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**Commonwealth: Imperialism and Internationalism, 1919-1939**

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**Commonwealth: Imperialism and Internationalism, 1919-1939**

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December, 2012**

## **Dedication**

To my parents, Anne and Steve

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not be possible without the help of many people at the University of Texas. I would like to thank the Department of History at the University of Texas, which provided me with a fellowship that allowed me to conduct research in London, Oxford, and Edinburgh. A.G. Hopkins supervised my work and gave me invaluable advice on my research topic, the state of the field, and my writing. I am indebted for him for his guidance. I would also like to thank William Roger Louis for his comments, his advice on research, his assistance with writing, and for gathering a wonderful community of scholars every Friday for British studies. I greatly appreciate Bruce Hunt for the many discussions we had about my dissertation and for all of the valuable advice he has given me about pursuing history. James Vaughn and R.J.Q. Adams have also taken the time to provide insightful comments on my work, and I thank them. I would like to extend my gratitude towards Marilyn Lehman, the Graduate Coordinator in the history department for being a patient guide to the department and the university's policies and procedures.

I conducted my research at the British National Archives in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Scottish National Archives in Edinburgh, and the Harry Ransome Center at the University of Texas. I greatly appreciate the assistance from the friendly and helpful staff members who made my research easier. I also thank the current Marquess of Lothian for his permission to quote from the papers of Philip Kerr, the eleventh Marquess of Lothian.

The University of Texas has a wonderful community of graduate students who have inspired, encouraged, and helped me to finish this work. In particular, I would like to thank Bob Whitaker, Michael Schmidt, Emily Brownell, Mikki Brock, and Matt Powers, who all took the time to comment on my work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. I could not have completed the dissertation without the warmth and support of my parents, Anne and Steve, my sister and brother-in-law, Elise and Scott, my grandmother, Millie, and my late grandfather, Alex. My parents in particular have given me an endless amount of encouragement, and this work is dedicated to them.

# **Commonwealth: Internationalism and Imperialism, 1919-1932**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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The dissertation places the British Commonwealth of Nations in the context of international organizations in the 1920s and 1930s. British officials and policymakers developed a Commonwealth ideology that recast the Commonwealth as an international organization with close, informal relations. I argue that this ideology remained at the heart of British approaches to foreign relations. British writers and politicians used Commonwealth ideology as a model for international organizations such as the League of Nations. The dissertation also examines the development of the Commonwealth as an international organization. It shows how the Commonwealth became an organization of sovereign nations, but rarely lived up to the close cooperation described by the ideology. The Commonwealth became controversial as British and Dominion governments differed about its nature. The British government argued that the main link was the Crown, while some Dominion governments viewed it as an international organization held together by economic links and the will to cooperate.

The dissertation differs from previous historical accounts by putting the Commonwealth in the context of internationalism. Many scholars have studied the interwar Commonwealth in terms of decolonization. They have measured the amount of independence the Dominions gained from Britain. Scholars of international organizations and globalization have tended to ignore the Commonwealth as an influential international organization. I argue that Commonwealth ideology served as an important British contribution to the development of internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s.

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## A Note on Terminology

The term Commonwealth had several uses during the 1920s and 1930s. British writers on international relations often used the word to describe a popular democratic government. They made references to the American Commonwealth, the French Commonwealth and even ancient Athens, as described by Alfred Zimmern in *The Greek Commonwealth*. British officials in the Colonial and Dominion offices also used the word Commonwealth as shorthand for the Commonwealth of Australia (much like how often they referred to the Union of South Africa as “the Union.”) After the First World War, British writers began to refer to the Empire as the British Commonwealth of Nations. The distinction between Empire and Commonwealth remained unclear. In 1934, the imperialist Philip Kerr wrote to a friend that “We have now reached a point where apparently everybody is agreed that neither the word 'Commonwealth' nor the word 'Empire' mean anything in particular but simply indicates a number of territories which are all in sorts of differing relationships with one another but associated together under the Crown.”

For the sake of clarity, I will draw a distinction between Empire and Commonwealth. I use the term “Commonwealth” to refer specifically to the relationship between Britain and the Dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the Irish Free State. Newfoundland also had Dominion status until 1933. The term emphasizes the Commonwealth as an international organization of sovereign states. I do not include Newfoundland in the Commonwealth or in general descriptions of the

Dominions as a group because it had no international profile. Contemporary writers and officials in the Dominions Office treated Newfoundland similarly. I use the term “Empire” to refer to the entire British Empire including the United Kingdom, the Dominions, India, and all other Crown colonies, dependencies, and territories under the British Crown.

### **ARCHIVAL ABBREVIATIONS**

CP: Lionel Curtis Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford

KP: Arthur Berriedale Keith Papers, University of Edinburgh

LP: Philip Kerr (11<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian) Papers, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh

RTP: Round Table Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford

ZP: Alfred Zimmern Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford

DO/CO: Dominions Office/Colonial Office Documents, British National Archives, London

## Chapter I: Introduction

The British Empire emerged from the First World War with two central problems. In the first place, intellectuals and policymakers were determined to prevent another world war. They turned to international organizations as a way to decrease tensions between nation-states. British internationalists looked to organizations such as the League of Nations to inspire international cooperation and provide arbitration for disputes. In second place, British politicians and officials wanted Britain to remain a world power. British power rested on the strength of its economic might, the Royal Navy, and the British Empire. After the war, however, the Empire had begun to fragment. The Dominions, the self-governing colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa,<sup>1</sup> left the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 with a desire for more autonomy in foreign affairs. Imperialists had feared that Dominion sovereignty could tear the Empire apart. British imperialists struggled to reconcile Dominion autonomy with imperial unity.

The internationalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s provided a potential solution. British writers and politicians recast the British Empire as a new international organization that could accommodate Dominion sovereignty while encouraging its members to collaborate on economic, strategic, and foreign policy. They referred to the

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<sup>1</sup> Newfoundland was also a Dominion, but its government had no ambitions for an independent foreign policy and did not join the League of Nations. The Irish Free State gained Dominion status in 1922 as a result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

relationship between the Dominions and Britain as the Commonwealth of Nations, and the idea of the Commonwealth defined the British approach to international relations during the 1920s and 1930s. The Commonwealth represented a unique British experiment in global government.

British imperialists developed a distinct Commonwealth ideology. They reimagined the British Empire as a political organization that trained colonies for self-government. The Dominions demonstrated the path to sovereignty for all British colonies. Imperialists claimed that Britain and the Dominions could maintain their close imperial ties even as the Dominions became fully independent. Commonwealth ideology held that Britain and the Dominions could maintain an unprecedented level of cooperation among sovereign nations. British adherents to the Commonwealth ideology noted that the Commonwealth formed a natural international community because of its members' shared history, economic and strategic links, similar values, and loyalty to the Crown. They viewed the will to collaborate as the most important aspect of the Commonwealth, however, and exported the idea as a British innovation in international relations.

The Commonwealth addressed Britain's approach to internationalism, imperial unity, and British power after the war. British internationalists offered the Commonwealth as a model for international organizations. They claimed that other nations should aspire to the same close, informal relations as those between Britain and the Dominions. The British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference specifically referred to imperial institutions and Commonwealth ideology in its plans for the League

of Nations. Imperialists, on the other hand, viewed the Commonwealth as the key to the maintenance of imperial unity. They welcomed Dominion sovereignty and portrayed the Commonwealth as a bloc of nations with closely integrated economic and defense policies. The combined resources of the Commonwealth could, in this view, keep up with rising powers such as the United States, the Soviet Union, or an integrated Europe.

The Commonwealth, however, developed along different lines. Dominion governments clashed with Britain and each other about the nature of their sovereignty. The Irish Free State, which became a Dominion under the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, minimized the Crown and other symbols of imperial unity. New Zealand, on the other hand, clung to the Empire and resisted the changes that made the Commonwealth resemble an international organization like the League of Nations. The British and Dominion governments did not form any effective machinery to coordinate their policies. The ambiguous nature of Dominion status confused foreign governments more than it inspired them. Nevertheless, Commonwealth ideology remained at the center of imperial policy. The disagreements with nationalists in the Dominion governments had more to do with the form of association than with the idea of a close-knit international organization. The Commonwealth remained a vital experiment in international government that was just as important in Britain as was the League of Nations.

The interwar Commonwealth has attracted relatively little attention from historians in recent years. The prevailing trend tends to examine it in relation to decolonization, where historians have focused on the extent of Dominion independence from Britain. The approach has had two effects on the study of the Commonwealth.

First, it has tended to emphasize the bilateral relationship between Britain and the Dominions. The focus on Dominion sovereignty has revealed several ways that the Dominions clashed or cooperated with Britain, and has shown how Britain's economic domination undermined outward claims for independence. Secondly, the emphasis on Dominion sovereignty has glossed over the interwar period and focused instead on the new Dominions after the Second World War. In this view, Canada, South Africa, and Ireland's aspirations for sovereignty are important mainly as precedents for India, Pakistan, and Britain's other former colonies.

The Dominions have remained a neglected subject since the 1960 and 1970s. The emphasis on Dominion sovereignty and the bilateral relationship with Britain has led to few works on the history of the Commonwealth as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The two standard accounts are Nicholas Mansergh's *Commonwealth Experience* (1969) and W. David MacIntyre's *Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact 1869-1971* (1977).<sup>3</sup> Both works provide a comprehensive narrative of the development of the Commonwealth until the end of the 1960s, but concentrate more on how the Commonwealth contributed to the transformation of colonies into sovereign states. J.D.B. Miller's *Britain and the Old Dominions* also provides an important study of constitutional issues.<sup>4</sup> The Dominions have become more prominent in recent works that study the British Empire as an

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<sup>2</sup> One notable exception is Margaret Macmillan and Francine McKenzie, *Parties long estranged: Canada and Australia in the twentieth century*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003) which looks specifically at the relationship between Canada and Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth experience*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), W. David MacIntyre, *The Commonwealth: Origins and impact 1869-1971*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> J.D.B. Miller, *Britain and the old Dominions*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

integrated unit. Scholars taking a more holistic look at the Empire have referred to it variously as the “British World” or the “British World-System.”<sup>5</sup> The recent works on the British World have moved away from historians’ focus on area studies.<sup>6</sup>

Amongst Empire and Commonwealth scholars, the 1920s and 1930s have attracted less attention than the years after the Second World War. R.F. Holland’s *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance* has remained the most thorough work on the interwar Commonwealth.<sup>7</sup> Holland makes a compelling argument that Britain and the Dominions had conflicting agendas that prevented the Commonwealth from developing a coherent mission. On the other hand, he also shows how the Commonwealth’s vague pragmatism became its enduring legacy. It developed the flexibility to adapt to new constitutional changes and interpretations that enabled it to survive as other international organizations crumbled. McIntyre’s recent work on the interwar period has unearthed some recently-released documents and provides a valuable reminder that the Commonwealth of the 1920s and 1930s occupied a unique phase.<sup>8</sup>

Recent scholarship on the Dominions has focused on the nature of Dominion independence. A.G. Hopkins, for example, argues that historians should include the

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Buckner and Francis R. Douglas, eds., *Rediscovering the British World*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), John Darwin, *The empire project : the rise and fall of the British world-system, 1830-1970*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See A.G. Hopkins, “Back to the future: from national history to imperial history,” *Past and present*, 164 (Aug. 1999), pp. 198-243 for an essay calling for historians to take a more holistic look at the British Empire.

<sup>7</sup> R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance*, (London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> W. David McIntyre, *The Britannic vision : historians and the making of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1907-48*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also John Darwin “A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics,” in Judith Brown and W. Roger Louis, eds. *Oxford History of the British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 v. 4, pp. 64-88 and Peter Marshall, “The Balfour formula and the evolution of the Commonwealth,” *Round Table*, 90 (2001), pp. 541-553.

Dominions as part of the larger analysis of decolonization after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Constitutional scholars have shown that the laws in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand remained sufficiently vague after the Statute of Westminster to make it difficult to pinpoint when they became independent.<sup>10</sup> Irish scholarship has been a notable exception. Historians have argued about the extent to which Irish Free State governments pushed for greater autonomy within the Commonwealth or treated it as a roadblock towards independence.<sup>11</sup> One of the most fruitful areas of recent Dominion scholarship has investigated the nature of identity. The question of how Dominion citizens reconcile their national and imperial identities has interested imperial scholars since Richard Jebb published *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* in 1905.<sup>12</sup> Historians have discussed the extent to which citizens balanced Dominion citizenship with a broader feeling of

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<sup>9</sup> A.G. Hopkins, "Rethinking decolonization," *Past and present*, 200 (Aug. 2008), pp. 211-247.

<sup>10</sup> W.J. Hudson and M.P. Sharp pose the question of when Australia became independent in W.J. Hudson and M.P. Sharp, *Australian independence: colony to reluctant kingdom*, (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1988). Leslie Zines provides evidence to suggest that British laws enabling meddling in the Dominions technically remained until the mid-1980s. Leslie Zines, *Constitutional change in the Commonwealth: the Commonwealth lectures delivered at the University of Cambridge on 8, 15, and 22 November 1988*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> See D.W. Harkness, *The restless dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-1931*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), Ged Martin, "The Irish Free State and the evolution of the Commonwealth," in Ged Martin and Robert Hyam, eds., *Reappraisals in British imperial history*, (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 201-225, and Donal Lowery, "New Ireland, old empire and the outside world: the strange evolution of a 'dictionary republic,'" in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan, eds. *Ireland, the politics of independence, 1922-49*, (London, Macmillan, 2000), and Deidre McMahon, "Ireland, the empire, and the Commonwealth," in Kevin Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.182-193). Steven Howe, *Ireland and empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) puts Ireland in the context of the British Empire.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Jebb, *Studies in colonial nationalism*, (London: E. Arnold, 1905). See also John Eddy and Deryk Schreuder, *The rise of colonial nationalism*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988) on Jebb. Daniel Gorman's *Imperial citizenship* also provides a good overview. Daniel Gorman, *Imperial citizenship: empire and the question of belonging*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

Britishness, although the work has focused largely on the period before the First World War.<sup>13</sup>

Economic historians have also provided important insights into the relationship between Britain and the Dominions. They have provided compelling evidence that Dominion dependence on British markets and capital often undercut the lofty rhetoric of independence.<sup>14</sup> Imperial trade policies and proposals to use tariffs to encourage trade within the empire remained an important and controversial issue throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>15</sup> The Ottawa Agreements, hailed at the time as a symbol of imperial economic unity, have come under particular scrutiny. Historians analyzing Dominion trade patterns have largely dismissed them as being motivated by panic from the Great Depression and having more political than economic value.<sup>16</sup> Studies of British capital

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<sup>13</sup> The classic work on Canada and imperial citizenship is Carl Berger, *The sense of power: Studies in the ideas of Canadian imperialism, 1867-1914*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1970). For revisionist takes, see Douglas Cole, "The problem of 'nationalism and imperialism' in British settlement colonies" *Journal of British studies*, 10 (1971), pp. 160-82 and Philip Buckner "'The long goodbye: English, Canadians, and the British world,'" in Buckner and Francis eds., *Rediscovering the British world*, pp. 181-208. For Australia, see Deborah Gare, "Britishness in recent Australian historiography," *The Historical Journal*, 43 (Dec., 2000), pp. 1145-1155.

<sup>14</sup> James Belich, for example, argues that New Zealand redesigned its entire economic strategy towards exports to Britain after the advent of refrigerated shipping in James Belich, *Paradise reforged: a history of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). The British market remained vital to the Australian and New Zealand economies well into the 1960s. See John Singleton, *Economic relations between Britain and Australasia, 1945-1970*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Mike Cronin argues that Ireland remained even more economically dependent than either Australasian Dominion on the British market in the 1930s in Mike Cronin, "Golden dreams, harsh realities," in Cronin and Regan, eds., *Politics of independence*, pp. 144-64. See also Ian Drummond, *The floating pound and the sterling area, 1931-1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) for an analysis of monetary policy on the Dominions.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Thompson examines tariff reformers as a pressure group in Britain in Andrew Thompson, *Imperial Britain: the empire in British politics, 1880-1932*, (New York: Longman, 2000). Tariff reform became a central issue in Britain's general election in 1924, and Herbert Samuel led a mass resignation of Liberals from the government in response to the Ottawa Agreements in 1932.

<sup>16</sup> See R.F. Holland, *Commonwealth alliance* and "Imperial collaboration and great depression: Britain, Canada, and the world wheat crisis, 1929-35," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 16 (1988),

investment and monetary policy have provided compelling evidence of British control over Dominion economic policies through loans and the Sterling Bloc.<sup>17</sup>

There are now excellent accounts of the development of the Commonwealth idea and imperial reform. Duncan Bell's *The Idea of Greater Britain* is an impressive history of ideas to reform the British Empire in the nineteenth century that traces the beginning of Commonwealth ideology.<sup>18</sup> The Round Table, an organization founded in 1909 to reform the Empire, has attracted attention from historians.<sup>19</sup> These studies, however, tend to focus on the period just before and during the First World War and highlight the influence of imperial federation. They have convincingly shown how the idea of federalism dominated discussion of imperial reform in that period.<sup>20</sup> The debate over federalism lay dormant after the First World War, when it became clear that Dominion governments would push for sovereignty. Federalism came back into fashion briefly

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pp. 107-127 as well as Tim Rooth "Ottawa and after" in Carl Bridge and Bernard Attard, *Between empire and nation: Australia's external relations from federation to the Second World War*, (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2000), pp. 110-129.

<sup>17</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688-2000* (New York: Longman, 2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). See Kosmas Tsokhas "Dedominionization: The Anglo-Australian Experience, 1939-1945," *The historical journal*, 37 (Dec. 1994), pp. 861-883 and Carl Attard, "Financial Diplomacy" in Bridge and Attard, eds., *Between empire and nation*, pp. 111-32 for an analysis of the Australian case. Tsokhas argues that Australia became more financially independent from Britain during the Second World War

<sup>18</sup> Duncan Bell, *The idea of greater Britain : empire and the future of world order, 1860-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> John Kendle *The Round Table movement and imperial union*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) and Walter Nimocks, *Milner's young men*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968) are overall histories of the Round Table, and Kendle, "The Round Table movement: Lionel Curtis and the formation of the New Zealand groups in 1910," *New Zealand journal of history*, 1 (1967), pp. 33-50 is a look at the Round Table in New Zealand. See also Christopher Rickerd, "Canada, the Round Table and the idea of imperial federation" in Alex May and Andrea Bosco, *The Round Table, The Empire/Commonwealth and British foreign policy*, (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1997), and May, "The London 'Moot', Dominion nationalism, and imperial federation," in *ibid*. Jeannie Morefield connects the Round Table ideology to interests in Ancient Greece in Morefield "'An education to Greece': the Round Table, imperialism, theory, and the uses of history," *History of political thought*, 28 (2007), pp. 328-361.

<sup>20</sup> Kendle, *Federal Britain: a history*, (London: Routledge, 2005) links imperial federation to British ideas about federalizing the home countries as well as federal solutions for Irish home rule.

during the late 1930s with movements for European, Anglo-American, and global federation.<sup>21</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, the dominant idea behind Commonwealth ideology shifted from federalism to internationalism.

Studies of British internationalism or the British connection to the League of Nations have generally ignored the Commonwealth as an intellectual inspiration. E.H. Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis*, written in 1939, has remained an important influence in framing the study of British intellectuals as either utopian internationalists or more hard-headed realists.<sup>22</sup> Historians have recently provided much valuable work on liberal internationalists.<sup>23</sup> Recent scholarship has illuminated the important connection between imperialism and internationalism, particularly in the British case.<sup>24</sup> These works have tended to examine on how attitudes towards colonies in Africa and Asia shaped British internationalism, particularly with reference to the mandates system.<sup>25</sup> The links between

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<sup>21</sup> See Kendle, *Federal Britain*, Andrea Bosco, "Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-40)," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (July, 1988), pp. 465-502 and Richard Mayne and John Pinder with John C. de V. Roberts, *Federal Union: the pioneers*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> E.H. Carr, *The twenty years' crisis: an introduction to the study of international relations*, (London: Macmillan, 1939). See also David Long and Peter Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis: inter-war idealism reassessed*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) for a revisionist view.

<sup>23</sup> Long and Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis* provides good starting points for most of the major British figures. Jeannie Morefield's *Covenants without swords: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005) and "'A liberal in a muddle': Alfred Zimmern on nationality, internationality, and Commonwealth" in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of international relations*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005) are excellent analyses of Zimmern and Gilbert Murray.

<sup>24</sup> David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of international relations*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005 and Philippa Levine, Kevin Grant, and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond sovereignty: British Empire and transnationalism, c. 1880-1950*

<sup>25</sup> See Daniel Gorman, "Liberal internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the mandates system," *Journal of Canadian history*, 40 (2005), pp. 449-77 and Susan Pederson, "The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32. Jahrg., H. 4, Sozialpolitik transnational (Oct. - Dec., 2006), pp. 560-582 on the mandates system. Hobson and Smuts from Imperialism and Internationalism

ideology of the Commonwealth and British approaches towards internationalism remain less apparent.

Historians of the League of Nations have largely ignored the connections between the Commonwealth and the League. Study of the League of Nations has recently undergone a revival as part of a greater scholarly interest in global or transnational studies.<sup>26</sup> Historians searching for the British approach to the League have explained its origins in political ideology.<sup>27</sup> The confluence of imperial reformers, particularly those associated with the Round Table, and the British delegation to the League of Nations Committee at the Paris Peace Conference has largely escaped notice. Mark Mazower is an exception. He argues that the British delegates had more influence on the creation of the League than Woodrow Wilson's American delegation.<sup>28</sup> Mazower emphasizes the importance of Alfred Zimmern and Jan Smuts on the League Committee, and links their ideas about empire to their contributions to the League.

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League," *American historical review*, 112 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1091-1117 highlights recent scholarship on the League of Nations. See also A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002). Frank Trentmann refers to the League as a site for "transnationalism" in "After the nation-state: citizenship, empire, and global coordination in the new internationalism," in Philippa Levine, Kevin Grant, and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond sovereignty: British Empire and transnationalism, c. 1880-1950*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 34-43.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Winkler characterized various internationalisms in his history of the League. George Egerton has suggested that the British League came from a "Conservative internationalism," although this is disputed by Peter Yearwood. Yearwood instead explains the League as a new liberal internationalism that rejected the older conference system. See Henry Winkler, *The League of Nations movement in Great Britain 1914-1919*, Rutgers University Press, 1952, George Egerton, "Conservative internationalism: British approaches to international organisation and the creation of the League of Nations," *Diplomacy and statecraft*, 5 (1994), pp. 1-20, Peter Yearwood, "'On the Safe and Right Lines': The Lloyd George Government and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1916-1918," *The historical journal*, 32 (Mar. 1989), pp. 131-155, and Yearwood, *Guarantee of peace: the League of Nations in British policy 1914-1925*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Gorman also discusses a Labour internationalism in "Liberal internationalism."

<sup>28</sup> Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

The Dominions play a limited role in analyses of interwar British foreign policy. Historians have analyzed their influence on British monetary and trade policy in the 1930s, especially in the context of the failed World Economic Conference in 1933.<sup>29</sup> The Great Depression provided early indications that Britain's imperial obligations clashed with interests on the Continent.<sup>30</sup> The Dominions also occasionally appear in works on appeasement, especially after D.C. Watt suggested that they acted as a pro-appeasement pressure group.<sup>31</sup>

Scholarship on Dominion international relations has illuminated how their nascent foreign policies fit with emerging small nations as well as into grander imperial schemes. Historians studying Ireland in particular have examined how the League provided Free State governments with a way to assert their sovereignty, although recent accounts have

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<sup>29</sup> See Patricia Clavin, "The fetishes of so-called international bankers: central bank co-operation for the World Economic Conference, 1932-3," *Contemporary European History*, 1 (Nov. 1992), pp. 281-311 and Ian Drummond, *The floating pound and the sterling area, 1931-1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> See Robert Boyce, *British capitalism at the crossroads, 1919-1932*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and "Was there a 'British' alternative to the Briand Plan," in Peter Catterall and C.J. Morris, *Britain and the threat to stability in Europe 1918-45*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 17-34.

<sup>31</sup> D.C. Watt, *Personalities and policies; studies in the formulation of British foreign policy in the twentieth century* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1965). Works on appeasement that assess Watt's assertion include Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of illusion: The British government and Germany, 1937-39*, (London: Weiden and Nicholson, 1971) and Ritchie Owendale, *"Appeasement" and the English speaking world*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975). See Deidre McMahon, "Ireland, the Dominions and the Munich Crisis," *Irish Studies in international affairs*, 1 (1979), pp. 30-37 on Ireland and appeasement and John D. Meehan, "Steering Clear of Great Britain: Canada's Debate over Collective Security in the Far Eastern Crisis of 1937," *The international history review*, 25 (Jun. 2003), pp. 253-81 on Canada's relationship to Japanese expansion.

shown how Irish policies could follow Britain and the Commonwealth.<sup>32</sup> These accounts emphasize Dominion independence and decolonization.

The works that best connect imperialism and internationalism examine imperialists who brought their Commonwealth beliefs to bear on their ideas about international affairs. These include figures such as Lionel Curtis, the founder of the Round Table and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), who was never able to accept the end of imperial federation.<sup>33</sup> Philip Kerr, the Marquess of Lothian,<sup>34</sup> has also attracted important scholarly attention. Kerr founded the Round Table, worked as Lloyd George's adviser on foreign policy during the Paris Peace Conference, and served as the Secretary of the Rhodes Trust in the 1920s, Undersecretary of State for India in the 1930s, and British Ambassador to the United States during the fraught early days of the Second World War. Scholarship on Kerr has revealed his influence on imperial reform, Anglo-American relations, and European Federation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations 1919-1946: international relations, diplomacy, and politics*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996) and "Chicanery and candour: the Irish Free State and the Geneva Protocol, 1924-5," *Irish historical studies*, 29 (May, 1995), pp. 371-384, and Lowry, "New Ireland."

<sup>33</sup> See Deborah Lavin, *From empire to international commonwealth: a biography of Lionel Curtis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and "Lionel Curtis and the idea of the Commonwealth" in Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse, eds., *Oxford and the Commonwealth*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 97-112,. See also Daniel Gorman, "Lionel Curtis: imperial citizenship and the quest for unity," *The historian*, 66 (2004), pp. 67-96, and Gerald Stuart-Kennedy, "Political science and political theology: Lionel Curtis, federalism, and India," *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth history*, 24 (1997), pp. 197-217.

<sup>34</sup> Kerr became the 11<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian in 1930 and is referred to as Lord Lothian in all publications from that date. For the sake of continuity, I will refer to him as Philip Kerr throughout.

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Bosco has made the strongest case for Kerr as critical for the development of European federation. See Andrea Bosco, "Lord Lothian and the federalist critique of national sovereignty," in Long and Cain, eds. *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis*, pp. 247-276, "Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-40)," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (July, 1988), pp. 465-502, and Andrea Bosco and Cornelia Navari, *Chatham House and British foreign policy 191-1945: The Royal Institute of International Affairs during the inter-war period*, (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1994). Biographies

Leopold Amery, the Colonial Secretary who founded the Dominions Office and headed it from 1925-1929, became an important figure in the development of the Commonwealth organization, even if it never matched his vision as an economic unit.<sup>36</sup> Alfred Zimmern's ideas that linked the Commonwealth to the League of Nations have also attracted valuable analysis.<sup>37</sup>

My work places the Commonwealth within the context of globalization. Scholars have examined the growth of economic links such as multi-national corporations, cultural exchange, and migration as forces that contributed to globalization.<sup>38</sup> Akira Iriye's studies of international organizations trace the emergence of a global consciousness beyond the borders of the nation-state.<sup>39</sup> Iriye focuses on the growth of international non-governmental organizations as the engines of globalization and argues that they continued to thrive during the 1930s.

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of Kerr include David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the quest of world order*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006) and J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, (London: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>36</sup> See W. Roger Louis, *In the name of God, go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the age of Churchill*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992) and Richard S. Grayson, "Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s," *Twentieth century history*, 20 (2006), pp. 489-515. Amery also left three volumes of memoirs and extensively annotated diaries. See Amery, *My political life*, v. 1-3, (London, Hutchinson, 1953), and Amery, *The Amery diaries*, edited by John Barnes and David Nicholson, v. 1-2 (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> Jeannie Morefield has been the most prolific scholar on Zimmern. See Morefield, *Convenants without swords*, "A Liberal in a muddle," and "An education to Greece." See also J.D.B. Miller, "The Commonwealth and world order: the Zimmern vision and after," *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth history*, 8 (1979), pp. 159-174, G.K. Reating "Globalism, Hegemonism and British Power: J.A. Hobson and Alfred Zimmern reconsidered," *History*, 89 (2004), pp. 381-398, Paul Rich, "Alfred Zimmern's cautious idealism: the League of Nations, international education, and the Commonwealth," in Long and Wilson, *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis*, 79-99.

<sup>38</sup> See David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global transformations: politics, economics and culture*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) and Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*.

<sup>39</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global community: the role of international organizations in the making of the modern world*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

I argue that the Commonwealth is an important agent of global government. Iriye claims that the League of Nations was a harbinger of doom for European empires. He suggests that internationalism inherently opposed imperialism.<sup>40</sup> The Commonwealth, however, emerged from both internationalism and imperialism. British imperialists maintained that the Commonwealth had become an international organization within the British Empire. They created an ideology that described Commonwealth relations as a uniquely close and informal collaboration among sovereign nations. British writers and politicians attempted to export this ideology as a model for international relations. They also assumed that British colonies in Africa and Asia would join the Commonwealth once they gained sovereignty. The British government portrayed the Commonwealth as an experiment in international governance on global scale. British internationalists and imperialists viewed the Commonwealth in international terms. They portrayed it as either a necessary complement or an alternative to the League of Nations.

My approach combines the study of Commonwealth ideology with the politics of Commonwealth relations during the 1920s and 1930s. I concentrate on the papers, correspondence, and publications of imperialists to develop a coherent picture of Commonwealth ideology. The Round Table was the most visible and influential Commonwealth think-tank between 1910 and 1920. It had members in both Britain and the Dominions, and the papers of the organization offer insight into how they organized their “moots,” raised money, and interacted with groups in the Dominions. I also looked at the papers of Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr. Their wide-ranging interests in imperial

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<sup>40</sup> Iriye, “Beyond imperialism: the new internationalism,” *Daedalus*, 134 (Spring 2005), pp. 108-116.

and foreign affairs, as well as their almost evangelical feelings about the Commonwealth, made them important ideological starting points. Alfred Zimmern was another important imperial theorist. By the late 1920s, Zimmern had become the leading advocate of the Commonwealth as an important complement to the League of Nations. His Commonwealth tour after the publication of *The Third British Empire* in 1927 created headlines in the cities he visited. Leopold Amery's diaries, books, and official correspondence as Dominions Secretary revealed an alternative to Zimmern's internationalist vision. Amery promoted the Commonwealth as an integrated economic and political unit that could compete with the American economy and keep Britain out of European affairs.

As shown above, the Round Table, Curtis, Kerr, Zimmern, and Amery have all been the subject of varying amounts of scholarly inquiry. My approach, however, examines them collectively in order to identify a coherent Commonwealth ideology. I focus particularly on how they compared the Commonwealth to other international organizations, especially the League of Nations. This analysis has revealed how the idea of the Commonwealth pervaded British approaches to internationalism. It has allowed me to track how their ideas about the Commonwealth changed in reaction to imperial and international events. The events of the late 1930s, when the League had all but collapsed and world war once again threatened, seemed to calcify imperial reformers' beliefs. Amery viewed the League's failure as proof that Britain had to depend on its Empire. Zimmern proclaimed that the League could save itself only by becoming more like the

Commonwealth. Curtis and Kerr returned to federalism and tried to extend their imperial federation model to the entire world.

I compare Commonwealth ideology to the development of Commonwealth relations in the interwar period. I examine British government records from the Colonial and Dominions offices from roughly 1919 to 1940 in order to gain insight on the inner workings of the Commonwealth. The government records revealed a different Commonwealth from the organization promoted by the Round Table, Curtis, Kerr, Amery, Zimmern and other imperialists. Commonwealth relations were a minefield of myriad constitutional crises, trade disputes, arguments over flags and songs, and, by the late 1930s, threats of secession and neutrality. Dominion politicians quarreled not only with the British government but amongst themselves. New Zealanders, who clung to the Crown and the outward trappings of Empire, could not reconcile their vision of the Commonwealth with Irish representatives who often did not seem to want anything to do with the organization.

Historians have long made use of the Colonial and Dominions Office records to illuminate the relationship between the British and Dominion governments. Some files, particularly those dealing with sensitive Irish issues and a large batch of documents about the 1936 Abdication Crisis, have recently been opened, but scholars have made excellent use of the same records to provide compelling accounts of the interwar Commonwealth.<sup>41</sup> My approach to the Commonwealth as an international institution, however, uses the

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<sup>41</sup> In particular, see Holland, *Commonwealth alliance*, McIntyre, *Britannic vision*, and Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

same records and issues for a different purpose. I track how Commonwealth ideology found its way into official documents and political speeches. The imperialist rhetoric about Commonwealth cooperation remained a staple at imperial conferences. The small coterie of Dominions Office officials remained largely in place throughout the interwar period, and Amery's influence remained strong. I frame the constitutional arguments between the British government and the Dominions in international instead of anti-imperial terms. This shift suggested that Hertzog and de Valera offered an alternative form of the Commonwealth that was more like the League.

I make use of the Arthur Berriedale Keith papers for constitutional questions. Keith was an unusual polymath.<sup>42</sup> He won acclaim as an internationally renowned Sanskrit scholar at the University of Edinburgh. In his spare time, he moonlighted as an unrivaled unofficial expert on Commonwealth constitutional issues. He regularly published thorough, weighty tomes that analyzed changes to Dominion status and published dozens of articles in British newspapers that explained the implications of new laws or constitutional precedents. Government officials bristled when his interpretations clashed with their explanations, but they always took him seriously. His work provides an invaluable commentary on the consequences of Dominion sovereignty.

These books, pamphlets, letters, and government documents show that the Commonwealth had an important place in the British conception of international relations. It had a distinct ideology that was not only about the Empire, but also about

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<sup>42</sup> Keith's biography is Ridgway Shinn, *Arthur Berriedale Keith, 1879-1944 : the chief ornament of Scottish learning*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1990).

international relations. British intellectuals and policymakers turned to the Commonwealth for ideas about how the League should function. At the same time, the Commonwealth developed into more of an international organization in its own right as the Dominions shed imperial vestiges and gained distinct voices in foreign affairs. The interwar Commonwealth was a product of and a contributor to a distinct approach to international affairs in the 1920s and 1930s.

The dissertation examines seven aspects of the Commonwealth in the interwar period. The first three chapters focus on the growth of Commonwealth ideology and its relationship to international organizations. The first chapter traces the emergence of Commonwealth ideology in a movement for imperial reform. It shows how British imperialists had begun to think of ways to accommodate Dominion autonomy without sacrificing imperial unity. The chapter examines plans for imperial federation or a looser association of sovereign states. These ideas for imperial reform called for innovations in global government that transferred to the British approach to the League of Nations. The second chapter examines influence of Commonwealth ideology on the British approach to internationalism and the formation of the League of Nations. The third chapter looks at intellectuals and policymakers who rejected the League. They planned to strengthen links with the Dominions and create a strong British bloc with integrated economic and strategic links.

The next set of chapters contrast Commonwealth ideology with Commonwealth relations. They show that Commonwealth relations were tense and rarely exhibited the type of close collaboration that imperialists claimed. The fourth chapter focuses on the

internationalization of the Commonwealth in the 1920s. The 1926 Imperial Conference accepted Dominion sovereignty, and the Commonwealth began to take on the trappings of an international organization. The fifth chapter examines economic links between Britain and the Dominions. It argues that preferential tariffs became important markers of Commonwealth membership as older imperial links began to fade. This chapter also examines the “economic war” with the Irish Free State. It suggests that the British government used the Free State’s exclusion from the tariff regime to alter its Dominion status. The sixth chapter analyzes Commonwealth ideology in the late 1930s. It shows that imperialists maintained faith in the Commonwealth as a model to the rest of the world as the League crumbled and another European war loomed. It also looks at constitutional crises between Britain and the Dominions as the Irish Free State and South Africa attempted to excise the Crown from their governments. The chapter argues that the nationalist Dominion governments offered a new perspective on the Commonwealth. They based the Commonwealth on voluntary association and economic links rather than the monarchy and imperial sentiment. Their perspective, however, maintained aspects of Commonwealth ideology by accepting the Commonwealth as a site for close international collaboration.

The final chapter returns to the central problem of international government. It traces the movement to create federal unions composed of several nation-states. Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr became involved in this movement. They treated it as an expansion of their imperial federation idea from the early Round Table days and viewed the Commonwealth as an important building block. The federal union movement

revealed an international fear of nation-states as catalysts for war. Curtis and Kerr designed their federation by broadening the notion of the Commonwealth to include countries outside the British orbit such as the United States or the Scandinavian countries. Once again, imperial reformers reached a moment of crisis, when they joined thinkers, writers and politicians to present ways to reshape world order after another gruesome and costly war. They continued to use Commonwealth ideology as the basis of their versions of world order.

## **Chapter II: Imperial Reform**

In the decade leading up to and during the First World War, British imperialists drafted plans for drastic imperial reforms. Specific plans for imperial reform, most notably Lionel Curtis's scheme for a grand imperial federation among Britain and the Dominions, lost steam after the war when Dominion governments sought sovereignty. Imperial reform, however, set important intellectual principles that would inform British internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. First, these reformers reinforced the importance of imperial solidarity, especially against an external threat. Second, imperial reform encouraged ideas about global organizations. These notions of peaceful relations between governments separated by oceans and with vast economic disparities transferred to British conceptions of the League of Nations. The two ideas of imperial solidarity and international organization carried over to the inter-war period as imperialists viewed the rapidly evolving Commonwealth as either a model for international relations or a more secure alternative to the League of Nations and other international organizations.

The roots of imperial reform stretch back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Several important changes during this period brought attention to the Empire. For one, the Empire provided a way for Britain to grow in comparison to competition from vaster countries, especially the United States, Russia, and newly united Germany. Technological innovations in travel and communications had drawn the empire together, and imperialists began to envision a global British polity. Dominion governments grew

more effective and sought more influence over commercial and foreign relations beyond their borders. Imperialists feared that stronger Dominion governments might demand independence; the American Revolutions lingered in their imagination. British imperialists and residents of the Dominions had begun to rethink the Dominions' place in the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> The new imperial spirit of the age was perhaps best captured by historian J.R. Seeley's lectures published in 1883 as *The Expansion of England*. Seeley claimed that the settler colonies were more important for the future of the Empire than dependent colonies, such as India.<sup>2</sup> The Dominions, he argued, fostered the growth of British values such as liberty and representative government, whereas the British governed India as autocrats. For Seeley, the Dominions represented the most dynamic community of Britons in the Empire, and he urged a close relationship with them as a way to fuse British institutions with a New World spirit.

Reformers sought to free the British government from the burden of imperial administration. By the late nineteenth century, many British policymakers became concerned about congestion in parliament, as the single body sought to handle home, foreign, Irish, and imperial affairs.<sup>3</sup> Intellectuals and reformers developed plans revolving around either federation of the nations of the United Kingdom or devolution

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan Bell provides an excellent and detailed account of the intellectual development of the late nineteenth century imperial reform movement. See Duncan Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain: empire and the future of world order, 1860-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> J.R. Seeley, *The expansion of England: two courses of lectures*, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883).

<sup>3</sup> An excellent analysis of the problems of parliamentary congestion in the late nineteenth century can be found in John Kendle, *Federal Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997).

into local parliaments.<sup>4</sup> Some of these plans naturally widened to include the Dominions in a further effort to streamline Parliament.

These concerns coalesced in 1884, when reformers founded the Imperial Federation League to develop a plan to cement the unity of the Empire by creating a federation with the self-governing Dominions. The IFL sprouted chapters in Britain as well as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Barbados and British Guiana, but members could not come to a consensus on a practical plan for their new form of government, and the British chapter folded after a decade. By the turn of the century, interest in imperial federation faded.

In many ways, imperial reform in the early twentieth century mirrored and intensified late nineteenth-century concerns. One of these concerns involved the rise of distinct national identities in the Dominions. Canadians in particular began to reassess their place in the Empire in the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The publication of Richard

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<sup>4</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the federal solution*, (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). As Kendle notes, reformers designed many of these federation or devolution schemes in order to deal with the volatile issue of Irish Home Rule. The debate over Ireland also contributed greatly to parliamentary congestion as Irish MP and nationalist leader Charles Parnell's strategy involved bombarding Parliament with petitions in order to grind it to a halt.

<sup>5</sup> The classic study of Canadian identity in the late nineteenth century comes from Carl Berger, *The sense of power: studies in the ideas of Canadian imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) where he argues that Canadian imperialists sought equality with Britain within the Empire. Douglas Cole challenged this concept of Canadian nationalism by separating Canadian calls for greater autonomy from a pan-British "race patriotism" in his "The problem of 'nationalism' and 'imperialism' in British settlement colonies," in *Journal of British Studies* v. 10, no. 2 (1971), pp. 160-182. More recently, Philip Buckner revisited the subject of Canadian nationalism and imperialism by attempting to downplay the influence of imperial federationists in the late nineteenth century but still identifying a Canadian strain of imperialism in "The long goodbye: English, Canadians, and the British world" in Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, ed., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp. 181-209.

Jebb's *Studies in Colonial Nationalism*<sup>6</sup> in 1905 brought the development of distinct Dominion national identities and the ambitions of Dominion governments to the attention of British readers. Jebb traveled throughout the Dominions in the late nineteenth century, and his work called for imperial reforms to accommodate Dominion demands for a greater voice in the Empire.

Tariff reform became the most controversial imperial issue in Britain in the early twentieth century. Britain's free-trade policy had begun to clash with Dominion protectionism by the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The question of tariff reform gathered more momentum after the turn of the century, when Joseph Chamberlain launched a campaign to make tariff reform the basis of an entire imperial philosophy in 1903. Chamberlain called for preferential tariffs for trade within the Empire. He argued that reform would strengthen imperial economic ties. Chamberlain's campaign for tariff reform became a political controversy; Liberals assailed the policy as a reversal of the free trade that had enabled the British Empire to reach its nineteenth-century heights of global economic dominance, while Conservatives claimed that tariff reform offered the only policy to keep the Empire unified. Tariff reform became a central issue in the 1906 election. Popular free trade sentiment helped the Liberals sweep to an unprecedented landslide victory. The Liberal victory did not discourage tariff reformers. They organized into a persistent interest group through organizations such as the Compatriots'

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Jebb, *Colonial nationalism*, (London: E. Arnold, 1905). John Eddy and Deryck Schreuder discuss the importance of Jebb in Eddy and Schreuder, *The rise of colonial nationalism*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Schreuder, "The making of the ideas of colonial nationalism 1889-1905 in Eddy and Schreuder, *The rise of colonial nationalism*, p. 77.

Club, founded by Chamberlain's most vocal acolyte, Leopold Amery, in 1904.<sup>8</sup> Tariff reform remained the most contentious imperial issue throughout the inter-war period because it intersected with deeply-held political ideologies.

Political developments in the Dominions served as an inspiration for early twentieth-century imperial reformers. Dominion governments turned to federalism in order to organize large, decentralized polities into functional national governments. Canada federated in 1867 and Australia federated in 1900. New Zealand opted out of an offer to join the Australian Commonwealth. The development of the South African Union 1910 had a significant influence on British imperial reformers. One important group of imperial reformers got their start as members of Lord Milner's staff in South Africa at the turn of the century. Members of Milner's team of young administrators included Lionel Curtis, Philip Kerr, John Buchan, Geoffrey Robinson (later Dawson<sup>9</sup>), and Patrick Duncan.<sup>10</sup> Milner wanted Amery for his staff, but Amery declined because of

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<sup>8</sup> Amery later described his feelings about Chamberlain's tariff reform speech as almost a religious conversion, as he wrote in the 1932 introduction to *A plan of action*: "My mind went back to that morning when, [Chamberlain's] speech just read, I walked up and down my room in uncontrollable excitement: The door flung open and in rushed Leo Maxse...For a moment we danced round hand-in-hand before we could even unloose our tongues." Amery, *A plan of action*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932). See Andrew Thompson, *Imperial Britain: the empire in British politics 1880-1932* (New York: Longman, 2000) for an analysis of tariff reformers as a persistent British interest group.

<sup>9</sup> Robinson changed his name to secure an inheritance. Peter Neville, "Geoffrey Dawson," *Oxford history of national biography*, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> This group of young, largely Oxford-affiliated men became known as "Milner's Kindergarten." Their exploits in South Africa are chronicled in Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968) and John Kendle, *The round table and imperial union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975). In addition, the South African experience forms an important part of the early chapters of Deborah Lavin's *From Empire to international Commonwealth: a biography of Lionel Curtis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) and the Philip Kerr biographies *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the quest for world order* (Westport, CT, Praeger Security International, 2006) by David Billington and J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London: Macmillan, 1965). Curtis also published his South African journals as *With Milner in South Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951).

a commitment to writing for *The Times*.<sup>11</sup> The administrators worked to shore up local government and rebuild South Africa's ties to the British Empire in the aftermath of the Anglo-South African War.

