

The criticism was unfair, but the resentment it revealed towards the Washington Conference is easily understood. Frenchmen had been led to believe that their country would claim the role of disinterested mediator in Washington. They had listened to predictions that American and British interests were bound to clash, and someone playing the role of 'honest broker' could earn prestige and good will. The result would be improved relations with Britain and America and their cooperation in European settlement. When Briand announced acceptance of 'the noble appeal of

[6] *The Times* (London), January 21, 1921, 11.

[7] *Action Française*, January 6, 1922. Cited in Léon Daudet, *Deputé de Paris* (Paris, 1933), p. 111.

President Harding' to attend the conference, he expressed the hope that it would secure his nation's defense and 'destroy the odious legend which shows France as seeking to dominate Europe'.[8] Measured against these goals, the conference was certainly a failure for France. The United States remained aloof from European affairs. Britain was moved to a position of willingness to conclude an Anglo-French security pact, but she offered little and demanded much. The 'odious legend' was not destroyed—in fact, French statements at Washington diverted the wrath of the American public from Japan.

Before the conference, *Revue Maritime*, the journal of naval opinion, had confidently predicted that France's naval armaments would not even be discussed at Washington.[9] The French navy had been reduced already and had fallen to fourth place, well below Britain, the United States and Japan. When a demand for French inclusion in the naval treaty did come, it came in a most humiliating way. France's delegates were excluded from discussions on the capital-ship ratio by the 'Big Three' (the American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, Britain's Arthur James Balfour and Japan's Baron Kato), and then were asked to accept a tonnage allotment after accord had been reached by the other powers. This allotment was to be the same as Italy's—a galling reminder of a changing balance of naval power in the Mediterranean. When the French delegates protested to Hughes, the author of the plan, he told them that France would appear 'imperialistic' to the world if their intransigence blocked accord on the naval treaty.[10]

The reaction to this in Paris was predictable. In the Chamber of Deputies legislators complained that France had not been allowed to discuss her security as an equal. M. Le Cour Grandmaison announced to the Chamber that it was incontestable that Britain and America had reached accord secretly before the conference.[11] That the British and Americans had taken such a righteous and moralistic tone only seemed to confirm suspicions of their hypocrisy. It was all too typical of these 'Puritans' to cloak their fiscal motives in sanctimonious garb. The specific complaint most often voiced in France during and after the conference was that Hughes had based tonnage ratios on existing fleets. Again and again it was argued that the standards of 1914 and not 1921 should have been used to establish the ratios, since the situation on the eve of the war represented a more normal division of power. This talk of the situation being 'more normal' in 1914

[8] France, *Journal Officiel* (Deputés, Debats), March 24, 1922, 1098. Briand's remarks are quoted and discussed in this debate.

[9] P. Chack, 'La Conférence de Washington et la Limitation des Armements Navals', *Revue Maritime* (October, 1921), 544.

[10] Sarraut to Briand, December 15, 1921, France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques, Conférence de Washington* (hereinafter cited as 'D.D.CONF.') (Paris, 1923), No. 70, 52.

[11] France, *Journal Official, loc. cit.*, 1100.

than after the war hints at an unwillingness to accept the implications of change. It was not the restriction on battleships which mattered at Washington; it was the fact that France, despite and because of her great efforts in the war, was no longer able to stand in the first rank of naval powers.

The Washington Conference was seen as a diplomatic success by the British public and as a failure by the French. These reactions cannot be explained adequately by tallying up the gains and losses of each government at the bargaining table. For if Britain had strengthened her friendship with the United States, she had also lost her alliance with Japan; if she had won some economies she had also yielded her historic position as the leading naval power. Conversely, France's prestige may have suffered as a result of the capital-ship tonnage limitation, but she had not done badly in other agreements. In the balance sheet of the conference which he drew up, Briand listed French successes on land armaments, submarines, light vessels and inclusion in the Four Power Pact against this single failure.[12] The public response was also determined by other factors: by popular expectations of what the conference would do, by widely held attitudes on disarmament, Anglo-American cooperation and European security, and by the way the conference was presented to the public by the press.

Lloyd George's decision to accept the invitation to a conference in Washington and to extend the scope of the conference from armaments to East Asian affairs was in itself indicative of a new orientation in British policy. Canadian Prime Minister Arthur Meighen had been pressing for a conference of Pacific powers since February 1921 so that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could be terminated 'with a good grace'.[13] Canadians could sympathize with the American view that the alliance encouraged Japanese expansionism and were concerned over Canada's position in the event of a war between Japan and the United States. When Meighen met his fellow Dominion premiers in London that June at the first Imperial Conference to be held since the war, he continued to argue for replacement of the alliance with 'a broad, inclusive arrangement' which he felt the United States would join. Curzon and Australia's William Morris Hughes opposed these views and urged renewal of the alliance. Hughes pointed to the difficulty of knowing what American opinion really was and derided Meighen's presentation as 'not the case for the Empire, but . . . the case for the United States of America'.[14]

Lloyd George postponed an immediate decision on the question, but it

[12] Georges Suarez, *Briand* (Paris, 1952), V, p. 312.

[13] Memorandum by Mr. Lampson on correspondence with the Canadian Government relating to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, April 8, 1921, *Documents on British foreign policy, 1919–1939* (hereinafer cited as 'B.D.'), 1st ser., Rohan Butler and J. P. T. Bury, eds. (London, 1947–68), XIV, 261, 271–6.

[14] Great Britain, Imperial Meetings: 9th Meeting, June 29, 1921; 10th Meeting, June 29,

was clear that Meighen's arguments had impressed him. On the afternoon of July 5, Curzon asked the American Ambassador in London to propose to his government that the President call a conference of interested powers 'to consider all essential matters bearing upon the Far East and Pacific Ocean' in order to ensure peaceful settlement.[15] The whole episode demonstrated the changes which the war had wrought within the Empire. British foreign relations were no longer the exclusive concern of Whitehall.

