LABOUR'S FOREIGN POLICY.
What has been and what might be

BY

H. M. SWANWICK.
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There is no department of politics in which the policy of Labour is more markedly opposed to that of the two older parties than the department of foreign affairs. From its very constitution, we might infer this difference; for the British Labour Party is the only one of the three parties in Parliament which is a member of an International organisation: the Labour and Socialist International.

Sir Austen Chamberlain has explained on more than one occasion that the true Briton abhors a general principle. Even if this be true, it may yet be possible for an eccentric who does happen to be interested in general principles to infer them by observing the long-continued actions and utterances of politicians—even of the most “unprincipled.” They may not themselves be aware of it, but all past Liberal and Conservative Governments have based their foreign policy on the ancient and outworn conception of a world composed of independent, competing, a-moral Sovereign States, which were compelled by the very law of their being to adopt in relation to each other methods essentially those of war. In direct opposition to this ancient conception is the new one, accepted whole-heartedly only by the Labour Party: that of States whose sovereignty is voluntarily limited by the obligations of law, the acceptance of arbitration and the development of co-operation. This conception leads to the adoption of methods of peace.

The development of this co-operative and international view of the relation of States was extended over many decades, and it would be absurd to claim that it has been the discovery of the Socialist Party alone, here, or in any other country. What Socialists may justly claim is that theirs is the political party which has most whole-heartedly adopted and made propaganda not only for this ideal in the abstract, but for the practical measures necessary for its realisation. While in this country Conservatives and Liberals alike do lip-service to the new principles of law, arbitration and co-operation, as laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations, yet many of their past actions have belied these principles. While all parties in this country declare that they stand for peace, only one, the Labour Party, is willing to pay the price of peace.

It cannot be too clearly understood that the two above-mentioned conceptions of the relations of States to each other are
mutually destructive and that, by his timid clinging to indefensible portions of the old conception, Sir Austen Chamberlain has been hindering the development of the new, not only here but—because of the importance of the British Empire—all the world over. The old conception always looked towards war, concerned itself with methods appropriate to war and converted statesmanship into strategy; peace was merely an interval between wars. The new conception looks towards peace, concerns itself with methods appropriate to peace, and puts statesmanship at the service of co-operation.

Effete diplomacy, based on the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of States, gets round the obligations of the League Covenant (which cuts deeply into that doctrine) by every available subterfuge and ingenuity. The letter of the law had not been broken by this Government, but the spirit is being broken most of the time.

It is proposed here to examine very briefly the record of Mr. Baldwin’s third Administration in regard to foreign affairs, and to contrast it with the policy which Labour would have pursued and has declared its intention of pursuing, if returned to power at the General Election.

THE LABOUR PROGRAMME.

I.—Strengthening the League of Nations.

Taking in their order the main points of the foreign policy of the Labour Party, as officially set forth by the Annual Conference, at Birmingham, in October, 1928, we find the first place given to the strengthening of the League of Nations. Obviously, if international co-operation is to take the place of international anarchy based on nationalist exclusiveness, the great organ of international co-operation—the League of Nations—must rely on the passionate loyalty of members and the respect of non-members. It will be possible for the League to resist any formidable outburst of belligerent feeling only when it has attained a secure place in the hearts of the peoples, so that in a clash of loyalties, the greater will overcome the less.

What has been this Government’s record in regard to creating this loyalty to the League? Under Mr. Baldwin’s third administration, Great Britain has (1) not broken the Covenant, (2) paid the assessed contribution to League expenses, (3) sent its Foreign Secretary regularly to attend sessions of the Council and the Assembly. Beyond this, it would be hard to find any direction in which Great Britain has strengthened the League in the course of the last four and a half years. On the other hand, there have been many occasions when our Government has definitely
obstructed the development of the League, and it has on no occasion been the initiator of forward movements, such as the Economic Conference, the Disarmament Conference, or the renunciation of all war.