The experience of the "kindergarten" in South Africa had an important effect on pre-war imperial reform efforts. First, it brought together a group of idealistic young men under the purview of Milner, one of Britain's most outspoken imperial reformers. Second, it exposed them to life in the Empire. Last, it gave them an opportunity to put theories of government into practice against real problems. Members of the Kindergarten became enamored with F.S. Oliver's biography of Alexander Hamilton, which ended with a case for imperial federation.<sup>12</sup> Curtis and Kerr in particular become lifelong advocates of a federal system of government. Curtis drafted most of the Selborne Memorandum, which outlined a plan for self-government in South Africa in 1907.<sup>13</sup> In 1910, the Union of South Africa attained self-government and Dominion status. The Kindergarten celebrated the successful development of a government that unified both Dutch and English provinces and kept South Africa within the Empire.<sup>14</sup> The South African experience validated their beliefs in shaping government and gave them the confidence to turn their reforming efforts to the Empire as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men*, p. 27

<sup>12</sup> F.S. Oliver, *Alexander Hamilton: an essay on the American Union*, (London: Constable and Co., 1906).

<sup>13</sup> Named after Lord Selborne, Milner's successor as High Commissioner to South Africa who served from 1905-1910.

<sup>14</sup> Nimocks argues that the Kindergarten unjustifiably took credit for the creation of the Union government, instead crediting conciliatory efforts from South African politicians. Nevertheless, he correctly points out that the belief that their theories had successfully developed the South African government inspired the creation of the Round Table. See Nimocks, *Milner's young men*, pp. 121-2

The Kindergarten became the foundation of the Round Table, the preeminent imperial reform organization. In September 1909, a group led by Curtis and Kerr met in a meeting they called a “moot” to discuss the fate of the Empire. They warned that the Empire would fall apart if the Dominions became sovereign nations. Instead, they advocated for the creation of an imperial federation.<sup>15</sup> They held to the principle of “organic union” where all citizens of the Dominions would share responsibility for imperial and foreign affairs.<sup>16</sup> The initial Round Table meetings focused on two goals: the establishment of Round Table groups in the Dominions to provide information and spread the message of their solution to imperial problems, and the development of a coherent philosophy of imperial union. To that end, Curtis and Kerr traveled around the Dominions to meet influential figures and form groups.<sup>17</sup> Around this time, Curtis began drafting the “Green Memorandum,” a statement declaring the need for imperial reform, to circulate among these newly-formed groups for comment.<sup>18</sup> In the Green Memorandum, Curtis argued that the Dominions and Britain were drifting apart, and that imperial citizens faced a choice between separation into weak national states or organic union. Philosophically, he traced the concept of cooperation among national states to Edmund Burke and rejected what he described as Cobdenite attempts to “liquidate Empire.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Minutes for the Moot, Sept. 4-9, 1909, LP, 11

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> John Kandle examined Curtis's trip to New Zealand specifically in “The Round Table movement: Lionel Curtis and the formation of the New Zealand Group in 1910,” *New Zealand Journal of History*, 1 (1967), pp. 33-50.

<sup>18</sup> The Green Memorandum, as well as comments from anonymous members of the various groups, is located in Curtis's papers, CP 156/4.

<sup>19</sup> Green Memorandum, CP 156/4

Instead, the memorandum advocated for an ill-defined type of federal union that would create an Imperial Parliament filled with delegates from Britain and all of the self-governing colonies. Curtis claimed that this Imperial Parliament would solve the problem of parliamentary congestion. More importantly, it would force voters to vote for representatives purely on imperial and foreign policy questions. Curtis argued that, under the current government, local and national issues overshadowed crucial imperial and foreign policy issues in elections in both Britain and the Dominions. Under a federal system, he suggested, the citizens of the Dominions would gain a voice in imperial policy while maintaining complete control over local issues. In addition, the existence of an imperial institution would tax the Dominions in order to pay for what Curtis and his federalist associates saw as their share of the burden of running and defending the Empire.

The Round Table's primary concern in the early years of 1910 and 1911 was to prevent the association of imperial federation with political parties.<sup>20</sup> In particular, this strategy avoided the controversial tariff reform issue that divided Liberals and Conservatives; Amery likened it to staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.<sup>21</sup> This strategy enabled the recruitment of reformers from both sides of the spectrum ranging from tariff-reform advocate Amery to Oxford professor Alfred Zimmern, who attacked Chamberlain and delivered speeches with titles such as "The Seven Deadly Sins

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<sup>20</sup> A statement of purpose for the Round Table emphasized the non-party character of the organization. The statement revealed that most members were Unionists, but also claimed that "some of their best friends are on the Liberal side." RTP 776 See also, Kendle, *The round table movement*, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> Kendle, *The round table movement*, p. 166

of Tariff Reform.”<sup>22</sup> The Round Table also worked to keep imperial federation off the agenda of the 1911 Imperial Conference.<sup>23</sup> Their effort failed when Joseph Ward, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, delivered a speech that called for federation. The speech was, by all accounts, vague and unconvincing, and British Prime Minister H.H. Asquith dismissed it as unrealistic.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Curtis’s influence, the Round Table initially avoided clarion calls for federation. The moot attempted to limit distribution of the Green Memorandum. In early 1911, Richard Jebb published an article that attacked the Round Table for attempting to push a federal union agenda. Curtis complained to a Round Table colleague that Jebb had drawn upon private conversations and unpublished manuscripts before Curtis had an opportunity to fully prepare the Green Memorandum for public consumption.<sup>25</sup> While many of the core Kindergarten members shared a federalist outlook, the group tried to attract imperial reform members of all stripes.

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<sup>22</sup> “The Seven Deadly Sins of Tariff Reform” speech manuscript from circa 1905, ZP 136. In the article, he also attacked the Compatriots Club.

<sup>23</sup> Kendle, *The round table movement*, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> See John Kendle, *The colonial and imperial conferences, 1887-1911*. New Zealand attorney-general J.G. Findlay wrote a fist-hand account of the speech in Findlay, *The imperial conference from within* (London, Constable and Co., Ltd., 1912). He argued that Ward’s scheme received a cool reception because federation raised the volatile issue of tariff reform. According to Kendle, Findlay himself had shown the Green Memorandum to Ward shortly before the conference. Kendle, *Conferences*, p. 172. There is evidence to suggest that the Round Table inner circle knew about Ward’s plan to suggest imperial federation before it happened, as a Round Table memo in preparation for the conference revealed a unified set of objections to the plan. The memo suggested that bringing up federation would force a premature discussion of imperial union, face a hostile audience in Asquith, South African Prime Minister P.W. Botha, and Canadian Premier Wilfred Laurier, and dismissed Ward as a “lightweight” unable to effectively make the case. RTP 776

<sup>25</sup> Curtis to Feetham, April 27, 1911, CP, 2

The Round Table straddled an ambiguous divide between study group and propaganda organization. It had been formed with an agenda. Curtis made it clear that he launched the Round Table with the express idea of creating an activist organization to promote some sort of union.<sup>26</sup> The initial meetings of the Round Table “moot” stressed a federal solution.<sup>27</sup> As the Round table grew beyond the London inner circle, however, some members resisted Curtis's federal schemes. When Curtis published *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, his manifesto for imperial federation, a Round Table member urged him to use his own name:

I feel now, however, that we must take most scrupulous care to prevent the Round Table name—whether on paper or in the minds of people—from being associated with any movement other than one devoted exclusively to search for political truth, and as far as possible removed from anything in the nature of the propaganda of any definite scheme of government.<sup>28</sup>

Historians of the Round Table movement have critiqued the popular view of the group as a monolithic federalist organization,<sup>29</sup> even going far enough to suggest that the London inner circle remained wary of federal solutions.<sup>30</sup> The organization, however, could not break free of its association with imperial federation as long as Curtis had a hand in its

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<sup>26</sup> Round Table statement, RTP 778

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of a meeting at Plas Newydd, Sept. 4-6, 1909. This was the meeting that established the creation of the Round Table. LP 11

<sup>28</sup> Vincent Massey to Curtis, March 2, 1916, RTP 795. Massey was a Canadian Round Table member. He served as the first Canadian representative to the United States and later as the Governor-General.

<sup>29</sup> Kendle, *Round Table*, p. 304

<sup>30</sup> Alex May, “The London 'moot', dominion nationalism, and imperial federation,” in Alex May and Andrea Bosco, eds., *The Empire/Commonwealth and British foreign policy* (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1997).

policy. Alex May describes Curtis as “constitutionally incapable of distinguishing between study and propaganda.”<sup>31</sup>

Federalists and non-federalists in the Round Table all shared a common concern for a unified imperial defense system. The Round Table originated during a naval arms race with Germany and the increasing prospect of European war. The naval rivalry with Germany intensified during the first decade of the twentieth century when a build-up of the German navy rivaled Britain's traditional naval supremacy.<sup>32</sup> The fear of impending conflict with Germany inspired the creation of the Round Table; the Green Memorandum specifically pointed to conflict with Germany as a serious threat to the Empire.<sup>33</sup> The first article published in *The Round Table*, the organization's journal, was an analysis of Anglo-German tensions by Kerr.<sup>34</sup> For the Round Table and other imperial reformers, anxiety over the threat of Germany became tied inexorably to the Empire.

The naval rivalry with Germany assumed imperial dimensions in terms of planning and funding. The Dominions' share of naval expenses remained a controversial imperial issue. In his article, Kerr pointed out the British government's struggle to keep up with Germany on naval spending while facing increasing demands to address social problems.<sup>35</sup> Imperialists argued that the Dominions should contribute to naval expenditures. At an imperial defense conference in 1909, Australian and Canadian

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<sup>31</sup> May, “The London 'moot'”, p. 226

<sup>32</sup> Kendle *Round Table*, p. 109

<sup>33</sup> Green Memorandum CP 156/4

<sup>34</sup> “Anglo-German rivalry,” *The Round Table*, v. 1 (Nov., 1915), pp. 7-40

<sup>35</sup> “Anglo-German rivalry,” *The Round Table*, v. 1 (Nov., 1915), p. 30

representatives offered to create navies controlled by Dominion governments, but the Round Table favored more centralized control. Curtis constructed his Imperial Parliament precisely to enable centralized defense planning. He claimed that the Parliament should determine how much each Dominion should contribute to imperial defense.<sup>36</sup> Kerr accurately summed up the Round Table view of imperial defense with a

*Round Table* article in 1911:

Either the nations of the Empire must agree to co-operate for foreign policy and defence, or they must agree to dissolve the Empire and each assume the responsibility for its own policy and its own defence. There is no third alternative. The present system cannot continue. It neither provides for the safety of the Imperial system as a whole nor for the safety of the Dominions within it. Somehow or other the nations of the Empire must agree upon the interests they are to defend in common and frame a policy towards foreign powers and a system of defence which they are all committed to support, or they will be faced with the necessity of providing by themselves for their own defence.<sup>37</sup>

The Round Table described the rivalry with Germany as a contrast in ideology. On the one hand, Curtis's Round Table model clearly drew on German examples of strength from unification; in the Green Memorandum, for example, he noted that the German Navy had the ability to draw on all component states while British taxpayers alone supported the British Navy that protected the entire Empire.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Round Table writers contrasted British and German values. Kerr compared differences in the German and British national character in his article on the Anglo-German naval rivalry. He claimed that the British valued individual liberty, while Germans favored a

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<sup>36</sup> Green Memorandum, CP 156/4

<sup>37</sup> Kerr, "The new problem of imperial defence," *Round Table*, v. 3 (May, 1911), p. 254

<sup>38</sup> Green Memorandum, CP 156/4

strong state.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he argued that the desire for individual liberty manifested itself in Britain's imperial administration. The Empire aimed to bring law and civilization to backward peoples and pursue a peaceful foreign policy based on enlightened self-interest. In contrast, German (or, as Kerr specified, Prussian) foreign policy rested on aggression and saber-rattling.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Curtis wrote in the Green Memorandum that a British imperial federation would come about through peace, while Germany united through Bismarck's "blood and iron" militarism.<sup>41</sup>

Other observers, however, found more comparisons between the rival powers. For example, J.A. Hobson, the noted journalist, found a sinister note in Curtis's praise of the Empire as a vehicle for the export of British ideals. To Hobson, Curtis's imperial fervor smacked of German *kultur*.<sup>42</sup> Hobson's attacks were especially scathing in 1916, at the height of British anti-German rancor. Despite these critiques, the comparisons with Germany only encouraged imperialists to venerate the Empire as a benign font of liberty. This belief crystallized as a key aspect of the burgeoning Commonwealth ideology.

Imperial reformers described the British Empire as a benign force. For the Round Table in particular, the British Empire fitted into a narrative of the development of

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<sup>39</sup> "Anglo-German rivalry," *The Round Table*, v. 1 (Nov., 1915), pp. 8-15

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Curtis, Green Memorandum, CP 156/4. He also elaborates on this theme in *The problem of the Commonwealth*, contrasting his proposed union of the British Empire with Germany's forced annexations. Curtis, *Problem*, p. 231

<sup>42</sup> Hobson's review of Curtis's *Problem of the Commonwealth* in a 1916 edition of the *Manchester Guardian* provoked a spirited correspondence with Zimmern, who attempted to defend Curtis, as Curtis had already left for India. The Hobson article had stated that Curtis desired to extend British *Kultur* to a world *Kultur*. "I found everywhere the note of assumption that Britain had developed a special genius for government, and that what Lowell called 'the Anglo-Saxon idea' was of universal validity: This may be true, but in the present stage of human affairs it ranks formally with the claim of Prussianism," he wrote to Zimmern. The exchange between Hobson and Zimmern ranged from Sept. 13 to Oct. 9, 1916. RTP 817

democracy begun in ancient Greece. Curtis, Kerr, and many other Round Table members venerated ancient Greece as the font of modern democracy. It is no accident that Alfred Zimmern came into the orbit of the Round Table just before the outbreak of war. His study on Ancient Greece, *The Greek Commonwealth*, published in 1911, lauded Athenian democracy. Zimmern became a leading British scholar of international relations, and his fusion of expertise in both ancient Greece and present-day international relations made him ideally suited to the Round Table. His emphasis on Greek citizen-democracy became influential in Curtis's thinking about imperial citizenship.<sup>43</sup> Curtis often drew parallels between classical and contemporary political situations, for example often comparing the League of Nations to the ineffective League of Delos.

Curtis crafted a historical narrative that promoted the British Empire as the summit of democratic rule. He first published this theory in the privately circulated Round Table studies, then consolidated it into the more widely circulated “Project of a Commonwealth” in 1915, and eventually used it as the basis for the first volume of his masterwork, *Civitas Dei*, in 1934.<sup>44</sup> Curtis charted four distinct phases of democratic government (which he referred to as a Commonwealth): the creation of popular democracy in Greece, the export of these ideals through the Roman Empire, the creation

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<sup>43</sup> Jeanne Morefield explains Zimmern's influence on Curtis and Round Table ideology in Jeanne Morefield, “An education to Greece: The Round Table, imperial theory, and the uses of history,” *History of political thought*, 28:2 (2007), pp. 328-361.

<sup>44</sup> *Civitas Dei*, the three volume work summarizing Curtis's philosophies and advocating in its third volume a federal union of Western democracies beginning with a federal union between the United Kingdom and New Zealand, was published as a single volume as *The Commonwealth of God (World Order in the United States)*. Though Curtis certainly changed his opinion on several issues, most notably on the government of India, by 1934, he maintained a consistent belief in this historical progression that differed little in its major arguments from his first studies begun before the First World War. See Curtis, *World Order*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

of a national Commonwealth in thirteenth-century England via Parliament, and the development of a federal government in the United States. Curtis argued that the British Empire represented the possibility of a new phase of “international Commonwealth” by extending the federal principle to the Dominions. His philosophy said more about contemporary imperialism than history; he confessed to historian W.V. Temperley that he proceeded in “mortal fear of professional historians”<sup>45</sup> (for his part, Curtis referred to himself as a “super-journalist”<sup>46</sup>). Curtis was right; contemporaries attacked his scattered and dogmatic summary of the history of Western civilization when he finally published the first volume of *Civitas Dei* in 1934.<sup>47</sup> Curtis's historical model was too eccentric for other imperialists to adopt in earnest, but it reflected an important shift in how imperialists depicted the Empire. The British Empire became, in their writings, a new form of Empire that promoted self-government and liberty.

The new imperial ideology manifested itself in plans to transform the British Empire into a global government. For Lionel Curtis and his supporters in the Round Table, global government took the form of a federation for Britain and the Dominions. The outbreak of the First World War disrupted the Round Table’s federal studies. Curtis, however, continued to develop his own proposal for a federal Empire, which he

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<sup>45</sup> Curtis to Temperley, Oct. 11, 1937 upon the publication of volume II of *Civitas Dei*. CP 115

<sup>46</sup> Curtis to Kerr, Nov. 13, 1916, CP 163/7

<sup>47</sup> Contemporary reviews included jibes from old Round Table colleague Edward Grigg, whose sympathetic review in the *Observer* (April 1, 1934) nevertheless pointed out that Curtis’s examination of history always mysteriously worked to support his claims. Harold Nicolson found his thesis unconvincing and ill-informed. *The Economist* (July 21, 1934) suggested readers approach the book as mythology rather than history. Curtis's take on religion, however, was more controversial, as he continuously associated Catholicism with papal authoritarianism. Not surprisingly, this aspect of *Civitas Dei* earned him harsh reviews in the Catholic press, especially in Ireland. For reviews of *Civitas Dei*, see CP 151-152.

published as *The Problem of the Commonwealth* in 1916. His plan called for the movement of the Foreign Office, Admiralty, War Office, India Office, and Colonial Office to a specifically imperial branch of government with an imperial parliament and imperial cabinet containing representatives of Britain and the Dominions.<sup>48</sup> These imperial bodies would also have the ability to levy taxes on the United Kingdom and the Dominions in accordance with their population and standards of living. Curtis hoped his parliament would disentangle imperial and foreign affairs from domestic issues, and argued that bringing Dominion voters into the government of the Empire would make them more interested in the Empire. He claimed that federal union could be accomplished without significantly altering Dominion constitutions, but he admitted that it would require serious changes in the constitution of the United Kingdom. Curtis's federal union would strip the British Parliament of its powers to control imperial and foreign affairs. Britain, in this plan, would become a Dominion itself. He called for a convention after the war to give the union a popular mandate.

Curtis's transcontinental federation fitted with his view that good government should evolve into ever-larger federations. In the *Problem of the Commonwealth*, Curtis identified the union of England and Wales with Scotland in 1707 as a precedent for enlarging the British polity. The United States gave him a model for extending democracy across a large geographical area. Dominion federations in Canada and Australia also fit into this pattern. For Curtis, the expansion of a federal electorate over four continents was the next stage in representative government.

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<sup>48</sup> Lionel Curtis, *The problem of the Commonwealth*, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1916).

Curtis's federal schemes attracted criticism outside Britain. Indian publications in particular blanched at the suggestion that representatives from the Dominions would gain a share of control of the Government of India.<sup>49</sup> Indian criticisms stemmed from distrust of the Dominions. Critics characterized the Dominions as ignorant of Indian affairs and reminded readers of the Dominions' discrimination against Indians. Critics in the Dominions took exception to Curtis's taxation schemes. As early as 1913, the *Toronto Star* attacked the Round Table for its secrecy and characterized Curtis's plans to tax the Dominions for imperial defense as the creation of a tributary state.<sup>50</sup> These concerns over taxation continued after the publication of the *Problem*. The *Toronto Star* criticized the book for proposing to take Canadian taxation out of the hands of strictly Canadian institutions.<sup>51</sup> Other Canadians who challenged the financial proposals included Canadian premier Robert Borden and a railroad executive named Zebulon Aikin Lash. Lash argued that the Dominions would oppose direct taxation and cautioned that the dependencies would resent any government that included Dominion control over their affairs.<sup>52</sup>

Other reformers rejected federation as too radical. Their plans advocated for Dominion sovereignty and suggested a close alliance between Britain and the Dominions.

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<sup>49</sup> Curtis acknowledged these criticisms in his 1917 pamphlet, "A letter to the people of India," published in response to a leaked letter to Kerr about Indian self-government. In this pamphlet, Curtis quoted selections from an unspecified Lucknow newspaper that defiantly claimed "We will protest with all our strength and vigour against the over-lordship of the Colonies over us" in an article entitled "Beware of the Round Table. Beware of Curtis." CP 163/8

<sup>50</sup> *Toronto Star*, May 24, 1913, RTP 795

<sup>51</sup> These criticisms are covered in Kendle, *The Round Table*.

<sup>52</sup> Kendle, *Round Table*. Lash's correspondence with Curtis can be found in RTP 841. It was published, along with Curtis's response, as "A Canadian's criticism on 'The Problem of the Commonwealth' and the author's reply thereto."

Amery consistently advocated for closer union without a formal federal structure.<sup>53</sup> He sought to emphasize Dominion equality with Britain by moving Dominion affairs to a new branch of government outside the Colonial Office.<sup>54</sup> Amery based his vision of Empire more on economic integration through tariff reform than on political integration through a federal structure.<sup>55</sup> Richard Jebb also favored Dominion sovereignty, and published *The Britannic Question* as an attack on the Round Table.<sup>56</sup> Jebb criticized federation as an assault on Dominion autonomy and a veiled return to what he referred to as “British ascendancy.”<sup>57</sup> Instead, he recommended creating a “Britannic Alliance,” where Britain and autonomous Dominions would cooperate in economic and strategic matters. He wrote that this sense of cooperation came not from “the compulsive power of a central government” (alluding to federation) but “the conscious sense of mutual living, of which the public policy must always be an expression if the 'unity' is to endure.”<sup>58</sup> Jebb wrote that advances in communications technology made his Britannic Alliance attainable.<sup>59</sup> For Jebb, the Empire could maintain unity without a need for radical constitutional change:

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<sup>53</sup> He reflects on this idea in his autobiography *My political life*, v. 1, (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1953), pp.348-352.

<sup>54</sup> *My political life*, p. 349. Amery followed through on this idea by leading a movement for the creation of the Dominions Office in 1925. He served simultaneously as the head of the Dominions and Colonial Offices until the defeat of the Conservative party in 1929.

<sup>55</sup> *My political life*, p. 349

<sup>56</sup> Richard Jebb, *The Britannic question*, (London: Longmans, 1913). This book came out before the publication of the *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, but Jebb was aware of the general outlines of Curtis's federation schemes.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-94.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

Applying this principle to the case of the Britannic states there is no call for any new imperial government, any dramatic act of constitution-making, or sudden change of any kind. All that is required is the deliberate continuation of developments already well begun on lines which have pointed to a comprehensive and intimate alliance as the future form of Britannic union, with a more fully elaborated Imperial Conference as its organisation.<sup>60</sup>

These ideas from Amery and Jebb provided ways to encourage Dominion autonomy while preserving a broad imperial agenda in matters of economic coordination and defense.

Though imperial reformers disagreed on the future shape of the Empire, concepts such as imperial federation and Britannic Alliance represented attempts to forge a new type of global government. For Curtis and the federalists, the Empire could become a new phase of federal government that expanded the British Empire into a united global polity. For Jebb, Amery, and other like-minded reformers, imperial reform provided an opportunity to recast the Empire as a tightly-knit international organization. This vision of imperial reform encouraged Dominion autonomy and even sovereignty while maintaining close ties to Britain through coordination in economic and defense matters. Both of these plans redefined the concept of Empire itself by downplaying British hegemony.<sup>61</sup> Instead, Empire would become an expression of a new type of relationship among independent nations.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 193

<sup>61</sup> For the non-self-governing parts of the Empire, the idea of Empire changed in a more complicated way. Curtis, for example, advocated transferring UK domination to his new parliament, therefore expanding the metropolis itself to include Dominion delegates. He and other imperialists had begun to characterize imperial control as a form of training for self-government for India, the Crown Colonies, and other dependencies.

The war changed attitudes to the Empire for intellectuals and policy-makers in Britain and the Dominions. For one, it satisfied imperialists' hopes of a united response against Germany. The war aroused imperial patriotism in the Dominions. It also became a testing ground for greater imperial centralization in both military and political efforts. In 1917, Britain and the Dominions took their closest step towards imperial consolidation with the formation of the Imperial War Cabinet, in which Dominion Prime Ministers and the Secretary of State for India joined the British Cabinet to form a consensus on war and peace aims.<sup>62</sup> The British government decided to put off constitutional questions about the status of the Dominions until after the war.<sup>63</sup> The Imperial War Cabinet, however, raised questions about the nature of Imperial organization. After the first session ended in the spring of 1917, Kerr sent a memorandum to Lloyd George about the ramifications of the meetings. He suggested that the government should investigate “incorporating the experiment of the Imperial War Cabinet in the fabric of the Empire itself.”<sup>64</sup> In this memorandum, Kerr noted that the Imperial War Cabinet could not sit continuously, and rejected any notion of the body replacing Dominion Prime Ministers with senior ministers. The Cabinet, he claimed, required Prime Ministers with the ability to make

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<sup>62</sup> A memorandum stated the aims of the Imperial War Cabinet broadly as involving conduct of the war, questions of the peace including thinking up a system of international relations after the war that would allow for peace and not a balance of power, demobilization and general liquidation of the war. LP 669

<sup>63</sup> LP 669. Earlier correspondence with Amery revealed that the prospect of convening the Imperial War Cabinet concerned South African premier P.W. Botha, who sought to avoid discussing inter-imperial commercial relations or the cost of Empire. Amery to Kerr, Feb. 3, 1917, LP 666. Kerr became Lloyd George's private secretary and chief adviser on matters of Foreign Policy when Lloyd George became Prime Minister in 1916. Amery served as the assistant secretary to the war cabinet secretariat until 1919, when he became the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office under Milner.

<sup>64</sup> Minute for Prime Minister, LP 671

decisions without necessarily having to refer to their own national parliaments.<sup>65</sup> Kerr wrote that British and Dominion Prime Ministers should continue to meet and establish the outlines of imperial policy, but he suggested more continuous contact through the Imperial Conference. Lloyd George supported the Imperial Parliament as a way to plan imperial and foreign policy without violating Dominion autonomy. The War Cabinet itself was a constitutional innovation. Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden wrote to Lloyd George that he hoped the meeting of imperial prime ministers would become a “recognised convention.”<sup>66</sup> New Zealand Prime Minister William Massey went further. He wrote to Lloyd George to suggest that the Cabinet laid the ground for further imperial consolidation.<sup>67</sup>

Dominion Prime Ministers also used the Imperial War Cabinet to assert their countries’ autonomy and their status as national leaders. Borden and Billy Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister, insisted on direct official communication with the British Prime Minister. They wanted their status to reflect the prestige of their offices and experience setting imperial policy alongside the highest levels of British government.<sup>68</sup> Traditionally, Dominion Prime Ministers communicated with the UK Prime Minister through the Colonial Office. Amery, for his part, encouraged this advance in Dominion sovereignty. He wrote to Lloyd George that the Dominion Prime Ministers had earned a “definite right to communicate direct with you as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

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<sup>65</sup> Minute for Prime Minister, LP 671

<sup>66</sup> Borden to Lloyd George, April 30, 1917, LP 672

<sup>67</sup> Massey to Lloyd George, May 24, 1917, LP 672

<sup>68</sup> Borden to Lloyd George, June 28, 1918. LP 679-80

and through the Secretariat with their colleagues in the Imperial Cabinet.”<sup>69</sup> Some Dominion officials, however, hoped to maintain an imperial connection more intimate than an alliance of sovereign states. Loring Christie, a Canadian Round Table member working as a legal advisor to the Canadian Department of External Affairs, wrote a memorandum encouraging imperial collaboration:

This is a more intimate association than an Alliance and suggests that the analogy to an Alliance in respect of the processes of consultation and concerted action may and should be modified in the direction of freer and more open communication, franker negotiation, less reserve, and an almost complete mutual confidence as to all information.<sup>70</sup>

In the context of the end of war and looming peace, however, the definite shape of the Empire in the coming years remained a mystery.

The Imperial War Cabinet ended any hope for imperial federation. It affirmed the victory of sovereignty over federation in the dispute over imperial reform. Nevertheless, the existence of both camps of imperial reformers remained critical in the development of British imperial and international policy from 1910 through the end of the war.

Imperial reform informed British views on global government. The Empire served as a test case for experiments in various forms of international government, whether through federal consolidation or the development of a closer form of alliance. Ideas for imperial reform coincided with a worldwide campaign to reinvent international relations with new organizations. British thinkers had already gained experience discussing the merits of global parliaments, conventions, and other institutions under the

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<sup>69</sup> Amery to Lloyd George, July 9, 1918

<sup>70</sup> L.C. Christie, “Notes on possible further machinery for promoting more effective inter-imp communications”, July 16, 1918, LP 686.

auspices of the Empire. When the creation of a League of Nations became an important aspect of the peace settlement, British delegates drew from imperial reform; the ideas that British imperial reformers had developed about the relationship among the United Kingdom and the Dominions translated directly into how British policymakers viewed the League of Nations. Experience in various imperial institutions from the Imperial Conference to the Imperial War Cabinet gave British policymakers confidence in global institutions promoting international cooperation.

At the same time, imperialists found that the war reinforced Britain and the Dominions' common interests. The war confirmed the importance of imperial participation in British wars and strengthened support for "racial" solidarity of Britain with its Dominions.<sup>71</sup> For these imperial thinkers, the primary function of imperial reform was to provide an effective counter to the threat of Germany. These imperialists hoped to foster Dominion sovereignty while maintaining the Empire as a distinctly British bloc. The war, for these imperialists, had shown the dangers of involvement with European politics. They sought to build the Empire into a self-sustaining group of nations that could become free from European entanglements.

Imperial reform became a pervasive influence on British internationalism. Imperial reformers took their experience of designing organizations to facilitate cooperation throughout the Empire to Geneva. At the same time, the belief in the Empire

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<sup>71</sup> Racial in the nineteenth century sense of a "British race." Contemporary usage included encouraging the Dominions to draw immigrants from "British stock," and discussed conflicts between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans as a "racial problem." See Cole for an analysis of British "race patriotism" in Canada.

as a way of maintaining Britain's role as a global power remained as important as ever. These two goals created an ideology that promoted the Commonwealth as an organization devoted to a uniquely close kind of cooperation. Imperial reformers, and particularly the Round Table, had close allies in the highest levels of British government. The Commonwealth ideology lay at the center of British approaches to imperial and international relations in the 1920s and 1930s.

### **Chapter III: Internationalism and Imperialism**

Imperial reform contributed to a unique form of British internationalism in the early 1920s. The Paris Peace Conference gave internationalists an opportunity to discuss the creation of a new organization based on closer cooperation. At the same time, Dominion governments used the Peace Conference to increase their autonomy from Britain and sought international recognition of their more independent status. These two imperial events had an important effect on British internationalism. Greater Dominion autonomy encouraged British delegates to claim that the British Empire now functioned as an organization of closely integrated nations. They began to refer to the British Empire as a Commonwealth of Nations, and they began to describe Commonwealth relations as a new approach to international relations. British delegates to the Peace Conference used the Commonwealth as a model for the League. The Peace Conference therefore wedded imperial reform ideology to internationalism. British internationalists and imperialists made the Commonwealth into an international organization and almost immediately began to offer it as an example to the rest of the world.

The influence of imperial reform on British internationalism manifested itself in two ways. First, imperial reform ideology created an organizational model for the League of Nations that differed from official American and French approaches to the League at the Peace Conference. Imperial reformers, especially those from the Round Table group, held important roles in the British delegation to the committee shaping the

League of Nations. These reformers made explicit references to the British Empire in their proposals. They also attempted to instill the same spirit of informal cooperation they claimed characterized the relationship between Britain and the Dominions. Second, British imperialists used British management of colonies and dependencies as an example of the administration of mandates. They insisted on the moral superiority of British colonial management and recast colonial administration as training for self-government that lined up with the internationalist concept of trusteeship. As a consequence, imperial reformers broadened the Commonwealth banner to include, one day, self-governing Asian and African territories, albeit with the reservation that these territories would not gain autonomy until far into the future.

Internationalist rhetoric and the experience of Dominion statesmen at the Peace Conference and the League encouraged the development of the Commonwealth as an international organization in its own right. Growing Dominion autonomy in foreign affairs raised questions about the relationship between the Commonwealth and the League of Nations. Some Imperial reformers remained skeptical of the League. Reformers such as Leopold Amery, Philip Kerr, and Lionel Curtis worried that it could compete with the Commonwealth for Dominion loyalty. For internationalists, such as Alfred Zimmern, however, the League and Commonwealth were complementary organizations with a shared mission to promote international understanding. Zimmern argued that the League could ease Commonwealth tensions; he suggested that shared international obligations under the League would replace policies such as imperial

defense. He also used the Commonwealth as a moral example for the League, especially in promoting inter-racial understanding.

Commonwealth ideology masked real conflicts between Britain and the Dominions. British delegates to the Peace Conference and the League of Nations grew frustrated as Dominion delegates appeared mainly interested in asserting their own sovereignty. Dominion interests occasionally clashed with British interests, and Dominion representation in the League mystified delegates from other nations, especially the United States. Despite these disagreements, however, the influence of imperial reform on British internationalism remained a real force. British imperial reformers clearly drew on their imperial ideal as a model for international relations regardless of the contentious reality.

Scholars have tended to overlook the influence of Commonwealth ideology on the formation of the League of Nations. Historians have offered excellent and detailed analyses of British approaches to the League of Nations, but often portray the philosophical roots of the League in the Concert of Europe and Wilsonian internationalism.<sup>1</sup> They effectively reveal how the Dominions limited British action in foreign and League policy. This chapter argues that ideas about the British Empire

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<sup>1</sup> These works include Henry Winkler, *The League of Nations movement in Great Britain 1914-1919* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1952); George Egerton, *Great Britain and the creation of the League of Nations*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 135-7 and “Conservative internationalism: British approaches to international organisation and the creation of the League of Nations,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 5:1 (1994), pp. 1-20; Peter Yearwood “‘On the safe and right lines’: the Lloyd George government and the origins of the League of Nations 1916-1918,” *The historical journal*, 32:1, (1989), pp. 131-155, and *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914-1925*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

became an equally important pillar of the British approach to the League and internationalism after the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

## **A BRITISH INTERNATIONALISM**

Western governments began to consider internationalist principles largely as a consequence of the failure to prevent war in 1914. The idea of preserving peace through international bodies dates from the mid-nineteenth century, but these organizations failed to take hold with governments in Europe and the United States.<sup>3</sup> The Hague Conferences of 1898 and 1907 provided an influential framework for a series of treaties governing international relations and arbitration of disputes. Later internationalists, however, viewed them as ineffective. Alfred Zimmern wrote that “nothing whatever was achieved, save the expression of pious hopes” at the 1898 Conference.<sup>4</sup> Zimmern did credit the Hague Conferences with introducing mediation by a disinterested third party as a way to resolve disputes between nations. He even suggested that the Hague Conventions and Concert systems provided enough existing machinery to prevent the outbreak of war in 1914, had Austria and Serbia accepted mediation from Great Britain and the United

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Mazower also makes this argument in *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Mazower argues that British ideas from thinkers like Zimmern and Smuts were more influential in the creation of the League of Nations than Wilsonian ideas. Paul Rich, “Alfred Zimmern's cautious idealism,” in Peter Wilson and David Long, eds., *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis: interwar idealism reassessed*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) links Zimmern to internationalism.

<sup>3</sup> See W.H. van der Linden, *The international peace movement, 1815-1874* and David Nicholls, “Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848-1853,” *Journal of British Studies*, 30:4, (1991), pp. 351-376.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Zimmern, *The League of nations and the rule of law*, 1936, 104

States.<sup>5</sup> For Zimmern, the central problem of the Hague System was not its legal foundations but its lack of a spirit of international cooperation. Zimmern's criticisms of the pre-war conference system illuminated his own goals for inter-war internationalism. He envisioned a League that would create a legal system of international mediation and also foster a spirit of international collaboration and cooperation that would eliminate the possibility of war among states. He and other British internationalists found a model for these types of relations in the evolving Commonwealth of Nations.

Intellectuals and policymakers across the world devised various international organizations to prevent the outbreak of another war. They differed on structure, policy, and even on the purpose of these proposed international organizations. War-time internationalism therefore remained a broad concept. Instead, it is more useful to describe the wartime atmosphere as nurturing various internationalisms that collided at the Paris Peace Conference. Zimmern described the drafting of the League of Nations Covenant as the convergence of British, American (specifically Wilsonian), and French conceptions of the League and internationalism.<sup>6</sup> Zimmern's national categories obscure the more nuanced conceptions of the League in each country,<sup>7</sup> but reflect his perception of each government's approach to the League. Zimmern's national categories, however, illustrated the diversity of internationalism and highlighted the importance of the Commonwealth in the strand of internationalism adopted by the British government.

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<sup>5</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 117-118

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 238

<sup>7</sup> Henry Winkler's *The League of Nations movement in Great Britain, 1914-1919*, for example, illuminates the diverse strands of internationalism in Britain alone.

The American government initially focused on developing methods of arbitration. William Howard Taft championed this philosophy; as President, he successfully sponsored arbitration treaties with Britain and France.<sup>8</sup> In 1915, Taft became president of the League to Enforce Peace, a new American organization aimed at preventing another world war. The LEP aimed to create an international council of arbitration backed by economic and military sanctions from all participating states.<sup>9</sup> It combined Taft's arbitration concept with Harvard President Abbott Lawrence Lowell's notion of "peace by force." Lowell proclaimed at the convention to launch the organization that "the only way to meet force is with force."<sup>10</sup> The resolution also proposed a vague series of meetings, suggesting that conferences of powers should meet "from time to time."<sup>11</sup> The League to Enforce Peace grew out of the Hague Conference system. It combined pre-war international machinery with an urgent demand for peace. Zimmern characterized the LEP as "a sort of fire brigade, an emergency arrangement to be prepared beforehand in view of the next crisis."<sup>12</sup>

The other major American interpretation came from Woodrow Wilson. Wilson made the concept of a "general association of nations" his fourteenth point in his speech to Congress in January 1918. The Wilsonian model differed from the League to Enforce Peace. Zimmern traced the origins of Wilson's idea of the League to the Monroe

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<sup>8</sup> See Zimmern, *League*, 119-127. Zimmern attacked the Taft treaties as riddled with so many reservations as to render them ineffective.

<sup>9</sup> The Resolution of the League to Enforce Peace can be found in the article "League to Enforce Peace is Launched," *New York Times*, June 18, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> "League to Enforce Peace is launched," *New York Times*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 162

Doctrine and an attempted Pan-American Pact based on mutual guarantees of territorial integrity and peace between the United States and states in Latin America.<sup>13</sup> According to Edward House, Wilson's principal adviser on the League of Nations, Wilson did not seriously consider the LEP plans.<sup>14</sup> Zimmern described the Wilsonian proposal as an interdependent co-equal community of nations instead of a set of alliances within a precarious balance of power. Zimmern viewed Wilson's proposal as “the appeal to the conscience of the plain people against the evil practices of their rulers,” and cast Wilson in the role of a minister preaching to a “body of apostles.”<sup>15</sup> The notion of mutual guarantees of territory remained a central plank of Wilson's idea of the League.

The French delegation to the League stressed the use of international force. In 1917, an official French Committee led by Léon Bourgeois drafted a report on the League of Nations. The report provided for the creation of an international tribunal backed by the enforcement of sanctions, including an international General Staff to coordinate military action.<sup>16</sup> Zimmern, as was his tendency, interpreted this plan with an analysis of “French thinking,” arguing that this notion was “an extension to the world-community of Rousseau's Committee of Public Safety.”<sup>17</sup> He claimed that the plan tended towards world government, which clashed with Wilson's Southern Democrat

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-218

<sup>14</sup> House, quoted in *Ibid.*, 220

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-2

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 188

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 248

ideology.<sup>18</sup> The Bourgeois Committee's proposals also suggested more practical concerns beyond Zimmern's interpretation of their philosophical pedigree. The French government intended to marshal international military support through collective security.<sup>19</sup>

British internationalism developed several strands before the government arrived at an official line. Internationalist organizations sprang up soon after the war began. The Union of Democratic Control formed in September 1914 to advocate a peace settlement stressing international cooperation and disarmament.<sup>20</sup> James Bryce, the former British Ambassador to the United States, formed a group in 1915 to discuss the shape of international relations after the war. The Bryce group, along with the public League of Nations Society, proceeded along similar lines as the American League to Enforce Peace.<sup>21</sup> Bryce advocated working in parallel with the American organization, and the group developed plans for a system of treaties to preserve peace. The Bryce group offered improvements to the Hague system.

Another strain of British internationalism came from the Fabian movement. The Fabian proposals, first outlined by Leonard Woolf in 1915, lauded the value of

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<sup>18</sup> "To World-opinion he [Wilson] was prepared to appeal," Zimmern wrote. "But World-government was a conception that no Virginian could entertain," Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 249.

<sup>19</sup> This attempt to create an international army nearly ran at cross-purposes with French security needs during the drafting of the Covenant. According to George Egerton, British representative Robert Cecil threatened the French delegation to drop their demands for an international general staff or risk losing the military support of Britain and the United States, claiming that the League "was their only means of getting the assistance of America and England, and if they destroyed it, they would be left without an ally in the world." Cecil did not receive official authorization for this stance. See George Egerton, *Great Britain and the creation of the League of Nations*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 135-7.

<sup>20</sup> Egerton, 1-7

<sup>21</sup> Winkler, 16-17

international cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Zimmern described the origins of the Fabian approach to internationalism in the Universal Postal Union.<sup>23</sup> He linked the idea to Fabian approaches to municipal government; they hoped to grow internationalism from the a Postal Union Conference in the same way that they hoped that gas and water socialism for cities would serve as a starting point for spreading socialist ideals on a larger scale.<sup>24</sup> Other intellectuals associated with the Fabians agitated for a more strident form of international government. Journalists John Atkinson Hobson (who sparred with Zimmern over Curtis's federation scheme) and Henry Noel Brailsford saw international government as a way to curtail economic disputes, which they saw as the root cause of wars. Novelist H.G. Wells agitated for a wide-ranging international government far more powerful than the diplomatic system developed by the Bryce Group.<sup>25</sup>

By 1918, the British government began to work out its official proposals for a League of Nations. Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour put together a committee headed by Walter Phillimore, a judge considered an authority on international law.<sup>26</sup> The Committee's report, known as the Phillimore Report, proposed a system of international

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard Woolf, *International government*, (New York: Brentano's, 1916), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Woolf prepared the book as a report for the Fabian Research Council. See also, Winkler, 10

<sup>23</sup> Zimmern, *League*, 170

<sup>24</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 170-1. Winkler echoes this idea, suggesting that the Fabian plan sought a league that would pave the way for supernational legislation. Robert Parker, Baron Parker of Waddington, dismissed the Fabian scheme as “gas and water internationalism.” See Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 176-7

<sup>25</sup> See Winkler, Chapter II, pp. 28-49 for more detailed analysis of these plans. Winkler draws from Hobson's 1915 *Towards international government*, Brailsford's *A league of nations*, and a number of Wells publications beginning with *What is coming?*

<sup>26</sup> Winkler, 179

arbitration to delay war between disputing nations.<sup>27</sup> The Phillimore Report created a rift among foreign policy intellectuals who viewed it as a recapitulation of the stale “old diplomacy” that created the treaty system that failed to prevent war in 1914.<sup>28</sup> Zimmern dismissed the Phillimore plan as “an unsatisfactory hybrid” that based on alliances instead of a true league.<sup>29</sup> The Round Table also furnished dissenters. Philip Kerr was working at the time as a policy adviser for Lloyd George on foreign relations. He called for a “new diplomacy” animated by moral force and an international organization devoted to finding common ground on thorny issues such as disarmament, colonies, and economic conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Zimmern also contributed to the British official approach to the League. In November 1918, he prepared a memorandum for Robert Cecil’s League of Nations committee.<sup>31</sup> Zimmern’s proposals drew on the Phillimore plan, but focused on creating an “inter-state body” that would meet regularly.<sup>32</sup> The plan called for the development of a standing council of Foreign Secretaries for the Great Powers (Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, with Germany and Russia eventually joining after they established stable

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<sup>27</sup> Winker, 238-9. The Phillimore Plan is available in full in David Hunter Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928), v. 2, pp. 3-6.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Yearwood, “On the Safe and Right Lines’: The Lloyd George Government and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1916-1918,” *The Historical Journal*, 32:1 (1989), p. 144

<sup>29</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 180

<sup>30</sup> Yearwood, 144. See also, George Egerton, “Conservative internationalism,” in which he argues that the Maurice Hankey’s and Philip Kerr’s plans for the League of Nations differed markedly from those of internationalists like Cecil and Gilbert Murray as a supplement to British diplomatic tradition instead of a radical replacement. Yearwood disagrees that the schism between these two versions of the league existed. See Yearwood, *Guarantee of peace*.

<sup>31</sup> Cecil resigned as the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the Lloyd George Government in November 1918 in protest of the disestablishment of the Welsh church. He was appointed the British adviser on the League of Nations to the peace conference at Versailles by January 1919.

<sup>32</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations*, 190.

governments).<sup>33</sup> It included a meeting of the Secretaries of all of the signatory powers every four to five years.<sup>34</sup> In essence, he envisioned a two-tiered international body, with the Great Powers serving as “a sort of executive committee of the whole body of sovereign States.”<sup>35</sup> Zimmern, however, had more in mind than treaties and arbitration. He proposed the development of international administrative bodies to coordinate global concerns such as transportation and public health.<sup>36</sup> He described his vision for an international body as an improved Concert of Europe.<sup>37</sup> The memorandum reflected his vision of League that would encourage international cooperation and collaboration. Cecil used the Zimmern memorandum as the basis for his plan, which formed a cornerstone of official British League policy.<sup>38</sup>

Jan Christiaan Smuts, the South African general of British forces in East Africa and South African Defense Minister, popularized the British proposals.<sup>39</sup> Smuts first published *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion* in December 1918.<sup>40</sup> Like

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<sup>33</sup> “A memorandum prepared for the consideration of the British government in connexion with the forthcoming peace settlement,” available in *ibid.*, pp. 196-208.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 191

<sup>38</sup> George Egerton argues that, in December of 1918, “The Cecil Plan can be taken as representative of the mainstream of Foreign Office thinking on the league question.” Egerton, 100. The plan was also circulated to the American delegation before the beginning of the peace conference. Winkler confirms the importance by citing a letter from Philip Noel Baker who wrote that the Memorandum “became a standard work of reference for the League of Nations Section of the British delegation to the Peace Conference, and was much used by Lord Cecil, Sir Cecil Hurst, and other members of the Section, who prepared the Covenant,” note 35, pp. 247-8

<sup>39</sup> Smuts would become Prime Minister of South Africa in 1919

<sup>40</sup> Jan Christiaan Smuts, *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion*, (New York: The Nation Press, 1919).