It seemed likely to the British press and public that the acceptance of a conference solution to Pacific and naval problems would mean formal agreement on naval parity with the United States and an end to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The prospect of armaments limitation was viewed favorably not only by parliament, but by a wide range of peace groups which sought to exert pressure on government policy. There had been pacifist organizations in England before the war, and after 1919 they were joined by the League of Nations Union, arbitration societies and other bodies trying to promote support for a new international order. Many of these groups tried to channel widespread revulsion against war into concrete demands, and disarmament in particular became their leading goal. Because the forthcoming Washington Conference would make disarmament a matter of practical politics it won the enthusiastic support of the peace movement.

One group, the World Alliance for the Promotion of International Friendship through the Churches, had been founded during the war by an American Congregationalist leader and boasted strong English support. Twenty-three nations were represented at its meeting in Geneva early in 1921, where the Archbishop of Canterbury presided at a session which started a petition calling on the powers to reduce armaments. This eventually received 20,500 signatures from ministers of various faiths throughout the world and was submitted to President Harding. Dr. Nehemiah Boynton, the group's founder and executive chairman, wrote in the *Westminster Gazette* in September 1921 that 'four weeks after our visit the Washington Conference was called. Though we are very far from feeling that our petition called the conference, we recognize that 20,500 ministers, representing a point of influence and power, was a stimulating influence.'[16]

The influence of the British Labour Party on the government's dis-

1921. Cabinet Minutes and Conclusions and other Cabinet Office Papers, Public Record Office (hereinafter cited as 'CAB.'), 32/2.

[15] Harvey to Hughes, July 8, 1921, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, 1935–), 1921, II, 19. Ambassador Harvey did not inform Washington of Curzon's remarks until July 8. By this time President Harding had cabled London, Paris, Rome and Tokyo about a conference on the limitation of armament, and this American proposal for a conference in Washington stood. An account of the genesis of the conference is in M. G. Fry, 'The North Atlantic Triangle and the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 39, No. 1, March, 1967, 46–64.

[16] Arthur G. Enock, *The Problem of Armaments* (London, 1923), pp. 140–3.

armament policy was more widely noted. Labourites did not propose solutions to the tangled problems of the Orient which the conference would deal with, but they showed no hesitation in urging disarmament. The official statement issued by the National Joint Council of the Labour Party on November 18 gave firm support to the effort to limit naval armaments. It urged that reductions should be 'drastic' and that any agreements should be extended to other countries and to all sorts of military weapons.[17] When the French Chargé d'Affaires in London reported that Lloyd George might be ready to attend the Washington Conference late in November, he said that the Prime Minister appeared to be ready to intervene for disarmament with all his authority in order to satisfy the demands of the working classes.[18] Reports from the American Embassy in London also stressed the influence of the Left in determining the British Government's attitude on armaments limitation.[19]

The enthusiasm which the prospect of disarmament aroused among Labourites was dampened, however, by the government's failure to provide Labour with representation in Washington at least comparable to what American union leaders had been granted. Samuel Gompers was included on an Advisory Committee of distinguished citizens attached to the American delegation to the conference. Early in September, a spokesman for the General Federation of Trade Unions wrote to Lloyd George urging that 'there should be definite Trade Union representation on the delegation'. Delegates at the Cardiff meeting of the Trades Union Congress that same month agreed that the conference 'would not be satisfactory unless Labour is adequately represented thereon'.[20] Nothing came of these suggestions, however, and on the eve of the conference the London *Labour News* complained that 'if only the representatives of the old governing caste is to have a voice, the conference is doomed to failure because of its lack of moral authority'. The socialist *Daily Herald* sounded the same note of skepticism in an article predicting that the 'conference probably will raise more trouble than it settles and it will likely devise an agreement by the robber Powers for a division of the spoils of China'.[21]

Some British Labourites were also disturbed by the possible effect of the conference on the League of Nations. After all, it was to be sponsored by an American administration which had rejected President Wilson's programs, and rumors circulated that the United States was going to use

[17] Labour Party of Great Britain. *Report of the Executive Committee*. Presented to the 22nd Annual Conference held June 27–30, 1922 (Edinburgh, 1922), 39.

[18] de Montille to Bonnevay, November 27, 1921, D.D.CONF., No. 47, 86–7.

[19] U.S. Embassy, London, to Hughes, October 25, 1921, National Archives 500 A400/93, 5.

[20] W. A. Appleton to Samuel Gompers, September 5, 1921, Gompers Papers, A. F. of L.-C.I.O. Building, Washington D.C. These papers include a digest on the conference prepared by the Information and Publicity Service of the American Federation of Labor describing Gompers's contacts with trade union leaders in Europe in support of disarmament.

[21] *Literary Digest*, November 12, 1921, 21.

the conference to initiate a new 'Association on Nations' to replace the Wilsonian League. One source of these rumors was former United States Ambassador to Germany David Jayne Hill, who met with League officials in Geneva in July 1921. He discussed the possibility that the Harding administration might suggest an association including the United States and Germany which would merge into the League, providing that a few changes were made in the Covenant.[22] If cooperation with America meant a watering down of the League, then it would be a questionable proposition for Labour.