Among many examples which might be given, the following will illustrate this judgment:—

Alliances. The League Council having the duty of judging impartially between States which are in dispute, it is obvious that no State-member should—in Mr. Wilson’s phrase—“play favourites” with any other State. We should have no alliances, understandings, commitments, or bargains, which might prevent our giving as impartial a judgment in any quarrel as is consistent with human frailty. Yet frequently the language and still more frequently the conduct of our Foreign Secretary have indicated relations, now with France (in regard to Germany and the occupation), now with Spain (in regard to Mosul and a permanent seat on the Council), now with Fascist Italy (in regard to Abyssinia), which suggest, not friendship alone—a wholly admirable state—but a common front against some other Power or Powers.

League Finance. It is obvious that the finances of the League must be subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny and conducted with intelligent economy. They are, as a matter of fact, far more carefully scrutinised by International Committees than are most national budgets, and rightly. But “economy,” does not mean “not spending,” and it should have been anticipated that, as the League grew and developed, the amount of its expenditure would necessarily increase. At the 1928 Assembly, the British delegation, which had been for years past objecting to increased expenditure, proposed to refer back the proposal of the Budget Committee for an increase of 1,500,000 Swiss francs over the previous year’s expenditure of 25,371,244 Swiss francs; this increase was chiefly due to expansion in the work of the International Labour Office (I.L.O.), and to new work recommended by the Economic Conference of 1927. It would have brought the League budget up to £1,070,000, this sum including the work of the Secretariat and its many Committees, the Council and Assembly, the Permanent Court of International Justice, the I.L.O. and its Committees. No one in his senses could deny the world’s crying need for economic co-operation; yet Mr. Godfrey Locker-Lampson was put up to propose a reduction of the estimates by one million francs. It is satisfactory (though humiliating to our national feeling) to record that, in the event, the Assembly actually increased the sum, not by 1,500,000 francs, as originally proposed, but by 1,800,000 francs.

It is well to ask ourselves what proportion of our total expenditure goes to the maintenance of the League, and what we get
in return for it. Great Britain is at present assessed at (roughly) 10 per cent. of the League’s expenditure. Upon the League’s budget for 1929, therefore, we shall pay only £108,000, and even some of this may be returned. Our total national expenditure in 1927 was £838,585,000, and out of this the League receives about one-eighth of a farthing in the pound. If Great Britain derived no direct cash advantage out of this expenditure—ludicrously small as peace insurance, when compared with our expenditure on armaments (£118,600,000 in 1927)—it would still be immensely profitable in indirect ways. But it happens that we have also derived remarkable financial profit, directly. The British loan to Austria of 2½ millions, which was, in 1922 threatened with complete loss through the bankruptcy of that country, has, as a consequence of the League reconstruction scheme, been paying a steady interest of £187,134 yearly; or nearly £80,000 more than our annual contribution for League expenses.*

Such results should not, of course, be anticipated as a necessary consequence of our membership of the League, but they do expose the meanness of the Government’s attitude. Although a Labour Government would certainly not encourage any slackness in League expenditure, we may feel sure it would not starve or cripple work so essential to civilisation.

The Eight Hours’ Convention. The conduct of the Government in regard to this Convention is a crying scandal. It was signed in 1919 at Washington by the British representative. The British Government has postponed ratification from year to year till, in 1926, a Conference of Ministers of Labour from the more important industrial countries in Europe met in London in order to define the terms. Ratification was to follow, but did not. On March 11th, 1929, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland gave to the Governing Body of the I.L.O. a more detailed criticism than his Government had yet published, but he made no constructive proposals. Labour, as usual, stood firm and the representatives of the French and German Governments also opposed the united forces of the Employers, declaring that revision would embarrass them.