Zimmern, he advocated a two-tiered League. Most power would reside within a council consisting of representatives of the Great Powers (Britain, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, and, eventually, Germany) as well as two rotating seats from other nations. One of these seats would come from what he called “intermediate powers” (smaller European countries, Russia, and Turkey) and the other from the rest of the signatories.<sup>41</sup> The Council drew its inspiration from the council of the peace conference itself. Smuts argued that his plan allowed for a majority for the Great Powers, but not a dominating majority. It also prevented small states from combining to check the Powers' interests. The Smuts plan had much in common with Zimmern's memorandum.<sup>42</sup> Smuts and Zimmern also converged on the notion of the League as a means to cultivate international cooperation. He wrote in *Practical Suggestion* that “the enlightened public all over the world will have to be taught to think internationally, to look at public affairs, not merely from the sectional national point of view, but also from a broad human international point of view.”<sup>43</sup> The greatest value of Smuts's *Practical Suggestion* was its broad popular appeal, which brought the Foreign Office's proposals to a far greater audience. David Hunter-Miller, an American lawyer who participated in the drafting of the League of Nations Covenant, wrote that the Smuts plan “had such a profound influence on President

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<sup>41</sup> Smuts, 29-33.

<sup>42</sup> Zimmern wrote that the Smuts plan “adheres to the standpoint and reinforces the argument of the Foreign Office Memorandum. In some cases the actual wording is closely followed.” Zimmern, *League*, 209

<sup>43</sup> Smuts, *League of nations*, 31

Wilson.”<sup>44</sup> Along with the Cecil proposal, the Smuts plan functioned as the central British approach to the League.

## IMPERIAL REFORM AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Imperial reform ideology had a great influence on the official British approach to the League of Nations. The war brought Britain and the self-governing Dominions together in the Imperial War Cabinet. Imperial reformers, most notably the Round Table organization, provoked debates about how to combine Dominion autonomy with imperial links to Britain, the other Dominions, and the rest of the Empire. The concept of the Empire as a cooperative integration of semi-sovereign nations emerged alongside British plans to create the League.

This influence came from a significant overlap between imperial reformers and the shapers of the British League policy. Philip Kerr, one of the founders of the Round Table, served as Lloyd George's private secretary specializing on foreign affairs. Kerr remained more skeptical than Zimmern or Smuts about the potential for a League of Nations to prevent war. Despite these reservations, he encouraged Lloyd George to support the creation of a League that was modeled on the Imperial War Conference and Supreme War Council.<sup>45</sup> Lionel Curtis, the other founder of the Round Table, also became linked to the formation of the League of Nations. His *Round Table* article

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<sup>44</sup> David Hunter-Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant*, (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1928,) p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Yearwood, *Guarantee of peace*, 47.

“Windows of Freedom,” drew explicitly on British imperial relations, arguing that “the British Commonwealth is a genuine League of Nations and a good deal more.”<sup>46</sup> He also claimed that a League would function most effectively like the Imperial Conference. The article quoted Wilfrid Laurier, the former Canadian Prime Minister, who described the Imperial Conference as “a conference of governments with governments.”<sup>47</sup> The article impressed Cecil enough to cause him to invite Curtis to Paris as a member of his League of Nations section.<sup>48</sup> Zimmern was also a member of the Round Table at this time.<sup>49</sup> Smuts rejected Round Table federation, but remained an ardent supporter of the British Empire in the tradition of Jebb's Britannic alliance.

The confluence of imperial reformers and internationalists around the League of Nations was no coincidence. Imperial reform, especially from Round Table circles, already included British and Dominion intellectuals interested in the transformation of the Empire into a form of global government, whether as a grand federation or as a Britannic Alliance. Imperial reformers debated how to maintain the imperial connection as the Dominions gained sovereignty, particularly in foreign policy and economic matters. They asked similar questions about the nature of the League of Nations, and turned to their own ideas about relations between Britain and the Dominions for answers.

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<sup>46</sup> Lionel Curtis, *Windows of freedom and other papers*, (London: B. Blackwell, 1948), p. 16. The original article originally published in the December, 1918 edition of *Round Table*.

<sup>47</sup> Curtis, 19

<sup>48</sup> Curtis recounted this anecdote in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, July 9, 1939. CP 128

<sup>49</sup> Zimmern cut ties to the Round Table in 1922, after he published a book that criticized Lloyd George. The *Round Table* published a notice that Zimmern no longer contributed in the June, 1922 edition, LP 19. Kerr and Zimmern had already clashed in 1919 after a Zimmern attack on Lloyd George. Kerr threatened to resign from *Round Table* editorial board. See LP 487.

The evolution of Dominions from self-governing colonies into members of the British Commonwealth of Nations<sup>50</sup> provided an important reference that molded a particularly British view of the League of Nations.

Both the Zimmern memorandum and Smuts's *Suggestion* made explicit references to imperial relations as a model for the League of Nations. Zimmern found inspiration from the Imperial Conference, the semi-regular meetings of British, Dominion, and imperial officials used to untangle the constitutional knots caused by Dominion status as well as to solicit Dominion opinion on economic and foreign policies that affected the entire Empire. Zimmern attributed his inter-state conference to inspiration from the War Council, but he also drew on imperial machinery. "There entered into it also the thought of the British Imperial Conference," he wrote. "This system of regular meetings between governments, established long before the war, had not only stood the strain of war conditions, but had emerged greatly strengthened, with a fine record of work to its credit."<sup>51</sup> Zimmern argued that the war had been caused by inadequate international meetings and suggested that the Imperial Conference model transferred easily to a League of Nations. In his memorandum, he also suggested that his inter-state conference should emulate the Imperial Conference and provide a public report of the proceedings with confidential matters omitted.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> W. David McIntyre notes that the specific term "British Commonwealth of Nations" applies only to the interwar Commonwealth in "Clio and Britannia's lost dream: Historians and the British Commonwealth of Nations in the first half of the twentieth century," *Round Table*, v. 93:376 (Sept., 2004), pp. 517-532.

<sup>51</sup> Zimmern, *League*, 190

<sup>52</sup> Zimmern memorandum, quoted in *ibid.*, 203

Smuts's *Practical Suggestion* also drew on the British Empire for inspiration. For Smuts, the Empire served as a model of an existing League. He claimed that “to-day the British Commonwealth of Nations remains the only embryo league of nations because it is based on the true principles of national freedom and political decentralization.”<sup>53</sup> Like Zimmern, Smuts explicitly referenced the Imperial Conference as a model for the League of Nations,<sup>54</sup> and claimed the Empire already existed as a “lesser league.”<sup>55</sup>

Smuts turned to the British Empire for ideas about the international administration of colonies. The Peace Conference in 1919 faced the problem of administration of colonies possessed by the defeated Central Powers. Internationalists such as Smuts feared that annexation of these territories by the victorious allies would undermine their goal to create a new world order. Smuts saw the League of Nations as a perfect instrument to develop new nations, whether they were European states well on their way to self-rule (such as Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia) or states in need of more help, such as the former Ottoman territories.<sup>56</sup> Smuts, however, rejected joint international control of the territories.<sup>57</sup> Instead, he suggested that the League should turn to states with a well-developed colonial system of government, arguing that “the only successful administration of undeveloped or subject peoples has been carried on by states with long experience for the purpose, and staffs whose training and singleness of mind fit them for

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<sup>53</sup> Smuts *Practical Suggestion*, 7

<sup>54</sup> “We are inevitably driven to the conference system now in vogue in the constitutional practice of the British Empire, although it will necessarily have to be applied with very considerable modifications to the complex world conditions obtaining under the league,” *ibid.*, 28

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16

so difficult and special a task.”<sup>58</sup> Here, Smuts certainly had the British Empire in mind as a basis for the mandates system.

Smuts specifically referenced the British Empire as a model for the League administration of mandated territories:

In the first place, in both cases the ultimate authority of common action is a conference of the principal constituent states. In the British Empire the common policy is laid down at conferences of the Imperial Cabinet representing the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India, while executive action is taken by the individual government of the Empire. In the second place, the minor constituents of the Empire, consisting of crown colonies, protectorates, and territories, are not represented directly at the Imperial Cabinet, but are administered or looked after by the individual principal constituent states referred to, just as it is here proposed that the Powers should under the league look after the autonomous undeveloped territories. In the third place, the economic policy of the open door and the non-military police policy here advocated for these autonomous or undeveloped territories are in vogue in the analogous British crown colonies, protectorates, and territories. It is therefore clear that the broad features of the two systems would closely resemble each other. *And it is suggested where the British Empire has been so eminently successful as a political system, the league, working on somewhat similar lines, could not fail to achieve a reasonable measure of success.*<sup>59</sup>

The difference between the British Empire and Smuts's League lay in the conditions of cooperation. The British Empire, according to Smuts, had an organic connection derived from a common allegiance to the Crown, while the League would be held together by “elaborately crafted” special arrangements.<sup>60</sup> Smuts's chief innovation involved encompassing the entire British Empire in the League model. The type of relations suggested by references to the Imperial Conference largely involved relations between Britain and the Dominions. The Smuts plan exported British ideas about colonial administration to the League as well.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5. Italics mine.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

Smuts's *Suggestion* focused mainly on the former Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian territories and not the former German colonies in Africa. This emphasis was somewhat surprising because he remained concerned about Germany's African colonies, particularly German South West Africa. Instead, he dismissed the German African and Pacific colonies as "inhabited by barbarians who can not only not possibly govern themselves, but to whom it would be impracticable to apply any idea of political self-determination in the European sense."<sup>61</sup> Zimmern found this a puzzling departure from his Memorandum's discussion of mandates as a way to "give precision to the idea of the responsibility of the civilised states to the more backward peoples."<sup>62</sup> Zimmern dismissed Smuts's changes as a "scheme for diverting the mandate system from a plan for the betterment of backward peoples to something not very far removed from a twentieth-century Holy Alliance."<sup>63</sup> Despite Smuts's comments in *Practical suggestion*, however, Smuts remained devoted to the idea of colonial reform in the interests of colonial subjects.<sup>64</sup> W.K. Hancock, Smuts's biographer, suggested that he trod carefully on the subject of the German colonies because he did not want to seem eager to take them as spoils.<sup>65</sup> Hancock argued that Smuts's proposals for aid to Africa under the aegis of the League of Nations "adopted the mandatory idea, if not the name."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

<sup>62</sup> Zimmern Memorandum, in Zimmern, *League*, 202-3

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 212

<sup>64</sup> W.K. Hancock, *Smuts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), v. 1, pp. 499-500

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 499-500

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 500

The “mandatory idea” for colonial territory reflected imperial reformers' shifting rhetoric about the dependent Empire. Imperialists at the Peace Conference recast the British Empire as a paternal caretaker preparing its colonies for independence. This idea dovetailed with the intellectual revision of Dominion status as a gateway to sovereignty. Zimmern described the mandates system as reflecting a new form of imperialism altogether. The “old associations of the word empire—military conquest, commercial profit, imperial prestige, strategic advantage—would be officially expunged and the principles which had guided the best minds among colonial administrators among all the Powers, that of guardianship and education towards self-government, would take its place,” he said in 1919 speech.<sup>67</sup> Zimmern claimed that the mandates system extended the British system of colonial administration to the rest of the world:

The British Empire was not an estate administered for the benefit of the people of Great Britain; it was a trust administered by us on behalf of the peoples and of the world, and if we did not act in this spirit, in the territories for which we were independently responsible, how could we ask the other powers to place confidence in our Administration of the Mandated territories, about which there was already so much jealousy and suspicion.<sup>68</sup>

Imperial reformers applied this rhetoric about training for self-government to India. In 1912, Kerr and Curtis rejected the idea of Indian representation in their proposed Imperial Parliament.<sup>69</sup> They focused on the self-governing Dominions.<sup>70</sup> Round Table members James Metson and William Marris, who had served in the Indian

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<sup>67</sup> Summary of Zimmern speech at the League of Nations Union public meeting at Aberystwyth, November 19, 1919. ZP 138. Susan Pedersen argues that the mandates system differed little from colonial administration. See Susan Pedersen, “The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32. Jahrg., H. 4, Sozialpolitik transnational (Oct.-Dec., 2006), pp. 560-582.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> G.L. Craik, Round table circular on Indian representation, July 9, 1912, RTP 777

<sup>70</sup> RTP 777

Civil Service, disagreed and pressed for Indian votes in the proposed imperial parliament.<sup>71</sup> They became important voices within the Round Table movement that called for greater Indian participation in the Government of India. Curtis dismissed Indian nationalists as unrealistic in their demands for self-government, but acknowledged the movement as a growing imperial concern. He wrote to Zimmern in 1916:

Imagine a country as large as Europe west of Russia, as populous and more varied in race, language and religion, the people as you see them in the book of Genesis, with all the complications of caste superadded, with two or three millions in the towns able to read and write and the professional classes numbering some tens of thousands imperiously demanding self-government and the most rapid diffusion of the present exotic half baked thing they have been led to call education. This people comprise one fifth of the human race. To fit them for self government needs generations of real education and patient work. And yet the few thousands of articulates are demanding it within 25 years. I have never seen a more difficult or critical situation, nor one which so needed clear and careful interpretation to the other self governing parts of the Empire. Unless it is understood and handled with strength and care we are in for a cosmic smash such as would throw India back for generations.<sup>72</sup>

Curtis decided to travel to India in 1916 to get a better sense of how it fitted with his Commonwealth vision. His trip convinced him that British policy in India should aim for eventual Indian self-government. Curtis approached India the same way he approached the Dominions. He set up informal study groups with Indian Civil Service officials interested in constitutional reforms and even established a Round Table chapter in Agra.<sup>73</sup> His solution for India reflected his belief that politics required an informed, civic-minded electorate. Therefore, he encouraged the development of democratic institutions within India. After months of discussion and deliberation, Curtis returned to Britain with a solution. His system, which he named “dyarchy,” called for Indian

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<sup>71</sup> Curtis to Zimmern, Nov. 29, 1916, RTP 780.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Curtis to Kerr, Nov. 13, 1916, CP 163/7.

representation in provincial bodies while retaining British control over the central administration.<sup>74</sup> This solution overlapped with his efforts to retain the Dominions within the British Empire. He wrote to Kerr that “we must do our best to make Indian Nationalists realize the truth that like SA all their hopes and aspirations are dependant [sic] on the maintenance of the British Commonwealth and of their permanent membership therein.” He would later suggest in his Letter to the People of India that India should eventually gain full representation in the Imperial Parliament he described in *Problem of the Commonwealth*.

Curtis became a champion of dyarchy and promoted it in influential British policy circles. He became prominent through controversy; Indian nationalists saw his visit as evidence of a conspiracy for Dominion domination of India, but the outrage against him also raised his profile. Curtis claimed that his notoriety had made people pay attention to dyarchy. Lord Ampthill claimed that “the incredible fact is that, but for the chance visit to India of a globe-trotting doctrinaire, with a positive mania for constitution mongering, nobody in the world would ever have thought of so peculiar a notion of that of 'Dyarchy.'”<sup>75</sup> Ampthill gave Curtis too much credit, but demonstrated Curtis’s talent for propaganda.

Imperial reformers used India as an example of the new British imperialism in action. Curtis, for example, held India up as the exemplar of the path to self-government that all other African and Asian colonies and dependencies could follow:

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<sup>74</sup> Curtis's synthesized his ideas about “dyarchy” in the Duke Memorandum published in *Papers relating to the application of the principle of dyarchy to the government of India*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919).

<sup>75</sup> Curtis, *Dyarchy*, xxvii

In solving the problem of responsible government for herself this vast and complex Oriental community will find she has solved it for the whole of Asia, and, in the fullness of time, for Africa as well. The greatest of all the services which one nation can render to another is example. For the greatest of problems are common to many; and solved by one, they are solved for many. Three continents are now living in the rays of a candle lighted by England centuries ago. India now has a candle which once kindled will never be put out till all the nations of Asia and Africa walk by its light.<sup>76</sup>

Curtis viewed colonial independence in the context of the Commonwealth. He expected colonies to develop responsible government much like the Dominions. Curtis therefore combined trusteeship with the new Commonwealth ideology.

#### **INTERNATIONALIST IMPERIALISM: A LEAGUE WITHIN A LEAGUE**

The growth of the League of Nations influenced the development of the Commonwealth. In particular, the establishment of separate seats in the League Assembly for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and the British Empire obscured boundaries between imperial and international relations. The Assembly seats confirmed the trend of increasing Dominion autonomy within the Empire; they signified that the Commonwealth would itself become an organization of sovereign nations. Separate League membership therefore raised questions about the relationship between the Commonwealth and the League. Internationalists referred to the Commonwealth as a league within the League, but the relationship between the two organizations remained unclear. The League led to a fundamental split among imperial reformers. Imperialists like Leopold Amery, Curtis, and Kerr came to see the League as

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, lxi

a distraction from imperial commitments; at worst it could become a competitor for the loyalty of the Dominions. For internationalists like Zimmern, however, the League and Commonwealth would function as complementary organizations that would solve problems of Dominion sovereignty and promote international cooperation.

The conflation of the League and Commonwealth contributed to a uniquely British form of internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Internationalists saw the League as a way to free the Dominions and Britain from the tensions caused by attempts to coordinate their defense, economic, and foreign policies. The Commonwealth, however, remained integral to the League's success. Pro-League imperialists such as Zimmern and Smuts portrayed the Commonwealth as a model for international cooperation. They also claimed that the British Empire showed how to bridge divides among peoples. It demonstrated how a diverse group of people making up a quarter of the population of the Earth<sup>77</sup> could work together within the Empire. Imperialists even used British colonial management as an example to the rest of the world of a colonial power training its dependencies for eventual self-government.

H. Duncan Hall's 1920 book *The Commonwealth of Nations* makes a case for the League and Commonwealth as complements.<sup>78</sup> Hall, an Australian socialist, created a blueprint for the post-war Commonwealth emphasizing loose cooperation among

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<sup>77</sup> Imperialists constantly mentioned this figure in their speeches and writings to show how the Commonwealth or British colonial administration could easily transfer to the rest of the globe.

<sup>78</sup> H. Duncan Hall, while not as influential as Zimmern or Smuts, was widely known and read within imperial reform circles. Smuts specifically cited the book in a meeting with British and Dominion officials, and Curtis referred to the book in a letter to fellow Round Table member A.S. Macolm, although he observed that "when an able student like Professor Duncan Hall tries to demonstrate a third alternative [between Imperial federation and full Dominion sovereignty] he gets tied up in hopeless knots." Curtis to Malcolm, June 17, 1921, RTP, 801.

sovereign Dominions. This idea clearly drew on the Imperial War Cabinet as a model for cooperation. Hall viewed the Commonwealth as an important precursor to the League of Nations, describing cooperative imperial bodies as doing “pioneer work in regions of international relationships not yet touched by general international action.”<sup>79</sup>

Hall took British rhetoric about the Commonwealth operating as a League within a League literally. He foresaw a League made up of groups of nations and used the British Commonwealth as a model of how these groups ought to function.<sup>80</sup> To Hall, the idea of grouping nations together in a League and grouping nations within that League developed as a natural process of history:

The principle of grouping, that is the superiority in many respects of group action over individual action, is now recognized as of fundamental importance in modern life—so much so that the Twentieth Century may come to be known in history as the age of association and of co-operation, in contrast to the Nineteenth Century, which is already being described as the age of competition and individualism. The principle of grouping is fast becoming the very foundation of modern industrial and social organisation. It is this principle which brings together workmen in their trade unions, employers and capitalists in their associations and trusts, doctors and lawyers in their professional organisations, students in their classes and groups, and worshipers in their churches and meeting-houses.<sup>81</sup>

He argued that groups of nations would make the League function more efficiently. Again, Hall drew on the example of the British Empire; colonies grouped into federation, such as Australia and South Africa, reduced the number of colonies represented at the Imperial Conference and increased organizational efficiency.<sup>82</sup> He advocated the

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<sup>79</sup> H. Duncan Hall, *The British commonwealth of nations; a study of its past and future development*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1920), p. 360

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 358

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 353

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 358

creation of many different types of groups from blocs of nations to a federation of West Indian colonies.<sup>83</sup>

Hall contrasted groups within the League to Imperial Federation. He complained that Imperial Federation was too unwieldy and problematic for minority interests in the Dominions.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Imperial Federation worked in opposition to Dominion nationalism. Hall cited the Labour Party's concerns that the wealthy classes would gain control over such a federation by being the only ones with access to communication, transportation, and organs of public opinion that could span the five continents of the Empire.<sup>85</sup> An Imperial Federation, Hall claimed, would obviate the need for a League of Nations.<sup>86</sup> Instead, a group of sovereign states within the Commonwealth would serve to strengthen the League and eventually broaden to become a league of all of the English-speaking peoples.<sup>87</sup>

Like Zimmern and Smuts, Hall also asserted the importance of the Commonwealth as an example of international cooperation amongst all peoples. He labeled the English-speaking peoples as "the torch-bearers of internationalism." "It is their duty to lead the way in giving an example to the rest of the world of the high spiritual and material gains which attend a policy of international co-operation in place of

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 358

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 210

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-215

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 218

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 218

a policy of competition,” he wrote.<sup>88</sup> He viewed the Empire as a microcosm of the world itself:

But it is as a League in miniature that the British Empire will be of the greatest value to the League. Because of the immense size of this political organization; because it brings together East and West, North and South, includes peoples of all races and civilisations, and may therefore be said to offer a fair sample of the world's problems and diversities; because of the unique intimacy of its members—it has a far greater capacity for international co-operation than the larger, less intimate, and more cumbrous League.

At the same time, Hall remained wary of the British Empire as a model for mandates. He noted that the Empire “has a longer and more intimate experience of the Colour Problem, and of the problems of racial contact, than any other state or group of states.”<sup>89</sup> Hall maintained that colonial administration under trusteeship should train colonies for nothing less than self-government. Otherwise, the mandatory principle would become “a mere cloak for capitalist imperialism.”<sup>90</sup> Despite his skepticism, Hall did concede that the British Empire provided the best model for mandated territories by citing organizations such as the English Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and its counterparts throughout the Empire as examples of colonial trusteeship.<sup>91</sup>

Like Hall, Zimmern saw the future of the British Empire as a group within the League of Nations. He went further, however, asserting that imperial relations were bound up inextricably with the League. The Commonwealth, he suggested, should become an Entente between Britain, the Dominions, and a self-governing India. They would share common ideals and bonds based on history and British political institutions,

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 359

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 362

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 363

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 364

but ultimately they would act as fully sovereign nations. Zimmern's idea of the Commonwealth came out of his ideas about nationalism. He supported nationalism as a vital part of culture. For example, while working as a professor at University College, Wales, Zimmern learned Welsh, supported the development of Welsh political institutions and protested the suppression of the Irish language. He remained skeptical of self-determination.<sup>92</sup> Instead, he celebrated the preservation of national languages and cultural practices within large political structures. Zimmern's imperialism rested on this inclusive nationalism; Dominion national identities could flourish within the context of a larger "British" identity. He sought to recreate that type of international integration within the League of Nations.

Zimmern saw membership in the League as the solution to thorny problems of the Dominions. He explained how international cooperation rendered moot the contradictions of Dominion status in a series of articles, lectures, and books in the 1920s.<sup>93</sup> He chose the term "Third British Empire" to delineate a new phase of Empire: the first referred to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North American Empire ended by the American Revolution, and the second marked the expansion of the British

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<sup>92</sup> He made a sardonic attack on the slippery slope of self-determination in *Nationality and government*: "One can see that at a glance by considering what would happen if the sentiment of nationality were admitted as a sole and sufficient claim for a change of government. French Canada would have to pass to France, Wisconsin to Germany, and part of Minnesota to Norway, while the NY police would become the servants of the new home rule government in Ireland." ZP 166.

<sup>93</sup> Zimmern initially published his views as articles that originally appeared as "The British Empire in 1924," *The Nation and Athenæum* in four installments published from July to September 1924. ZP 170 (part I) and 177 (parts II-IV). He then expanded them into the Beer Lectures, delivered Columbia University in New York in 1925. He published the Beer Lectures as *The Third British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925) in a remarkable display of academic entrepreneurship.

Empire through dominance of the seas, which ended with the First World War.<sup>94</sup> Zimmern characterized the third phase of the British Empire as a Commonwealth of Nations, or what he described as a “British Entente.”<sup>95</sup> He quoted Robert Borden's definition of the Commonwealth as “a League of Nations owing a single allegiance and possessing international relations that are still in a state of development.”<sup>96</sup> Zimmern admitted that the nature of the relationship between Commonwealth countries remained ambiguous, especially during the early 1920s. He suggested that the Dominions and Britain would develop bonds through the League of Nations that would hold them together more effectively than their shared connection to the Crown.

Zimmern claimed that the League could resolve conflicts of Dominion sovereignty and imperial unity by replacing imperial cooperation with international cooperation. For example, he argued that the League would solve the problem of Dominion participation in British wars by making war an international issue. Dominions would fight with Britain in wars not through any imperial arrangements, but as co-equal members of the League of Nations.<sup>97</sup> In addition, Zimmern suggested that the League solved problems of imperial defense. He predicted that the Dominions, like other small states in the League, would increasingly turn toward the League's resources for

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<sup>94</sup> John Darwin expanded on Zimmern's theme in Darwin, “A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics,” in Judith Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford history of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), v. 4, pp. 47-63.

<sup>95</sup> Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 42-3

<sup>96</sup> Borden's speech to Queen's University, Ontario, quoted in Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 4

<sup>97</sup> Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 61.

protection instead of relying on the British Navy alone.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the League's collective security would replace imperial defense. Furthermore, Zimmern maintained that the League would enable the Dominions to pursue their own interests in economic and foreign policy without pressure to conform to an imperial foreign policy. "How, indeed, is it possible that five communities (Great Britain and the older Dominions) situated in four continents and at very different stages of social and economic development should be able to co-ordinate their international relations?" Zimmern wrote. "The idea is plainly ridiculous."<sup>99</sup> That is not to say that Zimmern desired a complete dissolution of any imperial ties. Instead, he maintained that Britain and the Dominions continue to associate because they shared principles and outlook. In essence, he argued that the League presented the Dominions with an opportunity to cooperate with Britain as co-equal League members instead of as former colonies.

Zimmern contended that the British Empire could contribute most to the League by showing how it diminished racial tensions. He wrote that this "colour problem" formed the single greatest challenge to world peace. It manifested itself in two ways: economically and through prejudice. Zimmern claimed that the British Empire helped to ease prejudice.<sup>100</sup> The British Empire, he claimed, had moral authority the League had not yet acquired.<sup>101</sup> The Empire created what he described as an "inter-racial Commonwealth" in which "there is hardly a race, creed, or division of humanity that is

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<sup>98</sup> "The British Empire in 1924," *Nation and Athenaeum*, part II, ZP 177.

<sup>99</sup> "The British Empire in 1924," *Nation and Athenaeum*, part III, ZP 177.

<sup>100</sup> "The British Empire in 1924," *Nation and Athenaeum*, part IV, ZP 177.

<sup>101</sup> Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 67

not represented.”<sup>102</sup> He argued that the size and diversity of the British Empire made it a unique institution to combat racial tension as “the natural mediator between race and race, and especially, through its position in India, Burma, Malaya, and Hongkong, between Orient and Occident.”<sup>103</sup> He also lauded British colonial administration.<sup>104</sup> Though he acknowledged “black spots” on Britain's record of colonial government, he told his American audience that history would judge the Empire favorably.<sup>105</sup>

Zimmern therefore shared a vision of a Commonwealth inextricably linked with the League of Nations. As the author of an influential paper on the League, Zimmern had a unique opportunity to transfer his vision of imperial relations to international affairs. By the mid-1920s, he championed the League as the solution to imperial problems by replacing Dominion loyalty to the Empire with a shared loyalty to the League ideal. At the same time, the Empire performed a vital function as an inspiration to the League in the administration of mandated territory. For Zimmern, the League and the Empire had essentially merged into the same institution devoted to world peace.

## **THE DOMINIONS AND THE WORLD**

The Commonwealth ideology described by Zimmern, Smuts, and Hall had little basis in the contentious reality of imperial relations. They based their visions of the

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<sup>102</sup> “The British Empire in 1924,” *Nation and Athenaeum*, part IV, ZP. 177

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 77

<sup>105</sup> Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, 77

League on a quasi-international Commonwealth that did not yet exist.<sup>106</sup> The status of the Dominions during this time remained unclear in Britain and the Dominions; it mystified delegates from outside the British orbit. The British delegation found itself at odds with Dominion delegates who used the Peace Conference as an opportunity to advance their own agendas. Their goals did not necessarily match the Cecil delegation's vision of a new world order.

Dominion delegations at the Peace Conference focused on gaining international recognition of their growing sovereignty. At the outbreak of war, the Dominions technically had no foreign policy independent of Whitehall. The Round Table philosophy had emphasized Dominion influence in a united imperial foreign policy. Curtis's imperial federation plan took this concept to its logical conclusion by exchanging an imperial conference for an imperial parliament with representatives from each Dominion. By the end of the war, the meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet revealed to British officials that most of the Dominions sought to develop their own international personalities.<sup>107</sup> Dominion delegates saw the Peace Conference and the League of Nations as opportunities to broaden their governments' autonomy in foreign affairs.

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<sup>106</sup> For example, a 1919 speech by Smuts in South Africa reported in the *Cape Times* quoted him describing the Peace Conference: "it was felt all round, and generally admitted, that in the political experience of the British Empire there was collected a fund of wisdom and of sound, practical commonsense which might serve the world well through the very difficult times that are ahead of us; and so, whether you look at it from a territorial, or a material, or a political point of view, the group in the world to which we belong stands out as one of the greatest groups in history, probably the greatest that has been seen, or that the world will ever see." "The Might of the Right," *Cape Times*, Aug. 6, 1919, quoted in CO 886/8/3.

<sup>107</sup> The exception was New Zealand, where the government remained more interested in increased input on Whitehall policies.

The Peace Conference signaled a change in Dominion status, but the changes were unclear. The nature of the British delegation itself was ambiguous. The Treaty of Paris obscured the situation by naming the British Empire as a signatory power, but listing Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and India under it.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the League Council included a seat for the British Empire. This created confusion. The Dominions and India were parts of the British Empire, but had their own seats in the Assembly. The British Empire seat on the Council clearly represented the United Kingdom and all of the dependencies and Crown Colonies. It remained unclear whether the British Empire seat on the Council included the Dominions and India. The arrangement raised the question of whether Dominion representatives could serve as British Empire representatives on the Council.<sup>109</sup> This assumption threatened Dominion self-government on the international stage. George E. Foster, the Acting Canadian Prime Minister, sent a report to the Privy Council that argued that Wilson's convocation of the Council implied that the British delegate represented the UK alone. He declared that, if the seat covered the entire Empire, then Britain had to submit a list of delegates to Dominion governments for their approval.<sup>110</sup>

The confusing nature of British and Dominion representation to the League also stirred up international controversy. American representatives led by Senator Irvine

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<sup>108</sup> Newfoundland, also a Dominion, was not listed as a signatory power and did not take a seat at the League of Nations. India claimed a seat at the League, but not Dominion status, and was represented mainly by representatives of the India Office in international bodies.

<sup>109</sup> Hall shared this assumption and suggested that Dominion representatives could even appear as the leader of a British delegation.

<sup>110</sup> Certified copy of a report of the committee of the privy council, approved by His Excellency the Administrator on April 26, 1920, in CO 886/9/3 p. 31. Foster was serving as Acting Prime Minister while Borden recovered from an illness.

Lenroot claimed that the separate seats for the Dominions and India at the League amounted to six additional British votes. He drafted a reservation to the Treaty that prevented other parts of the British Empire from voting on matters affecting another member of the British group. For example, a dispute between Canada and the United States that went to the League would automatically exclude both parties from voting. Lenroot worried that the five British Empire countries would side with Canada. Therefore, the Lenroot reservation excluded other British, Australian, South African, New Zealand, and Indian votes as well.<sup>111</sup> The Legal Section of the League of Nations under the Dutch legal expert Joost Adriaan Van Hamel argued that any such dispute would be a serious matter of peace and war, a matter of the Crown that bound together the entire Empire. Therefore, according to Van Hamel, since the British Empire would fight together, any British imperial votes ought to be excluded.<sup>112</sup> This interpretation provoked Dominion protest. The Canadian Governor-General wrote to the Colonial Office that the American reservation “cannot be read as other than a direct challenge to the status of the Dominions in the League of Nations.”<sup>113</sup> Similar objections came from the Australian and South African governments, and Amery noted that Britain could not

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<sup>111</sup> This was the fourteenth reservation on the American Senate's list of reservations, stating that “The United States assumes no obligation to be bound by any election, decision, report, or finding of the Council or Assembly in which any member of the League and its self-governing dominions, colonies, or parts of Empire in the aggregate have cast more than one vote, and assumes no obligation to be bound by any decision, report, or finding of the Council or Assembly arising out of any dispute between the United States or any member of the League, if such member or any self-governing dominion, colony, empire, or part of empire united with it politically has voted.” CO 886/9/3

<sup>112</sup> CO 886/9/3

<sup>113</sup> Devonshire to Milner, Feb 4, 1920, CO 886/93

accept the American reservations without Dominion assent.<sup>114</sup> The Governor-General of Australia protested the idea that the Dominions would be bound by British declarations of peace and war. He admitted that present day conditions made it “practically impossible” for Australia to remain at peace while Britain was at war, but he argued that any assumption that a British war automatically involved Australia presented an “abandonment of our right to self-government.”<sup>115</sup> The Lenroot reservation left the British delegation in an impossible situation. They had to take American objections seriously, but they risked offending the delicate sensibilities of Dominion nationalism.

Other British analysts suggested that concerns over the American reservations were overblown. Hall claimed that the controversy came out of a “genuine misconception as to the real nature of the British Commonwealth, and the constitutional changes which have taken place within it in the last few years.”<sup>116</sup> American skeptics either did not understand or did not believe that the Dominions had become independent enough not to act as British puppets. Hall argued that the real value of the reservation came in the opportunity to clear up any questions of Dominion sovereignty to the rest of the world:

The incidents just referred to are a small sign of the angers involved in vagueness and misunderstanding; and they show how important it is that the British peoples should seize the first opportunity to set out clearly before the whole world, by means of a general declaration of constitutional right, the real nature of their relationship to one another within the British Commonwealth. With the formation of the League of Nations and the admission of the Dominions as separate members, this relationship has ceased to be merely a question concerning the British peoples, and has become an international

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<sup>114</sup> Amery to Devonshire, March 8, 1920, CO 886/9/3. Amery served as Acting Secretary of State for the Colonies at this time on behalf of Milner.

<sup>115</sup> Ferguson to Amery, CO 886/9/3

<sup>116</sup> Hall, 350

issue with regard to which the peoples of the world have a right to secure accurate information.<sup>117</sup>

Britain and the Dominions tried to maintain a unified policy at the Peace Conference, and Britain did not always dictate the terms. British and Dominion statesmen agreed that the British government, in theory, held no binding sway over Dominion votes. In practice, intellectuals and policymakers agreed to maintain imperial unity at the League and attempt to coordinate Dominion policy. Hall, for example, suggested that the British group at the League of Nations would decide on policy in the Imperial Conference and take no action at the League without the rest of the group's approval.<sup>118</sup> The British commitment to imperial unity meant that it had to support Dominion actions. At the Peace Conference, Australian Prime Minister William Hughes agitated against the inclusion of a clause in the Covenant proposed by the Japanese delegation that proclaimed that all races should have equal rights. The British delegates did not want to break imperial unity, even though they wanted to support the clause. Britain abstained from the vote, and the clause was left out of the Covenant. The incident damaged British relations with Japan. Dominion delegates criticized League guarantees of territory or compulsory sanctions, which also clashed with British internationalists.<sup>119</sup>

Zimmern's depictions of Commonwealth cooperation ran contrary to his frustration with Dominion statesmen at the Peace Conference. He wrote an article under

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<sup>117</sup> Hall, 351. In a 1921 memorandum, Smuts wrote that he agreed with Hall, and this need was referenced in an Amery memorandum before the 1926 Imperial Conference which sought to better elucidate the concept of Dominion Sovereignty. DO 117/35?

<sup>118</sup> Hall, 343

<sup>119</sup> Egerton, *Creation of the League of Nations*, 126-7. In his article, he would argue that the Dominions became an ally of "conservative internationalists" like Kerr that clashed with the more idealist ideas of British League enthusiasts such as Cecil and Zimmern.

the pen name “Atticus” around 1920 that assailed the Dominions for pursuing a phony sovereignty and damaging British foreign relations.<sup>120</sup> Zimmern complained about their new status at the League:

They are the irresponsible wards of the Imperial Government and of the United Kingdom taxpayer. Nor has their position been rendered more dignified—closely examined, indeed it has been made considerably more humiliating, by the fact that, in the course of the last fifteen months, they have attained on their own insistence, to a shadowy kind of independent status in international law.<sup>121</sup>

He complained that the Treaty inadvertently supported Dominion sovereignty; “by an ingenious printers' device,” the Dominions were listed individually on the Treaty under the British Empire. “Only a muddle-headed Briton could imagine that a constitutional dilemma could be resolved by a printer’s devil; and that the legal acumen of the American public has long seen through the childish inconsistency involved in this exhibition of Dominion and Indian ‘self-determination,’” he wrote. Zimmern's central complaint centered on his opinion that the Dominions had sought membership in the League for the purpose of bolstering their international status without developing a responsibility for the consequences of engagement with international politics from both Dominion governments and citizens:

Has the Australian public read Article X? Does it know it is in honour bound to take such steps as lie within its power to defend the territorial integrity of Poland and Czecho-Slovakia? Does it even know where Czecho-Slovakia is? And does it realize that its obligations to Czecho-Slovakia to which its representatives, making their debut in a firstclass international document, have solemnly affixed their signature, are far more binding in international law than any duty which they may regard as incumbent on them to defend the United Kingdom or other part of the British Commonwealth?<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> “The non-self-governing Empire and foreign affairs,” ZP 158. The article is undated, but the context and allusion to four years since Curtis published *The problem of the Commonwealth* dates it to 1920. The archive does not indicate where or whether this article was published.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

Zimmern complained that the nebulous nature of Dominion representation at the Peace Conference unfairly bound Britain to Dominion interests contrary to British ideals. He described the Dominions as jealously guarding their status as “little nations” on par with Belgium, Norway, Greece, and Panama, but relying on their imperial connection to throw their weight around. He characterized Hughes's actions towards the Japanese proposal for the racial equality clause as embarrassing, irresponsible, and damaging to Britain's relationship with Japan and East Asia. “Had Mr. Hughes been the delegate of an independent Australia, his opposition would have been negligible: indeed, he would, as matters stood, hardly have had the *locus estandi* to make it,” Zimmern wrote. “Had he been a true representative of the British Commonwealth, seeing its problems from the centre and subordinating sectional to imperial needs and principles, he would have withdrawn his opposition.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, he blamed the Dominions for causing conflict between Britain and the United States through their intransigence on the issue of voting rights. He also criticized Australia's abolition on trade with Germany “almost tantamount to an act of war,” and attacked Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, for advancing a policy towards Turkey that was more beneficial to India than to the British Empire as a whole.<sup>124</sup>

Zimmern attacked the Dominion demands to act as mandatories for ex-German colonies in Africa and the Pacific. He argued that the Dominion governments did not

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

understand the mandatory principle of colonial government and sought the colonies for their own financial gain:

The Dominions, largely owing to the fact that they have borne no responsibility for the government of India and the Crown Colonies, do not fully understand the doctrine of trusteeship or the unselfish ideal of British policy towards backward peoples. They are not yet familiar with the idea that it is contrary to the principles on which the British Commonwealth has been governed for the last three generations for the colonizing power to frame its policy with a view to commercial profit rather than the welfare of the native inhabitants. For this reason, they do not favour the 'open door' and other restrictions on the liberty of action and exploitation of a white government administering dependent peoples. Yet in default of annexation outright, they desired to secure mandates from the League of Nations for the government of the ex-German colonies contiguous to their own territory, and they relied on the influence of the British Empire delegation to secure these for them.<sup>125</sup>

Zimmern worried that foreign powers would use the Dominions' demands for mandates as evidence that the mandates system disguised a British colonial land-grab.

Zimmern also criticized the Dominions for not supporting the League financially. In a letter to the *New Statesman* in 1921, he complained about League delegates from Canada and Australia sent on "anti-waste tickets" who protested the cost of League activities. He suggested that those delegates misunderstood the purpose of the League. It was not there only to stop wars; its agencies fostered interdependence and mutual understanding. After all, he reasoned, since the British taxpayer paid for the bulk of their defenses, Canadians and Australians "might have been expected to open their purse-strings all the wider for broad international purposes."<sup>126</sup>

The problems between Britain and the Dominions came from the novelty of the Commonwealth and the League. No one was sure how the League or Commonwealth

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> "The Dominions and the League of Nations," letter to the editor, *The New Statesman*, September 21, 1921, ZP 178

would work, and British and Dominion delegates adapted to both organizations at the same time. The status of Dominion delegates at the peace conference and the creation of separate seats for them at the League of Nations happened without time for a full constitutional review of Dominion status and international policy. The Imperial War Cabinet agreed to have an Imperial Convention sometime in 1921 to clarify Dominion status. The conference failed to express the new constitutional position effectively; in fact, the Imperial Conferences did not focus on this type of constitutional review until 1926. Commonwealth relations were ambiguous and contentious. Zimmern, Hall, Smuts, and other internationalist imperialists found that it was much easier to talk about Commonwealth cooperation than to reconcile the divergent interests of an unwieldy community of sovereign states.

The idea of the Commonwealth relationship as a new and better model for international relations, however, remained pervasive in shaping the British approach to internationalism. Men who sincerely revered the British Empire became influential contributors to the British delegation to create the League, and they based their plans for the League on imperial relations. They borrowed from imperial institutions and the ideology that portrayed the British Empire as a community of nations. Imperialists would continue to cite the Commonwealth as an example to the rest of the world.

## Chapter IV: The Commonwealth as an Alternative to the League of Nations

Not all imperial reformers were happy with the Dominions' membership in the League of Nations. Some viewed the League and internationalism as a grave threat to imperial solidarity. They did not see the League of Nations as a necessary complement to the Commonwealth like Zimmern, Hall, or Smuts. Instead, they viewed the Commonwealth as an alternative to the League of Nations. They envisioned the Commonwealth as part of an economically and politically integrated British bloc that would become powerful enough to allow Britain to withdraw from the dangers of European power struggles.

Imperial reformers who were skeptical of the League agreed that the Commonwealth had become a new type of international organization. They tended to view the British Empire more like a regional bloc with shared interests. Leopold Amery, the Colonial Secretary who created the Dominions Office, tried to improve coordination between the British and Dominion governments. Philip Kerr, who became the Secretary of the Rhodes Trust in 1925, hoped to foster greater cooperation between the Commonwealth and the United States. Historians have looked at both the Amery and Kerr plans and noted how they contributed to ideas about imperial and foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Andrea Bosco, "Philip Lothian and the federalist critique of national sovereignty," in David Long and Peter Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis: inter-war idealism reassessed*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 247-276, David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the quest for world order*, (Westport, Conn., Praeger Security International, 2006), and J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, (London, Macmillan, 1960) on Kerr, and William Roger Louis, *In the name of God, go! Leo Amery and the British*

Scholars who have studied Commonwealth ideology, however, have tended to focus on the debate about federalism during the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Imperial reformers, however, continued to disagree about the shape of the Commonwealth throughout the 1920s and 1930s. They agreed that the Commonwealth had become an international organization, but disagreed about its relationship to the League of Nations.

This chapter examines three facets of the development of the Commonwealth as an alternative to the League of Nations. First, it discusses imperial reformers' objections to the League. They feared that the Dominions would become more loyal to the League than to the British Empire, and they doubted that the League could effectively maintain peace. Second, the chapter looks at how the League and internationalism affected Dominion relations. It focuses on two themes: the Irish Free State's attempts to bring Commonwealth business to Geneva, and the Commonwealth as a military alliance. These incidents validated imperialists' fears that the League and other international organizations weakened imperial unity. Finally, it addresses imperial reformers' ideas about Commonwealth cooperation.

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*Empire in the Age of Churchill*, (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992) and Richard S. Grayson, "Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s," *Twentieth century history*, 17 (2006), pp. 489-515 on Amery.

<sup>2</sup> See John Kendle, *The Round Table movement and imperial union*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975) and *Federal Britain: a history*, (London: Routledge, 1997). Other work on the Round Table includes Walter Nimocks, *Milner's young men*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968). The effect of Round Table federalism on British and imperial policy can be found in Andrea Bosco and Alex May, eds., *The Empire/Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy*, Lothian Foundation Press, 1997) and Andrea Bosco and Cornelia Navari, *Chatham House and British foreign policy 1919-1945: The Royal Institute of International Affairs during the inter-war period*, (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1994). Duncan Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain: empire and the future of world order, 1860-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), discusses the beginning of the idea of the Commonwealth in the nineteenth century and how it became wrapped up in debates about federalism.