Support for the League, and the new principles of international relations it was supposed to represent, was fainter in British Conservative circles than among Labourites. If a substitute had to be found for the *Pax Britannica* of the nineteenth century, then many Conservatives found the notion of an Anglo-American combination more desirable than the League. The dispute over naval supremacy and the United States' rejection of the Peace Treaty had dimmed this hope, but the prospect of the Washington Conference made an 'Anglo-Saxon' policy seem feasible once again. The public record does not show the extent of the desire for American cooperation by influential officials and Conservative leaders. It would appear, as Professor Beloff suggests, that British statesmen were reluctant to talk about the United States because their statements might arouse the wrong American response.[23]

In a lengthy memorandum on his visit to Washington in mid-1920, the former Ambassador to Tokyo and Peking, B. Alston, gave a number of suggestions for 'an Anglo-Saxon Policy for the Far East'. Alston saw the Pacific as the 'one quarter of the globe in which Anglo-American interests must be considered identical' and urged 'the maintenance of an adequate Anglo-Saxon fleet in the Pacific, based upon say Hawaii and Singapore' to curb Japanese expansionist tendencies.[24] Arthur Willert, who had been the *Times* American correspondent and a wartime representative of the Ministry of Information in Washington, was another advocate of extensive cooperation with the United States. When pre-conference squabbles over procedural matters between London and Washington endangered amity, he wrote to Lloyd George's Private Secretary warning that the 'unexampled opportunity' presented by the conference must not be lost. He said that

> our best and perhaps only chance of getting the world straight again lies in working with the United States. A few months ago the prospect in that regard was pretty bleak: a week ago, on the contrary, it was really encouraging. An unexampled opportunity

[22] E. A. Sweetser memo of conversation with David Jayne Hill, July 27, 1921. Enclosed with letter from Eric Drummond to A. J. Balfour, July 30, 1921, A. J. Balfour Papers, British Museum, League of Nations File No. 49749.

[23] M. Beloff, 'The Special Relationship: An Anglo-American Myth', in Martin Gilbert, ed., *A Century of Conflict* (London, 1966), pp. 149–71, 152.

[24] Memorandum by Sir B. Alston respecting suggestions for an Anglo-Saxon Policy for the Far East, August 1, 1920, B.D., 1st ser., XIV, No. 80, 81–6.

seemed to have arisen to take the United States by the hand and lead her inexperienced feet by the way they should tread.

Willert warned that Britain must make concessions over procedural matters to the Americans, who were 'children whose ignorance is unfortunately only matched by their power for good or evil'.[25]

'Anglo-Saxonism' frequently was linked to arguments for racial solidarity. The Foreign Office survey of the political situation in the Pacific prepared on the eve of the conference, stressed the racial aspect of the problem. 'The political and economic aspects', the memorandum argued, 'are in reality only secondary compared with the underlying racial problem'. The war had accelerated the break-up of 'the solidarity of the white races' and caused 'a profound impression throughout the coloured world'. However 'a great deal would be done to restore white solidarity by a policy of closer cooperation with the United States'.[26] Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge's well publicized statements about 'the coming conflict between the two halves of the human race, the white and the coloured . . . in the Pacific' brought similar arguments to a wider public.[27]

When the First Sea Lord, Admiral David Beatty, visited the United States in October 1921, he sounded out influential Americans on the issues which the conference would soon raise and on the possibilities of Anglo-American cooperation. He told Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who was to be a delegate at the conference, 'that the United States and England should get together on all questions in the East, especially with regard to navies'.[28] Beatty told another prospective delegate, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt Jr., that he was perfectly willing to accept equality between the British and American fleets and that the British Navy was largely obsolete. He left Roosevelt with the impression that England would accept naval limitation, although only 'within very moderate bounds'.[29]

Several British newspapers had been urging closer Anglo-American cooperation and a conference solution to Far Eastern and naval problems for months, and when the Washington Conference was announced they kept the subject in the public eye. The American Embassy in London reported that popular enthusiasm for the conference was even greater than press coverage indicated. A Foreign Office official had 'frankly admitted'

[25] Arthur Willert to P. J. Grigg, July 19, 1921, Lord Altrincham Papers, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, Reel 1.

[26] General Survey of Political Situation in Pacific and Far East with reference to the forthcoming Washington Conference, October 20, 1921, B.D., 1st ser., XIV, No. 404, 434–48.

[27] *Literary Digest*, November 12, 1921, 7.

[28] Henry Cabot Lodge, 'Arms Conference Journal', October 25, 1921. Lodge Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Lodge noted in this journal that the feeling in favor of such an agreement 'not by an alliance but on a general declaration of policy was very strong in the Navy'.

[29] Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., 'Diary', October 24, 25, 1921, 5–6, Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress.

to an embassy secretary that his government did not wish to buoy up the people's hopes and let them imagine that the millennium was imminent, as was the case before the Peace Conference. The press had accordingly been urged not to over-emphasize its possible achievements.[30]

The public discussions in Britain which preceded the Washington Conference were noteworthy in one respect: they revealed a widespread tendency to view disarmament and Anglo-American cooperation as alternatives to the frustrating and complex tasks of European settlement. From the Left came the exaggerated hopes for direct disarmament as a panacea which were often to be heard in later years; from the Right came hopes for far-reaching cooperation with the United States as a possible way out of the commitment required for an adequate European security system. Although Britain shared with France an interest in using the conference to involve the United States in European reconstruction, there was almost no mention of this in the British press. The only preliminary conference which the British Government sought was not with France, but with the Dominion Premiers and the United States. One informal attempt to encourage cooperation with France at Washington was made by Wickham Steed, Editor of *The Times*, who spoke with President Millerand and French delegates in October. Steed's prognosis was not encouraging. He suspected that the French had drafted a Franco-American treaty of alliance and were ready to exploit the expected quarrels over naval supremacy to win American friendship.[31]

The conference certainly did offer France a forum for appealing to the United States and enlisting her aid in European reconstruction. Premier Briand felt that this public appeal was important enough to justify his presence in Washington at the head of his delegation. Obtaining American aid was still only secondary to the more basic objective of Briand's policy, that of rapprochement with Britain.[32] For the most part, French newspapers showed an awareness that there were limits to what could be expected from the United States. *Le Matin* cautioned its readers that so far as America took an interest in European affairs, her disposition would be to act like England.[33] The *Journal des Débats* said that the conference should be used to pave the way for a future Anglo-French alliance, and urged preliminary meetings with Lloyd George on the naval situation.[34]

Because Briand was attending the conference while Lloyd George and other heads of government were not, many French observers assumed

[30] U.S. Embassy, London, to Hughes, October 25, 1921, National Archives 500 A400/93, 2.