Mandates. The conception of the Mandated areas as a “sacred trust of civilisation” is magnificent if honestly held, but repulsive if made a hypocritical cover for annexation or exploitation. The honest conception possesses one guardian in the Mandates Commission of the League, which exists to enquire into the way in which the “sacred trust” is exercised. In September, 1926, the Commission, which has always acted tactfully and discreetly, presented to the Council two requests—one was that cer-

* The figures in this paragraph relating to the Austrian Loan are derived from Headway, November, 1928.
tain questions (covering no new ground, but methodising enquiry) should be permitted, and the other that, under exceptional circumstances, the Commission should be entitled to receive, in person, petitioners from Mandated territories. The whole body of Mandatory Powers on the Council—France, Belgium and the British Empire—rallied to the attack on the Mandates Commissi on, and Sir Austen Chamberlain's rebukes lacked none of the asperity for which he has an unpleasant reputation. He makes no secret of the fact that he dislikes even the very small interference with national sovereignty contained in the Minorities Treaties and the Mandates system.

II.—The Renunciation of War.

The Pact of Paris, commonly known as the Kellogg Pact, was, after sixteen months of negotiations, signed in Paris by the United States, France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, the British Empire, Germany, Italy, Japan and Poland, and was then open to all the nations of the world to sign. By it the signatories (1) renounce war "as an instrument of national policy" (an undertaking which excludes acts of war committed under international authority), and (2) agree that the settlement of disputes "shall never be sought except by pacific means."

This epoch-making declaration was ratified first by the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and then by the United States, after a prolonged debate in the Senate. The British Government, whose loud and interminable trumpeting of the Locarno Treaty has become a subject for derision, has ratified the Pact of Paris without any reference to the House of Commons, on the plea that everybody is agreed about it. Is it not lamentable that the Government, so lavish with pageantry and pomp for militarist or imperialist occasions, should have no public honour to offer this occasion? Is it indeed because we are all agreed? Or is it because the British Government fears some reference to the "understandings" under which we agreed to sign the Pact? These include (1) the maintenance of the "inherent right" of every sovereign State to self-defence and (2) the condition that "there were certain regions, the welfare and integrity of which constituted a special and vital interest for the Empire's peace and safety" and that "the Government accepted the proposed Pact on the distinct understanding that it did not prejudice their freedom of action in that respect."

The Government has not named these regions; they certainly include Egypt (which would prefer the protection of the League lead); possibly a region round the Persian Gulf; conceivably Afghanistan. There is nothing to prevent this "understanding" from being extended to any region we please. On the same
grounds, France might have excluded Belgium, or Poland, or Czechoslovakia; Italy might have excluded Albania, and for the matter of that, so might Yugoslavia; Germany might have excluded Austria. But they did not. And the Covenant of the League provides us with all the safeguards to which we are entitled, for Article XI. declares that—

"Any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations."

It is an indirect but very effectual method of discrediting the League to insist upon a sort of "re-insurance" instead of boldly relying on protecting our legitimate interests in and through the League.

The two "understandings" mentioned by the British Government are not properly called "reservations," and they are not incorporated in the Pact. The Labour Party has therefore formally announced that it repudiates them and proposes to be bound by the strict terms of the Pact itself.

III.—Disarmament.

The third Baldwin Administration has played solemnly farcical variations on the theme of Disarmament. It sent representatives to five sessions of the League Preparatory Commission for a Disarmament Conference, and in 1927, at Geneva, took part in a Naval Disarmament Conference (commonly called the Coolidge Conference) with the United States and Japan; it is difficult to see that it did anything on any of these occasions, or subsequently, except entangle the question further and rouse considerable suspicion of our policy in America, Germany, and even France. In the Preparatory Commission, the British, Japanese and American representatives wished that naval armaments should be limited by categories, but the British and Americans could not agree as to the types of ships and guns to be excluded from limitation and this difference of opinion appeared irreconcilable at the Coolidge Conference. The Americans wished to limit all classes of combatant vessels, including light submarines (peculiarly desired by the French), and 10,000-ton cruisers, armed with 6 to 8 inch guns (peculiarly desired by the British); the British wished to limit ships over 10,000 tons, whether aircraft carriers or cruisers (peculiarly desired by the Americans). The French had presented a scheme for reduction by total tonnage which would have enabled them to have a larger number of the small vessels, submarine and otherwise, which they desire.
When at the Fifth Session of the Preparatory Commission, in March, 1928, the deadlock appeared to be complete all round, Mr. Hugh Gibson (U.S.A.) suggested that various Governments and groups of Governments might try by direct negotiation to eliminate their difficulties. Accordingly, Sir Austen Chamberlain negotiated privately with M. Briand, and between them the two Governments agreed to accept the Anglo-American plan of reduction by categories, but to propose the reduction of the big ships which America wanted and retain the smaller ships which France and Great Britain wanted. As a *quid pro quo*, Great Britain offered to withdraw her opposition to the French claim regarding trained military reserves.