The Commonwealth's emergence as an international institution inspired old fears of imperial dissolution and new ideas for imperial government. The Round Table had consistently argued that Dominion sovereignty would tear the Empire apart. Curtis condemned informal cooperation as a policy of drift and indecision. Imperial reformers, however, thought of new agencies and policies keep the Commonwealth united even as the Dominions gained autonomy. Amery in particular had long supported Dominion autonomy. He saw no reason why sovereign Dominions could not maintain strong economic links with Britain and the rest of the Empire. Amery's imperialism blended imperial patriotism with internationalist beliefs that blurred national boundaries.

#### **OBJECTIONS TO THE LEAGUE**

Imperial reformers had two concerns with the League's effect on the Dominions. First, they worried that the League would compete with the Commonwealth for Dominion loyalty. The Dominions' separate seats at the League already encouraged them to develop their own foreign policies. Imperialists also viewed the League as a distraction from more important imperial issues. Second, imperial reformers criticized the League as an ineffective instrument to preserve world peace, especially without American participation. They attacked it as being too loosely organized and lacking the Commonwealth's capacity for cooperation.

Imperial reformers disliked how the League encouraged Dominion sovereignty. Curtis offered two alternatives for the future of the Empire in the Green Memorandum:

one where the Empire had a single foreign policy or one where it separated into its component parts. The Imperial War Cabinet ended the possibility of federation, the Treaty of Versailles emphasized Dominion autonomy, and Dominions' seats in the League Assembly gave them their own platform in foreign affairs. Curtis's kindergarten chums in South Africa nicknamed him "the Prophet;" after the war, Curtis feared that the Empire had begun to unravel exactly as he had foretold.

The idea of cooperation referred to the Commonwealth's transformation into a series of sovereign states united by imperial ties. Britain and the Dominions planned to coordinate their defense, foreign, and economic policies to the benefit of the entire Empire informally. Curtis rejected cooperation as a first principle:

There are many who think this [imperial coordination] may be done by a policy of co-operation, but when we analyse this policy we find that the conclusion to which it leads differs in no essential respect from the policy of liquidating the Empire into separate and independent States. It is, in fact, a much more dangerous policy, because, by preserving and idolising the symbols of union, we encourage the delusion that we are equipped with the strength which can only be derived from unity itself.<sup>3</sup>

After the war, Curtis remained convinced that cooperation without federation was a mistake. By 1921, however, Curtis felt that his federalist disciples had deserted him.<sup>4</sup> He could do nothing to stop it. Cooperation, he argued, did nothing to encourage the Dominions to develop responsibility for foreign affairs<sup>5</sup> because they remained dependent on Britain for defense.

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<sup>3</sup> Green Memorandum, CP, 154/6

<sup>4</sup> He wrote to A.S. Malcolm, a New Zealand MP, that Malcolm was the only public man who would support him. Curtis to Malcolm, June 17, 1921, RTP 801

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Other imperialists shared Curtis's concern that the emergence of the Dominions as states in their own right threatened imperial solidarity. Kerr, for example, told the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1922 that imperial federation remained the only logical way to run the Empire, but he hoped cooperation would work.<sup>6</sup> Members of the Wellington Round Table group did not share Kerr's optimism. Members circulated a pamphlet entitled "The Constitutional Status of the Dominions" to the Round Table and to New Zealand newspapers in 1921 that issued dire warnings about cooperation:

If this tendency towards the dissolution of the British Empire continues at its present rate, then so far from the separate representation of the Dominions at the Peace Conference and their separate signature of the Peace Treaty tying the bonds of union tighter, this 'tremendously important act' will be one of the most disastrous events ever recorded in the history of the British Empire.<sup>7</sup>

The group sought to affirm New Zealand's status as the most "solidly and unrepentantly British" community outside the United Kingdom, and vowed to fight against any further separation at the upcoming Imperial Conference.<sup>8</sup>

Commentators outside the Round Table circle shared anxieties about cooperation. Arthur Berriedale Keith, the interwar period's most influential unofficial expert on imperial constitutional relations, also criticized the policy. Keith, a renowned Sanskrit scholar at the University of Edinburgh, produced several indispensable references on Dominion status in the 1920s and 1930s. He was not a part of the Round Table. He mocked Curtis and his followers in a letter to Richard Jebb that suggested that the federationists made their most significant contribution to the future of the Empire by

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<sup>6</sup> Kerr interview with *Toronto Daily Star*, November 7, 1922, LP 19

<sup>7</sup> "The Constitutional Status of the Dominions," Feb 5, 1921, RTP 801

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

provoking republicans and separatists.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Keith did believe in maintaining the integrity of the Empire. “I confess that, though I desire to see the complete autonomy of the Dominion, I should like to see them in cordial and close cooperation with the United Kingdom,” he wrote to Ontario Attorney-General William Edward.<sup>10</sup> He took issue with the hasty transition to Dominion sovereignty and called it “the most important step yet taken towards the disintegration of the Empire, and one adopted without consulting the people of this country or the Dominions.”<sup>11</sup> Keith supported the Dominions’ membership in the League of Nations and their perspectives on commercial and labor issues, but feared that the League could divide the Commonwealth. He suggested that the British and Dominion delegations should meet before League Assembly sessions to agree on a common policy.<sup>12</sup> Keith cautioned that:

It is idle to ignore the danger that separate membership in the League may otherwise tend towards the disruption of the Empire, and, having regard to the state of Europe, it would be a very unwise policy which accepted the view that membership of the League should be a substitute for membership of the Empire.<sup>13</sup>

Imperial reformers attacked the League as a rival to the Commonwealth. Curtis grew frustrated that the Dominions eagerly accepted the League while neglecting their

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<sup>9</sup> Keith to Jebb, May 25, 1921. Keith was reacting to a proposal to rename the Imperial Conference the “Imperial Cabinet” no doubt as an echo of the Imperial War Cabinet. Keith did not think much of the proposal, suggesting to Jebb that “the advocates of Imperial Federation having realised tardily indeed but clearly—as Mr Lowther's address at Ottawa indicates—the impossibility of a federal Parliament in our time have clutched with pathetic desperation at the term 'Cabinet' as if the name would make up for the lack of substance. It is a curious exemplification of human fatuity, but the hopelessness of the position seems sufficiently proved by the fact that supporters of the term have every reason in its defence, but abuse their opponents as indifferent to Imperial unity.” KP 145/2

<sup>10</sup> Keith to Raney, Dec 21, 1920 KP 145/2

<sup>11</sup> Keith, letter to the editor [publication unknown], Oct 25, 1920, KP 145/2

<sup>12</sup> Keith, letter to the editor [publication unknown], May 11, 1923, KP 145/2

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

imperial commitments. “Your attention is invited to the curious but undoubted fact that while the Dominion Governments did not hesitate to bind themselves by this Covenant in relation to foreign states, they would certainly have shrunk, even at this stage, from binding themselves by a similar covenant to the United Kingdom,” he wrote to the Round Table.<sup>14</sup> Even internationalists like Alfred Zimmern worried about the Dominion governments’ eagerness to guarantee the integrity of Czechoslovakia without considering the consequences.<sup>15</sup> The League’s appeal to the Dominions, however, was clear. Its collective security acknowledged Dominion sovereignty. The Dominions’ contributions to imperial defense only drew attention to their dependence on Britain.

Some imperial reformers doubted that the League could secure world peace. Amery, for example, completely rejected most internationalist ideas as early as 1916. “Guarantees for German good behaviour, leagues of peace, disarmament, etc. are all fudge,” he wrote to Cecil.<sup>16</sup> Instead, he advocated seizing German colonies in Africa and the Indian Ocean. According to Amery, this strategy of creating a “belt of continuous British and British-held territory from the Cape to Rangoon” would appeal to the Dominions and stimulate further effort in the war.<sup>17</sup>

Curtis and Kerr both supported the concept of international organizations, but became disillusioned with the League of Nations after the Peace Conference. They had initially viewed the League as an opportunity. By the early 1920s, however, they had

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<sup>14</sup> Curtis to Brig. Gen. Sir A.H. Russell Aug 14, 1919 (circulated to Moot Dec 17, 1919), RTP 799.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Zimmern, “The non-self-governing Empire and foreign affairs,” 158.

<sup>16</sup> Amery to Cecil, Dec. 16, 1916, *Amery Diaries*, v. 1, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Cecil, unmoved, wrote back to Amery that he disagreed with every one of his proposals. “It seems to me pure Germanism,” Cecil wrote. *Amery Diaries*, p. 134.

become more ambivalent. A 1920 Round Table circular to the Dominion groups made it clear that they valued the Commonwealth more than the League as means to secure peace:

The future of international peace and order hangs upon the test: and if indeed the flowering of the younger British nations be incompatible with their union in a single Commonwealth, the League of Nations must prove as vain and illusive an ideal in this twentieth century of grace as mankind's first glimmering desire for social order in the Age of Stone or Brass.<sup>18</sup>

Curtis and Kerr criticized the loose structure of the League. Their unshakable belief in federal governments clashed with the League's encouragement of national self-interest. Curtis tempered his enthusiasm for the League in his "Windows of Freedom" article. The League was only "scaffolding" until governments created a true international federation, he wrote.<sup>19</sup> He told Gilbert Murray, a prominent British internationalist, that he had become "unalterably convinced that in the centuries before us the nations of the world will feel their way to a world state...based on the will of a world wide electorate."<sup>20</sup> He explained to Murray that the organic union of the Commonwealth would hasten this process.<sup>21</sup> Kerr and Curtis alluded to the growth of a world state in their speeches at the Williamstown Institute of Politics in 1922. The *Christian Science Monitor* described their state as "similar to the present British Empire, or, as they prefer to call it, the British

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<sup>18</sup> Round Table circular to Dominion Groups, December 22, 1920, LP 17

<sup>19</sup> Curtis, *Windows of Freedom*, 23

<sup>20</sup> Curtis to Murray, Nov 3, 1920, RTP 811

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Deborah Lavin best described Curtis's belief in the importance of the Commonwealth in shaping international affairs, suggesting that "he translated his old-fashioned imperialism of Dominion consolidation into a new doctrine of internationalism in which the British Commonwealth of Nations, as the first international organization, would stand forth as an example of international cooperation and as an influential world power in its own right." Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and the Founding of Chatham House," in Andrea Bosco and Conelia Navari, eds., *Chatham House and British foreign policy 1919-45: The Royal Institute of International Affairs during the inter-war period*, (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1994).

Commonwealth: a loose federation of nations, each sovereign over its internal affairs but all acting as a unit in matters of international scope.”<sup>22</sup> Curtis and Kerr criticized the League with historical analogies. While Curtis likened the League to the Ancient Greek League of Delos, Kerr compared it to the United States under the Articles of Confederation.<sup>23</sup>

Kerr suggested that the League could not bring peace because it was based on sovereign states. He identified sovereignty as the source of international tension in his Williamstown lecture. At the same time, he did not support the creation of an international super-state. Kerr used the British Commonwealth as an example of a loose collection of independent states that could work towards common goals.<sup>24</sup> He spoke of the entire Empire as a successful way to integrate colonies, dependencies, and fully sovereign states into a political unit. Kerr used the British Empire as a microcosm of international relations. He described it as forming a “loose, independent bond,” covering a quarter of a population of the Earth.<sup>25</sup> Kerr’s Williamstown speech contrasted with Zimmern’s portrayal of the League and Commonwealth working in harmony. He dismissed the League as a “phantom...which is somehow by phrases and speeches to remedy the evils which threaten society...”<sup>26</sup> He also linked the League to what he described as a post-war Balkanization of Europe, which created international anarchy.

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<sup>22</sup> From *Boston Christian Science Monitor*, Aug 16, 1922, LP 503

<sup>23</sup> Kerr, third lecture at the Williamstown Institute of Politics, August, 1922. Transcribed in LP 503.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Kerr, LP 498

Kerr feared that the Commonwealth would become more like the League of Nations. The League had encouraged Dominion autonomy in foreign affairs, and Kerr worried that it had loosened imperial bonds. Imperial reformers fretted that the Dominions would abandon their organic bonds for the League's more formal, legalistic relations. Kerr warned that the Commonwealth could "dissolve" into a League of Nations.<sup>27</sup> He worried that the ineffectiveness, divisiveness, and looseness of the League would infect the Commonwealth. For Kerr and other imperialists, the Commonwealth remained a superior model for international relations, while the League served as an example of the pitfalls of internationalism.

### **THE DOMINIONS, THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, AND IMPERIAL FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920s**

Imperial foreign policy in the 1920s focused on the nature of Dominion autonomy.<sup>28</sup> Imperial reformers feared that Dominion autonomy would dissolve imperial ties. Their fears were confirmed when the Dominions used international organizations to separate themselves from imperial obligations. This section examines how the growing autonomy of the Dominions affected imperial policy in the 1920s in two ways. First, the League of Nations challenged the nature of Dominion status itself, especially after the Irish Free State joined in 1923. The Free State government used the League to redefine

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<sup>27</sup> Kerr, LP 498

<sup>28</sup> Four Dominions initially joined the League: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa. Newfoundland never joined the League of Nations and lost Dominion status in 1933. The Government of India joined the League as well. The Irish Free State joined the League of Nations in 1923.

relations with Britain as international instead of imperial. Second, Dominion governments became more reluctant to commit to British military goals without their consent, which challenged the idea of the Commonwealth as an ironclad defensive alliance. In particular, their specific exclusion from European defense obligations in the Locarno Treaty of 1925 signaled a profound weakening of the Empire to many imperialists. The Dominions had less autonomy in foreign policy in practice than these actions seemed to indicate. The perception of a fraying unity, however, furthered imperialists' anxieties that internationalism and Dominion sovereignty had become a threat to imperial solidarity. The Irish Free State's acquisition of Dominion Status complicated the relationship of Britain and the Dominions in international institutions. The Irish Free State government pushed an agenda of Dominion sovereignty and tried to move relations with Britain to the League instead of the Commonwealth. The Irish Free State's role in the Commonwealth has become a source of controversy amongst historians, who debate the extent to which the Free State government served as a driving force for Dominion independence.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of politicians' intentions, the Free State

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<sup>29</sup> The strongest case for the IFS as a force for change in the concept of Dominion status comes from D.W. Harkness. He argues that Irish demands for greater sovereignty, constitutional interpretations, and use of the League led the way for a more international relationship within the Commonwealth. See D.W. Harkness, *The restless dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-1931* (London: Macmillan, 1969.) Ged Martin, on the other hand, contends that Harkness overstated the Irish relationship to the Commonwealth on two grounds. First, he claims via an elaborate cricket analogy that the South African and Canadian governments had already done more to assert Dominion sovereignty and the IFS efforts merely supplemented these efforts. Second, he suggests that the IFS government had no intention of changing anything about Dominion status because the Free State was hardly a "genuine member" of the Commonwealth. See Ged Martin, "The Irish Free State and the evolution of the Commonwealth" in Robert Hyam, ed., *Reappraisals in British Imperialism*, (London: Macmillan, 1975).

formed an alliance with Canada and South Africa to push for greater Dominion autonomy in foreign affairs.<sup>30</sup>

The Irish Free State challenged the idea of imperial unity as the backbone of Commonwealth relations. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 partitioned Ireland and made the South a Dominion; it was a sour compromise that triggered civil war between pro-Treaty and republican forces. Round Table members helped shape the new Irish dominion. Curtis became involved with the treaty process after gaining attention from a *Round Table* article he had written 1921 after traveling to Dublin. He and his co-author, John Dove, called for the creation of two responsible governments while emphasizing the importance of an engaged citizenry. They made direct references to pre-Union South Africa, comparing the Northern and Southern governments to the Cape Colony and Natal.<sup>31</sup> Curtis and Dove also maintained that only an organic union with Britain and the Commonwealth could lead to a united Irish government. The article caught the eye of British officials, and Curtis was appointed as a special constitutional adviser to the commission that developed the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. He stayed attached to the Colonial Office until 1924 to monitor the Treaty's enforcement. Kerr involved himself in the negotiations in his capacity as an influential adviser in Lloyd George's circle.

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Kennedy argues, for example, that the Commonwealth implications of the IFS at the League have been overstated, and that IFS diplomacy sought equally or more to establish the IFS as a European state. See Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations 1919-1946: international relations, diplomacy, and politics*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996). Ged Martin emphasized this aspect by arguing that "The Free State was less Dominion setting precedents for Dominions than a small Catholic state enjoying the illusion of an international role." Martin, 209.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Curtis and John Dove, "Ireland," *Round Table*, v. XI (Dec. 1920 to Sept. 1921) pp. 465-534. Round Table articles preserved in this volume remain unsigned and undated. The attribution of an article on Ireland to Curtis and Dove comes from Alex May, "Lionel Curtis," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

The Treaty created an Irish Dominion while the nature of Dominion status was unclear. The Commonwealth in 1921 had not yet become an international organization, and Dominion claims to sovereignty were more aspirational than real. Éamon de Valera, an influential leader in the Irish republican movement, remained unconvinced that Dominion status implied anything other than British imperial domination. He explained to Lloyd George that he did not accept British assurances of Dominion autonomy:

‘Dominion’ status for Ireland everyone who understands the conditions knows to be illusory. The freedom which the British Dominions enjoy is not so much the result of legal enactments or of treaties as of the immense distances which separate them from Britain and have made interference by her impracticable. The most explicit guarantees, including the Dominions’ acknowledged right to secede, would be necessary to secure for Ireland an equal degree of freedom. There is no suggestion, however, in the proposals made of any such guarantees. Instead, the natural position is reversed; our geographical situation with respect to Britain is made the basis of denials and restrictions unheard of in the case of the Dominions; the smaller island must give military safeguards and guarantees to the larger and suffer itself to be reduced to the position of a helpless dependency.<sup>32</sup>

De Valera was willing to accept “a certain treaty of free association with the British Commonwealth group, as with a partial league of nations.”<sup>33</sup> This became an important precedent. De Valera showed he could accept the Commonwealth as an international organization as long as it could be stripped of any vestiges of British imperial control.

Irish Free State attempts to interpret the Commonwealth in a more international than imperial context affected the other Dominions. The hasty post-war establishment of the Dominions as nations within the British Empire meant unifying their constitutional

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<sup>32</sup> De Valera to Lloyd George, Aug. 10, 1921. *Official Correspondence relating to the Peace Negotiations June-September, 1921*. First edition Dáil Éireann Dublin (October, 1921).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

statuses; Canada's freedoms now became New Zealand's, and so on.<sup>34</sup> The British insistence on a unified Dominion Status created some friction as each Dominion government interpreted the Commonwealth in its own way. Dominion status for Canadians in 1919, for example, implied a separation from Britain in external affairs far more than New Zealanders desired. The Anglo-Irish Treaty took this constitutional unity even further. It specified a direct equivalence between the constitutional status of Canada and the Irish Free State.<sup>35</sup> The correlation with Canada provided an easy way to specify the Irish Free State's constitutional position without having to officially define Dominion Status. Furthermore, it gave British officials a way to assure the Free State's Provisional Government that it had the same privileges as the “senior” Dominion and could counter claims of imperial control by pointing to specific instances of Canadian autonomy. At the same time, British officials negotiating the Treaty did not seem to comprehend fully the consequences of the clause for the rest of the Dominions. The constitutional equivalence to Canada also worked in reverse; any pioneering advances by the Irish Free State toward Dominion sovereignty would apply to Canada and the rest of the Dominions.

Imperial reformers doubted that the Irish Free State would exhibit the spirit of Commonwealth cooperation. Kerr advised Lloyd George against Dominion Status as a solution for Ireland in 1921. “I am afraid that Ireland is not yet ready for the Dominion

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<sup>34</sup> There were some technical exceptions to this universality of status. For example, the Canadian government could not technically change its constitution without British action because it was based on the British North America Act.

<sup>35</sup> Anglo-Irish Treaty, Article 2.

solution,” he wrote. “The essence of the Dominion solution is a spirit of loyal partnership with the British Empire and that spirit of tolerance and compromise which lies at the root of British institutions. It does not yet exist in Ireland.”<sup>36</sup> Keith agreed with this sentiment. He wrote an editorial in the *Scotsman* in early 1922 reminding readers that “it is, in fact, important to realize that the Dominion status of the Irish Free State rests on a different foundation from that of any of the Dominions. These obtained it as a free grant from the Imperial Government and Parliament; the Irish State owes it to a successful rebellion followed by a treaty.”<sup>37</sup> In subsequent letters to the *Statesman*, Keith argued that the Irish Free State government planned to use Dominion status as a path to complete independence and had no interest in permanent allegiance to the King and suggested that the Irish Free State representatives were more interested in forming a republic. Keith did not see an Irish republic as a problem for the Commonwealth. He claimed that an Irish republic would cooperate more fully with British interests in defense and foreign policy after a definitive break with the British Empire. “Is not the Constitution of the British Commonwealth of Nations elastic enough to include a republic?”<sup>38</sup> he asked.

The Irish Free State used the League to challenge the British interpretation of Commonwealth relations. The Free State joined the League of Nations Assembly in 1923. In July 1924, Free State Governor-General Timothy Healy told Colonial Secretary

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<sup>36</sup> Kerr to Lloyd George, September 28, 1921, LP 633

<sup>37</sup> Keith, “The Irish Treaty and Irish Sovereignty,” *Scotsman*, Jan 9, 1922, from Keith, *Letters on imperial relations and international law 1916-1935*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 31-2.

<sup>38</sup> Keith, *Letters*, pp. 31-35.

J.H. Thomas<sup>39</sup> that his government had prepared to register the Anglo-Irish Treaty at the League of Nations. Treaty registration conflicted with the British *inter se* doctrine, which held that the relations between the various parts of the British Empire should be conducted only through imperial channels and never through the League or any other international organization. The British government sought to separate intra-imperial disputes from international arbitration. The Free State government argument countered that, as two members of the League of Nations, the British and Irish Free State governments should conduct their affairs through the proper international channels.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, the Irish Free State government was using the League to make Geneva the center of Anglo-Irish relations instead of London. In 1925, amendments to the Treaty passed, and again, the Free State government registered the treaty with the League. Amery, now the Dominions Secretary,<sup>41</sup> urged the Free State government not to register the treaty until the Imperial Conference in 1926. The controversy ended in stalemate. Thomas argued that Dominions agreed that Commonwealth agreements differed from international agreements at the 1926 Imperial Conference.<sup>42</sup> The Free State leadership certainly did not accept this argument, nor did the greater League community. The

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<sup>39</sup> J.H. Thomas served as the Colonial Secretary in the short-lived British Labour Government from January to November 1924.

<sup>40</sup> J.P. Walshe wrote to the British government: "The obligations contained in Article 18 are, in their [the IFS Governments'] opinion, imposed in the most specific terms on every member of the League and they are unable to accept the contention that the clear and unequivocal language of that Article is susceptible of any interpretation compatible with the limitation which the British Government now seek to read into it." Walshe to Amery, Dec. 18, 1924, DO 35/469/8.

<sup>41</sup> Amery had become Secretary of the State for the Colonies in November 1924 under Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government. The Dominions Office splintered from the Colonial Office in 1925 at Amery's urging, but he held both offices until the Conservatives left office in 1929.

<sup>42</sup> J.H. Thomas, Note on the registration of the Treaty of 1921 with the League of Nations, June 3, 1932. DO 35/469/8

British government refused to acknowledge the registration.<sup>43</sup> Nothing else came of the dispute.

The Irish Free State used the League to challenge the position of the Dominions again in 1926 by standing for a non-permanent seat on the League of Nations Council. The League Council at the time consisted of permanent seats occupied by France, Japan, Italy, and the British Empire, and six rotating non-permanent seats. In September 1926, Free State Minister of External Affairs Desmond FitzGerald informed the British and Dominion representatives at Geneva that the Free State intended to stand for election. The move surprised the other Commonwealth delegates, who offered no support.<sup>44</sup> A Free State council seat departed from both League and Commonwealth practice.<sup>45</sup> It challenged the ambiguous nature of the British Empire seat. In April 1926, the Canadian delegate Raoul Dandurand advanced the notion that the British Empire seat implied representation of the United Kingdom and its dependent colonies and not the parts that had League membership in their own right. FitzGerald agreed.<sup>46</sup> The British government did not officially accept this view. British representatives assumed they represented the whole Empire, including the Dominions; Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Secretary, habitually passed information from secret Council meetings to Dominion

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<sup>43</sup> Kennedy, 61-69

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> Kennedy makes a compelling argument that the IFS candidature had as much to do with emphasizing the freedom of all League nations to run for Council seats and was not just as an attack on Dominion Status. *Ibid.*, 82

<sup>46</sup> Batterbee, note on the discussions with the Dominion representatives at Geneva, April 1926, DO 117/21.

representatives.<sup>47</sup> Chamberlain admitted that the election of a Dominion to the Council would exclude the Dominions from the British Empire umbrella.

The Council election also unnerved Dominion representatives. FitzGerald surprised the British and Dominion delegations with the request, and stood for election even after giving them the impression that he would stand down.<sup>48</sup> The Free State government may have also irritated Canadian representatives who assumed that Canada would enter the Council first. Harry Batterbee, a Dominions Office official, wrote to E.J. Harding, the Permanent Undersecretary of the Dominions Department, that the Canadian government felt “jockeyed out of her proper position and she may be annoyed if we give all of our votes to the Free State.”<sup>49</sup> No Dominion representatives supported the Free State election at the time, although both Canadian and Australian representatives agreed that Dominions could occupy a Council seat.<sup>50</sup> Amery wrote to Chamberlain to say that the Irish candidacy would give an impression of “disastrous disunity” among Commonwealth League members.<sup>51</sup> In the end, the Free State stood for election and lost. Nevertheless, FitzGerald made it possible for Dominions to run for a seat on the Council.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Batterbee notes that Chamberlain asked how Dandurand's interpretation would affect the extent to which he could pass information to the Dominions.

<sup>48</sup> Kennedy, 82

<sup>49</sup> Batterbee to E.J. Harding, Dec. 15, 1926, DO 117/28.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Bell, the New Zealand representative, strongly disagreed with any Dominion representation on the Council. Austen Chamberlain, Cabinet Memorandum, “Candidature of the Dominions for seats on the Council of the League of Nations,” Sept. 1926, DO 117/27.

<sup>51</sup> Amery to Chamberlain, Sept. 20, 1926, DO 117/27.

Canada gained a seat on the Council in 1927, and the Irish Free State replaced it in 1930.<sup>52</sup>

The Free State's use of the League to assert sovereignty was not entirely novel. The League allowed the other Dominions to stake their claim as nations and establish foreign policy credentials outside the shadow cast by Britain.<sup>53</sup> Irish Free State representatives explained their actions in Commonwealth terms. FitzGerald portrayed the Free State as an advocate for better Dominion representation at Geneva. He assured Austen Chamberlain that "we are moved entirely by what we conceive to be the best interests of the Dominions"<sup>54</sup> and that his vote canvassing for the Council would "not let the Dominions down."<sup>55</sup> While some historians question the extent to which the Free State government had ever considered itself a part of the Commonwealth,<sup>56</sup> its representatives' actions were not an unprecedented departure from other Dominions. British and Dominion governments shared an understanding that whatever autonomy Free State representatives wrangled through the League also applied to the other

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<sup>52</sup> Kennedy suggests that the Treaty registration had as much to do with establishing League credentials in order to use the League to dispute the partition of Ireland as challenging the *inter se* doctrine. Furthermore, he presents a convincing case that IFS officials waited for the British government to kill the Geneva Protocol for mutual defense in 1925 before enthusiastically asserting IFS support. In reality, Kennedy argues, the IFS government had no interest in ratifying the protocol, but cannily let the British government cast itself as anti-internationalist, which allowed the Free State to both protect its image as a strong international citizen and publicly disagree with the British government. See Michael Kennedy, "Chicanery and candour: the Irish Free State and the Geneva Protocol, 1924-5," *Irish Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (May 1995), pp. 371-384.

<sup>53</sup> Martin makes the argument that the Canadian and South African governments had already achieved sovereignty without the Free State's actions.

<sup>54</sup> FitzGerald to Austen Chamberlain, Sept. 14, 1926, cited in Kennedy, 83

<sup>55</sup> Kennedy, 87

<sup>56</sup> Ged Martin argues that the Irish Free State government had always treated Commonwealth membership as a pragmatic byproduct of the Treaty and thus never accepted Commonwealth membership. Martin, 204.

Dominions, and Canadian and South African representatives often supported these claims. The Free State framed its actions at the League in the context of Dominion sovereignty, not anti-imperial separatism.

Imperialists worried about the effect of international organizations and increasing Dominion sovereignty on Commonwealth military arrangements. They celebrated the participation of the Dominions in the First World War as the purest example of imperial unity. After the war, however, Dominion governments claimed that Britain could no longer declare war for the entire Empire. The Governor-General of Australia characterized automatic Australian participation in British wars as an infringement on Australia's "right to self-government" in 1919.<sup>57</sup> He admitted, however, that his objection was theoretical. Nevertheless, the question of the Dominions' role in British wars remained a controversial problem throughout the 1920s and 30s for several reasons. First, the question of peace and war raised serious constitutional concerns in regard to the Crown. Constitutional scholars wondered how the King could be at war and at peace at the exact same time in different parts of the Empire. Second, the problem of war and peace threatened key Commonwealth assumptions. Imperial reformers prioritized the integration of imperial defenses above all else. If they could not count on the full strength of the Commonwealth in war, what exactly had the Commonwealth become?

The Chanak crisis tested Dominion assertions of autonomy. In August 1922, Turkish forces reoccupied territory that they had ceded to the Allies in the Treaty of Sevres. The Turkish army advanced toward the international zone holding the

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<sup>57</sup> CO 886/3 pp. 30-1

Dardanelles at Chanak. The British government faced a decision whether to attack.<sup>58</sup> Lloyd George made overtures for Dominion participation in the war effort. New Zealand Premier William Massey immediately pledged support, as did Australia's William Hughes.<sup>59</sup> Hughes, however, consulted his Parliament before committing troops.

The League of Nations also added to the complexity of intra-Commonwealth diplomacy. Hughes claimed that Australia supported the British effort, but his government preferred a peaceful resolution. He said that the Dominion representatives in Geneva wanted the League to get involved, but Keith described this claim as “shrouded in a certain mystery.”<sup>60</sup> Commonwealth representatives at the League actually disagreed on whether the League should act. British representative H.A.L. Fisher and South Africa representative Robert Cecil both rejected a proposal for the League Council to intervene. Smuts, now the Prime Minister of South Africa, called for League action.<sup>61</sup>

The Canadian government defended its right to decide whether Canada was at war. William MacKenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister, refused to reply to Lloyd George until Canada's Parliament made a decision. King saw the call to arms in terms of Dominion sovereignty; he wrote in his diary that the message had been designed to “test

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<sup>58</sup> David McIntyre, *The Britannic vision*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 154-5. John Darwin also covers the Chanak Crisis with special reference to Parliament in "The *Chanak* Crisis and the British Cabinet", *History*, Feb 1980, Vol. 65 Issue 213, pp 32–48

<sup>59</sup> Keith, *Sovereignty of the Dominions*, 456-7. Lloyd George cannily played on Australian and New Zealand sentiment to protect the Dardanelles, where so many ANZAC forces had perished during the war.

<sup>60</sup> Keith, *Sovereignty of the Dominions*, 457

<sup>61</sup> Although Keith notes that he did not get caught up with the crisis until September 25, after which South African military involvement was less urgent.

out centralization vs. autonomy regarding European wars.”<sup>62</sup> He brought his argument to Parliament in February, 1923. “It is for [Canada's] Parliament to decide whether or not we should participate in wars in different parts of the world, and it is neither right nor proper for an individual, nor for any group of individuals, to take any step which might limit the rights of Parliament in a matter which is of such great concern to all the people of our country,”<sup>63</sup> he declared.

The crisis at Chanak passed without violence. Dominion status, however, remained a crucial issue during negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne, which settled the outstanding questions of Turkish territory. The British delegation to the conference did not include any Dominion representatives.<sup>64</sup> King argued that his Parliament could not decide the extent to which it was bound by the treaty without representatives in Lausanne.<sup>65</sup> Britain could no longer negotiate on behalf of the entire Empire without facing Dominion protests.

The negotiations for the Locarno Pact highlighted Dominion autonomy from British foreign policy. The treaties settled at Locarno in 1925 attempted to stabilize post-war Western European borders and normalize relations between France and Germany. Britain pledged to guarantee the treaty. The Locarno Pact assumed imperial dimensions

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in McIntyre, 156. Keith also suggested that King had been upset that the British call to Dominion arms had reached the Canadian press before the government and that he had received no other information about the seriousness of the situation in the Near East. See Keith *Sovereignty*, 458-9.

<sup>63</sup> Keith, *Sovereignty of the Dominions*, 459-60

<sup>64</sup> According to McIntyre, this was partly due to French demands for representatives from Tunisia and Morocco if the Dominions appeared on the panel.

<sup>65</sup> Keith, *Sovereignty*, 460. King argues that there is a distinction between legally bound and morally bound.

when Chamberlain and the Foreign Office did not include the Dominions in the negotiations. Keith suggested that Chamberlain had asked Dominion governments for their opinion because they rejected the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes.<sup>66</sup> Chamberlain claimed that Dominion antipathy towards the Protocol proved that Dominion governments would not consent to any possibility of armed intervention to maintain security in Europe.<sup>67</sup> The Foreign Office had learned its lesson from Chanak, and refused to bind the Dominions to any European action without their consent. Therefore, Article Nine of the Locarno Treaty specifically exempted the British Dominions and India from any obligation unless their respective governments accepted it.

The Locarno Pact carried several constitutional and practical implications for the relationship between British, imperial, and Dominion foreign policy. In one way, it affirmed the Dominions' autonomy in foreign affairs by specifically exempting them from an obligation to participate in a British war in Europe. Chamberlain himself took this line when explaining the ramifications of the Locarno Treaty to reporters. "My government has not the authority to commit or bind any of the self-governing Dominions," he declared. "The Commonwealth in itself is the most perfect example of a League of Nations."<sup>68</sup> In another way, though, the Locarno Pacts reinforced the unity of

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<sup>66</sup> Keith Sovereignty, 399. The Irish Free State was the exception, although Kennedy argues that the Free State publicly supported the Protocol only because the government knew it was doomed. "Chicanery and candour."

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 399. R.F. Holland also suggests that Dominion Francophobia made the Foreign Office wary of involving them in the negotiations. See Holland, *Commonwealth Alliance*, p. 47

<sup>68</sup> "Heckling at Geneva: Mr. Chamberlain's Ordeal," *Morning Post*, Sept. 12, 1925. CO 537/1097

the Crown. Keith suggested that exemption of the Dominions and India only emphasized that treaties negotiated by the UK Foreign Office automatically bound the entire Empire unless otherwise noted.<sup>69</sup> The Treaties meant that Britain could no longer commit the Dominions to foreign pacts without Dominion representatives present.

British officials maintained that British wars committed the whole Empire. C.W. Dixon, a Dominions Office official, wrote in an internal note about Article Nine that “The Article in the Treaty was certainly not intended to cast any doubt on the hitherto accepted principle that, when His Majesty is at war, the whole Empire is at war...”<sup>70</sup> Batterbee preferred to preserve the ambiguity of the position, claiming that any breach of the Locarno Treaty would lead to a world war anyway and advised avoiding any specific inquiry into the potential ramifications of the Treaty on Dominion Status, the Crown, and imperial obligations to fight.<sup>71</sup> A full investigation would bring up more problems than it solved.

Imperialists outside the government, however, viewed the Locarno Pact as a blow to imperial unity in foreign affairs. Richard Jebb wrote to the *Morning Post* that the Article represented a constitutional deviation. He claimed that before the Locarno Treaty, Dominions could choose between a passive or active belligerency, but Article Nine gave them the ability to remain neutral.<sup>72</sup> War, he wrote, threatened no less than the

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<sup>69</sup> Keith 401

<sup>70</sup> CO 537/1097

<sup>71</sup> CO 537/1097

<sup>72</sup> Jebb, “The Empire and the pact,” *Morning Post*, Oct. 23, 1925, CO 537/1097

dissolution of the British Empire.<sup>73</sup> Kerr's correspondence with L.C. Christie, a Canadian Round Table member working as a secretary to Borden, convinced him that the Pact created problems for the Empire. Christie pointed out that Britain's failure to consult the Dominions ignored promises for inter-imperial consultation on foreign policy. Kerr forwarded the exchange to Lloyd George with a note cautioning that "Article 9 of the Locarno Treaties may be the beginning of the end for the diplomatic unity of the British Empire."<sup>74</sup>

British party politics also caused problems for imperial unity in foreign policy. The Labour Party came into power in Britain in 1924 and recognized the Soviet Union as the legitimate government in Russia on behalf of the entire Empire. Some Dominion governments were aghast; the Australian government strongly objected to the lack of Dominion consultation.<sup>75</sup> The Canadian government took a different tactic and acknowledged the Soviet government separately.<sup>76</sup> This dispute, although minor, highlighted the Dominions' ambiguous position in imperial foreign affairs.

The British government and imperialists began to confront the realities of the growing diplomatic autonomy of the Dominions in the 1920s. Foreign-policy issues raised uncomfortable questions about the Dominions' autonomy in foreign affairs. The Locarno Pacts highlighted the contrast between Britain's commitments to Europe versus

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Dixon noted these objections, but felt that it was not necessary at this time to discuss them with the Dominions.

<sup>74</sup> Kerr to Lloyd George, Nov. 13, 1925 LP 223

<sup>75</sup> Amery recalled the incident in a memo setting the agenda of the 1926 Imperial Conference. Amery memorandum, "Next Imperial Conference," Dec. 17, 1925, DO 117/10. Stanley Bruce's specific objection is mentioned in Keith, *Sovereignty of the British Dominions*, 385-6.

<sup>76</sup> Keith, *Sovereignty of the Dominions*, 385.

the Commonwealth. These conflicts strengthened imperialists' feelings of impending disunity. Some imperialists did not see the League's collective security as a solution. They made plans to mold the Commonwealth into an international organization with more effective guarantees for imperial defense.

### **REMAKING THE COMMONWEALTH**

Imperial reformers debated the nature of the Commonwealth after the war. As the Dominions gained autonomy, the Commonwealth took on the trappings of an international organization in its own right. For some imperial advocates, most notably Zimmern, the Commonwealth and the League of Nations could combine towards the same ends. Other reformers viewed Dominion membership in the League Assembly as a harbinger of imperial dissolution. They worried that the Commonwealth would start to look more like the League and lose the close bonds of imperial solidarity. They hoped to retain unity of purpose for the Commonwealth, and proposed ways that the Dominions could become fully sovereign while maintaining the Commonwealth connection. Their plans defined the Commonwealth as an international institution based on imperial ties, distinct from the League.

Amery and Kerr promoted the Commonwealth as an alternative to the League. Both contrasted its informal cooperation with the League's legalism. Both also prioritized the maintenance of the Commonwealth as a unified bloc with shared interests. They differed on how they viewed the Commonwealth's relationship to the United States. Amery encouraged the growth of the Commonwealth as a political and economic unit

that could stand on equal footing with other regions such as Europe or the Americas. This line of thinking combined the influence of Amery's mentor Joseph Chamberlain with a fear of European entanglements. Kerr sought closer links with the United States in order to foster more harmony amongst what he called "the English-Speaking Peoples." Kerr's interest in Anglo-American bonds came from his involvement with the Rhodes Trust as well as his Round Table affinity for American federalism.<sup>77</sup>

Amery's support for a Commonwealth built on cooperation between autonomous nations began before the war. Unlike Curtis and Kerr, Amery was an early advocate of Dominion autonomy and a critic of federation. He had a distinctly international vision for the Commonwealth that would also retain and strengthen imperial ties. Arthur Balfour referred to this idea as a "third policy" between federalism and separation into "indifferent isolation."<sup>78</sup> Amery also grew familiar with the political realities of the Dominions' nebulous status as the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1924-1929 and the Secretary of State for the Dominions from 1925-1929.<sup>79</sup>

Amery spread his message of imperial solidarity to the Dominions. He delivered a series of speeches outlining the importance of imperial unity and Dominion autonomy in dozens of cities across the Empire during a tour of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa.<sup>80</sup> Amery outlined his vision for an international Commonwealth in his

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<sup>77</sup> Kerr became the Secretary of the Rhodes Trust in 1925.

<sup>78</sup> Balfour, introduction to Amery's *Empire in the New Era*

<sup>79</sup> Amery himself served as the driving force for splitting the Dominions Department of the Colonial Office into its own Office, though he held both offices simultaneously

<sup>80</sup> These speeches are collected in Leopold Amery, *The Empire in a new era*, (London: Arnold & Co., 1928). The speaking tour occurred in 1927 and 1928.

speeches, but also altered his message to suit different Dominion audiences; for example, Amery's South African speeches tended to emphasize the international character of the Commonwealth and South African autonomy, while his New Zealand speeches played more on ideas of race patriotism by referencing the importance of migration from settlers of "British stock."

Amery stressed the coexistence of both an imperial and a national identity for Dominion subjects. "The two sentiments have rarely been antagonistic, never incompatible," he said in a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute when he returned. "Sometimes they have competed with each other; more often they have complemented each other."<sup>81</sup> He reassured a South African audience that "so far from there being any conflict between the claims of the Empire and of South Africa to your loyalty, those claims are inseparable. The Empire is not something outside of South Africa and separate from South Africa; it is only the wider and greater expression of South Africa's national life, as for us in England it is the wider expression of our national life."<sup>82</sup> Amery's conception of imperial citizenship was more spiritual than political. He told an audience of officials and politicians in Pretoria that:

It is in that sense that I ventured to say the other day that the Empire, like the Kingdom of Heaven, is something within us. 'Empire' is not something which we submit to, that owns us: it is something that we own, something which for each of us means an enlargement, an exaltation of our own national life...<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Amery, speech to Royal Colonial Institute, April 28, 1928, *Empire in a new era*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Amery, Civic dinner, Johannesburg, Sept. 8, 1927, *Empire in a new era*, 58

<sup>83</sup> Amery at a Government Dinner, Pretoria, Sept. 7, 1927, *Ibid.*, 43

Amery held the unification of the Empire under a single Crown to be a fundamental tenet of imperial citizenship. The Crown, Amery argued, “is not a mere symbol. It is a very real constitutional and organic bond of union.”<sup>84</sup> He suggested to the Royal Colonial Institute that the Crown rendered the separate governments of the Empire into “one single indissoluble body corporate of the King and his subjects,”<sup>85</sup> in essence uniting their interests for the global good of the Empire and enabling the spirit of cooperation inherent in Commonwealth relations.<sup>86</sup> Amery’s belief in the single crown spread to his officials in the Dominions Office. They defended it as the constitutional basis of the Commonwealth.<sup>87</sup>

Amery's characterized the future of politics as competition between large economic blocs. In his Royal Colonial Institute speech, he identified Empire’s two largest potential competitors as a united Europe and the United States. No European nation, he claimed, could stand against the naval power of the British Empire, the United States, or even Japan.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, he suggested that European nations should contemplate combining into what he called “Pan-Europa,” a European organization based not on any federal constitution, but on the basis of informal cooperation among sovereign

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<sup>84</sup> Amery, speech to Royal Colonial Institute, April 28, 1928, *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5. Amery uses the term “Empire” and “Commonwealth” interchangeably

<sup>87</sup> Other interpretations presented the Dominions as each under a separate Crown (such as a King of South Africa) all united in the same monarch as advanced by Irish leaders Arthur Griffith and Kevin O’Higgins and later South African Premier J.B. Hertzog. Amery also explicitly rejected any conception of the monarchy as a personal union with the Dominions as had existed between Britain and Hanover under Kings George I, II, and III.

<sup>88</sup> Amery, speech to Royal Colonial Institute, April 28, 1928, *Empire in a new era*, 7. Amery had special knowledge of naval competition, having served as the First Lord of the Admiralty during the Washington Naval Conference of 1922.

nations much like the British Commonwealth.<sup>89</sup> The United States, on the other hand, not only represented an unprecedented level of consumption, production, and wealth, but also stood at the head of a burgeoning Pan-American union.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Amery expressed concern over the economic potential of the Soviet Union, China, or a Far Eastern bloc led by Japan. Amery's imperial program, therefore, aimed to marshal the resources of the British Empire into its own bloc. He suggested that only the vast resources of the British Empire could compete with a Pan-European or Pan-American union. Otherwise, he warned, Britain would be absorbed by the European Economic Union, while the Dominions would gravitate towards a bloc led by the United States.<sup>91</sup>

Amery's vision for the Commonwealth focused on greater economic integration. He complained in a speech to government officials in Wellington that “we have in the past regarded economic issues as matters in which each part of the Empire should look after itself alone, hoping and believing that things would thus work out in the best interest of all.”<sup>92</sup> Amery wanted to pool the vast resources of the entire British Empire. He told the Canadian Club that combining northern and tropical produce was “the secret of all modern economic development”<sup>93</sup> and suggested that Canada should take advantage of the Empire’s bounty: “Her [Canada’s] Empire is there already, hers to use, hers to

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<sup>89</sup> Amery, speech to Royal Colonial Institute, April 28, 1928, *Empire in a new era*, 7-8

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>92</sup> Amery, Government luncheon, Wellington, Nov. 29, 1927, *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>93</sup> Canadian Club luncheon, Ottawa, January 24, 1928, Amery, *Ibid.*, 264-5

develop and build up, just as much as it is ours.”<sup>94</sup> Still the acolyte of Joseph Chamberlain, Amery emphasized tariff reform as the key to unlocking the economic potential of the Empire. Amery was disappointed that the 1926 Imperial Conference failed to establish imperial tariff preferences. He wrote in his diary that “empire development with imperial preference left out was like Hamlet minus the Prince of Denmark.”<sup>95</sup> Tariff reform, however, remained a controversial issue, and Amery reined in his tariff propaganda at official functions.<sup>96</sup>

Amery’s imperial vision went beyond economic integration. His speeches depicted an all-encompassing union of Dominion governments and the Empire. The Commonwealth, he told the Royal Colonial Institute, would evolve into “Pan-Britannia,” fueled by a “living pulsating energy” of Imperial patriotism.<sup>97</sup> This passage from a speech delivered in Johannesburg best encapsulated the scope of his plans:

The British Empire is a Commonwealth for security; it is a Commonwealth for increase and for welfare, but it is also a Commonwealth for the development of the personality and character of all its peoples...And not the least fruitful side of Empire co-operation is co-operation in everything that makes for human progress, co-operation in political intercourse and political thought, co-operation in science, in art, in education, and in social work.