[31] H. Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years* (London, 1924), 375–6.

[32] Briand planned to stay in Washington until November 23, when René Viviani would assume leadership of the delegation. Lloyd George was listed as head of the British delegation, but A. J. Balfour led it when Lloyd George announced he would not attend.

[33] *Current History of the New York Times*, November 1921, 559.

[34] *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, January 13, 1922, 11.

that the American people would be particularly sympathetic to France's case. They did not appreciate just how far removed the mood of Washington was from that of Paris. Just as the Peace Conference had been affected by its location in a Paris determined to settle accounts and guarantee France's security, so this naval conference was to be affected by American enthusiasm for disarmament. Mass demonstrations at Madison Square Garden in New York, the Coliseum in Chicago and Central High School Auditorium in Washington sponsored by the American Federation of Labor and Armistice Day celebrations throughout the United States helped to whip up this popular sentiment.[35] The Hughes plan for immediate arms limitation was just what the American public wanted to hear; Briand's appeals for American support in Europe and for security through strength were not.

The organization and procedures of the Washington Conference tended to give press and public opinion greater weight than they would have had at a more conventional diplomatic gathering. When reporters showed up in such great numbers that the scheduled meeting site, the Pan-American Building, could not accommodate them, the conference was shifted to the larger Memorial Continental Hall. Cables were laid directly from the basement of the building so that press dispatches could be sent out to London without delay. The first Plenary Session on November 12 left no doubt that Open Diplomacy had arrived with a vengeance. Cheering crowds of spectators and newsmen in the galleries overshadowed the formal proceedings. A British observer said that 'in a way, it rather resembled a public meeting—much clapping of hands and great enthusiasm'.[36] If the American electorate had rejected many Wilsonian principles in its turn towards isolationism, the idea of 'open covenants openly arrived at' had never been so much in favor.

The Harding Administration was willing to go along with these feelings. When the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, Colonel Charles À Court Repington, arrived in Washington he noted in his diary that 'we are evidently going to live in a diplomatic glasshouse here and there will be little secrecy. Harding and Hughes constantly see all Press representatives and things are all done *coram publico*. It is as if any Press men at home could see the King and Curzon every week and ask any question.'[37] The appointment of the twenty-one member Advisory Committee to act as a link between the delegation and the public appeared to be a notable step by the United States in the direction of Open Diplomacy. Hughes had doubts about this innovation before the conference, however. He said that the advisors would have little to do except as 'stage scenery'; several of them

[35] Gompers Papers, A.F. of L.-C.I.O. Building, Reel 214, 7.

[36] Lord Riddell, *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After* (London, 1923), p. 334.

[37] Charles À Court Repington, *After the War*, (London, 1922), p. 414.

were 'impossible from a practical standpoint' and the Secretary could not use some and not others without creating problems.[38]

Because there were several hundred newsmen, all of whom would be seeking interviews with the delegates, meeting places were provided in the Navy Building where each country could set up press headquarters. Every morning a list of delegates who were to give group interviews at fixed hours was distributed, and correspondents might be able to interview six or eight men each day. The main committees of the conference agreed to issue a communiqué after each meeting; and delegates had a 'gentleman's understanding' that parts of the discussions should remain secret. By the end of the first week it became obvious that this arrangement was not working. Balfour complained to London about news leaks to journalists and the 'great difficulties' publicity presented to the conference.[39] Similar complaints were heard from all sides before the conference ended.

It appeared at first that some of the serious business of the conference was to be transacted in public. On the opening day reporters had first-hand coverage of the Hughes proposals as they were presented. At the six remaining plenary sessions, however, spectators heard nothing very startling. The public listened to the reading of formal announcements and speeches reflecting decisions previously arrived at in closed committee meetings. Reporters found that the press conferences and statements issued by each delegation were their main news source.

The British prepared themselves well to take full advantage of this press arrangement. The Foreign Office provided the delegation with capsule descriptions of many of the individual newsmen in Washington and with a report analyzing the American press. This report described how the United States Government was able 'at any time to secure unreasoning support for almost any brand of diplomacy' chiefly 'by the patient coaching of the correspondents in Washington'. American officials knew 'that by picking a dozen of these men and by giving them an interview they can get their views next morning upon the breakfast table of millions'.[40] Arthur Willert, the British delegation's Press Attaché, had spent years in the United States and knew many correspondents in the predominantly American press corps at the conference. He set up a schedule of daily press conferences and arranged for British delegates to be present to meet newsmen at the British Embassy.

Newsmen could hear the British viewpoint expressed on another channel as well. Lord Riddell, who had acted as Lloyd George's spokesman at the Paris Peace Conference and had attended most important

[38] Chandler P. Anderson, 'Diary', October 28, 1921, Anderson Papers, Library of Congress; T. Roosevelt, 'Diary', October 29, 1921, 13.

[39] Balfour to Curzon, November 17, 1921, B.D., 1st ser., XIV, No. 424, 478–9.

[40] The American Press, October 3, 1921, *Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments*, III, Memoranda, Annex O, Public Record Office 11986.