Naturally, when this proposal leaked out through the French Press, Germany, whose trained reserves have been so drastically limited by the Treaty of Versailles, took alarm at the last point. Sir Austen’s telegram in reply to our Minister in Berlin was in the very best style of old diplomacy, for he considered he had reassured Herr Stresemann by explaining that "the text of the compromise" proposed by France and Great Britain referred exclusively to naval limitations, while there was only an "understanding" with France about the withdrawal of our opposition to her mass of trained reserves. Later on, Lord Cushendun, left as caretaker when Sir Austen’s health broke down, actually asserted in a telegram to Washington that it would be a "misapprehension" to represent the arrangement with France as a bargain; it was nothing of the sort; the British Government had quite independently come to the conclusion that "it would be impossible to move the French and the other European Governments" from their position in this matter. In reply to this it is enough to quote the actual text of a note by Sir Austen Chamberlain to Lord Crewe, dated June 26th, 1928, in which, after detailing the naval part of the suggested compromise, he concluded:

"You should add that the adoption of this suggestion, which His Majesty’s Government recognise would be a concession to their views on naval classification, would enable them to meet the French Government by withdrawing their opposition to the French standpoint in regard to army-trained reserves."

The words italicized (by me) plainly show that the proposal was intended to be a bargain: "You roll my naval log and I’ll roll your military log!" We cannot be surprised that Germany was alarmed. Neither can we be surprised that the United States was indignant at the Anglo-French Agreement, which, in the words of the American Ambassador in London, "appears to fulfil none of the conditions which to the American Government seem vital."
Small wonder if it began to be thought that there was some strategical basis for this British complaisance to French submarines and that the frequent revival of the phrase "Anglo-French Entente," even on ministerial lips, alarmed not only America, but all those Europeans who regard strategical alliances as dangerous to the League. More particularly must Germany ask herself how Great Britain is to carry out impartially her guarantee under the Treaty of Locarno, if she has tied herself up in this way to one of the possible disputants. If French and British fleets are to be considered as making one, this Entente is explicable; not otherwise.

Moreover, we induced Germany to sign the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles by the statement that it was "to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations," and it is simply putting our heads in the sand to refuse to see that by their unjustifiable delay in carrying out their side of the undertaking, the victors in the late war are tempting Germany to seize upon every device by which she can protect herself against the militarism to which we refuse to put an end and which is encamped on her very soil.

The fact is that, on this question of disarmament, none of the victor powers have had any policy but that of a scramble to keep as much as they each could. They have consulted their military, naval, air and chemical experts and have attempted to pursue the old policy of "trying to make every tree in the garden taller than every other tree" precisely as if the League of Nations did not exist. It may be said that we are not worse or more foolish than many other Powers, and this would be true if we were not greater than most and therefore more deeply responsible for holding up disarmament. For in a matter like this, it is for the strongest to lead the way.

In contrast with this confused grasping at contradictories the Labour policy is plain. Meaning what it says by "the Renunciation of War," intending to accept All-In-Arbitration, it declares its aim to "abolish the element of force from international relations" and not to rest content "until all nations have mutually agreed to reduce their armaments to the minimum required for maintaining national and international order." It is the only party which could give confidence to the world that it meant what it said in the matter, and its return to power would probably result in the decay of many militarisms in other countries.

IV.—Arbitration.