Amery portrayed the British Empire as an alternative to the global community envisioned by internationalists. He denied his plans called for imperial autarky, and he stressed the importance of foreign trade. His speeches, however, revealed his belief in an imperial bloc with access to resources from all climates. Amery’s zeal for

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 265

<sup>95</sup> *Amery diaries*, Nov. 1, 1926, 475

<sup>96</sup> One exception was in Wellington. Amery, *New Era*, 171

<sup>97</sup> Amery, Royal Colonial Institute speech, Amery, *New Era*, 12

Commonwealth integration illustrated the power of the Commonwealth idea. As Dominions Secretary, he knew more about how constitutional vagaries, Dominion nationalist politics, and competing economic policies stood in the way of cooperation than any other imperial reformer.

Kerr shared Amery's misgivings about the League of Nations and belief in Commonwealth unity in foreign affairs. Unlike Amery, however, Kerr remained a skeptic of imperial cooperation. In 1924, he wrote a letter to the *Times* under the pseudonym "Voyageur" complaining about a lack of communication between the Foreign Office and the representatives of the Dominions in London.<sup>98</sup> He also wrote to Austen Chamberlain to point out that communication between the Foreign Office and Dominion governments was not yet as good as communication with foreign governments.<sup>99</sup> Amery spoke of imperial cooperation as a significant advantage for Britain over other supranational blocs; Kerr grudgingly accepted it as the only way the Dominions would accept imperial ties.<sup>100</sup>

Kerr aimed to curb Dominion ignorance of foreign affairs. He wrote in a Round Table memorandum from the mid-1920s that Dominion citizens would not become knowledgeable about foreign affairs until the Dominions were responsible for peace and war.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, he did not think that the Commonwealth could exist unless all

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<sup>98</sup> Letter to the *Times*, Nov 12, 1924, Kerr to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 18, 1924, LP 19. In the letter to Chamberlain, he admits that he has written the "Voyageur" letter.

<sup>99</sup> Kerr to Chamberlain, Nov. 18, 1924, LP 19

<sup>100</sup> Kerr interview with Toronto Daily Star, November 7, 1922, LP 19

<sup>101</sup> Kerr memorandum, "Responsible Government in Foreign Affairs." LP, 20 It is undated, but placement in the Lothian archive dates it to late 1925 or early 1926.

of its component states went to war together. He questioned how increased Dominion autonomy in foreign affairs would affect most-favored nation tariff status or the British Empire seat on the League of Nations Council.<sup>102</sup> Kerr was also concerned that Dominion voters possessed a limited and parochial sense of foreign affairs and lacked the sophistication to act in the best interests of the Empire. He wrote to Loring Christie, a Canadian Round Table member involved in Canadian foreign affairs, that he sensed a “monastic spirit” within the Dominions that drove their governments to avoid responsibility for foreign affairs.<sup>103</sup>

Kerr differed from Avery in his views on the United States. Amery viewed the United States as the leader of a rival supranational bloc. Kerr encouraged the United States to work with the British Empire to ensure global security. He argued that the League would become engrossed with European affairs while “the main responsibility for dealing with the political problems of the rest of the world will fall upon the shoulders of the nations of the British Commonwealth and the United States.”<sup>104</sup> Kerr increasingly viewed the Commonwealth as the key to the creation of a Rhodesian association of the English-speaking peoples.

Kerr's believed that the Kellogg-Briand Pact would enable British and American sea power to maintain world peace. The 1928 Pact, engineered by American Secretary of State Frank Kellogg and French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, bound its signatories

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Kerr to Christie, March 13, 1926. This exchange was also circulated to the Round Table.

<sup>104</sup> Kerr, “The world of the Imperial Conference: a British view”, LP 414. The document is not dated, but context places it around 1926-7 after the 1926 Imperial Conference.

to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. Kerr supported the proposal in a series of articles and speeches.<sup>105</sup> He argued that states no longer tolerated violence within their borders and should not accept it as a way to resolve international disputes.

Kerr also saw the Kellogg-Briand Pact as a way for him to advance an internationalism that moved the Commonwealth away from Geneva and closer to the United States. The United States government had sponsored the Kellogg-Briand Pact and had stayed out of League of Nations. Therefore, Kerr consistently emphasized the Pact's importance in foreign policy in comparison ineffective League actions. In an article to *The Times*, he noted that, while the Covenant provided machinery for non-violent sanctions and international arbitration of disputes, it still tacitly accepted war as a legitimate instrument of national policy.<sup>106</sup> He observed that the Pact had the moral force of the United States behind it, unlike the League and the Locarno Treaties.<sup>107</sup> He characterized the Pact as a new American diplomacy and the League as an extension of the old diplomacy corrupted by European intrigue.<sup>108</sup> His assertion that the United States had chosen to withdraw from the League in order to escape the “vortex of European militarism”<sup>109</sup> suggested that he felt that the British Empire ought to look across the Atlantic instead of across the Channel.

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<sup>105</sup> Kerr spoke on the Pact to the House of Commons in March 1928 as well as to the League of Nations Union in May and the LNU Arbitration Conference in June. He also published a letter in *The Times* on April 30. LP 417.

<sup>106</sup> Kerr, letter to *The Times*, April 30, 1928, LP 417.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Kerr, address to the League of Nations Union Arbitration Conference, June 5, 1928, LP 417.

<sup>109</sup> Kerr, “The United States and the League. Pact and Covenant. The Naval Negotiations. Why Omit the Doms? Canada and the Rush Bagot Treaty.” September 15, 1928. LP 427

Kerr described the Pact as a combined effort between the Commonwealth and the United States. He argued that the combined naval strength of the United States and British Empire dwarfed any combination of powers and could therefore enforce the outlawry of war. During the late 1920s, the two governments had become estranged over naval policy stemming from unresolved disputes at the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference. Kerr suggested that a shared commitment to the Kellogg Pact would end the acrimony.<sup>110</sup> He also emphasized links between the United States and Britain, emphasizing “deep chords of community which still bind Great Britain and the United States together.” They shared language, customs, and an “essential and almost unconscious unity in moral outlook which comes to the surface in great crises.”<sup>111</sup> Kerr’s desire to include representatives of the Dominions at the signing of the Pact made it clear he saw it as a union of the United States and the Commonwealth:

But in the final picturesque climax which is to consecrate the agreement in the eyes of the whole world the Dominions ought to be in the forefront. They were present at Paris; they were present at Washington; they were present at Geneva. They ought certainly to be present at a transaction which morally, if not legally, will be the absolute and final renunciation of war, not between Great Britain and the United States alone, but between all the English-speaking peoples.<sup>112</sup>

Kerr made the implications of unity between the British Commonwealth and the United States even clearer when he described them as independent members of the “world

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<sup>110</sup> Kerr, “Anglo American Relations,” article undated and it is not indicated where or if it was published. LP 421

<sup>111</sup> Kerr, “Anglo-American Relations: A Basis of Solution,” article written for Liberal Summer School, Aug. 22, 1929. LP 426

<sup>112</sup> Kerr, “The United States and the League. Pact and Covenant. The Naval Negotiations. Why Omit the Dominions? Canada and the Rush Bagot Treaty.” September 15, 1928. LP 427

commonwealth of nations.”<sup>113</sup> Kerr’s Commonwealth ideology had spread to include the United States.

Kerr and Amery therefore viewed the Commonwealth as an alternative to the League of Nations. Both viewed the League as being susceptible to European intrigue. For Amery, cultivating the Commonwealth meant harnessing the economic resources of the Empire into a bloc capable of standing on equal footing with Europe, the United States, and potentially China and the Soviet Union. He believed that Dominion sovereignty did not matter as long as the Dominions’ central economic and strategic interests aligned with British aims. Amery therefore envisioned the Commonwealth as an international institution animated by imperial patriotism and economic integration. It also demonstrated his desire to ensure Britain remained at the head of a significant international bloc instead as a mere partner of Europe or the United States. Kerr believed that the League could do little to prevent another world war. He argued that the combined might of an alliance between the United States and the British Empire could prevent global conflicts. Kerr had a more inclusive idea of the Commonwealth that could include the United States.

## **CONCLUSION**

The development of the Commonwealth and League of Nations as parallel institutions during the 1920s caused complications for both organizations. Dominion

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<sup>113</sup> Article for American Academy of Political Science on Anglo-American Relations, April 5, 1929, LP 425

governments, particularly the Irish Free State, used the League to assert their own sovereignty and undermine imperial ties. The Dominions also became more reluctant to tie themselves to British defense commitments in Europe. The Commonwealth did not function smoothly as a League within the League, as some imperialists had claimed. Instead, League politics, such as conflict over seats on the Council, encouraged Commonwealth infighting. The Dominions' ambiguous sovereignty also hampered British treaty negotiations. Statesmen struggled to find ways to exclude the Dominions while negotiating on behalf of the British Empire.

The League did mitigate some problems with Dominion sovereignty. Dominion governments (with the exception of New Zealand) had been angling for more autonomy in their foreign policies since the meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet during the First World War. The League provided a place where Dominion governments could advance their status as international personalities while allowing for a close measure of Commonwealth collaboration. Delegates from Britain, the Dominions, and India met privately at assembly sessions in Geneva, and, with few exceptions (such as FitzGerald's run for a Council seat), worked in concert towards shared interests. It is difficult to imagine how the Dominions could make claims for sovereignty without the League; their separate seats at the Assembly at least gave them a basis for separation from the rest of the British Empire.

Imperialists such as Amery and Kerr used the League to demonstrate the superiority of the Commonwealth. They viewed the League as a hotbed of European intrigue while the Commonwealth stood for British cooperation. They characterized the

League as legalistic and bureaucratic while the Commonwealth was informal and based on shared values. They portrayed the League as being unable to prevent war, while the Commonwealth coordinated its imperial defenses. Reformers formed their plans for Commonwealth cooperation in opposition to what they saw as the League's defects. The implementation of Commonwealth cooperation, however, revealed the gap between Commonwealth ideology and Commonwealth relations.

## **Chapter V: The Dominions Office and the Internationalization of the Commonwealth**

Commonwealth officials found it easier to talk about cooperation than to implement it. Plans to coordinate British and Dominion economic, defense, and foreign policies ran up against esoteric constitutional arguments, and Dominion politicians balked at any scheme that appeared to limit their sovereignty. This chapter examines three events in the 1920s: the creation of the Dominions Office as a separate ministry from the Colonial Office, the 1926 Imperial Conference, and the establishment of Dominion diplomacy within the Commonwealth and in foreign affairs. These events revealed a Commonwealth riven with uncertainty and conflict. The Dominions divided over contrasting interpretations of the Commonwealth relationship. The Commonwealth also divided the British government. The Foreign Office and the Dominions Office quarreled about Dominion autonomy in foreign policy. The confusing and contentious nature of Commonwealth relations contrasted with the ideal type of cooperation described by imperial reformers.

Historians tend to deal with the 1926 Imperial Conference as a milestone in Dominion sovereignty. John Gallagher described the Conference as the inevitable result of years of eroding British control: “There was never any question of amputating the white colonies or dominions from the empire, however tenuous, even metaphysical, their connection with it seemed to become, turning as it did on such questions as Kevin

O'Higgins's comma and treaties about Halibut."<sup>1</sup> Other historians have analyzed the Commonwealth in the context of decolonization after the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines how discussions during the Imperial Conference revealed conflicts between Dominions and British officials over the shape of the Commonwealth in the future. Questions about international relations, especially the Dominions' relations to the League, dominated the Conference proceedings.<sup>3</sup> The arguments had a lot to do with assertions of Dominion sovereignty. They also revealed drastic differences in views about the Commonwealth's shape as an international organization.

The Commonwealth became more of an international than an imperial organization in the 1920s. The Dominions Office developed a system of intra-Commonwealth diplomacy with High Commissioners acting as Commonwealth diplomats. The 1926 Conference emphasized Dominion autonomy in international affairs. Channels of communication between Britain and the Dominions became more formal and allowed for greater divergence on foreign policy. The Dominions diverged in their interpretation of the Commonwealth. The Canadian, South African, and Irish Free State governments used their seats on the League Assembly and foreign legations to assert their autonomy from Britain. The Australian and New Zealand governments

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<sup>1</sup> John Gallagher, *Decline, revival, and fall of the British Empire: The Ford lectures and other essays*, ed. Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 75

<sup>2</sup> See Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth experience*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), W. David McIntyre, *The Britannic vision : historians and the making of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1907-48* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), and J.D.B. Miller, *Britain and the old Dominions*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> R.F. Holland makes this important point in Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance, 1918-1939*, (London: Macmillan, 1981).

wanted more influence on a united imperial foreign policy. The changes to the Commonwealth affected the Dominions' bilateral relationship with Britain. Dominion representatives communicated mainly through British channels. Dominion governments therefore used the language of international affairs to assert their autonomy.

The Commonwealth, however, lacked the type of close cooperation that imperial reformers associated with it. The nature of their cooperation remained unclear, and Dominion representatives could not agree on the form of Commonwealth agencies to coordinate their policies. Dominion governments remained more concerned about foreign recognition than imperial cooperation. The Dominions cooperated with Britain mainly because they had not yet developed the government infrastructure that would allow them to operate independently. They coordinated their policies with Britain because of lingering dependence. Imperial cooperation remained an important influence on rhetoric about the Commonwealth, but it was difficult to point to specific examples of the policy in action.

### **THE DOMINIONS OFFICE**

The creation of the Dominions Office helped to redefine the Commonwealth as an international organization. Leopold Amery drafted a memo proposing the separation of the Dominions from the Colonial Office within a month of taking office as Colonial

Secretary in November 1924.<sup>4</sup> The memo stressed two major reasons for the creation of a Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. One reason was congestion. Amery argued that the current configuration of the Colonial Office unfairly taxed its personnel with the unwieldy and varied nature of Colonial and Dominion Affairs.<sup>5</sup> The addition of the Irish Free State only increased the workload.<sup>6</sup> Amery suggested that the Permanent Undersecretary of State for Colonial Affairs had become overburdened because the Parliamentary Secretary had to travel so often.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Amery made a case for separating the Dominions from the Colonial Office on the grounds of efficiency.

Amery also used the Dominions Office to separate the Dominions from association with the colonies. He claimed that a new department would show the Dominions that they were no longer imperial possessions:

An essential condition of Imperial unity to-day is the full recognition of the demand of the Dominions to be treated as equal in status—if not in stature—with ourselves as partner nations in the British Empire. Any failure, or even undue delay, in meeting that demand on lines that preserve Imperial unity tends to create a demand for the assertion of that status in the direction of a position increasingly approximating to that of foreign nations. On the other hand any action on our part which gives evidence of a spontaneous recognition of Dominion status, even in small matters, has what to us may seem a quite surprising effect on Dominion sentiment.<sup>8</sup>

Amery suggested that the Dominions resented the stigma of inferiority associated with the Colonial Office. “[The Dominions] are always suspecting the Colonial Office of endeavouring to reassert its old power by some devious scheme to the detriment of their

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<sup>4</sup> Amery served as Secretary of State for the Colonies in Stanley Baldwin's government in 1924.

<sup>5</sup> Amery Memo, Dec. 4, 1924. DO 120/1

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

hard won autonomy,” he wrote.<sup>9</sup> Amery also mentioned that the Dominions “dislike the idea that the same officials should deal indiscriminately with their affairs and those of the coloured races in the dependences directly under Colonial Office control.”<sup>10</sup> He told Winston Churchill, then serving as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that he hoped that a Dominions Office would “produce a very profound impression on the Dominions, to whom just now the question of status is almost an obsession.”<sup>11</sup>

The proposal went over well in the Dominions, but the British government resisted. Churchill questioned Amery’s claims that a new office would ease congestion. He also pointed out that Dominion calls for equal status meant they wanted direct contact with the British Prime Minister.<sup>12</sup> Churchill was right about that, but underestimated how much the Dominions resented dealing with the Colonial Office. Warren Fisher, the head of the Civil Service, accused Amery of trying to dismember the Colonial Office.<sup>13</sup> A Treasury committee of inquiry rejected a Dominions Secretary as unnecessary. Instead, the Committee proposed appointing another junior minister to diminish congestion. The delays frustrated Amery, who complained to Baldwin in March that he had hoped to reorganize the Colonial Office by Christmas of 1924. He dismissed the Treasury Committee as “certain worthy fellows who knew nothing about the organization at the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* He made this point in a more frank and ugly way to Geoffrey Dawson, mentioning “the legend of Colonial officials writing to a nigger one minute and then turning round and writing in the same strain to a Dominion Prime Minister.” DO/120/1

<sup>11</sup> Amery to Churchill, Dec. 5, 1924, DO 120/1

<sup>12</sup> Churchill to Amery, Dec. 7, 1924, DO 120/1

<sup>13</sup> Fisher to Amery, May 15, 1925 DO 120/1

C.O. when they began and not very much when they finished.”<sup>14</sup> Amery eventually won the day. The Dominions Office opened in June 1925.

The Dominions Office performed an important function in the development of Dominion Status. On the one hand, it had a cosmetic and ceremonial function: the British government literally removed Dominion affairs from a colonial context.<sup>15</sup> The Office was also designed to remind the Dominions of their imperial interests and to prevent them from conducting imperial business at Geneva.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the Dominions Office became an important clearing-house of expertise in the confusing world of Commonwealth relations. Its officials kept the Dominion perspective in mind, and mastered complicated constitutional questions. The establishment of the Dominions Office also left Amery's imprint on Commonwealth relations throughout the inter-war period. His sensitivity to Dominion nationalism and zeal for imperial unity affected permanent officials who stayed in the Department after Amery left office in 1929.

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<sup>14</sup> Amery to Baldwin, May 23, 1925 DO 120/1

<sup>15</sup> The separation was less impressive in practice. RF. Holland notes that for the rest of the 1920s, the Dominions Office functioned essentially as a subordinate department of the Colonial Office. Holland, *Commonwealth Alliance*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> The creation of the DO also had to do with British politics. Holland suggests that Baldwin acceded to Amery's demands because he wanted to deemphasize internationalist policy and satisfy the imperialist wing of the Conservative Party. Holland, *Commonwealth Alliance*, p. 44.

## THE 1926 IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

The 1926 Imperial Conference marked a turning point in Dominion Status. It produced the Balfour Report,<sup>17</sup> which famously referred to the Dominions as “autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.” It prepared the way for the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which removed many of Britain’s constitutional controls over Dominion legislatures. The Conference was not a declaration of Dominion independence. The Dominions relied on Britain for defense, diplomats, and other services that they had not yet developed. It, however, affected the rhetoric about Dominion Status. After 1926, the British government described the Dominions as sovereign nations, even if its imperial policies maintained control. Scholars have treated the Conference within the context of decolonization. They have questioned the extent to which the Conference and the Statute of Westminster actually brought about Dominion sovereignty.<sup>18</sup>

The 1926 Conference was not only about Dominion sovereignty and decolonization. The most important debates focused on the Dominions’ relationship to

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Balfour Declaration and confused with the 1917 Balfour Declaration that declared British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Peter Marshall prefers the less ambiguous term “Balfour Formula.” Peter Marshall, “The Balfour Formula and the Evolution of the Commonwealth”. *The Round Table*, 90: 361 (September 2001), pp. 541–53

<sup>18</sup> See for example W.J. Hudson and M.P. Sharp, *Australian independence: colony to reluctant kingdom*, (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1988) and Leslie Zines, *Constitutional change in the Commonwealth*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Hudson, Sharp, and Zines show that constitutional anomalies made the extent of Dominion sovereignty unclear. Zines argues that the Canada and Australia did not technically gain full constitutional autonomy from Britain until the 1980s.

the League and international organizations. Their international status had remained ambiguous since the Paris Peace Conference, and the 1926 Conference aimed to clarify it. Several Commonwealth issues remained in limbo. Dominion representatives disagreed about their place in the Empire. Officials from the Dominions and Foreign Offices clashed over the nature of Dominion foreign policy. The Dominions' status as unique international personalities distinct from the British Empire baffled foreign governments.

The use of an Imperial Conference itself retained an important element of continuity. Imperial conferences had been held since 1887 to sort out imperial policies and shape Dominion status.<sup>19</sup> Post-war Imperial Conferences in 1921 and 1923 legitimized the Imperial Conference system as a site for Commonwealth business instead of moving it to the League. After the war, the Imperial Conferences became a means to coordinate the policies of increasingly autonomous states. They self-consciously maintained an imperial context. The Dominions met with Britain in association with the rest of the Empire.<sup>20</sup> The 1926 Imperial Conference was important because it made the Commonwealth an international institution by acknowledging the Dominions' sovereignty, but did so in a distinctly British and imperial setting. It indicated that the Commonwealth would develop into an international organization distinct from the League with unique imperial bonds.

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<sup>19</sup> See John Kendle, *The colonial and imperial conferences, 1887-1911*, (London: Longmans, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> The question of whether the Dominions were actually a part of the British Empire or whether the term "British Empire" had lost all of its meaning became a contentious issue at the conference.

The 1926 Imperial Conference was tasked with untangling five years of confusion about the Dominions' international status and foreign policy. The timing of the Conference coincided with several events that highlighted constitutional and practical irregularities in the Dominions that involved international status. The Locarno Pact, for example, illustrated uncertainty about the distinction between the Dominions and the British Empire in British treaties. British officials handled this challenge by specifically exempting the Dominions from action. The exemption, however, implied that Whitehall could negotiate on behalf of the Dominions.<sup>21</sup> The ratification of the Treaties in December 1925 and their registration with the League in June 1926 pushed the Dominions' foreign policy to the front of the Conference agenda.

A dispute between South Africa and Portugal just before the Conference also highlighted the ambiguities in Dominion status. A debate in the Portuguese legislature in May 1926 referred to South Africa as a colony. This incensed South African Prime Minister J.B. Hertzog. Hertzog became Prime Minister in 1924 on the National Party ticket associated with Afrikaners that resisted any whiff of British imperial encroachment. He delivered a speech complaining about the vagaries of "group unity" in Commonwealth foreign policy and the unclear position of the Dominions.<sup>22</sup> He also wrote to Amery in July to demand a declaration of Dominion sovereignty at the upcoming Conference. "You have no conception of what irreparable harm is being done

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<sup>21</sup> This is Keith's interpretation, but the difference between constitutional theory and practice caused tension between the Dominions Office and Foreign Office.

<sup>22</sup> Hertzog's speech at Stellenbosch, May 15, 1926, reprinted in DO 117/32 via the *Cape Times*.

to Empire co-operation through the policy of secrecy pursued in an atmosphere of constitutional fog,” he wrote.<sup>23</sup>

Hertzog's speech asserted that the shared link to the Crown provided the only connection among Commonwealth nations with no other legal or constitutional bonds.<sup>24</sup> This interpretation meant that Hertzog saw the Commonwealth as a personal union between countries ruled by the same sovereign. Amery did not accept this view. He treated attempts to divide the Crown as heresy; he saw the single Crown as the backbone of his Commonwealth:

[The Commonwealth is] an organic unity resulting from the existence of a common Crown which, though advised in respect of the several parts of the Empire by different Ministers, each body of whom can claim complete responsibility for the advice tendered in its own sphere, is nevertheless the one centre and source of Executive authority in all parts.<sup>25</sup>

Amery suggested that Hertzog did not fully comprehend the consequences of the divided Crown.<sup>26</sup> He alerted the Cabinet that Hertzog might bring it up at the Conference.<sup>27</sup> The provocation from Portugal rankled with Hertzog,<sup>28</sup> and intensified his calls for sovereignty at the Conference.

A final challenge to Dominion sovereignty just before the Conference sprang from a Canadian constitutional crisis. MacKenzie King's Liberal Party had lost its majority in Parliament in October 1925, leaving no party with a clear majority. Lord

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<sup>23</sup> Hertzog to Amery, July 26, 1926, DO 117/32

<sup>24</sup> Hertzog's speech at Stellenbosch, May 15, 1926, reprinted in DO 117/32 via the *Cape Times*.

<sup>25</sup> Amery, Status of the Union of South Africa, Note to the Cabinet, July 27, 1926

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> This is reinforced by a report by Batterbee of a conversation with South African High Commissioner Jacobus Stephanus *Smit in Geneva*. DO 117/32

Byng, the Governor-General, advised King to resign and hold new elections;<sup>29</sup> King decided instead to remain in power as the head of a minority government through a tenuous alliance with the Progressive Party. In June, 1926, the coalition fell apart. King requested a dissolution of Parliament and new elections. Byng refused King's request. He called for Arthur Meighen, the leader of the Conservatives, to form a government because the Conservatives held more seats in Parliament. Meighen acquiesced, but his government faltered. Byng dissolved Parliament.

The King-Byng controversy, as it became known, became a constitutional crisis. Byng assured Amery that he had asserted the constitutional right of the Governor-General to accept or reject a Prime Minister's advice for dissolution. He blamed King for not resigning in November after he had lost the election.<sup>30</sup> King painted Byng's refusal as a high-handed and unconstitutional assertion of authority. "In all parts of the British Empire to-day there will be raised I fear by the refusal on Your Excellency's part to accept advice tendered a grave constitutional question without precedent in the history of Great Britain for a century and in the history of Canada since Confederation," he wrote to Byng.<sup>31</sup> King also requested that Byng consult the Dominions Office for instructions.<sup>32</sup> Amery sympathized with Byng, but prudently refused to give any official opinion on the matter. He informed Byng that he could not intervene in a Canadian dispute.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> According to Byng's secretary A.F. Sladen in a report sent to the DO, Byng had tried to persuade King to "take the dignified course of resigning," Slade's report, DO 117/20.

<sup>30</sup> Byng to Amery, June 30, 1925, DO 117/20

<sup>31</sup> King to Byng, June 28, 1926, sent by Byng to Dominions Office on June 30, DO 117/20

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Amery to Byng, July 1, 1926

Contemporary commentators made cases for both sides. The *Times* called Byng's actions "scrupulously constitutional,"<sup>34</sup> and King George V supported his Governor-General.<sup>35</sup> Keith, on the other hand, became a staunch supporter of Mackenzie King. He claimed that Byng's actions relegated Canada to colonial status<sup>36</sup> and violated the principle of responsible government.<sup>37</sup> Legal scholars debated the constitutionality of Byng's dismissal.<sup>38</sup> Debates about Byng's constitutional rights to refuse King's dissolution, however, missed the real consequences of the controversy. Dominion nationalists saw Byng's actions as a high-handed imperial intrusion that undermined Canada's sovereignty. The timing of the controversy coincided with the Conference. King was reelected in September and came to London determined to modify the Governor-Generals' powers.

The Imperial Conference convened in October. Delegates aimed to clarify Dominion status in the Commonwealth and in the world at large. Amery and the British

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<sup>34</sup> "Lord Byng's Decision," *The Times*, July 1, 1926, DO 117/20

<sup>35</sup> In a telegram to Reginald Antrobus of the Colonial Office, George's secretary Lord Stamfordham wrote that the King said that Byng "had acted constitutionally and probably did the right thing," although George's grasp of imperial constitutional issues appeared fairly tenuous and largely based on what he had read in the *Times*. Stamfordham, and later Clive Wigram, often wrote to the DO requesting clarification after the King had become alarmed by a *Times* interpretation of the role of the Crown in the Dominions. Stamfordham to Antrobus, July 2, 1926, DO 117/20

<sup>36</sup> Keith, "Canadian Constitutional Crisis, 1926," *Manchester Guardian*, July 8, 1926, republished in *Letters*, pp. 58-9. The Dominion Office clearly resented another Keith incursion into an imperial constitutional crisis. In a note at the beginning of the file, a DO official dismissed Keith as a "textbook writer."

<sup>37</sup> Keith to MacKenzie King, June 30, 1926, KP 143/6. Keith and King had been in correspondence since at least 1924, when Keith sent him a copy of *The Constitution, Administration and Laws of the Empire*. By 1926, they had developed a friendly correspondence, and (perhaps encouraged by Keith's outspoken support during the crisis) developed a mutual respect.

<sup>38</sup> The most detailed analysis of Governor-General crises comes from H.V. Evatt and E.A. Forsey, *The Reserve Powers*, (Sydney: Legal Books, 1990) republishing criticisms of Keith from Evatt in 1936 and Forsey in 1943 that provide a detailed defense of Byng. Keith savaged the Evatt book in a review, see Keith, *Letters*, 81-90

Government saw the Conference as an opportunity to convince the more nationalist Dominion Prime Ministers that the British government respected their growing sovereignty and to show them the value of Commonwealth unity. Hertzog and King, however, still smarted from their recent disputes, and Irish Free State Prime Minister William Cosgrave sought to remove any vestiges of British imperial control. The Free State government enumerated its concerns in a memo entitled “Existing Anomalies in the British Commonwealth of Nations.”<sup>39</sup> These anomalies included Crown’s power to disallow Dominion legislation (by 1926, this would never occur in practice, but it remained on the books), the assumption that British representatives could bind Dominions to treaties or international agreements, the Governor-General’s dual role as the representative of both the British government and the Crown, and the use of the British Foreign Office as the main channel of communication between the Dominions and foreign countries.<sup>40</sup> It ended with a call for cooperation as the only basis for Commonwealth solidarity:

If the British Commonwealth of Nations is to endure as the greatest factor for the establishment of peace and prosperity throughout the world its cohesive force must be real and permanent whether viewed from within or without. It cannot be held together by a mere collective expression which only serves to create doubt in the minds of Foreign statesmen and discontent amongst the diverse nationalities of which it is made up.

The King is the real bond and forms used in international treaties will be devoid of all meaning so long as they do not give complete expression to that reality. The co-operation resulting from the bond of a common King will be effective only because it is free co-operation and to the extent to which it is free. Antiquated forms dating from a period when common action resulted from the over-riding control of one

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<sup>39</sup> “Existing Anomalies in the British Commonwealth of Nations,” Memorandum by Irish Free State government submitted to Balfour Committee at the 1926 Imperial Conference c. Nov. 10, 1926, DO 117/36

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

central Government are liable to make co-operation less efficacious because they make it seem less free.<sup>41</sup>

Not all Dominion governments wanted greater autonomy in international affairs. The Conference highlighted vehement disagreements among Dominion governments on the future of the Commonwealth. Dominion representatives also had responsibilities to their constituents in their own countries, and their actions at the Conference reverberated in national politics. These divisions were important because the Dominions shared a unified status. They all had the same relationship to Britain, the same international presence and the same relationship to the Crown.<sup>42</sup> The 1926 Conference provided a rare opportunity for representatives of Dominion governments to hash out their interpretations of the Commonwealth together instead of through bilateral talks with Britain.

The meetings of the Treaty Procedure Subcommittee of the Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations revealed Dominion fault lines. The Committee met to sort out how treaties and international agreements signed by the King on behalf of the Empire affected the Dominions. Its dry discussions about technical matters gave way to revealing debates about the essence of the Dominions' relationship to the Empire. Controversy arose from matters as simple as listing the parts of the Empire. Hertzog asked whether the term "British Empire" included the Dominions. Francis Bell, the New Zealand representative, argued that listing the British Empire separate from the Dominions removed them from

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Constitutional vagaries among the Dominions prevented some wholesale changes, such as Canada being bound to the British North America Act which technically prevented the Canadian government from making changes to the Canadian Constitution without London's authority. The act made it difficult to introduce wholesale constitutional changes in the Dominions. It is also worth noting that Canada's Dominion status was tethered to the Irish Free State's by way of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

the Empire. “I want to be within the British Empire,” Bell declared, “and I do not like an expression that put me outside it.”<sup>43</sup> Desmond FitzGerald, the Irish Free State Minister for external affairs, countered that he did not like the term “imperial” at all.<sup>44</sup> The discussion prompted him to bring up the problematic British Empire seat on the League of Nations Council. John Costello, the Free State Attorney General, argued that the term “British Empire” no longer held any meaning outside the League of Nations Covenant.<sup>45</sup> “The popular meaning,” replied Bell, “is everything.” At the next meeting, Bell held firm. He reminded FitzGerald that “we are all part of the British Empire.”<sup>46</sup> This exchange revealed a philosophical split between New Zealand and the Irish Free State. The Free State representatives viewed the Dominions as outside the British Empire and free to associate in the Commonwealth. Bell claimed that the Dominions, whatever their change in status, remained important parts of the Empire.

The notes of the Treaty Procedure Subcommittee show the Dominions’ desire for international recognition of their sovereignty. FitzGerald argued that the Dominions claims of special Commonwealth bonds undermined the Dominions’ international status. For example, he cited American resistance to imperial tariff preferences in contrast to most-favored nation status. FitzGerald argued that American politicians accused the Dominions of trumpeting their sovereignty at the League, but claiming a special

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<sup>43</sup> Fifth meeting of the Treaty Subcommittee of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee, Nov. 4, 1926, DO 117/40

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Sixth meeting of the Treaty Subcommittee of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee, Nov. 9, 1926, DO 117/40

exemption for imperial tariff preferences that was more favorable than MFN rates.<sup>47</sup>

FitzGerald suggested that the Commonwealth should look more like the Little Entente:

In an earlier stage I got the idea that we were stressing the unity of us, because outside countries were looking for fissures amongst us-- I forget who used the expression. Personally I cannot see that. Nobody makes fissures among the Little Entente; they are bound by common interests, and we are bound by our own interests, and we also have a definite bond in the Crown.

Hertzog also referenced the importance of foreign governments' perception of Dominion status. He reminded the Committee that "we must not confuse our particular relation with what nations consider our position."<sup>48</sup> This statement suggests that Hertzog had not forgotten the slight from the Portuguese government.

Cecil Hurst, the legal adviser to the Foreign Office, stressed that Commonwealth made no sense without the imperial connection. "The whole basis of our work here is that relations between us are not international," he argued.<sup>49</sup> Hurst was right; Commonwealth anomalies such as the *inter se* doctrine<sup>50</sup> and imperial tariff preferences existed nowhere else in international relations. The disagreement between Hurst and Hertzog and Fitzgerald illustrated the importance of explaining Commonwealth relations to the outside world.

Officials from the Dominions and Foreign Offices disagreed about the Dominions' independence in foreign policy. The summer before the Conference, the Foreign Office and Dominions Office devised different interpretations of how Dominions

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* The Little Entente was an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> The *inter se* doctrine kept Commonwealth relations outside of international organizations such as the League of Nations.

signed international treaties. The argument focused on “central panels,” which could sign treaties on behalf of the entire Empire. The Foreign Office suggested that plenipotentiaries from London should sign a treaty covering the entire Empire with a reservation that specifically exempted the Dominions unless Dominion governments opted in. This model meant that Dominion representatives to treaty conferences would only represent their governments’ interests. Dominion representatives could not serve on central panels or represent the Empire as a whole. The Dominions Office argued that Dominion representatives should serve as full imperial plenipotentiaries. They would operate with an understanding that they especially served the needs of their governments and that the Foreign Office served the United Kingdom and the parts of the Empire without a seat at the League. Both proposals emphasized the Dominions' sovereignty in foreign affairs. The Dominions Office proposal, however, appealed more to Dominion assertions of co-equality with Britain within the Empire. Amery warned that the Foreign Office proposal rankled with the more independent Dominion governments. He claimed that the Foreign Office implied an element of British control of Dominion foreign policy. Hurst countered that the more the Dominions acted as separate entities, the less they could claim exemption from adjudication in international bodies such as the League or Court of International Justice. Amery characterized his proposal as a show of good faith to the Dominions. If the British government mollified the Dominions, they would be more likely to sign a declaration declaring that Commonwealth relations remained outside the purview of international organizations, Amery argued. He warned that antagonizing them would lead to further recalcitrance. The difference in the positions

illustrated differences in departmental priorities. The Foreign Office position was meant for foreign consumption, whereas the Dominions Office focused on the Dominion perspective.

The Balfour Report, the Conference's most enduring legacy, came from a strident debate about the nature of Dominion sovereignty. The statement was drafted by the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee. Arthur Balfour, the aged former Prime Minister, chaired the Committee, which consisted largely of Dominion Prime Ministers.<sup>51</sup> Committee members could not even agree that the Conference should make a declaration. The pressure came from Hertzog, who demanded a declaration of Dominion sovereignty.<sup>52</sup> Other representatives hesitated. Mackenzie King found the task of drafting a statement that balanced Dominion autonomy with imperial unity too daunting. Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce also preferred not to issue a statement. New Zealand and the Irish Free State resumed their debate over Dominions' place in the Empire. Gordon Coates, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, proclaimed that he would not approve any draft that did not include the phrase "British Empire." O'Higgins said that the term remained unpopular in the Irish Free State and the word "imperial" implied domination. He stated that his government was more concerned with redressing the

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<sup>51</sup> With the exception of the Irish Free State, represented by Minister of Justice Kevin O'Higgins. The Secretary of State for India, F.E. Smith (known by then as Lord Birkenhead), was also present. Amery represented the British government instead of Baldwin.

<sup>52</sup> In a speech on May 28, Hertzog had told the South African Parliament that "It is only in the League of Nations and through the League of Nations that we are known as international States, but nothing beyond that, and I think the time has come that that position should be changed, and that we should not merely say among ourselves that we are independent States, on a footing of absolute quality, but that we should also make it known to the outside world. When that is done the position will be clear, and then we shall know what our relations are in the future." DO report, DO 117/22

constitutional anomalies used by separatists to dismiss Dominion status as a veil for British control than concocting any sort of declaration.<sup>53</sup> Balfour himself passionately defended keeping the references to the British Empire. He dismissed the term “Commonwealth” as objectionably Cromwellian and without meaning. The delegates, he pointed out, were at an Imperial Conference, not a Commonwealth Conference.<sup>54</sup> Balfour also objected to the phrase “freely associated,” claiming that the term implied a freedom to disassociate. Balfour compared the phrase to the “introduction of a suggestion of divorce into a marriage ceremony.”<sup>55</sup>

The Dominion Office vision of the Commonwealth prevailed at the Conference. The Balfour Report granted full powers to Dominion representatives in treaty talks and recognized that treaties would not bind any Dominion without the specific ratification of its government. The king would still sign treaties as the head of state of the entire Empire, but the Report suggested listing the Dominion and Indian governments separately under his signature. This principle lent credence to the idea that the term “British Empire” stood for the United Kingdom and its colonies and not the entire Commonwealth at the League. The Declaration, however, left open the possibility of representation of the entire Empire in a single delegation that contained representatives of the Dominions. The Report also included concessions to the Canadian, Irish, and South

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<sup>53</sup> All of these positions were articulated in a summary for Baldwin of the committee's proceedings on November 1, 1926. DO 117/48

<sup>54</sup> Inter-Imperial Relations Committee Nov. 1, 1926, summary for Prime Minister, DO 117/48. The author of the summary (probably Maurice Hankey) noted that Amery defended his nomenclature by reading the entries for “Commonwealth,” “Empire,” and “British Empire” from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which King dryly accused Amery of writing himself.

<sup>55</sup> Inter-Imperial Relations Committee Nov. 1, 1926, summary for Prime Minister, DO 117/48

African representatives by stating that the British government would not meddle with Dominion laws. It called for an expert conference to untangle the constitutional issues.<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, the British government pledged to act only on the advice of Dominion governments in matters related to Dominion politics. Finally, the Conference clarified the position of the Governor-General as a representative of the Crown and not of the British Government. This change eliminated a vestige of colonial control and paved the way for a new type of Commonwealth diplomacy.

The triumph of the Dominion Office's vision laid the groundwork for the Commonwealth's transition into an international organization. The Conference aimed to clarify the status of the Dominions in international affairs to the satisfaction of the Canadian, Irish, and South African governments. One of the most important conflicts, however, had nothing to do with Dominion governments. It involved Amery and the Dominions Office convincing the Foreign Office that the perception of greater autonomy by Dominion governments was more important than the perception of foreign governments. Issues involving representation in international organizations and treaties dominated the Conference. It did not resolve every issue, but it confirmed the Dominions' path to full sovereignty within the framework of imperial cooperation.

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<sup>56</sup> The expert conference met in 1929 and produced the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

## CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Dominion sovereignty meant a new approach to Dominion representation to Britain and foreign countries. The British government began sending High Commissioners to some of the Dominions as representatives of the British government.<sup>57</sup> The network of High Commissioners from Britain in Dominion capitals and Dominion ministers in London created a form of Commonwealth diplomacy. Dominion governments disagreed about the role of High Commissioners, and the Australian and New Zealand governments resisted the change. British officials in the Dominions and Foreign Offices also clashed over Whitehall's control over Dominion foreign policies. The High Commissioner system made the Commonwealth more of an international institution by bypassing the Governor-General. British High Commissioners also became more active in representing British interests in the Dominions. The High Commissioner system, however, mainly directed interactions between Britain and the Dominions. Dominion governments continued to communicate with each other through London.

The Dominions also began to appoint representatives to foreign countries. The Canadian government posted a Minister to the United States in 1927, and other Dominions followed and sent emissaries to a handful of other nations. The Dominions' desire to appoint diplomats matched their enthusiasm for the League. Both supported their claims that they had become sovereign nations with independent foreign policies. Their interests, especially in commerce, in foreign countries had also become more

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<sup>57</sup> See Lorna Lloyd, *Diplomacy with a Difference: The Commonwealth Office of High Commissioner, 1880-2006*, (Leiden: Martin Nijhoff Publishers, 2007).

distinct from British interests. Dominion representation, however, also caused problems. The Dominions disagreed about the nature of their representation. Foreign Office officials worried about Dominion representatives creating problems in foreign countries. They sought to maintain a more unified imperial foreign policy that did not involve inexperienced Dominion diplomats causing problems in foreign capitals. Ultimately, the British government still had to defend the Dominions, which meant it bore responsibility for Dominion foreign policies.

The Commonwealth High Commissioner took on a diplomatic role after the 1926 Imperial Conference. Governors-General had traditionally represented both the Crown and the British government in the Dominions. The Conference resolved that Governors-General served exclusively as representatives of the Crown. Shortly after the Conference, Mackenzie King proposed the creation of a new channel of communication between the British and Canadian governments.<sup>58</sup> King recommended two major changes: increased direct communication between the Dominion and British governments and the creation of High Commissioners to serve as the representative of the British Government in the Dominions. The Canadian government already had a High Commissioner in London as early as 1880; other Dominions installed their own commissioners in the first decade of the twentieth century. These High Commissioners served mainly as Dominion advisers to the British government on matters of finance,

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<sup>58</sup> Amery to Governors-General of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (copies were also sent to the Governor-General of the Irish Free State and Governor of Newfoundland), November 5, 1926, DO 117/44

trade, and migration. After the war, they often represented their government at the League of Nations.<sup>59</sup>

Governors-General held mixed opinions on the change. The Canadian Governor-General, Lord Willingdon,<sup>60</sup> wrote to Amery that he supported the change because the constitutional controversy had made it impossible for him to represent both the British government and the Crown.<sup>61</sup> Amery, however, found more resistance in the Antipodean Dominions. John Baird, the Australian Governor-General, and his New Zealand counterpart, Charles Fergusson, saw the appointment of a High Commissioner as a threat to their positions. Baird wrote that the changes would make the Governor-General into a ceremonial position and allow the Labor Party to justify eliminating it as a waste of government funds.<sup>62</sup> Fergusson feared that a High Commissioner would weaken links to the Crown.<sup>63</sup> King's High Commissioner proposals ran counter to the New Zealand government's plans to further integrate Commonwealth foreign policy. Joseph Coates, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, wrote a memo during the 1926 Conference suggesting that Dominion Prime Ministers should send a representative to London as part of the British Cabinet Secretariat and that the British Foreign Office should send a representative to each Dominion.<sup>64</sup> For Coates, this procedure ensured close

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<sup>59</sup> Cabinet memo, "Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 3, 1927, DO 117-62

<sup>60</sup> Byng retired in September 1926, just as King returned to power.

<sup>61</sup> Willingdon to Amery, Nov. 1, 1926, DO 117/44

<sup>62</sup> Baird to Amery, Nov 8, 1926, DO 117/44.

<sup>63</sup> Fergusson to Amery, Nov. 8, 1926, DO 117/44

<sup>64</sup> Coates memorandum, "Conduct of Foreign Affairs: Consultation and Communication," DO 117/39

communication in the maintenance of an imperial foreign policy. He argued that “the British Foreign Office is, as in my opinion it should be, regarded as the Foreign Office of the Empire.”<sup>65</sup>

Other Governors-General expressed more support, although each Dominion presented unique complications. Lord Athlone, the Governor-General of South Africa, welcomed the proposal. He felt that it would make relations with his government easier if politicians did not suspect that he acted as an agent for British interests.<sup>66</sup> In South Africa, however, the Governor-General already served as the High Commissioner over the Crown dependencies in South Africa, and Athlone wanted to make sure that he maintained those responsibilities.<sup>67</sup> Timothy Healy, Governor-General of the Irish Free State, also supported more direct contact between governments. He questioned the purpose of a High Commissioner in Dublin because Britain and Ireland were so close, and he cautioned that a High Commissioner in Dublin served no purpose other than creating another avenue for anti-British sentiment.<sup>68</sup> William Allardyce, the Governor of Newfoundland,<sup>69</sup> argued against the need for a High Commissioner. He claimed it would obviate his office and weaken the Empire. He closed his letter to Amery with a warning that “Mackenzie King is said to have strong United States sympathies,”<sup>70</sup> subtly accusing

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<sup>65</sup> Coates memorandum, “Conduct of Foreign Affairs: Consultation and Communication,” DO 117/39

<sup>66</sup> Athlone to Amery, Nov 8, 1926, DO 117/44

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Healy to Amery, Nov 6, 1926, DO 117/44

<sup>69</sup> Newfoundland had Dominion status, but avoided most of these controversies because its government had no international profile.