European conferences since, was in Washington representing the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of London. Next to Northcliffe, Riddell was probably the most influential publisher in Britain. His success running the *News of the World* and his support of Lloyd George brought him a peerage. Riddell met daily with British delegates, and scheduled two daily press conferences and frequent talks to church and civic groups to present Britain's case. One American reporter testified to his success as an intermediary:

'To all intents and purposes Lord Riddell has been since November 12 the British Empire. . . . When you read in the press 'the conference will do this or that' or 'it is learned on high authority that the conference thinks this or that', you were reading Lord Riddell. . . . He mixed enough truth [with propaganda] so that correspondents thronged his meetings.'[41]

Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the British Delegation, admitted to Lloyd George that 'the combination of a British peer and a newspaper proprietor, to say nothing of his personality, was altogether too much for the Americans and he could just put over them what he liked'.[42]

Riddell became the *bête noire* of the French delegates, who were angered at British success in winning American popular support. On December 16, during negotiations on the capital-ship agreement, word leaked to the press that the French were insisting on a very high tonnage allotment for themselves which might endanger the success of the Hughes plan. American newspapers carried the story in headlines, which Hankey observed 'appeared to have removed the last remnant of French popularity'.[43] The French traced the leak to Riddell, who blandly insisted that he had heard their proposals accidentally, 'from a man on another delegation'.[44] British delegates turned aside French protests about Riddell by pointing out that he was not officially attached to their delegation. The whole incident only deepened suspicions that Britain was trying to undermine France's naval position.

Some French officials felt that if they were being hampered by the press, then it must be due to a covert English-led plot. Albert Sarraut, Minister of Colonies and head of the French delegation at the end of the conference, reported to Paris that he suspected a hostile coalition under English leadership was trying to undermine every French position.[45] The Count de Saint-Aulaire, Ambassador in London, saw the press campaign against France as part of Lloyd George's pro-German and pro-Soviet policies. In his view, the Foreign Office deplored this effort to turn the public against France and tried to neutralize it.[46] By mid-December some French newspapers

[41] *Review of Reviews*, Vol. 65, 49.

[42] Letter from Sir M. Hankey (Washington Delegation) to Mr. Lloyd George, Undated, B.D., 1st ser., XIV, No. 517, 569–73.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Lord Riddell, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

[45] Sarraut to Bonnevay, December 20, 1921, D.D.CONF., No. 82, 75.

[46] Comte de Saint-Aulaire, *Confession d'un vieux diplomate* (Paris, 1953), p. 574.

were talking about the 'plot' against France in which Lord Riddell was supposed to figure prominently. The authoritative *Le Temps* gave little credence to these conspiracy theories, but stressed that the Washington Conference revealed weaknesses in the French Government's approach to publicity.[47]

It was indeed apparent to newsmen in Washington that the French delegates were not getting their views across to the American public. Part of their difficulty was linguistic. Colonel Repington noted in his diary that it seemed odd that they were the only ones using French at the conference and that because of this 'they seem to be the only foreigners here'. He found it amusing that the Frenchmen thought their dramatic oratory was being understood when everyone was simply bored during the wait for translation.[48] The French magnified their difficulty by failing to provide translators for interviews, even though Ambassador Jusserand was their only delegate who spoke English fluently. This may have reflected a desire to curb the trend away from French as the language of diplomacy, but the press in Washington found it only irritating.

France's publicity arrangements at the conference were ill-considered in a number of ways. Instead of using the office space provided at press headquarters, the French gave interviews at their hotel in another part of the city. Reporters could not find their press conferences in the general listings and had to request appointments in order to get information. The contrast between Riddell's skilled bantering and the official correctness of his French counterparts in dealings with reporters was dramatic. The isolation of the French delegation and the shortcomings of its propaganda at the conference were widely discussed in the press. The Paris correspondent of the *Westminster Gazette* reported that many Frenchmen felt the British had an unfair advantage on American soil, because the English language gave them a quick apprehension of the nuances of American temperament.[49]

Several incidents brought the French into the headlines and emphasized the weakness of their press relations. The first of these was caused by faulty reporting of some remarks made by Premier Briand to the Italian delegate Carlo Schanzer. The British *Daily Telegraph* and several French newspapers carried reports late in November that Briand had insulted the Italian army by referring to its 'moral decomposition'. After *La Stampa* of Turin published the story, it created a furor in Italy. Anti-French riots erupted in Turin, where the French Consulate was sacked, and in Naples. When word of this reached Washington, the French issued a denial that any offensive statements had been made. Some newsmen speculated that

[47] *Le Temps*, January 2, 1922, 2, January 19, 1922, 1.
[48] Charles À Court Repington, *op. cit.*, pp. 422, 438.
[49] *L'Europe Nouvelle*, March 11, 1922, 292 and the *Literary Digest*, January 28, 1922, 20, include discussions of French propaganda at the Washington Conference.

someone might have mistranslated Briand's observation that the Italian army was being reduced (and hence was in a state of 'decomposition').[50] In any case, the damage was done, and the onus was on a British newspaper for having carried the story first. Only when it became clear that the *Daily Telegraph* had gotten the story from a French correspondent, 'Pertinax' (André Géraud), Editor of the *Echo de Paris*, were the English absolved.[51]

In early January 1922, another affair cropped up to embarrass the French. Some commercial agents of Chita, the pro-Bolshevik Far Eastern Republic, released what they claimed to be documentary evidence of secret agreements between France and Japan. The far Eastern Republic, later to be incorporated into the Soviet Union, was a focal point of Soviet and Japanese pressures in Siberia. France had supported anti-Bolshevik forces in the area, and was accused by Chita of having conspired with Japan to re-establish a monarchical regime in Russia and support one another's positions at the Washington Conference. Before the French had a chance to question the authenticity of Chita's 'documents'—which were spurious—the story was given wide coverage in the United States. Senator Borah said the disclosures seemed to be true because the revelations were 'in keeping with the way such things are done'.[52] *Le Temps* speculated that the Far Eastern agents had fabricated the story in order to strengthen the hand of American isolationists and block passage of the Four Power Pacific Pact.[53]

A more serious incident occurred during the acrimonious debate on submarines which damaged Anglo-French relations at a time when *rapprochement* seemed possible. The British, while pressing for the abolition of submarines, met firm French counter-demands for a large 'defensive' submarine fleet. On December 30 Lord Lee, First Lord of the Admiralty, delivered a blistering attack on France, focussing attention on a series of articles which had appeared in *Revue Maritime* during the previous year. Lee quoted passages from this official French naval journal which appeared to defend wartime German U-Boat tactics. The author, Captain Raoul Castex, had concluded one article: 'After many centuries of effort, thanks to the ingenuity of man, the instrument, the system, the martingale is at hand which will overthrow for good and all the naval power of England.' The harshest British charges against France were apparently justified, and French delegates had to repudiate the statements limply.[54]

Captain Castex had indeed defended the use of submarines in modern

[50] Mark Sullivan, *The Great Adventure at Washington* (Garden City, N.Y., 1922), p. 69.