The "gap" in the Covenant. The Covenant makes it much less easy to wage aggressive war, but such wars are still possible
and it was the intention of the Labour Government in 1924 to render them impossible by continued action with other powers through the celebrated Geneva Protocol. This instrument, unanimously recommended to all the Powers by the Fifth Assembly, would have introduced All-In-Arbitration and have coupled with it a Disarmament Conference to take place in 1925. One of the first acts of the Conservative Government was to reject the Protocol, and it has ever since then firmly rejected pleas for All-In-Arbitration and even the offer of Treaties on the part of such peaceful and non-provocative states as Switzerland, Sweden and Holland.

The General Act. The Ninth Assembly (1928) recommended for signature a treaty called “The General Act for the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes.” In it there is full provision for all varieties of national settlement, but the British Government has received it with marked coldness and obviously intends to do nothing about it. This Act is the positive side of the negative in the Pact of Paris, by which we bind ourselves never to seek the solution of a dispute “except by pacific means.” If we mean this, we must develop the “pacific means” and our refusal to do so bears a, perhaps undeservedly, sinister interpretation; just as many men, who had not cared one way or another about the enfranchisement of women were forced, at last, to ask themselves why, after all, it was being so obstinately opposed. If Great Britain will not sign the General Act, if she will not herself accept the very undertakings which she pressed upon France and Germany and backed by her guarantee in the Treaty of Locarno, will not all her asseverations fail to reassure people who ask why she still keeps ajar the little door of lawlessness leading back to the old European anarchy which was the ultimate cause of the war?

The principles of the General Act have been accepted by the Labour Party and we may feel confident that its signature by Great Britain would be followed by many other signatures and would, as it was intended to do, greatly facilitate the process of Disarmament.

The Optional Clause. When Great Britain became a member of the League, she recognised the League's Permanent Court of International Justice as suitable for the adjudication of certain (legal or justiciable) disputes; but she did not sign the “Optional Clause” of the Statute establishing the Court, by which she would have bound herself (with or without qualifications) to carry such disputes to the Court. As time has gone on, over 26 States-Members have in one form or another accepted the obligations of the “Optional Clause,” including Germany, who signed as
soon as she became a Member in 1926. There is little doubt that, if we signed, the rest of the Members would fall in with us, and the Labour Party has declared its intention of signing, with, possibly, one or two qualifications which would in no way affect the binding nature of the undertaking never to seek the settlement of international disputes except by pacific means.

V.—Economic Co-operation.

It is obvious that so long as States feel there is a danger of war, there will be a tendency to try to be self-sufficient. In the case of Great Britain it is so manifestly impossible that these islands should be self-sufficient that the tendency has been to try to attain self-sufficiency within the Empire, and the struggle for this has been responsible for many of our wars and annexations and for our attitude in regard to sea-power. Once the danger of war were reduced to a minimum by the methods already suggested, we could not only throw down barriers of trade, but we could develop, by means of the League and of all-inclusive organisations of trade and industry outside the League, a degree of economic co-operation which would in time set every man, woman and child beyond the reach of want and out of the power of exploitation. The consumer, as well as the worker, could be protected by international action, if only confidence could be established.

VI.—Publicity.

Open Diplomacy. It will be remembered that when the Labour Government was in office it made a declaration that it would enter into no treaties or agreements without the consent of Parliament, and in 1925 the Labour Party went so far as to pass a resolution that—

"No Treaty or Convention of any kind shall be binding upon this country or will be recognised as such by any future Labour Government until it has been confirmed by Parliament."

On July 11th, 1927, Sir Austen Chamberlain declared that the Government will undertake no future engagements on behalf of our country without submitting those engagements to Parliament and having the approval of Parliament for them."

Nevertheless, Sir Austen's preference for pre-League methods of diplomacy does not diminish. He has used Geneva far more as a meeting-place for private confabulations than for action in and through the League, and he contributed largely to the disastrous failure of the Extraordinary Assembly in March, 1926, when his secret undertakings to France and Spain and Poland
served to encourage the aspirations which prevented the admission of Germany at that time. Again, it was not till the Abyssinian Government appealed to the League that the British people became aware of the mapping out in that country of "Spheres of Influence" between the British and Italian Governments. It is methods such as these that bring us to the edge of an "inevitable war" without our knowing our danger.