<sup>70</sup> Allardyce to Amery, Nov 8, 1926

King of harboring an anti-imperial agenda. These varied reactions revealed that the Imperial Conference had done little to establish unity among the Dominions in their vision for the Commonwealth. The New Zealand government's version remained fundamentally incompatible with the type of Commonwealth envisioned by the Canadian, South African, and Irish governments.<sup>71</sup>

British officials also clashed over Commonwealth communications. Amery quarreled with the Treasury over the expense of new appointments.<sup>72</sup> Officials at the Foreign Office and the Dominions Office agreed to appoint British representatives to facilitate communications with Dominion governments.<sup>73</sup> They had different ideas for the type of person to appoint. Amery wanted to appoint a politician as the High Commissioner to Canada. Austen Chamberlain called for a diplomat. Amery argued that appointing a diplomat would encourage the development of actual diplomatic relations between the countries.<sup>74</sup> He preferred a well-rounded figure that could collaborate with the Canadian government on more issues than foreign affairs.<sup>75</sup> Dominions Office

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<sup>71</sup> Holland argues that if the British government had promoted the New Zealand proposals, it would have sparked an imperial crisis. Holland, 71

<sup>72</sup> Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, found Amery's proposals exorbitant, especially in light of their party's pledges to lower government expenses. Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66

<sup>73</sup> They agreed to appoint a High Commissioner to Canada, a junior Foreign Office official to New Zealand, and also agreed that the Imperial Secretary in the South African High Commissioner's Office should handle relations between Britain and South Africa. In South Africa, the term "High Commissioner" referred to an official that dealt with South African territories. Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66.

<sup>74</sup> Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66. Holland points out that this argument represented a fundamental difference in view of the Dominions Office and the department that the High Commissioner came from had a significant effect on Amery and Chamberlain's influence. See Holland, p. 73

<sup>75</sup> Dominions Office Memorandum by C.W. Dixon and E.J. Harding, March 7, 1928, DO 117/106

officials characterized the Foreign Office's conception of the High Commissioner as an old-fashioned attempt to control Dominion policies through Whitehall.<sup>76</sup> Curzon, now the Lord President but a representative of the Foreign Office view, endorsed this view. He wanted to maintain a unified imperial policy that allowed Dominion contributions.<sup>77</sup> Both Curzon and Churchill also tried to keep information about British representation in one Dominion away from the others.<sup>78</sup> The Foreign Office defined the High Commissioner's job as manipulating Dominion foreign relations into harmony with British interests. The mission was particularly important in Canada because of its proximity to the United States, as this Foreign Office memo indicated:

She alone among the Dominions has her own specific and constant interests *vis-à-vis* a great foreign Power—interests which need not and sometimes do not coincide with ours; she more than any other Dominion has taken an independent line where foreign policy is concerned. If Canadian and British interests in Washington are to be harmonized; if we wish to avoid last minute surprises by Canada at Geneva; if we wish to avoid the recurrence of incidents like Chanak; then the Foreign Office must have the means of explaining to the Department of External Affairs at Ottawa more fully than at present the various factors which are involved in any particular problem of foreign policy, it must be able to receive earlier information of the way the ideas of that Department at Ottawa are shaping, and it must be able to offer where required advice culled from its extensive experience in the handling of foreign affairs to the latest arrival in the world of international politics.<sup>79</sup>

Dominions Office officials tried to develop imperial unity while acknowledging Dominion sovereignty. Amery and the Dominions Office officials often championed

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<sup>76</sup> Dominions Office Memorandum by C.W. Dixon and E.J. Harding, March 7, 1928, DO 117/106

<sup>77</sup> Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66

<sup>78</sup> Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66. Churchill specifically asked Amery to avoid telling Bruce about the Canadian High Commissioner when he traveled to Australia because he would want a similar arrangement. Amery demurred. It seemed that Churchill and Curzon maintained a fairly anachronistic notion of intra-Commonwealth communication.

<sup>79</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Representation in Canada of His Majesty's Government in Great Britain, Oct. 24, 1927, DO 117/107.

Dominion interests as a way to mollify the Dominions and keep them open to cooperation. They knew that the more high-handed assertions of imperial policy favored by the Foreign Office would alienate the more independent Dominions. Amery viewed the High Commissioners as a way to strengthen communications between Britain and the Dominions, which would facilitate collaboration.<sup>80</sup> The Dominions Office also viewed High Commissioners as crucial sources of information about Dominion affairs.<sup>81</sup> By the 1930s, High Commissioners' reports on Dominion politics and personalities read like intelligence reports from a foreign legation. The Foreign Office and Dominions Office shared the goal of maintaining imperial unity, but the Dominions Office recognized the reality of the Commonwealth after the 1926 Conference. The Commonwealth would have to look more like an international organization to keep the Dominions invested in unity. Otherwise, the Commonwealth could fall apart and force Britain to interact with the Dominions through diplomats and at the League.

The new Commonwealth diplomacy involved collaboration with the Dominions on defense. The Dominions Office invited the Canadian, Australian, South African, and New Zealand High Commissioners in London to join the Committee of Imperial Defense.<sup>82</sup> Dominion ministers in London had attended CID meetings in the past. The British government suggesting including Dominion High Commissioners to better

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<sup>80</sup> Memo "Representation in the Dominions of his Majesty's Government in Great Britain," DO 117/62

<sup>81</sup> Cabinet Report: Comments on Representation in the Dominions of His Majesty's Government in Britain," May 11, 1927, DO 117/66

<sup>82</sup> Telegram to Canadian, Austrian, New Zealand, South African Governors-General, March, 1928, DO 117/102

coordinate defenses with Dominion governments.<sup>83</sup> The presence of the High Commissioners at CID meetings also increased their profile. The Dominions Office, however, specifically excluded representatives from the Irish Free State from receiving CID materials. Officials felt that the Free State government had little desire to cooperate on matters of defense.<sup>84</sup> Dominion governments remained wary that the High Commissioners would have little input on imperial defense. Mackenzie King refused to send the Canadian High Commissioner for political reasons; his opposition portrayed the CID as an avenue for Whitehall to centralize defense policy.<sup>85</sup> King described the CID as a British institution. He declared that the British government should form its own views on strategy and consult the Dominions when necessary through the ordinary channels.<sup>86</sup> King sought to extend Canadian military diplomacy beyond its borders by appointing a military attaché to Washington. The British government resisted. British officials believed that appointing Dominion attachés in foreign capitals would lead to foreign attachés in Dominion capitals and thus increase foreign access to imperial military information.<sup>87</sup> Instead, the British government suggested adding a Canadian attaché to the British delegation at Washington.

Dominion governments appointed their own representatives to foreign governments after the 1926 Imperial Conference. The appointments had precedents. In

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<sup>83</sup> DO note by Peter Liesching, April 3, 1928, DO 117/102

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Clark to Harding, July 24, 1929, DO 117/157

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Proposed letter from Prime Minister to Canadian Prime Minister, Nov, 1927, DO 117/74

1920, Canada proposed appointing a representative to Washington attached to the British Embassy. The agreement maintained the supremacy of the British Ambassador; the Canadian minister had instructions to maintain imperial unity, remain in close communication with the Ambassador, and allow the British Ambassador to lead all discussion of any issue with repercussions beyond Canadian interests.<sup>88</sup> King contemplated independent Canadian representation in the United States in 1923, when negotiating a commercial treaty regulating halibut fishing. The treaty was the first international agreement signed by a Dominion without a British signature. When the British government resisted this unilateral diplomatic action, King threatened to open a Canadian legation in Washington. The Canadian government did not appoint a minister to Washington, but it set a precedent. The Irish Free State sent Timothy Smiddy to the United States under the proposed Canadian terms.

By 1925, the Dominions prepared to send agents abroad and receive foreign diplomats in their capitals.<sup>89</sup> The Canadian government appointed Vincent Massey as the first Canadian diplomat to Washington. The appointment showed the close relationship between imperial reform and international relations; Massey was a member of the Canadian Round Table chapter. The American government reciprocated and sent a representative to Canada. The presence of an American diplomat worried Amery and

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<sup>88</sup> Amery to Stamfordham, April 5, 1928

<sup>89</sup> For example, a 1925 memo from the Australian Governor-General to Amery argued for foreign diplomats in Canberra and set about sorting out various diplomatic tax exemptions. Forster to Amery, Jan 12, 1925, CO 886/11/3

Willingdon.<sup>90</sup> The Canadian government also opened a legation in Paris, although this appointment stirred controversy. King clashed with the Dominions Office on whether the Canadian minister would function independently or as part of the British mission.<sup>91</sup> British officials did not necessarily take Dominion legations seriously. William Clark, the British High Commissioner to Canada, described the Canadian legations as “their new toy” and suggested that the Canadians were “extremely sensitive lest its importance may not be recognized by all the world, and especially lest it should be regarded as something semi-dependent on Great Britain.”<sup>92</sup> The Dominions ignored British objections. The Canadian government established another consulate in Tokyo, and South Africa sent two representatives to Europe by 1930.<sup>93</sup> The Canadian, South African, and Irish Free State governments wanted the legations to enhance their international prestige and distance themselves from foreign perception of a monolithic British Empire foreign policy.

The growth of Dominion foreign embassies affected relations among the Dominions. The Canadian, South African, and Irish Free State governments formed a united front of autonomy-minded Dominions and collaborated on their plans to foster

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<sup>90</sup> Amery wrote to Chamberlain that he contemplated sending a “pretty big man” to “balance the American minister. Amery to Chamberlain, April 1, 1927, DO 117/62. Willingdon saw the appointment of an American ambassador as part of a larger plan to unseat Britain as Canada’s closest ally. See Holland, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Holland, 78-9

<sup>92</sup> Clark to Harding, June, 1929, DO 117/150

<sup>93</sup> Britain resisted both of these appointments. The Japanese government protested Canada’s exclusionary immigration policies, and Britain did not want to antagonize it. Dominion governments had already managed to embarrass the British government in Paris when they opposed the addition of Japan’s declaration of the equality of all races to the League of Nations Covenant. Holland identifies the Canadian appointment to Tokyo as the crucial step in establishing other Dominion legations. Holland, 80-86

independent foreign policies.<sup>94</sup> They met in Geneva, symbolically crafting their international policy at the site of international government rather than in London, the seat of imperial affairs. The quest for embassies, however, caused disagreements. The Canadian and South African governments argued about a South African attempt to send a single diplomat to cover both Canada and the United States as a way to save money. King protested the appointment because he felt it conflated the United States and Canada.<sup>95</sup> The proposal also blurred the line between Commonwealth and foreign relations by putting an officer in charge of both.<sup>96</sup> King also bristled when the British government suggested that Canada collaborate with the Australian and New Zealand governments to draft a letter for foreign governments announcing the formation of Dominion legations.<sup>97</sup> King saw no point in collaborating with the two Dominions that had no interest in independent foreign policy.

The British government resisted Dominion legations abroad because it was concerned that they would undermine imperial unity in foreign affairs. Britain and the Dominions both conducted diplomacy through the same Crown, and British officials worried about the constitutional ramifications. The British government's concerns sprang from a diplomatic controversy between Mexico and Canada in 1926.<sup>98</sup> King pushed for

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<sup>94</sup> Holland, 79. One particularly interesting dimension that Holland draws from these discussions is his emphasis on Dominion representation as another contest between the Dominion and Foreign Offices.

<sup>95</sup> Holland, 80

<sup>96</sup> Holland, 80

<sup>97</sup> Clark to Harding, June, 1929, DO 117/150

<sup>98</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum, March 12, 1928, DO 117/99. The controversy stemmed from Canadian Catholic leaders criticizing anti-clerical laws in the Mexican government under Plutarco Calles. They protested a Canadian trade mission to Mexico for supporting the Mexican government, and, in response,

the Mexican Consul's recall, and the Mexican government refused and threatened to dismiss the Canadian Trade Minister in Mexico.<sup>99</sup> The distinction between Mexico's relations with Britain and Canada remained unclear.<sup>100</sup> The Foreign Office noted that the British Ambassador would continue to serve as *de facto* representative in Canadian interests in Mexico. Therefore, Mexican Consul would not technically create a breach in relations with Canada by dismissing the representative.<sup>101</sup> The Canadian and Mexican governments officially conducted affairs through British channels. Canada's diplomatic standoff with the Mexican government ended several months later without any recalls.

Canada's new legation in Tokyo created new problems. Chamberlain and the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum in 1928 to examine what would happen in the event of a rupture of foreign relations between Japan and Canada. The Foreign Office warned that a rupture between the Canadian and Japanese governments could cause a serious constitutional dilemma. Canada had full diplomatic relations with the Japanese government; if either Japan or Canada recalled its minister, relations between the two countries would be severed.<sup>102</sup> This situation raised a serious question about the relationship of Dominions to the Crown. If Japan severed its relations to Canada then there could be two consequences: either the Crown had severed its relations with Japan,

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the Mexican Consul General in Ottawa published a retort the memo described as "indiscreetly worded" in the Toronto *Daily Star*.

<sup>99</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum, March 12, 1928, DO 117/99

<sup>100</sup> Holland demonstrates that King courted this controversy intentionally in order to test divisions between imperial unity and Canadian diplomacy. Holland, 77.

<sup>101</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum, March 12, 1928, DO 117/99. Holland implies that the Mexican government seemed unlikely to accept this sort of esoteric hair-splitting interpretation. Holland, 77

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

or only Canada had severed its ties and therefore had a separate Crown. The Foreign Office labeled both of these scenarios unacceptable and likely to lead to the end of the Empire itself.<sup>103</sup> Though the Canadian-Japanese dispute remained hypothetical, it was not unimaginable. Many in Japan resented Canada's restrictions against Asian immigration and had protested the opening of the Canadian legation.<sup>104</sup>

King George V remained alarmed at the implications of Dominion diplomacy towards the Crown. His secretary, Lord Stamfordham, wrote to Amery mentioning that the king felt that the Canadian government had “displayed little understanding of diplomatic usages” in the dispute with Mexico.<sup>105</sup> The king feared that a Dominion diplomat would drag Britain into an unnecessary diplomatic incident. He suggested making all Dominion diplomats into trade ministers in order to leave the foreign policy in the hands of the British government.<sup>106</sup> His solution was out of touch with Commonwealth developments. He did not understand his Empire’s transformation into what Stamfordham unenthusiastically described as a “so-called Commonwealth of Nations.”<sup>107</sup> “There is much talk nowadays of 'cementing', but the King is inclined to question whether the action of these free and independent nations will not tend rather to

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Holland, 81

<sup>105</sup> Stamfordham to Amery, 1928, DO 117/99

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

loosen the fabric of Empire, of which the Sovereign has been regarded as the Chief Corner Stone,”<sup>108</sup> Stamfordham wrote.

The introduction of High Commissioners and Dominion diplomats made the Commonwealth appear more like an international institution. The new Commonwealth diplomacy, however, was conducted within an imperial context. Dominion governments used diplomats as proof of their sovereignty and independent foreign policy credentials. The High Commissioners mainly regulated bilateral relations between Britain and the Dominions. The Dominions still communicated mainly through London. Dominion governments also could not agree on the nature of their foreign relations. Canada, South Africa, and the Irish Free State pushed for British High Commissioners and independent legations abroad. New Zealand and Australia rejected these changes and continued to work with Britain through the old imperial methods. The Foreign Office tried to maintain control of imperial foreign policy. The new agencies and embassies had a mixed effect on the development of the Commonwealth as an international institution. On the one hand, they supported the idea of Dominion sovereignty and independent foreign policy. On the other hand, the bickering and confusion did little to contribute to any coherent Commonwealth policy.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

Imperial reformers envisioned the Commonwealth as an international organization of sovereign states united in close cooperation. The nature of Commonwealth cooperation, however, remained ambiguous. Commonwealth relations became an ongoing battle between Dominions interested in furthering their sovereignty and British attempts to maintain control over imperial policies and preserve imperial unity in foreign policy. The 1926 Imperial Conference acknowledged the Dominions as sovereign nations. The appointment of High Commissioners replaced imperial relations through the Governor-General with a new Commonwealth diplomacy. Canada, South Africa, and the Irish Free State established legations in foreign countries to advance their national interests. None of the Dominions had the government infrastructure to function without British diplomats or defenses. The Imperial Conference and the changes in diplomacy and communication ensured that the Commonwealth would work in an imperial context. The British government lost its claims to control the Dominions. The Commonwealth had begun to operate with the understanding that its members were independent nations that collaborated through voluntary ties and shared fealty to the Crown.

The reality of Commonwealth cooperation remained messy and ill-defined. Dominion governments could not agree on the Commonwealth's shape. They could not even agree on the meaning of the term "British Empire." The Foreign Office bristled at Dominion foreign policies as the work of dilettantes pursuing an autonomous agenda at

the expense of British and imperial interests. Officials worried that Britain would have to clean up the Dominions' diplomatic messes. The Dominions Office defended Dominion sovereignty, but Amery and his officials did so more out of an attempt to mollify the more strident Dominion governments. Dominions Office officials had no intention of decreasing Britain's influence at the head the Commonwealth bloc.

Imperial reformers had discussed the Commonwealth as new set of international relations, a League within the League of Nations, and a model for international order and harmony. The reality of the Commonwealth contradicted this model. It had become a unique international organization, but only because it remained inscrutable to outsiders. Its members did not cooperate more effectively than other organizations; they could not even agree on how to cooperate. Commonwealth members coordinated their economic, foreign, and defense policies because they depended on Britain. Cooperation remained more of a vestige of imperialism than a bold new doctrine in international relations.

## **Chapter VI: The Ottawa Conference and the Commonwealth Economy**

The Commonwealth had developed into an international organization built on contradictions and ambiguities by the early 1930s. The Dominion governments had succeeded in establishing their sovereignty. By 1931, the Statute of Westminster had attacked the constitutional vestiges of British imperialism, the Dominions had begun to appoint High Commissioners to Britain and ambassadors to foreign nations, and Dominion governments sat in the League of Nations Council. Avenues of Commonwealth cooperation, however, remained vague. British and Dominion politicians continued to affirm their commitment to close, informal cooperation, but implemented few specific plans. The Commonwealth looked less like a model for a new type of international organization than a group of nations bound by the residual economic, military, and cultural ties of the British Empire. The Imperial Conference in Ottawa, which set up a system of imperial tariff preferences in 1932, therefore took on an importance far more important than its economic arrangements. The Conference established a basis for imperial unity and a material meaning to Commonwealth membership beyond the ephemeral bonds of king and constitution.

The 1932 Imperial Conference met to install preferential tariffs for British and Dominion goods. Dominions had granted marginal preference on British goods throughout the 1920s. The British government avoided tariff reform because it was a

controversial political issue.<sup>1</sup> Imperial preference in 1932 came more from desperation than the triumph of tariff reform ideology. Tariff walls went up in Europe and the United States in response to the Great Depression, and the British government turned to imperial trade and protection in search of relief. Negotiations between the British and Dominion governments began in early 1932 and quickly degenerated amid quarrels about tariff rates and meat and wheat quotas in Britain. The acrimony continued at Ottawa where the conference nearly broke down. The British and Dominion delegations managed to escape from Ottawa with a series of bilateral trade agreements that set the Commonwealth economic program for the rest of the decade.

Tariff reformers were disappointed in the Ottawa Conference. Joseph Chamberlain had launched his campaign in 1903, and reformers such as Leo Amery had suffered through nearly thirty years of defeat before finally seeing a British tariff. The Conference, however, dampened their triumph. The hastily negotiated and grudgingly accepted tariff agreements at Ottawa had not brought imperial unity, but bitter resentment and mutual suspicion. Imperialists' hopes for greater imperial economic integration were met with vague rhetoric, while both British and Dominion governments demonstrated a commitment to national economic self-interest.

Historians have looked at two effects of the Ottawa Conference on Dominion economies. R.F. Holland focuses on British trade with the Dominions in the 1930s. He argues that the animosity engendered by tariff negotiations at Ottawa and throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> The Conservative Party lost two elections related to tariff reform in 1906 and 1924.

1930s fractured the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> Holland suggests that the negotiations exposed the Commonwealth to volatile political forces in Britain and the Dominions and revealed the cracks in Commonwealth unity.<sup>3</sup> Ian Drummond shows that the agreements had virtually no effect on patterns of trade and consumption in Britain or the wider Empire.<sup>4</sup> Cain and Hopkins, on the other hand, look beyond trade at financial and monetary policy.<sup>5</sup> Their work illustrates Dominion dependence on Britain for capital and shows how the sterling bloc increased British control over Dominion economies. Both of these approaches focus on the interaction between economic policies and Dominion sovereignty. This chapter examines how the Ottawa agreements became important to the definition of Commonwealth membership, despite fractious negotiations and British economic domination.

Imperial preference became a substantial indicator of Commonwealth membership. The establishment of Ottawa preferences below the most-favored nation rate manifested the special nature of Commonwealth relations to foreign governments. The Ottawa Conference also affected relations within the Commonwealth. The British disputes with Éamon de Valera, the nationalist leader of the Irish Free State, left the Free State out of the tariff regime as part of the “economic war.” The Irish exclusion from tariff preferences marked the first schism in the unity of Dominion status. The British

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<sup>2</sup> R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance, 1918-1939*, (London, Macmillan, 1981) .

<sup>3</sup> “Imperial collaboration and Great Depression: Britain, Canada, and the world wheat crisis, 1929-35,” *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history*, 16 (1988), pp. 107-127. Holland describes the imperial economic policies in the 1930s as “ideal, pre-fabricated decolonization.”

<sup>4</sup> Ian Drummond, *Imperial economic policy, 1919-1939: studies in expansion and protection*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974).

<sup>5</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, (New York: Longman, 2002).

government sought to maintain a unified Dominion status throughout the 1920s; as soon as Canada could appoint foreign emissaries, for example, New Zealand gained the same rights. After the Ottawa Conference, the Irish Free State became an exception. The Dominions Office referred to the Irish Free State and the “Ottawa Dominions.” The British government used the new tariff arrangements to give the Free State a different status than the other Dominions.

The Ottawa Conference and the tariff arrangements in the 1930s reinforced the idea of the Commonwealth as a unique international institution. Tariff preferences helped to define the Commonwealth beyond the Crown and members’ promises to cooperate. The tariff links became important because the 1926 Imperial Conference and Statute of Westminster had undone constitutional links between Britain and the Dominions. At the same time, the Ottawa Conference reinforced Dominion sovereignty and the Commonwealth’s international character. Britain and the Dominions quarreled in their negotiations before, during, and after the Conference. De Valera attacked remnants of the Crown in the Free State constitution. The British government undermined potential competition from Dominion industries in imperial markets. National self-interest overwhelmed Commonwealth cooperation. The economic conflicts made the Commonwealth difficult to distinguish from other international organizations in the 1930s.

## THE DOMINIONS OFFICE AND THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Amery had been the dominant British personality in the Commonwealth in the 1920s. He oversaw the creation of the Dominions Office and guided the British government through the nuances of Commonwealth diplomacy. He understood the importance of respecting the Dominions' outward shows of sovereignty. Amery believed that stronger economic and strategic links to Commonwealth would bind them to Britain more effectively than any constitutional ties. In 1929, the Labour Party swept the Conservatives out of power and replaced Amery with the veteran Fabian, Sidney Webb.<sup>6</sup> The Labour government, however, did not stay in power long enough to make significant changes in Commonwealth policy, and the cadre of Dominions Office officials hewed closely to Amery's policies.<sup>7</sup> Ramsay Macdonald formed the National Government coalition in 1931 and brought in J.H. Thomas as Dominions Secretary.

James Henry Thomas, universally known as “Jimmy,” brought an approach to the Dominions Office that was different from Amery's imperial zealotry. Thomas, a self-made man from the “University of the Streets,”<sup>8</sup> rose to prominence as chairman of the National Union of Railwaymen. The change in government, however, did not bring in a radical change in Commonwealth policy. Thomas had served as Colonial Secretary in the 1924 Labour Government, and, by the time he became Dominions Secretary in 1931,

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<sup>6</sup> Webb had been named Baron Passfield shortly before taking his post.

<sup>7</sup> One significant Labour change supported the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes that had been opposed by the Conservatives.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Boyce, *British Capitalism at the crossroads, 1919-1932*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 17

he had embraced imperial tariff reform.<sup>9</sup> Thomas's imperialism did not match the socialist intelligentsia in his party, and his shifts towards becoming a “tory democrat” increased after 1929.<sup>10</sup> Andrew Thorpe characterizes Thomas’s embrace of imperial protection as opportunistic.

Thomas’s return to the Dominions Office in 1930 was a demotion after a disastrous turn as Lord Privy Seal.<sup>11</sup> According to Thorpe, Thomas took the Dominions post partly because he needed a ministerial salary to pay his mounting debts.<sup>12</sup> Either way, he was certainly no Amery when it came to imperial zeal; it is difficult to imagine Jimmy Thomas dancing arm-in-arm with a friend after hearing Joseph Chamberlain’s speeches on tariff reform.

The shift to Labour and National governments had a relatively small effect on the government's Commonwealth policy. The main differences between Amery and Thomas had more to do with style than policy. Amery had mastered the art of Commonwealth diplomacy and usually managed to suppress public disappointment when the Cabinet deviated from his deeply-held beliefs about Empire. Nevertheless, it is hard to envision Amery in Ottawa carrying out his government's wishes by fighting against Dominion wheat and meat quotas and other “food taxes.” Thomas had a more pugnacious style and a tendency to antagonize Dominion ministers who resisted the British agenda. He clashed with hard-bargaining Dominion governments and with de Valera. Amery, on the

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Thorpe, “I am in the Cabinet’: J.H. Thomas's decision to join the National Government in 1931,” *Historical Research*, v. 64: 155 (Oct., 1991), pp. 390-1.

<sup>10</sup> Thorpe, 391.

<sup>11</sup> Thorpe, 391-394

<sup>12</sup> Thorpe, 398-99

other hand, had never faced anything as divisive as the tariff negotiations and the dispute with the Irish Free State.

The other major development affecting the Dominions Office involved the division of the Dominions and Colonial Offices between two ministers. Philip Cunliffe-Lister became Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1931. Thomas became the first Dominions Secretary to hold that post alone. The offices remained separated until 1938, when they temporarily reunited under Malcolm Macdonald. Malcolm Macdonald (Ramsay Macdonald's son) became Dominions Secretary in 1935. Thomas took the Colonial post until scandal forced him from the government in May 1936.<sup>13</sup> He brought continuity to the post after serving as Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Dominions Office since 1931. The separation of the offices undermined some of the prestige of the Dominions Office. One editorial in an Ottawa newspaper enthusiastically called for the unification of the Dominions and Colonial Offices under Macdonald because the Dominions Office had become “nothing more than a post office.”<sup>14</sup> The sense that the Dominions Office had lost some prestige came from the increasing prominence of alternative channels of communication, such as High Commissioners. It is possible that the everyday functions of the Dominions Office had faded from public view during the 1930s. The Dominions certainly had never been more prominent than during the Ottawa Conference in 1932.

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas resigned among allegations that he had leaked information on impending changes to the tax code to two friends. See Philip Williamson, “Thomas, James Henry (1874–1949),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Campbell to Harding, Nov. 4, 1938, DO/35/541/3. Campbell, the British High Commissioner in Canada, was quoting what he described as “the very offensive leading article” from the *Daily Express* from Oct. 28, 1938.

## THE OTTAWA NEGOTIATIONS

The collapse of the global economy in the 1930s altered the focus of Commonwealth policy. Commonwealth policies in the 1920s emphasized Dominion sovereignty, and Dominion governments resisted plans for economic integration. The Great Depression caused the British Dominion governments to emphasize trade and monetary policy. The advent of protectionism and currency blocs played into the hands of the old tariff reformers who trumpeted imperial economic integration as a solution to Britain's economic woes.

The swift spread of economic malaise caused fueled nationalist economic policies. The United States Federal Reserve Board increased discount interest rates, which led to a contraction in American investment abroad.<sup>15</sup> European central banks felt compelled to match the American rate hikes in order to attempt to attract dollars, but the high interest rates encouraged deflation.<sup>16</sup> French policy also encouraged deflation by hoarding gold and issuing a relatively small amount of currency.<sup>17</sup> Trade policies also reflected this pattern. Commodity prices collapsed as the crisis deepened; by 1931, for example, wheat prices on the Liverpool Exchange had decreased by 50 percent and meat

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<sup>15</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 96-98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 98

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 97

prices by 40 percent since 1929.<sup>18</sup> Governments responded with tariffs and quota systems. Britain's attempt to hold onto free trade made its market ripe for dumping.<sup>19</sup> The British government gave into the pressure of protectionism with the Import Duties Act of 1932.

Politicians discussed the Ottawa Conference with high-minded appeals to imperial economic cooperation. The economic desperation of the British and Dominion governments, however, undermined the spirit of cooperation. Imperial reformers had fostered the idea of the Commonwealth as a new type of international relation that enabled close and informal relations with the sovereign Dominions. The negotiations before the conference undermined that idea. Britain and the Dominions prioritized their national economic interests over Commonwealth unity.

The Ottawa negotiations highlighted the economic inequity between Britain and the Dominions. Dominion economies generally depended on access to the British market more than the British economies needed Dominion markets.<sup>20</sup> Australia and Canada had adopted protectionist policies in response to the Depression that targeted British goods as much as foreign goods. The economic inequality complicated the idea of the Conference

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 101

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 103

<sup>20</sup> James Belich argues that the advent of refrigerated shipping caused New Zealand to reorient its trade entirely towards exports to Britain. See Belich, *Paradise reforged : a history of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). John Singleton also emphasizes Australian and New Zealand dependence on the British market, although he focuses on the period after the Second World War. John Singleton, *Economic relations between Britain and Australasia, 1945-1970*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002). Mike Cronin points out that the Irish Free State exported a larger share of its produce to Britain than either of the Antipodean Dominions. Mike Cronin, "Golden dreams, harsh realities: economics and informal empire in the Irish Free State," in Cronin and Regan, eds., *Ireland: the politics of independence 1922-1949*, pp. 144-64.

as an opportunity to engineer economic imperial cooperation. It pitted Commonwealth cooperation against politicians' desire to show voters that they had made tangible economic gains. Britain had the upper hand in negotiations because the Dominions needed preferential entry to British markets. On the other hand, the pressure to prevent a rupture within the Commonwealth forced the British government into concessions.

The Ottawa Conference did not succeed in creating a coherent system of imperial economic cooperation. It focused mainly on the bilateral relationships between the Dominions and Britain. Dominion representatives made some deals with other Dominions, colonies, and semi-self-governing territories including India, Southern Rhodesia, and Newfoundland.<sup>21</sup> Negotiations between Britain and the Dominions, however, overshadowed the other arrangements. The bilateral deals only affected trade. Delegates at the Conference avoided discussing other avenues of economic integration, such as imperial monetary policy or agencies to facilitate intra-Commonwealth business. At the same time, the Ottawa Conference reinforced the importance of the Commonwealth as a unique international institution. The Dominions and Britain used the Commonwealth to justify their tariff preferences beyond most-favored nation status. They needed to convince other nations that the Commonwealth maintained special imperial ties that were different from other international relations. British and Dominion governments, therefore, discussed the Conference as a demonstration of Commonwealth

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<sup>21</sup> Newfoundland was technically a Dominion in 1932, but suffered significant economic and political upheaval throughout the early 1930s. In 1933, the Newfoundland government abdicated its powers to a mixed Newfoundland and British panel in order to secure a British loan after unsuccessfully attempting to sell Labrador to Canada. Canada absorbed Newfoundland in 1949.

cooperation, but the real business of the conference revolved around bilateral tariff negotiations.

The Ottawa Conference ended the unity of Dominion status through the absence of the Irish Free State. Historians have differed over the extent to which Irish participation in Imperial Conferences in the 1920s pushed the bounds of Dominion Status or undermined it entirely.<sup>22</sup> Either way, the constitutional changes of the 1920s applied equally to the Irish Free State. The Free State's absence from Ottawa alienated it from the tariff regime. The tariffs became an important signal of Dominion status, and therefore the Free State became a different kind of Dominion than Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa.

The British government began preparations for the conference in December, 1931. From the outset, the Cabinet sought to balance concessions to the Dominions with preferences for British goods.<sup>23</sup> Ministers rejected outright any tariff boards or bulk purchase schemes, but called for the development of a system for inter-imperial industrial cooperation. The Cabinet called for a report on potential Dominion concessions. This policy represented a reversal on British policy towards tariff bargaining with the Dominions. A report from the 1930 Imperial Conference strongly discouraged

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<sup>22</sup> See D.W. Harkness, *The restless dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-1931* (London, Macmillan 1969), Ged Martin, "The Irish Free State and the evolution of the Commonwealth," in Ged Martin and Robert Hyam, eds., *Reappraisals in British Imperial History*, (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 201-225, and Donal Lowry, "New Ireland, old empire and the outside world: the strange evolution of a 'dictionary republic,'" in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan, *Ireland: the politics of independence 1922-1949*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 164-216.

<sup>23</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, Dec. 2, 1931, DO 35/236/12.

bargaining with various parts of the Empire.<sup>24</sup> The memo argued that Britain's position at the center of the Empire made it impossible to favor one part of the Empire over another and threatened that tariff bargains could erode imperial relations. It offered the example of a trade agreement between Canada and New Zealand. According to the report, Canadians complained about preferences enabling competition from New Zealand's "foreign" butter.<sup>25</sup> The shift in attitude therefore revealed two important aspects of the British position on the Ottawa Conference. First, it suggested that the desperation of the Depression had forced the government to reverse its policy and negotiate with the Dominions. Second, it showed that the British government expected the conference to yield tangible gains.

The British government viewed the conference as an opportunity to increase British trade within the Empire. A preliminary report aimed at a 30 percent increase in imperial trade by increasing imports of foodstuffs from the Empire and exports of British manufactured goods.<sup>26</sup> The report projected that increased trade within the Empire would lead to gains for British shipping and suggested moving trade from countries on gold to Sterling countries.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Memorandum on Tariff Bargains between the United Kingdom and Britain, Sept. 1930, DO 35/236/12

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* The appendix dealing with the dispute between New Zealand and Canada noted that the importation of New Zealand butter into Canada had affected the Canadian election. "Mr. Bennett will ride to victory on a Canadian cow; and Mr. King will slip on out on a pat of New Zealand butter," one commentator predicted. The Canadian Liberals lost the election in 1930, and Bennett came to power at the head of a Conservative, protectionist government.

<sup>26</sup> Dominions Office note on preparations for the Conference, DO 35/236/12.

<sup>27</sup> Britain went off the gold standard in 1931.

The tariff negotiations created several conflicts of interest between Britain and other parts of the Empire. The Cabinet, for example, took care to emphasize that Southern Rhodesia had not yet attained Dominion status, even though it had delegates at the Conference.<sup>28</sup> The representation of India also caused potential problems. The India Office had the awkward problem of negotiating for the benefit of India, but its officials worked for the British government. The dependent colonies shared this conflict. The Cabinet advised the Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to represent their interests in negotiations with Britain and the Dominions.<sup>29</sup>

The preparations for the conference revealed economic tensions between Britain and the Dominions. The Dominions Office, Board of Trade, and other interested sections of the British government pressed the Dominion governments for preliminary offers and desiderata during the spring in 1932. British officials hoped to secure early agreements and smooth the way for a tranquil conference. The British requests for desiderata, however, had the opposite effect; they irritated Dominion governments and sparked tough negotiations. Thomas and the Dominions Office set a hostile tone in May with a telegram to the Dominion governments.<sup>30</sup> The May 9 telegram chastised the Dominion governments for their slow responses. It threatened to end British concessions after November 15 under the auspices of the Import Duties Act unless the Dominions

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<sup>28</sup> Note on the status of Southern Rhodesia at Imperial Conference at Ottawa, April 14, 1931, DO 35/236/12.

<sup>29</sup> Cabinet Conclusions Dec. 2, 1931, DO 35/236/12.

<sup>30</sup> J.H. Thomas to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, May 9, 1932, DO/35/239/2

reciprocated.<sup>31</sup> The telegram's tone poisoned relations with the Dominions before the conference.

Each Dominion had its own economic issue with Britain. Three case studies of the negotiations Canada, Australia, and New Zealand conducted with Britain before the conference reveal different sources of controversy. The negotiations with Canada highlighted how the Dominions Office failed to fully understand political tensions within the Dominions. The case of Australia emphasized the gap between British and Dominion expectations for concessions. Finally, the negotiations with New Zealand illustrated Dominion dependence on Britain. The negotiations were also important because they showed the nascent Commonwealth diplomacy system in action. The Dominions Office faced a difficult task because the Depression had made the Dominions desperate. Dominions Office officials, and J.H. Thomas in particular, exacerbated the tension with an indelicate approach.

Britain's hardline approach irritated the Canadian government. The Dominions Office grew increasingly frustrated with the Canadian government's reluctance to produce trade figures. Canadian Prime Minister R.B. Bennett took exception to the tone of Thomas's telegram. William Clark, the British High Commissioner in Canada, wrote to the Dominions Office that the telegram had "considerably ruffled the Prime Minister's spiritual dovecote."<sup>32</sup> Clark argued that Bennett's reaction showed that the Dominion governments did not understand the consequences of British protection, claiming that:

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> William Clark to E.J. Harding [Dominions Office], May 11, 1932, DO 35/239/2.

The world is an ironic place, and every wise man knows that the attainment of something long ardently desired is generally accompanied by some disillusionment. The Dominions have been so eager to see a protectionist England that they haven't considered any possible drawbacks; the whole thing has been simply an article of faith; but now they are getting some shocks.<sup>33</sup>

The Dominions, he implied, had not prepared for Britain to direct tariffs at Dominion goods while thinking nothing of subjecting British goods to their own tariffs. Bennett saw the British telegram differently. He, like many other Dominion Prime Ministers, argued that the Dominions had been giving voluntary preference to British goods for years and saw the British posture as unnecessarily aggressive.

Bennett had his plans for the Conference. He hoped that it would establish a basic policy for imperial trade beyond bilateral agreements. Bennett told Clark that he hoped to establish a master list of goods for free entry anywhere in the Empire. Clark reported to the Dominions Office that he found Bennett's attitude unrealistic and part of his attempt to avoid negotiations.<sup>34</sup> He complained that Bennett "seems to be toying with the possibility of evading the issue in a cloud of sonorous principles."<sup>35</sup> Bennett told Clark that he feared that bilateral negotiations at the Conference would lead to strained imperial relations.<sup>36</sup>

The back and forth between Clark and Bennett showed how High Commissioners had become more like diplomats. Clark tried to gather any feasible information for his government about Canada's political situation and Bennett's attitude. British officials

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Clark to J.H. Thomas, June 15, 1932, DO 35/239/2

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Clark, Note of conversation with Prime Minister [Bennett] June 29, 1932, DO 35/239/3

even used clandestine informants to obtain intelligence. Clark submitted a secret report of a conversation between Bennett and a friend of the British Trade Commissioner.<sup>37</sup> This anonymous source pushed Bennett to reveal the nature of Canadian preparations for the conference. The same file also reported on a conversation between the Trade Commissioner and a minor Canadian civil servant. Dominions Office officials believed that the conversations offered insight into Bennett's strategy at the Conference. The British intelligence tactics did not quite fit with the idea of the Commonwealth as an organization devoted to open and close cooperation.

Bennett hesitated to start negotiations with Britain because of domestic political pressure. He counted on support from Canadian manufacturers and had to make sure that they backed the preferences. Bennett told Clark that the manufacturers frustrated him; he characterized them as intransigent and claimed that they had not helped the Canadian government prepare for the conference.<sup>38</sup> Clark's was sensitive to Bennett's position. He wrote to Thomas that Bennett risked alienating the manufacturers by allowing freer entry to British products.<sup>39</sup> Bennett felt significant political pressure to win concessions at the conference,<sup>40</sup> and Clark suggested that the conflict paralyzed him.<sup>41</sup> Despite his sympathy for Bennett's political predicament, Clark remained frustrated. He wrote that the

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<sup>37</sup> F.W. Field [British Trade Commissioner] to Clark, March 25, 1932, DO35/239/2

<sup>38</sup> Clark, Note of conversation with Prime Minister [Bennett] June 29, 1932, DO 35/239/3

<sup>39</sup> Clark to Thomas, June 30, 1932, DO/35/239/3

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

conference depended on “whether the Prime Minister makes up his mind to deal firmly with the Canadian manufacturers.”<sup>42</sup>

The British delegation at the conference had little understanding of or sympathy for Bennett's political restrictions. British Trade Commissioner F.W. Field complained that the Canadian government had ignored British requests to discuss preferences before the conference.<sup>43</sup> Field also blamed the Canadian government for press reports that claimed that the British offers were based on out-of-date figures. British delegates also accused Bennett of allowing the manufacturers to dictate his proposals. The Canadian statistics came directly from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. Horace Wilson, the chief official advisor to the British government, told a Canadian official that he had not traveled 8,000 miles to learn the opinions of Canadian manufacturers. Field complained that the Canadian government restricted his access to these documents. Bennett and his cabinet also withdrew several of their offers at the last minute, and it took a final round of tough negotiations to restore the preferences.<sup>44</sup>

Australia's position mirrored Canada's in some important ways. Like Canada, Australia had responded to the Depression with high protective tariffs. R.W. Dalton, the Senior British Trade Commissioner in Australia, argued that these tariffs nullified any preferences that Australia had extended to British goods.<sup>45</sup> The Australian government also felt pressure from manufacturing interests to maintain tariff levels. Dalton informed

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Dalton to DO, Feb 2, 1932, DO/35/240/1

the Dominions Office that the New South Wales branch of the Australian Manufacturers' Association had enough clout to influence the new Australian government.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the Canadian government, the Australians began negotiations with Britain before the Conference. The discussions revealed a significant gap between Australian expectations and the British offer.

The Australian government recoiled at British officials' aggressive demands. British officials had little to offer Australia. Dalton wrote to the Dominions Office in February that no adjustments at Ottawa could significantly improve Australia's trade with Britain. He suggested that Australian officials should trade preferences for financial assistance.<sup>47</sup> The Dominions Office did not cushion the blow. Thomas's telegram, combined with stringent British demands for lower tariffs, infuriated Australian ministers. W.C. Hankinson, the British representative in Australia,<sup>48</sup> reported that the Australians viewed the telegram as a demand for concessions, but found the British offers lacking.<sup>49</sup> The Dominions Office touched on two Australian fears. First, Australian officials felt that the British government was unfairly throwing its weight around; they complained about Thomas using the "big stick."<sup>50</sup> Secondly, they feared that an aggressive British approach could hurt Commonwealth relations by making Ottawa an

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<sup>46</sup> Dalton Memo, Feb. 27, 1932, DO/35/240/1 Joseph Lyons and the United Australia Party unseated James Scullin's Labor government in a December 1931 election and came to power in January 1932.

<sup>47</sup> Dalton to DO, Jan. 27, 1932, DO/35/240/1

<sup>48</sup> Britain's representative in Australia was not styled a High Commissioner until 1936. Hankinson was a Dominions Office official sent to represent Britain's interests and ascertain local intelligence much like a High Commissioner.

<sup>49</sup> Hankinson report, June 1, 1932, DO/35/240/3

<sup>50</sup> Hankinson dispatch, May 27, 1932. DO/25/240/4

arena for haggling. “The whole meeting of the subcommittee,” Hankinson wrote, “could only be described as 'hostile.’”<sup>51</sup> The Australian government became so irate that they prepared a retaliatory telegram offering insultingly stingy concessions. Hankinson reported that he and Dalton had to intervene to stop the report and allow ministers time to cool off.<sup>52</sup>

The acrimony subsided in June and July. Dalton reported to the British government that they had convinced the Australian ministers to offer more generous preferences.<sup>53</sup> “The attitude of the Australian Government in many cases is in fact much more favourable than they would be willing to indicate in an official statement at this stage,” he wrote.<sup>54</sup> The British government received a list of Australian proposals at the end of June, but both sides eased off negotiations until the Conference. British officials’ hopes to head off tension at the Conference had backfired. The Australian government had already become disillusioned with the British proposals and went to the Conference determined to wring any concession it could salvage.

The negotiations with New Zealand took on a different tone. Unlike the defiant Canadian and Australian governments, the New Zealanders attempted to leverage their loyalty to Britain and the Empire to extract more generous concessions. Lord Bledisloe,

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Dalton, telegram to Department of Overseas Trade, June 15, 1932.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

the Governor-General of New Zealand,<sup>55</sup> wrote to the Dominions Office that his government feared “hard bargaining” with Britain before the Conference.<sup>56</sup> Bledisloe warned the Dominions Office that the preferences in New Zealand had become a politically sensitive issue. New Zealand already allowed a 20 percent preference on approximately 60 percent of British imports, and government officials claimed that the preferences had hindered New Zealand’s economic recovery.<sup>57</sup> New Zealand officials argued that their country should be rewarded for sublimating its own economic interests to the interests of Britain and the Empire at large.