[51] The British Ambassador in Paris discovered Pertinax's authorship of the story. Pertinax was asked by his government to return to France. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy* (London, 1947), p. 263.

[52] *The Times* (London), January 4, 1922, 9.

[53] *Le Temps*, January 4, 1922, 1.

[54] U.S. Senate, Document No. 126, Vol. 9, 67th Congress, 2nd Session, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament*, 1922, (hereinafter cited as 'S.D. 126'), December 30, 1921, 348–350.

warfare, but he had specifically condemned the way Germany had employed them. Lord Lee had lifted remarks out of context and misrepresented Castex's views. The next issue of *Revue Maritime* to appear claimed that Lee had merely repeated a version of the articles advanced by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* without having read them, an accusation with the ring of truth.[55] Only on January 31, after a delay of several weeks during which the subject was tossed about in public, did Ambassador Jusserand answer Lee's speech and show how Castex had been misquoted.[56] After this, the moralistic tone of the British drive for abolition sounded more hypocritical than ever to the French.

Former President Raymond Poincaré, Briand's critic in the Senate and soon his successor, saw his misgivings about Open Diplomacy confirmed by these events in Washington. He deplored the way the conference had put heads of government in the spotlight as symbols of their nations; the way their words were being pored over carefully and even their silences taken as calculated and meaningful. Once the public seized on some remark—even if, as with Briand's 'insult' of the Italian Army, it was misquoted—the damage could not be undone.[57] Conservatives found other innovations in Washington objectionable. French delegates, in the tradition of old diplomacy which required one to ask for more than was expected, had overstated their naval tonnage demands. This had backfired, and Hughes had wired directly to Briand over the heads of the delegates in order to obtain French accession to the Five Power Treaty. That the new methods of diplomacy seemed to be working against France sealed the case against them.

When Poincaré assumed the premiership in mid-January, *Le Temps* called upon him to reorganize governmental propaganda machinery. The Castex incident and the 'exposés' by Chita had shown that something more than a purely defensive system was needed. France, said *Le Temps*, had to develop the ability to seize on incidents and use them to advantage.[58] This refrain was repeated in later articles and picked up in the Chamber of Deputies. A debate on the Washington treaties in March raised the Castex incident and the weaknesses of French propaganda it demonstrated. One deputy asked why it had taken weeks to rebut Lord Lee's charges, with the facts getting to French delegates so late that the calumny was never erased.[59] A new division of the Service d'Information et de Presse was established in 1922, which met some of these criticisms. It

[55] *Revue Maritime*, February, 1922, 254. The original series of articles by Castex, 'Synthèse de la guerre sous-marine', appeared in January, February, March and April, 1920.

[56] S.D. 126, January 31, 1922, 427–32.

[57] Raymond Poincaré, *Histoire Politique: Chroniques de Quinzaine* (Paris, 1922), IV, pp. 151–2.

[58] *Le Temps*, January 19, 1922, 1.

[59] France, *Journal Officiel*, *loc. cit.*, March 24, 1922, 1096–8.

prepared statistics and other 'background' material for distribution to the foreign press at the request of French officials.[60]

While press coverage of the conference had embarrassed the French, it served the British well. Britain's campaign to abolish submarines can be understood only in terms of the Open Diplomacy which she conducted in Washington. For it was clear from the start that abolition was 'a policy of perfection not very likely to be realized'.[61] Balfour admitted to the Second Plenary Session on November 15 that 'probably the submarine is the defensive weapon, properly used, of the weak, and that it would be impossible, or, if possible, it might well be thought undesirable, to abolish it altogether'.[62] The Director of Plans of the British naval delegation in Washington agreed that abolition or even serious reduction of submarines was 'extremely improbable'.[63] Despite this, the British not only proposed abolition but campaigned actively for it in December.

Hughes felt that a wide public debate on abolition would lessen the chances for acceptance of the naval treaty and he asked Roosevelt to speak to Lord Lee about moderating British demands. But Roosevelt could only report on December 19 that the British were set on the matter and expected to have submarines outlawed by repeated 'hammering'.[64] Lee pressed his case in a long speech before the Committee on the Limitation of Armament on December 22. He argued that the submarine was not a defensive weapon, for although it could prey on merchant ships it was ineffective against warships. The French replied by citing wartime experiences to show that submarines were indeed defensive, and they proposed an increase in the submarine tonnage allotment of the naval treaty.[65] This demand got no support from other delegations, but neither did Britain's drive for abolition.

While the delegates remained unmoved on the submarine issue, the American public was responding—as intended—to Britain's pleas. Senator Borah said that for him the test of the conference's success would be the outlawry of these weapons of destruction. Colonel House agreed that 'submarines must go', in an editorial for the Philadelphia *Ledger* which was applauded by the New York *Herald Tribune* and other journals.[66] By

[60] Ruth Emily McMurry and Muna Lee, *The Cultural Approach* (Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 21, describes the functions of the Service d'Information et de Presse.

[61] This was a conclusion of the Standing Subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence in Preface CID 280-B, October 24, 1921, to the Washington Conference *British Empire Delegation Minutes*, CAB. 30/1/A.

[62] United States, Government Printing Office, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament; Conference de la Limitation des Armements* (Washington, 1922), p. 102.

[63] Note for the First Sea Lord re light craft especially destroyers and submarines, November 11, 1921, Public Record Office ADM 116/2149.