It is significant that Sir Austen should have proposed that the League Council should meet only three instead of four times a year on the ground that it has not enough to do. But it is a popular gibe that "the Council touches nothing which it does not adjourn," and this is mainly because anachronistic diplomacy, like that of Sir Austen, cannot bring itself to treat frankly the problems that come before the Council, but prefers the old secret methods, by which all sorts of unavowed pressure can be used.

Espionage. Diplomatic spying and all the shady methods of the Secret Service are not only ineffectual for good, but a positive bar to frankness and understanding. Unavowable shady characters who frequently sell the same valueless "secrets" to a number of mutually hostile gulls and who become expert in manufacturing those which they cannot find, lead by the nose men who should be responsible statesmen; the Foreign Office becomes an appendage of Scotland Yard.

VII.—Political Co-operation.

The kind of co-operation which the Labour Party contemplates is with all Powers all the time, and not with one Power or set of Powers in opposition to another Power or set of Powers; a co-operation which shifts about and has no significance or stability. When Spain failed to get a permanent seat on the League Council, her representative complained openly that she had been ill rewarded for the support she had given to Great Britain over Mosul! We have joined with Fascist Italy in some very queer dealings over Abyssinia (kept secret from Abyssinia as well as from the British people), and, in spite of the admirable reciprocity (on paper) of the Treaty of Locarno, our foreign policy, whether from fear or friendship, leans always to the side of France.

We not only pocketed a share of the French receipts from the invasion of the Ruhr (which we had declared illegal), but to oblige the French Government we continued our occupation of the Cologne area for many months after evacuation was due, according to the Treaty. We do not, or dare not, speak clearly about the total evacuation of the Rhineland, which should have taken place as a consequence of the Locarno Treaty and the entry of Germany into the League of Nations.
In regard to Russia, Conservative policy has led us further and further away from an understanding, has certainly not prevented Bolshevik propaganda, and has lost us many millions of pounds' worth of trade at a time when it was of vital importance to us to extend our commerce. The Arcos raid in 1927 was an outrage which, while it certainly damaged Russia, damaged us at least as much. Undoubtedly one of the first acts of a second Labour Administration would be to resume diplomatic and commercial relations with Russia and settle outstanding differences by Treaty or by arrangement.

The folly of our alienation of America in order to oblige France scarcely needs to be enlarged upon. The United States, by its negotiation of the Pact of Paris, by its signature and ratification, has made the greatest step towards the rest of the world since its repudiation of the Versailles Treaty and its refusal to join the League. It has, in fact made a treaty of eternal peace with all the world, including Russia. It is as difficult for a great Power to be truly international as for a camel to enter the needle's eye, and yet the greatness of the United States, as of the British Empire, depends precisely on whether they can achieve this miracle. For this it is absolutely essential that we should discuss the whole question of the Freedom of the Seas with the United States and come to the only—which is the international—solution: that they shall never be closed by any Power as a matter of national policy. If we do not come to terms with the United States on these lines, nothing is more certain than that it will increase its navy until it is in a position to turn the tables upon us and claim against us the belligerent rights which we claimed in the last war.

Continuity?

Lord Grey of Fallodon last November renewed the plea for continuity of Foreign Policy. But the Labour Party cannot travel the same road as the other two parties. They look back; the Labour Party looks forward.

Lord Grey hoped that Foreign Affairs might not be made an election issue; the Labour Party regards it as one of the most important of all issues and one on which this Government (as well as previous Liberal and Coalition Governments) has gone disastrously wrong.

Lord Grey suggested that the Anglo-French naval agreement had perhaps been an "isolated blunder." Such blunders are too costly and this one was not isolated.

Sir Austen Chamberlain is, in one respect at least, too modest; he has some principles; and he acts on them.

They are not the principles of the Labour Party, and the Labour Party intends to oppose them.
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(To be signed by all Members.)

(Adopted May 23rd, 1919.)

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