The New Zealand government argued that New Zealand showed imperial patriotism while the other Dominions acted out of self-interest. Bledisloe reported that the New Zealand government expected the other Dominions to approach the conference in a “spirit of voluntary co-operation.”<sup>58</sup> The British government encouraged this attitude with the May 9 telegram that threatened to withdraw preference. New Zealand officials grew alarmed that they had been lumped together with the less cooperative Dominions.<sup>59</sup> The New Zealand trade commissioner in London drew up a series of “arguments” in order to emphasize his government's preferences to Britain and contrast it with the other Dominions. He noted that New Zealand had increased imports from Britain at the

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<sup>55</sup> A British High Commissioner did not appear in Auckland until former DO official Harry Batterbee took the post in 1939. The Governor-General maintained a stronger link to Britain in New Zealand than in other Commonwealth countries.

<sup>56</sup> Bledisloe to Thomas, May 19, 1932, DO 35/241/2

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Discussions with the New Zealand Representatives, Board of Trade, June 21, 1932, DO 35/241/2

expense of foreign goods while suggesting that other Dominions had balked.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, he noted that New Zealand had not subsidized exports to compete with UK goods as Australia and South Africa had.<sup>61</sup> He also claimed that New Zealand could not increase preferences for British goods since they had lower tariffs than the other Dominions.<sup>62</sup> Instead, he sought import quotas to restrict British imports by other nations at the expense of New Zealand.<sup>63</sup> This remarkable document demonstrated New Zealand's desperate attempts to retain its advantages in the British market. The trade commissioner understood New Zealand's position in the British market depended on imperial solidarity. Therefore, he portrayed New Zealand as the most loyal Dominion, even if it meant denigrating the other Commonwealth countries.

The delegates' opening statements reemphasized the Ottawa Conference's imperial goals. They claimed that the Conference had global importance. Bennett noted that increasing trade within the Empire would spark stagnant global trade.<sup>64</sup> Stanley Bruce, the head Australian representative, echoed the importance of the Empire as a model for international relations:

If we, the British peoples, united by ties of kinship and common interest, cannot in this hour of crisis act together in a spirit of cooperation and good will, what hope is there of international action between nations divided in sympathy and outlook and in many cases the inheritors of centuries of prejudice and hostility?<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Sandford [New Zealand Minister of Trade], Set of Arguments, June 21, 1932, DO 35/241/2

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Sandford accused the Danish government of dumping butter.

<sup>64</sup> Bennett, "Record of Proceedings from the Opening Session of the Conference, July 21, 1932, Report on the Ottawa Conference Appendix A, DO35/242/6

<sup>65</sup> Bruce, *Ibid.*

Dominion delegates also used the conference to emphasize their national sovereignty. Several compared the Ottawa Conference to the Lausanne Conference as an equally important international summit.<sup>66</sup>

The Conference did not live up to the lofty rhetoric, and it degenerated into acrimonious negotiations. The British government held all of the economic advantages, but lost leverage because its delegates could not leave the Conference without an agreement.<sup>67</sup> Dominion representatives knew the British position, and demanded more generous concessions; Thomas saw this strategy as blackmail.<sup>68</sup> Canadian and Australian delegates demanded British taxes on foreign wheat and meat that threatened Britain's considerable foreign trade, but the British government managed to escape without giving in. The Ottawa Conference poured cold water on imperialists' romantic evocation of Commonwealth cooperation. Economic desperation undermined any sense of Commonwealth goodwill. British and Dominion representatives struggled bitterly to secure economic advantages.

Despite the near-breakdown of the Ottawa Conference, it actually served to strengthen the Commonwealth. The trade agreements themselves provided few immediate boosts to imperial trade.<sup>69</sup> It failed to reinvent the Commonwealth as an integrated economic regime. The Ottawa Conference, however, justified imperial

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<sup>66</sup> The Lausanne Conference, held in July 1932, canceled German reparations from the First World War.

<sup>67</sup> Holland, 141

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

preference below the most-favored nation rates. Imperial tariff preferences provided a tangible link between Commonwealth countries even as constitutional links faded.

## REACTIONS TO OTTAWA

Informal reformers' opinions on the Conference split beyond the traditional axis of internationalists and those pursuing a stronger Commonwealth bloc. Amery and Zimmern both supported the tariffs, albeit for different reasons. Amery viewed the Ottawa Conference as a small step towards his dream of greater imperial economic integration while Zimmern lauded it as a path to the colonies' fiscal autonomy. Kerr, on the other hand, opposed the Conference because of his opposition to protection and devotion to free trade. The Ottawa Conference brought imperial policy within the orbit of party politics that divided imperial reformers even further amongst themselves.

Amery was profoundly disappointed that Britain and the Dominions had finally met to decide on imperial economic planning and tariff reform without him at the helm. Since leaving the Cabinet in 1929, he intensified his calls to strengthen imperial economic links. He published *Empire and Prosperity* in 1930, which denounced free trade as ruinous for the Empire and called for the reorganization of the Empire into a more efficient economic unit.<sup>70</sup> Protection, he argued, had created the Empire and made it prosperous, while Free Trade undermined Britain's economic advantages. Amery

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<sup>70</sup> Amery, *Empire and free trade*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1930). The book's opening salvo was, oddly enough, written from the perspective of a belligerent Martian observing the evolution of the British Empire who expressed bafflement by the lack of imperial unity.

focused on tariffs and preference, but also advocated more integrated imperial shipping, communications, investment, banking, currency, and migration.<sup>71</sup> His plan did not mean that he advocated imperial autarky; Amery recognized the importance of foreign trade, but claimed that Britain could divert more trade to the Empire.<sup>72</sup> His book, *A Plan of Action*, published in 1932, presented a series of reports on tariffs, industrial, agricultural, and monetary policies before the Ottawa Conference.<sup>73</sup> The reports contained several concrete proposals, but Amery made it clear that the conference must create a plan to rationalize agriculture and industry across the Empire.<sup>74</sup>

Amery's excitement over the Ottawa Conference waned as he arrived as an unofficial adviser. The disappointment of spending the conference on the sidelines crushed him. He wrote in his diary that he sat through the opening speeches imagining what he would have said as head of the British delegation.<sup>75</sup> His frustration with his position went beyond personal ambition. Amery felt that the British delegation had let domestic political concerns override the imperial mission. He had no confidence in Thomas, writing in his diary that “his lack of tact as well as of knowledge is incredible”<sup>76</sup> and “it is awful to think of such a fellow being allowed to take part in the Conference.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite his reservations, Amery's strong feelings about imperial economic coordination

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>73</sup> Amery, ed. *A plan of action: embodying a series of reports issued by the research committee of the Empire Economic Union and other papers*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932).

<sup>74</sup> Amery, *A plan of action*, 18

<sup>75</sup> Leopold Amery, *The Amery Diaries*, John Barnes and David Nicholson, eds., (London: Hutchinson, 1980) v. 2. July 21, 1932, 243-4

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, 1932, 240

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1932, 242

compelled him to participate in any capacity that he could. Lord Beaverbrook, the influential publishing magnate and friend of Amery, advised him that a failure at Ottawa could bring down the government and keep him out of a new one.<sup>78</sup> Amery agreed, but decided that he would rather “give a helping hand.”<sup>79</sup> He felt he was more knowledgeable than most of the official delegation.

Amery’s goals for imperial economic links clashed with the British government’s aims. He advocated for import duties on foreign wheat and meat while allowing preferences for Dominion produce. The British delegation refused to accept meat and wheat duties; “food taxes” were unpopular enough in Britain to sink the coalition in power. Amery favored generous concessions for the Dominions. He believed that the gains to imperial goodwill were more important than any short-term political concerns. The British delegation blamed Amery for pushing the meat tax and sympathizing with the Dominions.<sup>80</sup> Amery felt that the Dominions Office faltered without his steadying hand. “It would have been very different if [Bennett] had to deal with me, who really had been the master of my civil servants, and had a policy,”<sup>81</sup> he wrote in his diary. Amery left the conference before it ended.<sup>82</sup> The damage to Amery's political career had already been

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, July 6, 1932, 241-2

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, July 6, 1932, 241-2

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1932, 253

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 23, 1932, 255

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1932, 254. Amery’s decision to leave coincided with a family crisis involving his son John’s impetuous marriage.

done. Thomas told a reporter that the Tories had forsaken him, although Amery blamed this reporter for portraying him as “Bennett's lap dog.”<sup>83</sup>

Despite the bitter ending, Amery remained upbeat about the conference setting a precedent for imperial economic coordination on some level. He noted in his diary that the Ottawa Agreements, though wrung out of a series of tense meetings, had been a substantial advance in policy.<sup>84</sup> “The mere fact of agreement,” he wrote, “may seize the imagination of our peoples, apart from the entire lack of imagination and inspiration on the part of most of those concerned.”<sup>85</sup> He regretted that the British delegation had missed an opportunity for generous and bold initiatives and felt that representatives had misled Dominion leaders about the possibility of a meat tax. Amery hoped that the bad feelings and mistrust on both sides would fade and leave behind the edifice of imperial cooperation.<sup>86</sup> Amery's analysis once again revealed that the Ottawa Conference's primary achievement lay in setting up some sort of imperial economic regime, even if the actual concessions were underwhelming. He may have had unrealistic expectations for the results of the conference, but he correctly saw the value reinforcing Commonwealth economic ties.

Not all imperialists shared Amery's enthusiasm for protection. Kerr saw the Ottawa agreements as a dangerous reversal of Britain's free trade tradition. In a speech to a Liberal party meeting in October, 1932, Kerr blamed the worldwide economic crisis

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 12, 1932, 258

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19, 1932, 256

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

on restrictions to trade.<sup>87</sup> The Ottawa agreements, he argued, only added to this trend. Kerr argued that the Ottawa agreements fitted into a protectionist worldview that undermined the internationalist League of Nations spirit. He joined with other Liberals and resigned from the government, but he continued to attack on the tariffs from the House of Lords.<sup>88</sup> Kerr characterized imperial protection as a misguided policy of autarky. The aspect of Ottawa he found most disturbing, however, was its political effect. He told the Lords that the coalition had violated a “most ancient rule” by bringing imperial policy into party politics.<sup>89</sup> Kerr’s accusations rang hollow. Imperial preference had been an important issue in elections in the past, and the Dominions had offered preferences to British goods for years.

Kerr feared that the tough negotiations threatened imperial unity. He wrote to Curtis well before the conference to persuade him to rally the *Round Table* against tariff preferences. He characterized tariff bargaining as being “the most serious blow to inter-Imperial unity,” and destined to “lead to every kind of trouble, both Imperial and International.”<sup>90</sup> “I have always believed that the policy of tariff bargains between the units of the Empire would destroy the Empire, just as tariff treaties between other nations generally lead to tariff wars,” he wrote to Liberal leader Herbert Samuel.<sup>91</sup> He suggested to the Lords that Ottawa had proven that economic ties and preferential tariffs had a

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<sup>87</sup> Kerr speech at Queen’s Hall Liberal Meeting, Oct. 12, 1932, LP 435.

<sup>88</sup> Kerr was the Under-Secretary for India. Liberal leader Herbert Samuel denounced the Ottawa Agreements and led the Liberals out of the coalition. Samuels criticisms are in DO 35/269/3.

<sup>89</sup> Kerr, notes for speech at House of Lords, Nov. 9, 1932, LP 436

<sup>90</sup> Kerr to Curtis, Mar. 8, 1932, LP 159

<sup>91</sup> Kerr to Herbert Samuel, March 8, 1932, LP 159

centrifugal effect on the Empire. Ottawa, he declared, had shattered the great Chamberlain romance.<sup>92</sup>

Arthur Berriedale Keith argued that the Ottawa Conference drew the Empire together into a tighter economic regime. In *The Constitutional Law of the British Dominions*, his updated analysis of Dominion status, he admitted that the agreements caused some friction within the Commonwealth.<sup>93</sup> Keith pointed out Australian and New Zealand complaints about the agreements' effects on their protective tariffs.<sup>94</sup> He noted that, regardless of quibbles about tariffs, the Ottawa agreements reinforced the idea of the Empire as an economic bloc by giving the Dominions an exception from most-favored nation status. The connection provided tangible evidence that the Commonwealth states differed from ordinary international relations. Zimmern agreed with this analysis in his review of *Constitutional Law* for the *Guardian*.<sup>95</sup>

Zimmern became an unlikely supporter of the agreements. A younger Zimmern had penned an anti-tariff jeremiad entitled "The Seven Deadly Sins of Tariff Reform" where he dismissed imperial preference as "a mere quack remedy for our Imp

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<sup>92</sup> Kerr, notes for speech at House of Lords, Nov. 9, 1932, LP 436

<sup>93</sup> A.B. Keith, *The constitutional law of the British Dominions*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933). This meticulous survey of constitutional changes followed his earlier *Sovereignty of the British Dominions*, which reflected the changes wrought by the Statute of Westminster, Ottawa Conference, and increased friction with the Irish Free State.

<sup>94</sup> Keith, *Constitutional law*, vi

<sup>95</sup> Alfred Zimmern, review of *The constitutional law of the British Dominions*, *The Guardian*, Feb. 22, 1933, KP 2237/5

difficulties.<sup>96</sup> His enmity towards protective tariffs seemed to have mellowed by 1932. His speeches focused more on the implication for the non-self-governing colonies than for the Dominions. It is also possible that Zimmern did not want to attack the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. Zimmern had become an ally of Macdonald and continued to support him as the head of the National coalition.

Zimmern argued that the Ottawa agreements set a precedent for colonial freedom. His speeches and correspondence on the Ottawa Conference largely ignored the agreements between Britain and the Dominions, which he dismissed as “horse-trading.”<sup>97</sup> He focused instead on the conference's relationship to the colonies, and championed the maintenance of the Open Door policy. Zimmern claimed that the participation of India and the colonies served as an important step towards autonomy.<sup>98</sup> Canada, he observed, had also started its path towards political autonomy with greater fiscal autonomy.<sup>99</sup> Despite these changes, he claimed that the Ottawa agreements reinforced imperial unity because the Colonial Secretary had negotiated for the Colonies as a bloc. Thus, the colonies benefited from collective bargaining that helped extend markets to other colonial members.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Zimmern, Speech at New College, Oxford, “The Seven Deadly Sins of Tariff Reform,” ZP 136. The speech is undated, but was likely delivered between 1903 and 1905. Zimmern targeted Amery's Compatriot's Club that supported Joseph Chamberlain.

<sup>97</sup> Zimmern, “Is there an Empire foreign policy?” *International affairs*, v. 8 (May-June, 1934), ZP 168

<sup>98</sup> Zimmern, “The Open Door and Reciprocity as illustrated by developments within the British Colonial Empire,” *Economic Survey*, v. 8 (June 1933) and “L'Empire Britannique après la Conférence d'Ottawa,” *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, no. 3 (Fevrier, Mars, Avril, 1933), ZP 168

<sup>99</sup> Zimmern, “Open Door,” ZP 168

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Zimmern argued that the Ottawa agreements helped to free the colonies from an economic policy meant to benefit the metropole by allowing them to act in their own economic interest. His argument for colonial freedom through tariff preference does not make complete sense. He acknowledged that Ottawa preferences depended on raising tariffs on foreign goods, which kept the colonies pinned to the imperial economic system. The tariff barriers irritated him because he did not want the Empire to develop as a self-contained economic unit. He advocated for the colonies' freedom to negotiate with foreign governments, but stated that they would never contemplate that on their own because of their loyalty to the British Empire.<sup>101</sup> Zimmern's attitude towards Ottawa therefore fitted with his belief in the British Empire as a road to colonial sovereignty, but he had to revert to contradictory logical leaps in order to fit the Ottawa agreements into that worldview.

Zimmern's views towards Ottawa coincided with his confidence in international institutions to solve imperial problems. Critics questioned how the Dominions and Britain could exchange preferences below the most-favored-nation rate.<sup>102</sup> Zimmern acknowledged the logical problem, but countered that foreign countries seemed willing to accept it. The preferences would not ruin the most-favored-nation clause unless Britain's trading partners all denounced their treaties in protest.<sup>103</sup> He viewed tariffs as a matter for the upcoming London Economic Conference, and suggested that imperial preference

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Zimmern exchange with Ben Greene, a prospect Labour candidate for the Gravesend division, in the *News-Letter*, Jan. 21, 1933, ZP, 181.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

gave Britain a strong bargaining position.<sup>104</sup> He described the Conference as an opportunity to harmonize imperial and international trade policies.

The London Economic Conference put imperial and international economic interests at odds. The Ottawa Conference had already solidified Britain's commitment to imperial trading preferences. The British government declined to participate in a low-tariff bloc that included Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands at a conference that met just before Ottawa in the Swiss city Ouchy.<sup>105</sup> The World Economic Conference focused far more on monetary policy than on trade. Britain already exerted a strong influence over Dominion currencies; the British abandonment of the gold standard in 1931 had a profound effect on Dominion currencies pinned to sterling.<sup>106</sup> The Ottawa Conference presented an opportunity to forge a comprehensive imperial monetary policy, but trade issues dominated the conference. The British delegation refused to commit to anything that could create problems at the upcoming World Economic Conference.<sup>107</sup> The preparations to the London conference, however, pitted the Dominions' interest in a floating pound against a European desire for Britain to commit to currency stabilization

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Robert Boyce argues that Ouchy could have allowed for a British alternative to the Briand's plan for European federation, but the British delegation foolishly declined in favor of imperial preferences and passed up the opportunity to lead an effort to increase European economic cooperation. Boyce, "Was there a 'British' alternative to the Briand Plan," in Peter Catterall and C.J. Morris, *Britain and the threat to stability in Europe, 1918-45*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 17-34.

<sup>106</sup> South Africa was the exception, and remained on the gold standard until 1932.

<sup>107</sup> According to Amery, Macdonald had ordered the British delegation not to commit, although his information was second-hand. *Amery Diaries*, Aug. 24, 1932, 255.

and an eventual return to the gold standard.<sup>108</sup> These positions were irreconcilable.<sup>109</sup> The Ottawa agreements and monetary policy forced Britain to choose between the Empire and major international trading partners.

The Ottawa Conference illustrated the difference between imperial reformers' visions and government policies. It became neither the imperial cataclysm prophesied by Kerr nor the first step towards Amery's integrated economic bloc. Zimmern saw imperial interests clash with international interests. The Ottawa Conference represented the British and Dominion governments' attempt to use the resources of the Empire to ease the effects of the Depression. Kerr correctly predicted that the negotiations would cause tensions between Britain and the Dominions, and Amery bore the brunt of the bargaining first-hand. Zimmern and Keith, however, recognized that the Conference strengthened imperial bonds by giving the Dominions tangible advantages to Commonwealth membership. The Dominions had to remain in the Commonwealth to maintain imperial preferences.

#### **“OTTAWA DOMINIONS” AND THE IRISH FREE STATE: THE FRACTURING OF DOMINION STATUS**

The British and Irish Free State governments feuded after Éamon de Valera's nationalist Fianna Fáil party took power in 1932. De Valera introduced legislation to

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<sup>108</sup> Patricia Clavin, “The fetishes of so-called international bankers: central bank co-operation for the World Economic Conference, 1932-3,” *Contemporary European History*, 1 (Nov., 1992), pp. 292-3.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

remove the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown from the Irish Constitution and stopped paying land annuities to Britain. The British government placed special tariffs on the Free State, and the Free State boycotted British goods. The “economic war,” as it came to be known, reached its height in the early 1930s, and the Free State did not take part in the Ottawa Conference.<sup>110</sup> The economic war took place just as economic links became the cornerstone of Commonwealth membership.

The dispute between Britain and the Irish Free State overlapped with the introduction of imperial preference. The exclusion of the Free State from the Ottawa tariff preferences had two significant effects on the Commonwealth. First, it allowed the British government to give the Free State a different status from the other Dominions based on its tariff rates. Within a year, Thomas and the Dominions Office began using the term “Ottawa Dominions” to refer to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. The term technically referred to tariff rates, but it implied a separation beyond economic matters. Second, the exclusion forced British politicians and officials to engage with de Valera’s alternative vision of the Commonwealth. De Valera saw the Commonwealth as an international institution bound by free association instead of by ties to the Crown. The timing of the two effects was curious. When the British government excluded the Free State from imperial preference, it took away the most important tangible link between Commonwealth countries that did not involve the Crown.

The Irish Free State's exceptional status marked an end to its decade leading the charge for Dominion sovereignty. During the 1920s, Free State premier William

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<sup>110</sup> Irish observers traveled to the Conference, but did not sign an agreement with Britain.

Cosgrave campaigned to make the Commonwealth more like an international organization than the evolution of an empire. Historians have debated whether Cosgrave and his ministers sincerely hoped to make the Commonwealth more palatable for the Free State or whether they were laying the ground for an escape.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of Cosgrave's intentions, the Free State pushed for its demands in a Commonwealth context. The British government, for the most part, accommodated the Free-State interpretation of Dominion status, and Cosgrave found willing nationalist collaborators in South Africa's J.B. Hertzog and Canada's Mackenzie King.<sup>112</sup> The three independent-minded Dominion Prime Ministers worked together to emphasize Dominion sovereignty. Each Dominion theoretically shared the same status, so an innovation in Dominion autonomy applied equally in the Free State and in New Zealand.<sup>113</sup>

Free State policy towards the Commonwealth shifted with the election of de Valera as President of the Executive Council in March of 1932. De Valera had bitterly opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty that brought the Free State into the Commonwealth, and

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<sup>111</sup> D.W. Harkness argues that the Free State led other Dominion governments to embrace sovereignty and international status within the Commonwealth. The fact that he ends his work in 1931 implies that de Valera shifted away from the Commonwealth context. Ged Martin, on the hand, argues that the Free State government never had any intention of remaining in the Commonwealth and viewed it as a necessary phase on the road to full independence. De Valera, in his view, merely continued the earlier governments' campaign to leave the Commonwealth. He claims that the Canadian and South African governments had already gained sovereignty for the Dominions.

<sup>112</sup> The British government never recognized the Free State's registration of the Anglo-Irish Treaty with the League of Nations.

<sup>113</sup> By the 1930s, the uniformity of Dominion status had become, like most Commonwealth procedures, murky and ill-defined. Each Dominion's relationship to Britain was determined by a separate law that led to some idiosyncrasies. The New Zealand and Australian governments did not ratify the Statute of Westminster and refused to accept British High Commissioners. Equal status, however, only moved in the direction of more Dominion sovereignty. Australia and New Zealand did not ratify the Statute or have High Commissioners because they preferred to preserve more imperial trappings, but there was nothing stopping them from emulating the Free State.

spent several years outside politics in protest. Dominion status had changed significantly since the signing of the Treaty. By 1932, the Dominions had achieved recognition of their status as sovereign nations. The change in status did not satisfy de Valera. He still claimed that the Treaty had been imposed under duress, and he bristled at any connection to the Crown.

De Valera planned to attack the Treaty on two fronts. His main priority was to remove the Oath of Allegiance.<sup>114</sup> The Treaty stipulated that the oath sworn by members of the Dáil included professing loyalty to the Crown. De Valera preferred that the Oath only recognize the king as Head of the Commonwealth. He also planned to stop paying a series of land annuities and other payments to the British government. These annuities were debts left over from land purchases in Ireland before the creation of the Free State. The Free State government assumed some of this debt when it took control of the country's finances. A 1925 agreement officially ended the Free State's liability for the British public debt, but the Free State government made several unofficial agreements to pay the land annuities. Both the British government and the Cosgrave administration maintained that the annuities were payments to private citizens through a British agency. In 1931, the land annuities amounted to approximately £3 million per year, and the British National Debt office calculated that the total Free State debts to Britain totaled approximately £5 million per year.<sup>115</sup> De Valera, however, saw the annuities as another vestige of imperial control. He and his legal team argued that the annuities were part of

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<sup>114</sup> This was the first plank of the Fianna Fáil platform, DO/35/227/6

<sup>115</sup> DO Summary DO 35/383/3

the public debt liquidated by the 1925 agreement.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, they argued that the unofficial agreements had no force of law, and his administration had the freedom to discontinue payment.<sup>117</sup> The dispute boiled down to the issue of sovereignty and the nature of the “gentleman's agreements.” The British government and the Cosgrave administration viewed the settlement as an agreement between two Commonwealth members that had the force of international law. De Valera and his supporters viewed the unofficial agreements as arrangements made by another administration that he could terminate. This interpretation gained force during the hard times of the early 1930s. De Valera promised to remit the annuities payments back to farmers.<sup>118</sup>

The British government schemed to use economic pressure against de Valera even before he was elected. Officials worried that de Valera would attempt to repudiate the Treaty. By February 1932, a month before de Valera took office, the Dominions Office had considered options for retaliation by boycott or blockade.<sup>119</sup> The report was ruled out both as ineffective and likely to draw international criticism. The timing of the Irish Free State election coincided with changes to Britain's trade policy. The Dominions Office pointed out that the tariffs installed by the Import Duties Act allowed for discrimination against the Free State.<sup>120</sup> British officials quickly embraced protection as a tool to pressure the Dominions. Thomas used the Import Duties Act to threaten the Dominions

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<sup>116</sup> “Irish Land Annuities: Opinion of Mr. de Valera's legal advisers (extracts from the 'Irish Free Press' 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> February,” DO 35/383/4

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Fianna Fáil platform, DO/35/397/10

<sup>119</sup> Dominions office note, Feb 15, 1932, DO/35/387/10

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

in his May 9 telegram; the British government had no qualms about using tariffs to enforce the Treaty.

The upcoming Ottawa Conference loomed over the dispute. De Valera hoped to negotiate trade preferences with Britain at Ottawa even after abolishing the oath and refusing payment of the annuities. William Peters, the British Trade Commissioner in Dublin,<sup>121</sup> reported that de Valera hoped to erode political ties, but strengthen economic links. The Fianna Fáil platform called for mutual tariff preferences with Britain.<sup>122</sup> Peters thought that de Valera failed to understand that the preferences were more than an economic arrangement. “His preferences are preferences to best customers,” Peters wrote. “Our preferences are to fellow members of the Commonwealth.”<sup>123</sup> Thomas saw the Ottawa Conference as an opportunity to bring Commonwealth pressure to bear against the de Valera government. He tried to get Bennett to withdraw the Free State's invitation to Ottawa or ask the other Dominions to refuse to negotiate until de Valera and his government had “purged their offense.”<sup>124</sup>

The other Dominions offered little support to de Valera. De Valera put the case in terms of Dominion sovereignty. He explained that his government had a mandate to remove the oath, and the Dominions had the right to change their constitutions.<sup>125</sup> Dominion premiers did not rally to his cause. George Forbes, the Prime Minister of New

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<sup>121</sup> Britain did not have a High Commissioner in Dublin. The Trade Commissioner was the highest-ranking British agent.

<sup>122</sup> Fianna Fáil platform, DO/35/397/10

<sup>123</sup> Peters report, April 1932, DO 35/397/11

<sup>124</sup> Thomas, “Courses of action at the present time,” submitted to inter-departmental Irish Situation Committee, April 1932, DO/35/397/11

<sup>125</sup> De Valera to Lyons, April 1932, DO 35/397/11

Zealand, chastised de Valera, warning that it would be “calamitous” for the Free State to miss the Ottawa Conference. He noted that New Zealand had accepted the Statute of Westminster despite grave objections for the good of the Commonwealth, and reminded de Valera that its principles assured the equality and autonomy of all Dominions.<sup>126</sup> Joseph Lyons, the Prime Minister of Australia, wrote only that the dispute worried him. The lack of Antipodean support for de Valera was predictable. De Valera, however, could not secure support from his allies in South Africa and Canada. Hertzog sent a tepid telegram that expressed his hope for a satisfactory resolution. The Canadian government was silent.

De Valera refused to budge, and the British government implemented a series of special duties against the Free State in late July. The Import Duties Act exposed Free State goods to British tariffs, the same tariffs that the Dominions avoided by signing the Ottawa Agreements.<sup>127</sup> British politicians claimed that the special duties were meant to make up for the lost land annuity revenue. In reality, the tariffs targeted de Valera. Officials knew that the duties could never make up the annual £3 million debt.<sup>128</sup> A Dominions Office memo written in June 1932 admitted that, even if the special duties initially raised enough money, they would strangle trade dramatically and reduce future revenues.<sup>129</sup> The British government planned the duties as a “short and sharp campaign”

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<sup>126</sup> New Zealand telegram to de Valera, April 1932, DO 3/397/11

<sup>127</sup> The tariffs came into effect on November 15. These were the same tariffs that Thomas had threatened to levy against the Dominions in the May 9 telegram.

<sup>128</sup> G.G. Whiskard, note for Irish Situation Committee, June 27, 1932, DO 35/383/4

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

designed to disrupt the Free State economy and force a new election.<sup>130</sup> The Free State retaliated and applied duties against British products, especially coal. Britain and the Free State had declared a tariff war a month before a conference ostensibly meant to strengthen the economic bonds of Commonwealth.

British proposals for arbitration started a debate with de Valera over the Commonwealth's status as an international organization. De Valera traveled to London in June to meet with top British officials in the hopes that they could resolve their dispute before the Ottawa Conference. Neither side would budge on the oath. Thomas proposed arbitration for the land annuities through an Empire Tribunal, an organ proposed at the 1930 Imperial Conference to handle Commonwealth disputes.<sup>131</sup> De Valera wrote to Thomas that his government would accept arbitration, but not by a panel made up only of judges from the Commonwealth.<sup>132</sup> He told the Free State Senate that “the dice would be loaded against us” in an Empire Tribunal.<sup>133</sup> De Valera's rejection of an Empire Tribunal paralleled Cosgrave's desire to integrate Commonwealth business further into the League of Nations and other organizations. His rejection of imperial arbitration implicitly attacked the *inter se* doctrine; he claimed that Britain's refusal to allow arbitration outside the Commonwealth made a mockery of Dominion sovereignty.<sup>134</sup> De Valera used the

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<sup>130</sup> G.G. Whiskard, note for Irish Situation Committee, June 27, 1932, DO 35/383/4

<sup>131</sup> Note on conversation between Macdonald and Thomas with de Valera and Sean T. O'Kelly, June 10, 1932, DO/35/397/11

<sup>132</sup> De Valera to Thomas, June 16, 1932, DO 35/383/4

<sup>133</sup> De Valera, Speech to Senate, July 18, 1932, DO 35/383/5

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

financial debate to make his case for a Commonwealth that functioned more like the League of Nations.

British and Irish Free State delegates tried to reconcile at the Ottawa Conference. British officials saw Conference as an opportunity to bring the Free State into the tariff regime within an imperial context. The Free State sent a small delegation to the conference led by Sean O'Kelly, the Vice President of the Executive Council, and Sean Lemass, the Minister for Industry and Commerce. Thomas made a secret offer to O'Kelly as the conference wound down. He proposed that the other Dominions would offer a senior judge to form a panel and evaluate the financial dispute. Both governments would end their economic sanctions even if they did not accept the report. Thomas's offer allowed the British government to end trade hostilities without conceding anything and prove that Commonwealth members could resolve internal disputes. Thomas also tried to cajole O'Kelly, asking him "Can you afford to bring back nothing and admit that you have failed?" The Free State delegation rejected the proposal. De Valera sent O'Kelly to Ottawa with specific instructions not to budge on the oath or the Empire Tribunal, and Thomas only offered a variant of imperial arbitration.

By 1933, the Free State's exclusion from the Ottawa agreements gave it an intermediate type of Dominion status tied directly to tariff rates. Thomas recommended creating an "intermediate status" for Free State produce between that of a foreign country and what he called the "Ottawa Dominions."<sup>135</sup> He suggested, for example, that if Britain

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<sup>135</sup> Thomas to Elliott, August 3, 1933, DO 35/268/1

taxed foreign imports at 10 percent and Dominion imports at 5 percent, then Free State goods should enter at 7.5 percent.<sup>136</sup> Thomas argued for his compromise because he wanted to avoid treating the Free State like a foreign country.<sup>137</sup> Other Cabinet members disagreed. Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, claimed that the Free State was a nuisance to the Empire. He called Thomas's plan "semi-Empire treatment," and claimed that it encouraged de Valera's recalcitrance.<sup>138</sup> The Dominions Office favored the softer line. One official noted that even a small break on tariffs provided an incentive for the Free State to stay in the Empire.<sup>139</sup>

De Valera's renewed attacks on the Treaty encouraged the British government to treat the Free State as an exception. The British attempts to use the tariffs to oust de Valera failed; Free State voters returned him with more Fianna Fáil seats in the Dáil in the 1933 election. De Valera used his mandate to introduce legislation abolishing the oath, the Governor-General's right to block legislation, and the appeal to the Privy Council. The British Government viewed these bills as the beginning of a republican movement, and relations with the Free State deteriorated. The king called the bills an affront to the dignity of the Governor-General and threatened to recall him.<sup>140</sup> The Dominions Office grew frustrated with de Valera and questioned the Free State's place in the Commonwealth: "The question is: has the time now come when we should tell Mr. de

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Thomas to Neville Chamberlain, Aug 31, 1933, DO 35/268/1

<sup>138</sup> Chamberlain's views are summarized in a letter from Donald Ferguson to DO official Edward Marsh, August 31, 1933, DO 35/268/1.

<sup>139</sup> Whiskard note, Sept. 4, 1933, DO 35/268/1

<sup>140</sup> Wigram to Harding, Aug. 28, 1933, DO 35/398/4

Valera quite plainly that he cannot be both within and outside the Commonwealth at the same time, and that he must make his choice on which side he wishes to be.”<sup>141</sup> De

Valera became more forceful in his attacks on the Commonwealth:

The Irish people have never sought membership of the British Commonwealth. Their association with Great Britain has never on their side been a voluntary association. In every generation they have striven with such means as were at their disposal to maintain their right to exist as a distinct and independent nation, and whenever they yielded to British rule in any form they did so only under the pressure of overwhelming material force.<sup>142</sup>

The economic and constitutional dispute stoked fears of violence. De Valera challenged Thomas to declare that Britain would not respond to the declaration of an Irish republic with force.<sup>143</sup> The British response divided the Cabinet. Lord Hailsham, the Secretary of War, sought an ambiguous response that “keeps the enemy in doubt to the risks he is running.”<sup>144</sup> Thomas urged caution. He suggested that de Valera had set up a trap and advised the Cabinet not to respond to hypotheticals.<sup>145</sup> Dulanty told Harding that de Valera had abandoned the “Commonwealth idea.”<sup>146</sup> British officials feared the effects of these tensions on the Empire. The Earl of Reading, the Foreign Secretary, claimed that Keith's argument had dangerous implications for India. Neville Chamberlain worried that other Dominions would continue to treat an Irish republic as a Dominion.<sup>147</sup> In any

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<sup>141</sup> Batterbee note, Sept. 9, 1933, DO 35/398/4

<sup>142</sup> De Valera to Thomas, November 29, 1933, DO/35/398/5

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Hailsham to Thomas, Nov. 24, 1933, DO/35/398/5

<sup>145</sup> Irish Situation Committee, Conclusions, Dec. 4, 1933. DO 35/398/5

<sup>146</sup> Notes of meeting between Dulanty and Harding, Feb 19, 1934.

<sup>147</sup> Cabinet, Irish Situation Committee Meeting, Nov. 30, 1933, DO35/398/5

event, the members of the Irish Situation Committee anticipated that Free State secession would create an endless legal battle.

A trade agreement at the end of 1934 eased the tariff wars, but reinforced the Free State's exceptional Commonwealth status. The economic war devastated the Free State economy. Dulanty met with British officials in 1934 and proposed an increase in British imports of Free State cattle in exchange for Free State imports of British coal.<sup>148</sup> The Coal-Cattle Pact represented an economic truce between the feuding governments, but not a permanent solution. British officials could not find another group of commodities to swap.<sup>149</sup> The Coal-Cattle agreement did not solve the lingering hostilities over de Valera's constitutional reforms. It also did not bring the Free State into the Ottawa agreements. The Free State remained an exception to the rest of the "Ottawa Dominions." On the other hand, the agreement eased tensions and reinforced the importance of economic links as the basis of Commonwealth membership.

The Ottawa Conference therefore had a significant effect on the fracturing of Dominion Status. The exclusion of the Free State from the Ottawa tariff regime led directly to the Dominions Office specifically referring to the Free State's "intermediate status" that differed from the "Ottawa Dominions." De Valera's attempts to chip away at the constitutional ties to the monarchy exacerbated the tensions with the British government. The exclusion from Ottawa, however, institutionalized this intermediate

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<sup>148</sup> The negotiations on the agreement lasted from December 1934 to February 1935. DO/35/268/4

<sup>149</sup> The only potential swap, according to a Board of trade report, was an agreement involving horses and greyhounds, which officials described as economically insignificant. Board of Trade report, Feb. 1935, DO/35/268/4.

status. After Ottawa, the Free State precedents had less of an effect on the relationship between Britain and the other Dominions because the British government put the Free State in its own category. The Free State, however, remained in the Commonwealth, and de Valera continued to push for a Commonwealth held together more by tangible links than by the Crown.

### **BEYOND OTTAWA: TRADE IN THE COMMONWEALTH IN THE 1930S**

The Ottawa Agreements solved a political problem by tying trade policy to the Commonwealth. The hasty compromises that came out of contentious discussions, however, guaranteed future conflict between the Dominions and Britain over trade policy. Dominion governments pressed the British government to renegotiate the agreements after the Conference for three reasons: they saw the effects of the Ottawa system in action, they reacted to new economic circumstances, or a new government came to power with a different agenda. The renegotiation of the Ottawa agreements revealed three important aspects of the Commonwealth economic system. First, the Ottawa agreements failed to address the problem of the development of industry in the Dominions that competed with British goods. Secondly, they reinforced the Britain's economic dominance over Dominion economies. The British government sought to maximize its advantage in the Dominions, even at the expense of other Dominions. The British government continued to hold a great influence over Dominion economic policies

because the Dominions depended on British credit and markets. Finally, the Ottawa Agreements allowed for British leverage in trade negotiations with foreign countries.

British officials calculated that the Ottawa Agreements facilitated increased trade with the Dominions. Dominions secretary Malcolm Macdonald told the parliamentary Trade and Industry Committee that the Dominions' share of British imports had increased from 21 percent in 1931 to 38 percent in 1935. British imports from countries outside the Commonwealth declined from 71 percent to 62 percent during the same period.<sup>150</sup> Macdonald also cited a modest gain in British exports to the Commonwealth from 45 percent of total British exports in 1932 to 48 percent in 1935.<sup>151</sup> A Board of Trade report in 1937 also showed a trend of increased trade with the Dominions since Ottawa.<sup>152</sup> The Ottawa Agreements, according to these reports, had facilitated trade within the Empire at the expense of foreign trade.<sup>153</sup> Macdonald explained that the Ottawa regime had limits. He noted that the economic war with the Irish Free State depressed these trading figures, but pointed out that Commonwealth trade increased when only counting the “Ottawa Dominions.”<sup>154</sup> His use of the term “Ottawa Dominions” included Southern Rhodesia and Newfoundland.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Malcolm Macdonald, Speech to Trade and Industry Committee, July 21, 1936, 303/5

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Board of Trade Report, Sept. 17, 1937. According to the report, exports to Dominions increased by 46 percent (from £101 million to £147 million) and imports from Dominions increased by 41 percent (from £177 million to £250 million) from 1932 to 1936.

<sup>153</sup> Ian Drummond suggests that British politicians overestimated the effect of the Ottawa agreements on changing patterns of trade. See Drummond, *Imperial economic policy*, pp. 284-289.

<sup>154</sup> Malcolm Macdonald, Speech to Trade and Industry Committee, July 21, 1936, 303/5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

The gains in Commonwealth trade did not prevent squabbling over the Ottawa Agreements throughout the 1930s. By 1933, British officials had already begun complaining about problems with Dominion enforcement of the new tariff arrangements. British officials griped that Canadian customs officials would not withdraw surcharges on British imports and characterized Australian duties on cotton as a blatant tariff infraction.<sup>156</sup> Dominion governments viewed Britain's treaties with Argentina and Denmark as threats to their share of the British market.<sup>157</sup> The disputes in the 1930s illustrated a fundamental problem with the Ottawa agreements: Britain's largest trading partners were not in the Empire. The British government therefore worried about the effect of the agreements on their international trade, and the Dominions jealously guarded their claims to the British market. By the mid-1930s, Dominions had few other options as international markets tightened.

The conflict between British and Dominion interests came to a head in Australia. The Australian government increasingly protected its own industries against British competition. Australian politicians saw the Ottawa agreements as a barrier to their nation's industrial development. They sought revisions to the agreements. Joseph Lyons, the Prime Minister, contemplated a formal denunciation of the Ottawa agreements in 1937.<sup>158</sup> The Australians wanted to alter the agreements to cover specific goods instead

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<sup>156</sup> Dominion office reports on the Ottawa Agreements and difficulties caused by the Ottawa Agreements, Oct. 1933, DO/35/270/1

<sup>157</sup> Dominions Office report on difficulties caused by the Ottawa Agreements, Oct. 1933, DO/35/270/1

<sup>158</sup> Liesching to Machtig, Feb. 16, 1937, DO 749/6. Percival Liesching went to Australia as assistant to Geoffrey Whiskard, who took his post as the first British High Commissioner to Australia in 1936. Eric

of general categories. British officials suspected that the revisions would allow for increased Australian tariffs against British goods, and ministers asserted that they would not offer any new concessions to Australia without receiving any in return.<sup>159</sup> They argued that Britain never agreed to aid the development of Australian competitors.<sup>160</sup> British ministers reprimanded a visiting Australian delegation as a difficult trade partner, citing complaints from British manufacturers.<sup>161</sup> The Dominions Office took a more tactful line. Officials cautioned the Board of Trade against an aggressive attack on Australia.<sup>162</sup> The crisis resolved in 1938 when the governments agreed to minor modifications to their trade agreement that maintained the Ottawa principles.<sup>163</sup> The bitter disagreements, threats, and strong-arming tactics used during this debate illustrate the reality of the Ottawa regime more than the Conference's airy rhetoric about imperial cooperation.

Political shifts in the Dominions also contributed to disagreements between Britain and the Dominions over trade. In 1937, Mackenzie King returned as Prime Minister of Canada. King's Liberal Party denounced the agreements as an affront to free trade. King demanded new renegotiations and asserted his government's right to cancel

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Machtig worked for the Dominions Office and eventually succeeded Harding as Permanent Undersecretary in 1939.

<sup>159</sup> Memorandum from the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, May 3, 1938, DO/35/749/7

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Minutes of meeting between Cabinet Committee on Trade and Agriculture and Australian trade delegation, May 14, 1938, DO/35/749/7 .

<sup>162</sup> DO report on Australian negotiations, May 25, 1938, DO/35/749/7.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

the agreements unilaterally.<sup>164</sup> Dominions Office officials did not take these threats particularly seriously. They assumed that King planned to leverage his threats into a more favorable agreement.<sup>165</sup> The British and Canadian governments renegotiated their agreement in 1937, but King's return meant dealing with a Prime Minister not committed to the Ottawa rhetoric of imperial economic cooperation.

Britain's dealings with the New Zealand Labour government showed the extent of Britain's influence over Dominion economic policies. New Zealand's first Labour government came into power in 1935 under Michael Savage with ambitious plans to increase public works and fix prices. Savage's plans for large-scale government aid as well as mounting sterling losses required an unconventional new approach to New Zealand's trade and financial policies. Walter Nash, the finance minister, proposed a new trade arrangement with Britain that would balance New Zealand imports with British exports in 1936. Nash explained to Malcolm Macdonald that he hoped to increase New Zealand exports to Britain and expand trade between both countries.<sup>166</sup> British officials rejected those proposals. A Dominions Office memorandum deprecated Nash's plans to balance bilateral trade out of principle: "Our general trade policy cannot be recast to suit New Zealand's convenience."<sup>167</sup> They also worried that making such an arrangement for New Zealand would upset other Dominions.<sup>168</sup> British officials instead advised Nash to

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<sup>164</sup> William Clarke to Thomas, Feb. 2, 1935. Do/35/270/5

<sup>165</sup> E.J. Harding to Clarke, draft telegram, Feb. 14, 1935, DO 35/270/5. Harding viewed the threat of a unilateral cancellation as the product of an unfortunate Irish Free State precedent.

<sup>166</sup> Nash to Malcolm Macdonald, Jan. 8, 1937, DO/35/763/1

<sup>167</sup> DO Memorandum on trade with New Zealand, Nov. 1936, DO/35/274/1.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

stick to Ottawa principles. The disparity between the New Zealand's dependence on British trade and Britain's relatively modest business with New Zealand forced Nash to accept the Ottawa status quo.

New Zealand's dependence on British capital also affected trade policy. The Savage government took control of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand in order to finance public works and inflate prices for dairy products.<sup>169</sup> The British financial community recoiled at this use of the Reserve Bank.<sup>170</sup> The Labour reforms also rankled conservative New Zealand bankers. Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the Chairman of the National Bank of New Zealand, wrote a panicked memorandum to the British government likening Savage's attitude to "that of a small boy in a power station happily pulling one switch after another to see what happens."<sup>171</sup> Savage's economic policies contributed to a growing loss of sterling in New Zealand reserves. Nash produced a plan to mitigate the sterling losses by instituting a system of exchange controls and import licensing. The British government bristled at another instance of Dominion protection, and the Board of Trade complained that New Zealand had unfairly targeted British exports.<sup>172</sup> Exchange

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<sup>169</sup> Ian Drummond, *The floating pound and the sterling area, 1931-1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 111.

<sup>170</sup> According to Cain and Hopkins, the reaction to the economic reforms "revealed the depths of gentlemanly distaste for those who refused to play the financial game by the normal rules." Cain and Hopkins, 513.