[64] T. Roosevelt, 'Diary', December 19, 1921, 97. Hankey wrote to Lloyd George that Hughes had interceded in order to keep the question from being raised in an open session, where the 'moral position of the United States [might] be put into question'. B.D., 1st ser., XIV, No. 517, 573.

[65] S.D. 126, December 22, 1921, 264–5.

[66] Mark Sullivan, 'Afterthoughts on the Conference', *World's Work*, April, 1922, 589–597, 593.

the end of December the *Daily Chronicle*, Lloyd George's personal sounding board, was calling attention to the way French insistence on a large submarine fleet was drawing world opinion to England's side.[67] On December 29 Sarraut reported that sentiment at the conference was turning against France, with opinion in favor of strict legislation forbidding attacks on commerce and restricting submarine tonnage.[68]

Abolition stood no chance of success, but the anti-submarine campaign was still useful as a way of mobilizing opinion against excessive French demands. The British, therefore, remained active in support of a lost cause. A naval staff report to Balfour early in December had stressed that if submarine tonnage limitation were to be obtained it would have to be 'more by use of public opinion than by technical argument'.[69] By the end of December another tactical reason for continuing the drive for abolition became apparent. The Admiralty objected to the limits set by the Hughes plan on auxiliary surface craft such as cruisers and destroyers (which were used to combat submarines). If submarines and French obstructionism were kept in the headlines, this part of the plan could be shelved quietly. On December 27, the naval staff advised Balfour that 'the plain and logical outcome of [the] failure to secure the abolition of submarines' was that Britain must keep a free hand in anti-submarine warfare.[70]

While Lord Lee raged in public about Captain Castex and the threat posed by a large French submarine fleet, the Admiralty took a much more sanguine view. One naval staff report reasoned that 'if the war is any guide', French and Italian submarines were 'too inefficiently handled to be a serious menace'.[71] Balfour spelled out the strategy at the December 20 meeting of the British Empire Delegation, shortly before Lee made his public appeals. Abolition might be attainable at some future conference, but Balfour said he 'could not get it now'. However, it was still possible 'to secure as great a present limitation as possible, and to gain complete freedom in respect of anti-submarine craft'. The best way to do this was to present the case for abolition 'in a full, well-argued and moderate speech which could be given out for publication'.[72] The emphasis was on the freedom to build surface craft rather than on restricting the French. When a dominion delegate asked during a delegation meeting in January if more could not be done to reduce the size of the French submarine fleet, Lee told him 'that there was very little to be gained by a reduction by France

[67] Quoted in the *New York Times*, December 30, 1921, 1.

[68] Sarraut to Briand, December 29, 1921, D.D.CONF., No. 92, 87.

[69] French and Italian possible attitudes re submarines, December 5, 1921, Public Record Office ADM 116/2149, 38.

[70] Rules for Submarine Warfare Against Merchant Shipping, December 27, 1921, *ibid.*, 63.

[71] December 4, 1921, *ibid.*, 37.

[72] Washington Conference, *British Empire Delegation Minutes*. 62nd Conference, December 20, 1921, CAB. 30/1/A.

from 90,000 to 30,000 tons, and if her allotment was reduced Britain might suffer some restriction of cruisers. This was very undesirable.'[73]

The strategy was a partial success. France would not accede to the agreement on submarine tonnage, and failure here killed the chances of extending the naval treaty to surface auxiliary craft. Britain was able to maintain the large cruiser and destroyer fleet which the Admiralty felt was required by the Empire's long sea lanes and volume of trade. Only in the course of later conferences did Britain's strong objections to enforced equality with the United States in cruisers become a major source of controversy. At Washington, Anglo-American differences over cruisers were almost lost alongside their common opposition to France. The French also made things easier for the Admiralty by failing to ratify the one agreement which the conference did reach on submarines, the Root Resolutions outlawing their use as commerce destroyers. This codification into international law of vague rules governing the conduct of war at sea had been a doubtful proposition from the Admiralty's point of view, but Balfour felt obligated to support resolutions which called attention to the evils of submarine warfare.[74]

Elihu Root described this submarine treaty bearing his name as 'not merely an agreement between governments resulting from diplomatic negotiation', but an appeal to mankind 'to maintain a fundamental rule of morals applied to international conduct'. If the treaty lacked sanctions, he said there was a 'force greater than Governments or than navies, the force of the public opinion of the civilized world which could mete out terrible punishment'.[75] President Harding spoke in a similar vein at the close of the conference, claiming that although he had once advocated armed preparedness, he had come to believe that 'there is a better preparedness in a public mind and world opinion made ready to grant justice precisely as it exacts it'.[76] Exaggerated claims for the power of public opinion and the effectiveness of Open Diplomacy also came from across the Atlantic. Lord Lee said that the Washington Conference had been saved because negotiations were conducted 'face to face where . . . opinions could not be misrepresented one to another or mischief made between us'.[77] Balfour said that Washington had been 'unique in history' and had improved on pre-war machinery for conducting international relations. No existing method of dealing with foreign relations had been destroyed or weakened, he said, but new possibilities had been opened.[78] These comments should be read more as

[73] *Ibid.*, 69th Conference, January 11, 1922, Senator Pearce of Australia was the delegate.

[74] Admiralty objections to the resolutions are explained in Public Record Office ADM 116/2149, 63.

[75] Elihu Root, *Men and Policies: Addresses* (Cambridge, Mass., 1924), p. 462.

[76] S.D. 126, February 6, 1922, 233.

[77] Lord Lee of Fareham, 'The Washington Conference', *United Empire*, June, 1922, XIII, No. 6, p. 383. Remarks delivered in a speech during May, 1922.

[78] Earl of Balfour, *Opinions and Arguments from Speeches and Addresses of the Earl of Balfour* (New York, 1928), pp. 276–7.

attempts to shape the course of events and win approval for the Washington treaties than as balanced and final judgments. Even so, they reveal an optimism which would have been out of place in a later decade.

The conference had taught a lesson about the limitations of Open Diplomacy as well as its advantages. Hughes might have hoped to accomplish something in the plenary sessions, but the cacophony from the galleries forced him to turn these into mere ceremonies after the first session and resort to more traditional procedures. Sir Robert Borden, the Canadian delegate and for a while Secretary to the British Empire Delegation, observed in his report on Washington that 'the rigid method of formal meetings seemed calculated to frustrate or delay agreement', turning what might have been a business-like meeting into a 'debating forum'.[79] Closed sessions were indispensable if delicate negotiations were not to be imperiled by undue or premature publicity. While the public watched the open sessions and waited for reports on committee meetings, the fate of the conference was in fact decided by Hughes, Balfour and Kato in private talks.

The Washington treaties were given an enthusiastic welcome in Britain and were quickly ratified. Lloyd George told the House of Commons that the conference was 'one of the greatest achievements for peace that has ever been registered in the history of this world'. The Labour Party's J. R. Clynes was scarcely less bold in describing it as 'the beginning of conferences leading to definite arrangements . . . founded on the disarmament of the world'.[80] The welter of idealistic expressions used to describe the conference did not obscure the motives of economy which led the way to disarmament. The Geddes Committee judged the Royal Navy to be overmanned and on February 11 recommended the dismissal of 35,000 men and budget cuts of £21 million. Navy men were understandably aroused about this and some were critical of the conference. Admiral Lord Wester-Wemyss wrote an article which blasted the naval treaty and the British Government, so anxious for a 'triumph' that it had sacrificed too much.[81] Admiral Ernle Chatfield, naval delegate at the conference, had not always agreed with his government's views on disarmament, but he felt that the Navy 'might well have done worse. . . . We had successfully resisted efforts to limit our cruiser and destroyer numbers.'[82]

By early 1923 the Washington treaties had been implemented by Britain, Japan and the United States, but were still not ratified by France. It was hard for Englishmen to appreciate the reasons for opposition to the treaties

[79] Canada, *Report of the Canadian Delegate to the Conference on the Limitation of Armament* (Ottawa, 1922), 10–11.

[80] Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), CL, 5, 16.

[81] Lord Wester-Wemyss, 'La Marine et la Conférence de Washington', *La Revue de Paris*, March, 1922, 143–56. The article also appeared in the British *Nineteenth Century and After*.

[82] Lord Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence* (London, 1942), p. 197.

across the Channel. For, as one naval expert put it in the *Fortnightly Review*, France was not called upon to scrap any ships in the near future, and in any case her capital ships were obsolete.[83] French opposition to the work of the conference could not be explained by this kind of reasoning. The treaties raised a question of prestige and for that reason were resented. However, by the time the Washington Conference ended the French public had lost interest in it, and it received little mention in the press.

The articles and pamphlets which did appear in 1922 were unanimous in considering Washington a defeat for France. Naval officers took the lead in condemning the treaties. Admiral Degouy advanced the theory that Ambassador Geddes had told American leaders about British naval plans before the conference, and that France was a victim of this covert planning.[84] Lieutenant-Colonel Reboul wrote that the conference had sidestepped the real problem in the Pacific, China, and had adopted the worthless Four Power Pact in order to permit England to denounce her alliance with Japan.[85] Commandant Vivielle told his countrymen to 'demand our part and proclaim our right to liberty', before discussing ratification, while Vice-Admiral Favereau said that after a victorious war the government had no right to permit such a humiliation to be inflicted on the nation. The damage done was not irreparable, Favereau wrote, for parliament has only to refuse to ratify the Washington treaties.[86] One common thread running through these criticisms of the conference was that the French delegates had committed grave tactical errors which were largely responsible for their 'defeat'.[87]

This emphasis on a failure of tactics served to obscure for a while the policy difference between France and her wartime allies. In early 1922 it was still possible to hope that the international situation was fluid enough to allow clever diplomacy or propaganda to win support for France's policies. The British success at the Washington Conference appeared to be an example of what could be done along these lines. Not only French critics but also Americans testified to the way Balfour and Riddell were able to use press and public opinion to advantage. H. L. Mencken could chide his countrymen for swallowing the British line. 'No American,' he wrote, 'not even any of the American delegates, was able to cope with

[83] Archibald Hurd, 'Is the Washington Naval Treaty Doomed?' *Fortnightly Review*, January 1, 1923, 13–27, 24.

[84] Admiral Degouy, 'Après Washington et après Gênes', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, June 1, 1922, 644.

[85] Lieutenant-Colonel Reboul, *Le Conflit de Pacifique et notre marine de guerre* (Paris, 1922), p. 87.

[86] Vivielle's remarks, quoted in *La Depeche* (Brest), August 2, 1922, 3, were reported by the American Consul in Brest, National Archives 500 A4b/64. Favereau's views are found in his pamphlet, *La Marine Française et la Conférence de Washington* (Angoulême, 1922), p. 1.

[87] The press reports of the British Embassy in Paris comment on this emphasis on 'tactical errors' in French newspapers. Hardinge [Cheetham] to Curzon, February 10, 1922, Public Record Office F.O. 425/389, No. 52.

their propaganda. They not only dominated the conference and pushed through a set of treaties that were extravagantly favorable to England; they even established the doctrine that all opposition to the treaties was immoral!'[88] The French could take such comments seriously and talk about improving their own propaganda machinery while overlooking the basic convergence of interests between Britain and the United States which made Balfour's success possible. Britain's bid for American friendship had been effective because disarmament was a perfect issue on which to base an appeal. It brought together important strands of Anglo-American opinion and the policies of London and Washington.

[88] H. L. Mencken, 'On Being an American', *Prejudice: Third Series* (1922), reprinted in Huntington Cairns, ed., *The American Scene; A Reader* (New York, 1965), pp. 23–4.