<sup>171</sup> Lord Balfour of Burleigh, memorandum, DO/35/764/1

<sup>172</sup> Board of Trade memorandum, Nov. 23, 1938, DO/35/764/1

controls also violated New Zealand's agreements with Britain as well as the spirit of the Ottawa regime.<sup>173</sup>

Nash had little leverage with the British government. He needed British assistance to avoid defaulting on British loans to New Zealand. He arrived in London in June 1939 hoping to secure about £15 million in new loans. New Zealand already owed £17 million.<sup>174</sup> The British government eventually agreed to give Nash a loan, but also demanded a restriction on import controls.<sup>175</sup> Nash had no choice but to give in and abandon his ambitious schemes. New Zealand's dependence on British trade and capital made it impossible to diverge from the British liberal order.

The British government usurped the spirit of Commonwealth economic cooperation by opposing any trade agreement between Dominions that did not benefit Britain. British manufacturers complained about a trade agreement between Australia and Canada that benefited Canadian companies in the Australian market. The British Trade Commissioner in Canada reported that many of these Canadian exports had come from factories set up by American companies in Canada.<sup>176</sup> He complained that British trade was "suffering considerably and justifiably from this pseudo Canadian competition," and blamed Australian customs officials for not effectively policing the loophole. The memorandum, however, also revealed a general discomfort with any imperial trade agreements that left Britain out. The trade commissioner suggested that

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<sup>173</sup> Nash acknowledged that the controls violated of Article 8 of New Zealand's agreement with Britain, but he claimed special circumstances forced his hand. Drummond, *Sterling area*, 111.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15.

<sup>176</sup> John Dalton, report on Canadian trade, Oct. 1935, DO/35/273/4.

Britain should benefit from any Dominion tariff break. He cautioned that the threat posed by trade agreements between Dominions would only grow as the Dominions industrialized. British officials, on the other hand, seemed to have no problem with New Zealand preferences that favored British over Canadian automobiles.<sup>177</sup> The British government seemed to support imperial trade only when it benefited British businesses.

The Ottawa agreements did not disrupt trade British trade with foreign countries. Foreign governments grudgingly acknowledged the imperial preferences. One Italian official questioned why Ottawa preferences could not be extended to other governments after Britain and the Dominions had made such a fuss over Dominion sovereignty. An American senator complained that the Dominions were independent when it suited them and part of the British Empire when it did not.<sup>178</sup> The Netherlands protested that the Ottawa Agreements sabotaged the Ouchy Accords, which sought to lower tariffs throughout Europe.<sup>179</sup> The Argentinian government attempted to claim Ottawa preferences through a creative interpretation of the 1825 Anglo-Argentine Treaty of Friendship and Navigation. Foreign governments recognized the agreements despite their grumbling. Few governments were willing to risk a trade dispute with Britain over imperial preference.

Britain's trading partners agreed to recognize imperial preference as part of their agreements with Britain. France confirmed the validity of imperial preference in

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<sup>177</sup> DO memorandum on New Zealand Trade, Nov. 1936, DO/35/274/1.

<sup>178</sup> DO Memorandum, "Attitude of foreign countries towards the principle of imperial preference," Jan. 1937, DO/35/569/8.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* Boyce supports this interpretation. See Boyce, "British Alternative."

exchange for British recognition of a French imperial tariff system.<sup>180</sup> The American government recognized the Ottawa accords in 1935 as part of an agreement with Canada. Even the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, which criticized imperial preference in a 1931 report, agreed that the Dominions' historical association with Britain allowed for such arrangements in 1936.<sup>181</sup> Zimmern had correctly predicted the use of imperial preference as a bargaining chip.

The Ottawa agreements did not enable the type of economic cooperation that politicians had discussed at the Imperial Conference. They led to increased trade between Britain and the Dominions, but both parties continued to pursue their own national economic interests. British and Dominion officials bickered over the terms and enforcement of the agreements. The Dominions had little chance to best Britain in a dispute. They depended on British markets and capital, and the British government attempted to prevent them from protecting their industries or deviating from British economic orthodoxy. British officials even intervened to prevent the Dominions from making agreements amongst themselves that threatened British interests. The result was an imperial economy that differed from imperial reformers' descriptions. Commonwealth cooperation remained contentious, and British economic domination abrogated Dominion sovereignty.

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

The Ottawa Conference had an important political effect on the Commonwealth. As constitutional ties disappeared and Dominions asserted their sovereignty in international organizations, it became unclear what was holding the Commonwealth together. The Ottawa agreements tied tariff preferences below the most-favored-nation rate to Commonwealth membership. Holland correctly points out that the Ottawa regime had come from a “refugee imperialism” born from the pressures of the Depression,<sup>182</sup> but his assertions that the cut-throat economic negotiations fractured the alliance underrate the Ottawa regime's importance in Commonwealth identity. Tariff preferences became an outward symbol of Commonwealth membership for members and for foreign countries. They demonstrated that Commonwealth relations differed from international relations. Commonwealth politicians and imperial reformers used the Ottawa Conference to portray the Commonwealth as an international organization that could successfully act in concert during a crisis.

Imperial reformers had mixed reactions to the Ottawa Conference. Kerr feared that tough negotiations would create rifts in the Commonwealth. Amery saw those negotiations first-hand. He had lobbied for tariff preferences for nearly thirty years, but the Ottawa Conference nearly destroyed his career. British officials accused him of helping the Dominions push for stronger concessions, and Amery blamed the Conference for keeping him out of the government. Amery, however, saw the conference as an

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<sup>182</sup> Holland, 151

important step towards the economic integration of the Empire. Kerr attacked the Conference for abandoning free trade and resigned from the government in protest with other Liberals. Zimmern was more pragmatic. He agreed with Keith that the tariff preferences helped to define the Commonwealth and recognized that they gave Britain leverage in foreign trade negotiations. Zimmern claimed that the Conference had its greatest effect on the non-self-governing colonies. He argued that the Ottawa conference recognized their economic interests and prepared them for self-government.

The Ottawa tariff regime redefined Dominion status. British officials tried to use tariff preferences to convince de Valera to maintain the oath of office and repay the land annuities. When de Valera refused, the British government leveled special duties against the Free State and refused to extend imperial preferences. The exclusion of the Free State from the tariff regime had consequences beyond the economy. The tariff preferences became an important aspect of Dominion status. British officials used differing tariff rates to show that the Free State had a different kind of Dominion status than Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa. The Free State took on an “intermediate status” different from the “Ottawa Dominions.” The Free State exception resonated beyond tariff rates. De Valera pushed legislation to remove the Crown from the Free State and threatened to leave the Commonwealth. The tariff rates symbolized British officials’ recognition that the Free State did not fit into their idea of the Commonwealth.

The political consequences of Ottawa added an economic dimension to the Commonwealth. The trade agreements had a negligible effect on Commonwealth trade. They reinforced the Dominions' economic dependence on Britain. Imperial preference

failed to unify the Commonwealth the way that tariff reformers had envisioned. The tariff preferences provoked endless bickering between the British and Dominion governments throughout the 1930s. The Ottawa Agreements, however, did not fracture the Commonwealth. They gave the Commonwealth meaning beyond a shared loyalty to the Crown. Imperial reformers hoped that the Ottawa Conference would demonstrate the close, informal cooperation that they associated with the Commonwealth. They hoped that it would demonstrate how the Commonwealth had become a model for all international organizations. The tough negotiations, disputes, and accusations surrounding the Conference undermined reformers' lofty expectations. The arguments showed that the Commonwealth had become more like other international organizations.

## **Chapter VII: Constitutional Crises**

The Commonwealth in the late 1930s faced numerous constitutional crises. Nationalist politicians in the Irish Free State and South Africa proposed measures to reduce the Crown's role in the Commonwealth. They supported the rights to neutrality in British conflicts and secession from the Commonwealth. They claimed that each Dominion had its own monarch that it happened to share with the rest of the Commonwealth. Éamon de Valera, the President of the Free State, separated citizenship from British subjecthood and introduced a constitution that removed the monarchy from all but external matters. British officials viewed these changes as attacks on the fundamental basis of the Commonwealth. Legal experts pored over de Valera's legislation; officials and politicians defended the importance of the Crown. British observers portrayed the constitutional challenges as incompatible with the Commonwealth spirit of collaboration. De Valera and Hertzog, however, presented an alternative form for the Commonwealth. Their challenges emphasized the Commonwealth's economic and strategic links as the basis for cooperation instead of the Crown. The process had already begun at the Ottawa Conference, when tariff rates had become one of the few concrete markers of Commonwealth membership. They accelerated the Commonwealth's transformation into an international organization.

The constitutional innovations provoked reams of debate and expert analysis, but resulted in few changes to the operation of the Commonwealth. British officials attacked

de Valera's proposals and questioned whether the Free State had seceded after every significant innovation. The British government, however, had no weapons with which to combat the changes. Politicians were unwilling to remove a Dominion from the Commonwealth; the Irish Free State and South Africa remained in the Commonwealth as long as their governments claimed to be members. Dominions Office officials could do little but grit their teeth and register their complaints. The constitutional changes had little effect on Commonwealth relations. British experts identified some practical consequences of changes in Dominion citizenship or external association, but they were mainly hypothetical. The 1938 financial agreement between Britain and the Free State, signed after de Valera's quasi-republican Constitution came into effect, engendered the friendliest Anglo-Irish relations since de Valera came to power in 1932. The agreements put the Free State (Eire, under the new constitution) on the Ottawa tariff regime, which had become an important symbol of Commonwealth membership.

Dominion neutrality provided the most threatening change to the Commonwealth in the late 1930s. The Canadian, South African, and Irish Free State governments all asserted the right to neutrality in British wars. The British government could not accept Dominion neutrality because it strained the unity of the Crown. Officials argued that the king could not be at war in one of his dominions but not in others. Britain did not demand automatic Dominion participation in British wars. Officials concocted schemes for passive belligerency that maintained the unified state of war without calling for Dominion troops. British and Dominion governments had avoided this argument in the past by promising to fight together as part of a League of Nations action. As the League

dissolved and war approached, the Commonwealth's military dimension became more prominent.

Historians have tended to evaluate this period of Commonwealth history in terms of imperialism versus decolonization. They tend to analyze degrees of Dominion sovereignty. Historians taking a wide view of the evolution of the Commonwealth, such as Nicholas Mansergh and David McIntyre, have focused on the period as a precedent for the Commonwealth after the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> They examine de Valera's struggles between Commonwealth and Republic as precedents for India and Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Dominion-centered histories tend to focus on the extent to which each nation had gained sovereignty. The historiography of Ireland has provided a particularly fertile debate about the extent to which de Valera's changes rejected British imperialism while economic ties to Britain rendered constitutional changes moot.<sup>3</sup> The Dominions also play a small but notable role in histories of British foreign policy in the run-up to the Second

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, (London: Macmillan, 1982, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and David McIntyre, *The commonwealth of nations: origin and impact 1869-1971*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). McIntyre's new book, *The Britannic vision: historians and the making of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, also focuses on the interwar years as a period of Dominion sovereignty and constitutional innovation that paved the way for the Commonwealth's expansion after the Second World War. McIntyre, *The Britannic vision: historians and the making of the British Commonwealth of Nations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Deidre McMahon draws these parallels most explicitly in "A Larger and Noisier Southern Ireland: Ireland and the Evolution of Dominion Status in India, Burma and the Commonwealth, 1942-9" in Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly, ed., *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-66 : from Independence to Internationalism*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Recent works on Ireland in the 1930s have reemphasized Anglo-Irish connections in the face of constitutional gains. See Donal Lowry, "New Ireland, Old Empire, and the Outside World" in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan, eds. *Ireland: The politics of independence 1922-49* on Irish foreign relations. Several authors, including Lowry, Cronin, and Ged Martin, point out that Irish economic ties to Britain and the Sterling Area provided more important links to Britain and the Commonwealth.

World War, especially their influence as a pressure group that promoted appeasement.<sup>4</sup> R.F. Holland argues that the Commonwealth's contradictions had caused it to unravel in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> The Dominions developed economic and strategic interests outside of the British orbit. Holland, however, suggests that the ambiguity of Commonwealth relations that developed in response to constitutional challenges became its biggest asset and enabled it to survive as other international organizations crumbled.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter contrasts Commonwealth ideology and Commonwealth relations in the late 1930s. Imperial reformers compared the Commonwealth and League of Nations as international organizations and offered two paths for the Commonwealth. One, voiced most effectively by Alfred Zimmern, associated the Commonwealth with internationalism. As the League of Nations fell apart, he became convinced that the only way for the League to survive was for it to emulate Commonwealth relations. Zimmern emphasized the Commonwealth's peaceful coexistence and its spirit of cooperation. The other strand, led by Leopold Amery, presented the Commonwealth as an alternative to

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<sup>4</sup> D.C. Watt raised the issue of the Dominions as a pressure group towards appeasement in 1960 in *Personalities and policies: studies in the formation of British foreign policy in the twentieth century* (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1965). Ritchie Owendale's large study of the Dominions' role in British foreign affairs agrees that the Dominions pushed for appeasement, but downplays their influence, arguing that they mainly confirmed a British appeasement policy in *"Appeasement" and the English-speaking world*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975). Deidre McMahon notes that these works ignore Irish contributions to the appeasement policy, despite their neutral stance in "Ireland, the Dominions and the Munich crisis," *Irish studies in international affairs*, v. 1:1 (1979), pp. 30-7. More recently, works on the Dominions have examined their foreign policies individually such as John D. Meehan, "Steering Clear of Great Britain: Canada's Debate over Collective Security in the Far Eastern Crisis of 1937," *The international history review*, 25:2 (Jun., 2003), pp. 253-81.

<sup>5</sup> R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance, 1918-1939*, (London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Holland, 209

international organizations.<sup>7</sup> A strong, economically integrated Commonwealth, he suggested, could allow Britain to disengage from Europe. The Commonwealth could function as a model for other large regional economic blocs that could mitigate national tensions. Both viewed the Commonwealth as a force for good and vital for the maintenance of world peace.

The constitutional crises of the 1930s tested Amery and Zimmern's Commonwealth ideology. The chapter examines the battles between the British Government and the Dominions over the direction of the Commonwealth. It focuses on debates about secession, nationality, the role of the Crown, and neutrality. The constitutional quarrels became heated, and neither side could resist threats or accusations of bad faith. The chapter argues that de Valera, Hertzog, and other Dominion politicians created a more international version of the Commonwealth. They acknowledged special bonds of Commonwealth such as close cooperation and special tariffs below the most-favored-nation rate. They argued, however, that their bonds came from free association and not from the abstract connections to the Crown.

## **IMPERIAL REFORMERS**

Imperialists continued to disagree about the Commonwealth's relationship to international organizations. Both Amery and Zimmern maintained their belief in the

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<sup>7</sup> See Richard S. Grayson, "Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s," *Twentieth century history*, 17 (2006), pp. 489-515.

Commonwealth's contribution to world order. Zimmern remained faithful to international organizations as the basis of peace despite his growing disappointment in the League of Nations. Amery, on the other hand, viewed the League's failings as proof of his skepticism. He asserted that a strong and interconnected Commonwealth would allow Britain to disengage from Europe. These positions had not changed fundamentally since the early 1920s. During the 1930s, both the League and the Commonwealth faced new challenges. Zimmern could only watch helplessly as the League failed to prevent wars in Manchuria, Ethiopia, and the Gran Chaco. Amery not only watched his long-desired imperial tariff conference become infected with bitterness and mutual suspicion, but became the scapegoat for its problems. Both struggled to reconcile their belief in the Commonwealth as an exemplar of international cooperation with more assertive Dominion nationalism.

Despite their fundamental differences on the League, Amery and Zimmern still shared an unshakable faith in the importance of the Commonwealth as the key to global peace and order. The strains of the 1930s only reinforced their veneration of it as a model for international cooperation. They both used the Commonwealth as an example of various nationalities working within the context of a wider supranational patriotism. Zimmern portrayed the Commonwealth as a model for the League of Nations. He argued that other states, particularly in Europe, should learn from the Commonwealth. Amery also depicted the Commonwealth as a model international institution, but rejected Zimmern's calls to reform the League in its image. He suggested that other groups of nations should form economically-integrated blocs like the Commonwealth; for example,

he called for a “Pan-Europa” of sovereign states on the Continent with informal cooperation along Commonwealth lines. Both of these conceptions of the Commonwealth celebrated its innovation as an international organization of sovereign states based on cooperation and mutual understanding.

The philosophical differences between Amery and Zimmern had less effect on policy in the 1930s than in the previous decade. The Conservative-dominated National government had no use for Amery, especially after its leaders blamed him for encouraging Dominion intransigence at the Ottawa Conference. He sat in Parliament as a frustrated back-bencher. Zimmern's star continued to rise as one of the most respected British experts on international relations. He was knighted in 1936 after publishing a history of the League entitled *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*. He also remained closely allied with Ramsay Macdonald and the National Labour platform, although there is little evidence that he had much influence on policy.<sup>8</sup> He even managed to maintain a spirited public feud with H.G. Wells.<sup>9</sup> Both remained prolific commentators on imperial and international affairs. They may not have been able to

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<sup>8</sup> A *Time and Tide* editorial from Aug. 5, 1933, alleged that Zimmern had become a stooge for Macdonald. A former student wrote in to defend him. ZP 179. Zimmern corresponded with both Ramsay and Malcolm Macdonald, but his letters give the impression of a spirited supporter rather than a trusted confidant.

<sup>9</sup> Wells attacked Zimmern in the Jan. 11, 1933 edition of the *Listener*. He disparaged Zimmern's support for nationalism as “mischievous nonsense.” “Zimmern is the sort of man who would call a human being uniform and monotonous, and rejoice over the infinite freedom and variety of an equivalent weight of earthworms. He would rejoice in the delightful differences in a load of bricks and object to their being built up into a cottage. For obscure reasons he is incapable of distinguishing between Unity and Uniformity. I wish I could have him psycho-analysed. There are more than intellectual resistances in his brain,” Wells wrote. ZP, 181. Zimmern ridiculed Wells's quest for world unity in an undated article in his papers (ZP 162) and in a 1937 speech at Chatham House. See Zimmern, “The Decline in International Standards,” *International Affairs*, (Jan-Feb., 1938) in ZP 169.

affect British policy directly, but they had the ears of those who did, and they promoted their ideas about the Commonwealth in books, articles, and talks.

The most significant change in Zimmern's opinions on international order came from his disillusion with the League of Nations. His support for the League was more than ideological; he served as the deputy director of the League's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation from 1926-1930.<sup>10</sup> The Japanese invasion of Manchuria created the first cracks in his all-encompassing faith in the League. He wrote an article entitled "What is wrong with the League of Nations and how to repair it" under the pseudonym "Vigiles," in which he argued that the League had been designed to prevent conflicts like the invasion of Manchuria.<sup>11</sup> An exchange between Zimmern and a fellow foreign policy expert, Philip Noel-Baker, at Chatham House in 1935 illustrated Zimmern's attitude towards Manchuria and the League itself. Noel-Baker suggested that the Commonwealth delegates at the League had failed to pressure the Japanese delegation into calling off the invasion in 1931. Zimmern responded that no major powers had stood up to Japan in Geneva:

The Japanese at Geneva, both in the Assembly and delegation, might have been made to feel that their country's honour was at stake. All invitations to social intercourse with them might have been courteously but pointedly refused. They might have been made so unhappy that their unhappiness would have overflowed into their official despatches and personal letters.

What actually happened was that the Japanese delegation gave an evening party in the week following the occupation of Mukden and all the world and his wife attended it, vociferously anti-Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Committee aimed to bring scientists, educators, and intellectuals together and was a forerunner to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

<sup>11</sup> "What is wrong with the League of Nations and how to repair it," Manuscript [undated]. ZP, 132

<sup>12</sup> Zimmern, Correspondence with Chatham House, 1935, ZP 98

This passage revealed Zimmern's sincere belief that social pressure on Japanese representatives at Geneva could have checked their government's expansion and reinforced his conception of the League as a society of nations where mingling delegates formed an international community beyond the formal sessions.

By the mid-1930s, Zimmern realized that the League could not function amidst anti-democratic states. He described Wilson's ideal for a union of democracies as dead when the Soviet Union joined the League in 1934.<sup>13</sup> Zimmern dismissed the German government as despotic in form and malicious in policy and suggested that only the Western Democracies could save internationalism.<sup>14</sup> He argued that the mixture of democracies and authoritarian states in Europe prevented the establishment of a true League in Europe.<sup>15</sup> In addition, he became weary of politicians who claimed to support the League of Nations without following through. "Leave it to the League of Nations," he said in a 1934 lecture, "is for some public men a very convenient way of evading personal and national responsibilities."<sup>16</sup> Yet even Zimmern could not ignore the fact that the League had failed to prevent war in China, South America, and Ethiopia.<sup>17</sup>

Zimmern increasingly turned to the Commonwealth as the key to saving the League of Nations. During the 1930s, he lauded the Commonwealth's informal

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<sup>13</sup> Zimmern, speech on the Fifteenth League Assembly, Chatham House, October 9, 1934, ZP 98.

<sup>14</sup> Zimmern, "British Foreign Policy Since the War," Montague Burton international affairs lecture, 1934, ZP 140. The other nations were Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, and Czechoslovakia, which he referred to as the "Straight Eight."

<sup>15</sup> Zimmern, Chatham House Memo, Oct. 27, 1934, ZP, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Zimmern, "British Foreign Policy Since the War," Montague Burton international affairs lecture, 1934 ZP. 140.

<sup>17</sup> Zimmern 1935 Chatham House Memo, ZP, 97

collaboration as being superior to any centralized bureaucracy.<sup>18</sup> He described it as a “true league system” defined as a “system based on mutual confidence and a spirit of co-operation.”<sup>19</sup> Zimmern claimed that Commonwealth cooperation derived naturally from British values. He argued that the British preference for decentralized collaboration made the Continental<sup>20</sup> desire for rigid League obligations “alien to us” and wrote that “it is constitutionally and psychologically impossible for us to adjust ourselves to it.”<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s, Zimmern believed that the League had to become more like the Commonwealth in order to survive. He wrote in the Chatham House journal *International Affairs* that he hoped to “Britannicise” the League by inculcating its members with the moral and political unity that held together the Commonwealth:

We should have liked, if I may coin a word, to have been able to Britannicise the world through the League of Nations: but we must regretfully admit that it is not going to happen just yet. The members of the League are most of them not ready to be Britannicised, as we too rashly assumed that they were. Or perhaps it would be truer to say, not that we assumed that they were ready to work the League system on British lines, but that we never realised that there was any other possible way of working a League of Nations.<sup>22</sup>

The failure of the League encouraged Zimmern to portray the Commonwealth as the key to international peace. In a 1932 lecture in Edinburgh, he described the

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<sup>18</sup> Zimmern, “The Future of the League of Nations,” [publication unknown] Jan 1935 ZP 144. He also ended *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* on a similar sentiment. Alfred Zimmern, *the League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936).

<sup>19</sup> Zimmern memo for Chatham House, Oct. 27, 1934, ZP 97

<sup>20</sup> Zimmern constantly attributed centralization of the League to the French thinking. His *League of Nations and rule of law* presented the idea of a world-state as a distinctly French plan rooted in a global extension of Rousseau’s Committee of Public Safety. This usually contrasted with British plans rooted in the Commonwealth. See *League of Nations*, 248.

<sup>21</sup> Memo prepared for Chatham House Subcommittee on the Commonwealth and the Collective system, Jul. 28, 1934, ZP 97.

<sup>22</sup> Zimmern, “Is there an Empire Foreign Policy?” *International Affairs*, 13 (May-June, 1934) pp. 303-324.

Commonwealth as a school of international cooperation.<sup>23</sup> He emphasized the importance of the Commonwealth in international affairs in a dialog he wrote between himself and a fictional straw-man called “Everyman” about the Empire in the BBC’s *Listener*.<sup>24</sup> Zimmern patiently explained to Everyman that the Commonwealth had made the British Empire into a society that would never go to war against other members. Similar relations existed between the United States and Canada and among the Scandinavian countries; these nations were the “true modern peoples.” He closed the article asking that “if the Rule of Law can be brought about over one quarter of the globe, why can’t it be brought about over the whole globe? That, put in a nut-shell, is the problem of peace.”<sup>25</sup>

Zimmern's support for the Commonwealth did not stop him from criticizing Dominion foreign policies. He characterized them as insular and disengaged with internationalism. He argued that Dominion citizens had no informed opinion about Japan or the League in 1931.<sup>26</sup> He attributed the League's failure to both British and Dominion reluctance to take the responsibilities of the Covenant seriously and claimed that the Dominions did not grasp the implications of the Locarno system.<sup>27</sup> By 1940, Zimmern admitted that the Commonwealth response to the European threat had been incoherent

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<sup>23</sup> Zimmern, “The Cosmopolitan, the International and the Universal,” the James Seth Memorial Lecture, University of Edinburgh, Jan 15, 1932, ZP 142.

<sup>24</sup> Zimmern, “Way of Peace: Facing Facts,” *Listener*, Jan 19, 1938. ZP

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Rebuttal to Noel-Baker, Chatham House, 1935, ZP, 98

<sup>27</sup> Zimmern, “Organize the Peace World!,” *Political quarterly*, April, 1934, ZP 177.

and ineffective.<sup>28</sup> He wrote that the collapse of the League and post-war internationalism had left an international and moral vacuum, and people in the Dominions had lost sight of the Commonwealth's contributions towards international order. Instead, the Commonwealth looked like another power bloc.<sup>29</sup> He also suggested that the Dominions' distance from Europe caused their citizens to support isolation from Europe and pressure Britain to appease Germany.<sup>30</sup> Only the outbreak of war in Europe, he argued, allowed the Commonwealth to unite again in common purpose.<sup>31</sup>

Amery weighed in on the Empire and the state of international order in 1935 with a political manifesto called *The Forward View*.<sup>32</sup> His sections on the Empire recapitulated the major themes of Commonwealth unity that he had pushed since the 1920s. Like Zimmern, he espoused a belief in the Commonwealth as the purest expression of a special British sensibility. He wrote that the Empire was the “translation, into outward shape, under ever varying circumstances of the British character, and of certain social and political principles, constituting a definite British culture or way of life, which first evolved on British soil, have since been carried by our people across all the seas.”<sup>33</sup> Amery described the British Empire as an example of cooperation between co-equal states and colonies. The Commonwealth nations reduced barriers to trade amongst

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<sup>28</sup> Zimmern, “The British Commonwealth and The War” [publication unknown] May 1940, ZP 157

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Except, of course, for Ireland. Zimmern, however, supported Irish neutrality in this article.

<sup>32</sup> Amery, *The Forward View*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935).

<sup>33</sup> Amery, *Forward View*, 169

themselves, organized rationally as an economic unit, and combined for mutual defense.<sup>34</sup> He hoped to see similar organizations of states in the Americas, in Asia, and, most importantly, in Europe. He claimed that the Empire pioneered regional supranationalism through the natural feelings of British imperial patriotism.

*The Forward View* reiterated Amery's belief in the Commonwealth as Britain's chance to disengage from Europe. Amery had long agitated for Britain to plan its future with the Commonwealth instead of with Europe. European tensions in the 1930s encouraged those beliefs. In *The Forward View*, he detached Britain from Europe altogether, claiming that the British were “outsiders to the European family.”<sup>35</sup> Like Zimmern, he hoped for closer collaboration with the United States and the Scandinavian countries.<sup>36</sup> He also suggested that Britain should support the development of a European Commonwealth along British lines as an interested observer but not a participant.<sup>37</sup>

Amery called for more efficient Commonwealth cooperation. He had tried to promote agencies and organizations to coordinate imperial economic affairs during his tenure in the Dominions Office and at the Ottawa Conference, but he made little headway. He called for annual imperial conferences and the creation of an imperial

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid 14

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 282

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 274

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 280-1 He also published these ideas in “The British Empire and the Pan-European idea,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International affairs*, 9:1 (Jan., 1930), pp. 1-22 and in the foreword to R.N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Europe must unite*, (Glaucus, Switz.: Paneuropea Editions, Ltd., 1940).

secretariat headquartered outside of London.<sup>38</sup> He also suggested that the High Commissioners should hold informal conferences.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Amery hoped to direct British migration towards the Dominions in order to keep them from being “swamped by alien elements.”<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, he advocated greater imperial economic integration. That included elaboration on the Ottawa tariff system, which he lauded in *The Forward View* as a triumph of imperial cooperation. He endorsed a coordinated imperial monetary policy and called for the creation of a “sterling convoy.”<sup>41</sup> The book contained nothing Amery had not suggested in years of imperial propaganda, but contributed to his vision of the Empire as an integrated political and economic unit.

Amery's most novel contributions to *The Forward View* came from his wholesale attack on individualism, internationalism, and liberalism. The events of the 1930s only confirmed his worst suspicions about the League's impotence. He dismissed the League as the Emperor's New Clothes, the Kellogg Pact as make-believe, and the whole edifice of collective security as a fantasy.<sup>42</sup> The internationalists, he argued, replaced a system of professional bilateral diplomacy with what he referred to as “conference craving.”<sup>43</sup> He found it astounding that the complex historical and psychological tangle of European issues could be decided by a body including Chinese, Guatemalan, and Dominion

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<sup>38</sup> Amery, *Forward View*, 199. He felt that Dominion representatives saw London as a symbol of imperial domination, although he wanted to reinforce the symbolism of the Crown. He suggested a royal palace such as Westminster.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 199

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 208. Amery also welcomed other Northern European, particularly Scandinavian, migrants to fortify the Dominions' diversity.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 327

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-7

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 108

delegates.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, he argued that internationalism manifested in the global economy through the most-favored nation clause. To Amery, the most-favored nation clause strangled European economic cooperation, which he saw as the crucial first step towards the creation of a Pan-European Commonwealth.<sup>45</sup>

Amery viewed internationalism as the most recent and dangerous manifestation of liberal individualism. He had long opposed free trade and Cobdenite anti-imperialism.<sup>46</sup> He favored Friedrich List's ideas about economic nationalism applied to the Empire at large like his mentor, Joseph Chamberlain. Amery associated liberal individualism with socialism. By 1935, he believed that socialism posed the greatest threat to Britain and cited the radical socialist Stafford Cripps's *Problems of a Socialist Government* as a blueprint for tyranny.<sup>47</sup> He thought Mussolini's corporatism provided a better path to prosperity.<sup>48</sup> Mussolini's attempts to reorganize Italian life around a vigorous national patriotism appealed to Amery, who wished to cultivate a similar sense of purpose in the Empire.

Corporatism animated many of Amery's political proposals. He suggested adding a third house of Parliament, a "House of Industry," to replace obsolete geographic

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. He argued that the most-favored-nation clause scuttled prevented the creation of tariff concessions for small groups of states such as Scandinavia.

<sup>46</sup> Amery admitted that free trade had been useful to the development of British trade, but argued that Britain's Victorian prosperity had more to do with the California and Australia gold rushes. He also pointed out that free trade had helped British industry at the expense of colonies. *Ibid.*, 82-84.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 152

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-6. He put Mussolini in the same category as "his two greatest fellow Italians, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Buonaparte."

divisions with representatives of Britain's industrial and agricultural sectors.<sup>49</sup> Amery did not approve of the violent coercion that came with fascism in Italy, and he dismissed Nazi Germany as a “ridiculous campaign of racial megalomania.”<sup>50</sup> He also had little use for Oswald Mosley and his British brand of fascism.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, his corporatist vision for Britain and the Empire was not particularly democratic either. He proposed extra voting power for property holders and people with children as long as they did not receive government assistance.<sup>52</sup> This plan came across as a transparent attempt to disenfranchise potential socialists. Amery liked to describe himself as a hard-headed realist in contrast to League of Nations idealists and socialist revolutionaries, but his proposed changes seemed fantastically ambitious in the context of 1930s British politics.

The differences between Zimmern and Amery came to head in a debate between them on the issue of imperial security in the *Listener* in 1938.<sup>53</sup> Amery argued that the best way to ensure imperial security involved replacing national with imperial thinking: “The first question a British Foreign Secretary should ask himself when some new issue arises is: How will that affect Australia; what is its bearing on the security of India; how will it strike Canadians?” Zimmern countered that the Dominions had divergent foreign policies, and their interests tended towards isolation. He accused Amery of attempting to enmesh the Dominions in British strategic dilemmas and called a centralized foreign

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 451-2

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 144. Richard Grayson also rejects the notion of Amery as a fascist in Grayson, “Leo Amery's imperialist alternative to appeasement in the 1930s,” *Twentieth Century History*, 17:4, 2006, pp. 489-515.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 155

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 453

<sup>53</sup> “The Way of Peace,” *Listener*, Feb. 23, 1938, ZP 177.

policy the “backward view.”<sup>54</sup> Amery denied that he wanted to centralize foreign policy or impose it from Whitehall. He claimed that British foreign policy would naturally harmonize when it came to major issues such as mutual defense against an aggressor. Zimmern agreed with Amery that the Dominions should maintain independent foreign policies. Zimmern closed by reiterating his belief that the Commonwealth formed part of a larger global society. He suggested that the Empire and Commonwealth shared the same purpose.<sup>55</sup> Zimmern admitted that the Wilsonian version of a Universal League had died. Nevertheless, he asserted that the British held no monopoly on justice or freedom and called for the Commonwealth to associate with any other state sharing these values.<sup>56</sup>

Zimmern and Amery described two different reasons to support the Commonwealth. Both promoted the Commonwealth as an example of close, informal international relations. Zimmern’s vision associated the Commonwealth with the League of Nations. By the end of the 1930s, he believed that the League should follow the Commonwealth model. Amery offered a plan to more closely integrate the Empire. He viewed the League’s failure as proof that the Commonwealth should close ranks and keep out of European conflicts. Though neither had a direct hand in British foreign or imperial policy in the 1930s, their prominence in organizations such as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, publications in mainstream publications such as the *Listener*, and reputations as a public intellectuals and political experts on Dominion Affairs helped keep the Commonwealth in the public consciousness.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

## NATIONALITY, SECESSION, AND EXTERNAL ASSOCIATION

The Commonwealth faced its greatest constitutional challenges in the mid-1930s. De Valera and Hertzog led an insurrection against the Dominions' relationship to the monarchy, questioned the nature of Dominion citizenship and British subjecthood, and asserted the right to secede. On the surface, the seemingly endless parade of Commonwealth constitutional crises in the 1930s portended its disintegration. De Valera's new constitution that came into effect in 1938 removed the Crown in all but external matters, and a 1936 Irish nationality law declared that citizens of the Free State were no longer British subjects. Exasperated Dominions Office officials described the changes as the designs of a nationalist malcontent determined to undermine the Commonwealth. The discord surrounding these constitutional changes ran counter to the type of cooperation described by imperialists and seemed to mirror the disintegrating League of Nations. How could imperialists sell the Commonwealth as a model international organization when its members could not even agree what the Commonwealth stood for?

The constitutional crises of the 1930s, however, had very little bearing on the operation of the Commonwealth. Constitutional changes, even those as radical as Ireland's quasi-republican constitution, left the Commonwealth intact until 1947. The conflicts with de Valera and Hertzog came from a collision between two different

Commonwealth philosophies. The Dominions Office desired a Commonwealth united, above all, by the Crown, which is why officials treated absurd issues such as the date that George VI became the king as constitutional catastrophes. De Valera and Hertzog espoused a view of the Commonwealth as a group of states held together by mutual interest and economic ties. Viewed this way, it is not surprising that Britain and Ireland reached a zenith of friendly relations after the passage of the 1938 Constitution. The financial settlement that ended the economic war and brought Ireland into the Ottawa tariff regime did more to integrate Ireland into the Commonwealth than any abstract connection to the Crown. The Irish and South African interpretation of the Commonwealth helped instill the flexibility that defined the Commonwealth after the Second World War.

Three controversies sparked Dominions Office consternation and fears of the Commonwealth's imminent dissolution. They involved concerns about the right of secession, questions about Dominion nationality versus the traditional status as a British subject that had applied across the entire Empire, and finally the relationship of a Dominion to the Crown that came to the fore during the 1936 abdication crisis and de Valera's new constitution. The disagreements raised important questions about the nature of Commonwealth membership.

The issue of secession in South Africa provides a good example of how national politics affected imperial rhetoric. Hertzog had long asserted that South Africa could leave the Commonwealth at will. South African MPs used the 1930 Imperial Conference as a platform to grandstand about the nature of their country's independence. Smuts

provoked controversy when he interpreted the recommendation coming from the experts at the Overseas Dominion Legislation Conference<sup>57</sup> to mean that any law about the succession of the Crown or Royal Title must be approved by the UK and Dominion Parliaments. This interpretation sparked what the *Cape Times* described as a “Fresh ‘Secession’ Rumpus in Pretoria.”<sup>58</sup> Nationalists led by Hertzog and Finance Minister Nicolaas Havenga argued that Smuts's logic made secession impossible. “If you are right,” Hertzog said to Smuts, “then the struggle [for secession] will now begin.”<sup>59</sup> Nationalist MPs moved to emphasize the right to secede in a law accepting the Conference report. Hertzog, however, remained relatively quiet about secession when he arrived at the Imperial Conference. His secession threats were meant for South African consumption.

South African politicians revived the secession issue in 1934. Hertzog's National Party merged with Smuts's South Africa Party to form the United South Africa Party. The merger (described in South Africa as “fusion”) forced Hertzog to temper his republican utterances and Smuts to downplay his disagreements with the Prime Minister. Fusion, however, isolated and intensified the extreme nationalist and imperialist wings in both parties. Daniel Francois Malan broke with Hertzog to form a “Purified” National Party that pursued a hardline republican agenda. Charles Stallard broke from Smuts to

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<sup>57</sup> This Conference began in 1929 as a meeting of constitutional experts and lawyers tasked with disentangling Constitutional barriers to sovereignty after the 1926 Imperial Conference established the principle of equal status. Their report formed the basis of the Statute of Westminster.

<sup>58</sup> “Fresh ‘Secession’ Rumpus,” *Cape Times*, May 21, 1930, clipping in DO/35/92/1

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

form the Dominion Party that agitated for strong links to the Crown. The South African political climate put the Commonwealth at the center of political controversy.

Political changes coincided with a debate over the Status of the Union Act in 1934. The Act ratified the provisions of the Statute of Westminster. The Statute had already been in effect since 1931, but the South African Act served as a statement of South Africa's sovereign independence. Debates over the Status Act made constitutions, secession, and neutrality important political issues in South Africa in 1934 and 1935. British officials in South Africa forwarded notes and articles about the controversies to the Dominions Office.<sup>60</sup>

Smuts and Hertzog dismissed questions about the Commonwealth as being academic since South Africa was unlikely to secede, and the League of Nations determined South Africa's participation in wars. When a Stallard ally accused Smuts of surrendering to the republicans by supporting the Status Act, Smuts replied:

To my mind, these things, secession, neutrality and the like are impracticable and academic. I don't believe that anything we can say in a constitution will settle our attitude or influence when we come to the day of secession or to the day to declare our neutrality....Whether it is neutrality or secession or any of these things, they will be decided not by legal documents or the phraseology of a Bill like this, but by the ordeal of facts, of great events which might shake not only this country, but even the world to its foundation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The sources for these speeches and news clippings dating back to 1926 came from an impressive memorandum put together by the UK High Commissioner's office in South Africa by an official named Wallinger. In September 1935. "Memorandum on the Questions of Secession and Neutrality in South Africa," DO/35/108/6

<sup>61</sup> Smuts, Parliamentary Debate, April 11, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.* Smuts was responding to Charles William Albert Coulter.

Hertzog kept to a similar line and claimed that his differences with Smuts had to do with finer points of interpretation that were unlikely to come up.<sup>62</sup> Hertzog seemed more concerned with Malan. In December, he announced that he was “done with republicanism” citing its “fallacies” and accusing Malan of using republicanism as hollow propaganda.<sup>63</sup> Havenga cautioned nationalists that a republican revolution entailed shooting fellow South Africans and not the British.<sup>64</sup> Smuts remained less ambiguous about South Africa's future in the Commonwealth. He reminded supporters that South Africa was part of the British system that operated over one quarter of the globe.<sup>65</sup> More than anything, however, he sought to end the damaging arguments over constitutional questions. Smuts claimed that the Status Act left the secession issue “dead as a dodo”<sup>66</sup> and, by December, declared the constitutional issues settled. “Let us not bother about them anymore,” he said.<sup>67</sup>

Malan continued to push for South Africa's right to secede and for a republic. In a speech to his Nationalist followers in March, 1934, he argued that South Africa's “sovereign independence” included a right to secede from the Commonwealth of its own free will without accusations of rebellion.<sup>68</sup> He anchored his theory of sovereign independence in the divisibility of the Crown, meaning that the UK and each Dominion

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<sup>62</sup> Hertzog speech at Upington, Oct. 11, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Hertzog speech at Bethal, Nov. 28, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Havenga speech at Rustenberg, July 16, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Smuts speech at Port Elizabeth, July 4, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Smuts speech at Overseas League Empire Day Dinner, May 24, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Smuts speech at United Party Plenary Congress in Bloemfentein, December 5, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Malan speech, Stellenbosch, March 8, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

had a separate king that all happened to be the same person. The King of South Africa, in this model, could only act on the advice of his South African ministers. Hertzog agreed with this interpretation, which continued to vex the Dominions Office throughout the 1930s. In this case, the divided Crown became vital to Malan's assertions of neutrality, secession, and, eventually a republic. He declared that a republic remained the only solution to South Africa's racial problems,<sup>69</sup> and declared that his interpretation of the divided Crown meant that there was no British Empire. Only the bond of friendship held the Commonwealth together.<sup>70</sup>

The British High Commissioner Report gave the impression that Malan emphasized republicanism in order to undermine Hertzog. Malan argued that the Status Act had delivered full sovereign independence to South Africa, and that independence meant the ability to secede from the Commonwealth or form a republic at will.<sup>71</sup> It appeared that Hertzog, Smuts, and Malan agreed that the Status Act had settled the issue of South Africa's sovereignty. Malan, however, continued to demand a republic as the only way to guarantee neutrality. He accused the United Party of ignoring neutrality in its platform and claimed that a republic was inevitable.<sup>72</sup> Malan, however, seemed more interested in using republicanism to attack Hertzog. He told a supporter that he did not plan to pursue a republic until the people had become “properly enlightened.”<sup>73</sup> By 1935,

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<sup>69</sup> “Racial problems” at the time exclusively referred to conflict between the English and Afrikaans-speaking sections. The rights of black South Africans had no bearing on these Commonwealth debates.

<sup>70</sup> Malan speech at Morresburg, May 9, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Malan speech at Heilbron, June 6, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Malan speech at the Strand, Jan. 4, 1935, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

Malan's speeches focused on neutrality and the practical questions involving the Simonstown naval base.<sup>74</sup> Unlike constitutional questions, the possibility of neutrality involved a significant adjustment to the role of the Commonwealth.

Another significant avenue of constitutional discord involved the status of Dominion nationals. The British government hoped that all Commonwealth nationals would retain their status as British subjects. The 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, which clarified British subjecthood, specifically exempted all of the Dominions at the time, but had been ratified by the Canadian, South African, Australian, and New Zealand legislatures by the end of the 1920s.<sup>75</sup> British subjecthood appealed to the British government because it was simple and comprehensive. All British subjects, including those from the Dominions, were entitled to British consular services. It also reinforced the unity of the Empire under the Crown. An inter-departmental committee report on nationality prepared before the 1930 conference lauded British subjecthood as both well-known and unambiguous.<sup>76</sup> Dominion governments, however, had already recognized different types of British subjects. They had excluded immigrants from the African and Asian parts of the Empire since the late nineteenth century, and groups such as the substantial Indian community in South Africa faced discrimination.

The British government began grappling with Dominion nationality in preparation for the 1930 Imperial Conference. By the late 1920s, representatives of some Dominion

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<sup>74</sup> Simonstown was a Royal Navy base controlled by Britain. It became prominent in discussions about South African neutrality or belligerency in the case of a British war.

<sup>75</sup> Revised draft report of the inter-imperial relations committee [for the 1930 Imperial Conference], Jul. 18, 1930, DO/35/90/2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

governments desired their own national status. The Canadian government created a distinct Canadian nationality in 1921, but Canadians remained British subjects under the provisions of the 1914 Act. British officials expected Canadian, South African, and Irish Free State delegates to push for what they called an “extreme view” of Dominion nationality at the 1931 Imperial Conference.<sup>77</sup> The “extreme view” would replace British subjecthood with a Dominion nationality. Any “common status” shared by British subjects in the Commonwealth would be maintained through reciprocal arrangements with the British and other Dominion governments.

British officials worried about the practical and political effects caused by the “extreme view.” One official theorized that the loss of a common Commonwealth status would mean that British subjects only existed in the United Kingdom.<sup>78</sup> Dominion nationals would immediately lose any rights or privileges granted to British subjects in foreign countries and would become aliens outside of their home nations. The report warned that “common allegiance will be a matter of sentiment and not of law.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the report noted that Dominion nationality caused potential problems with the definition of subjecthood in the United Kingdom, the non-self-governing parts of the Empire, and India.

The conference assuaged the officials’ fears. They hoped to preserve Dominion nationality as a “subspecies” of British subjecthood. At the same time, they also recognized that “British subject” remained a sensitive term in the Free State and South

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Africa, and they focused pragmatically on maintaining a common status within the Commonwealth tied to the Crown. The Conference approved a vague statement on nationality that allowed for the maintenance of a common status as defined by the 1914 Act, which essentially preserved British subjecthood without using the term, prevented any member of the Commonwealth from changing the common status without the consent of other members, and freed the Dominions to define their nationals as they saw fit.<sup>80</sup> The Canadian government swiftly passed a new nationality act that made virtually no alterations to Canadians' national status. Hertzog campaigned to establish a separate Dominion and Commonwealth nationality, but did not press the issue.<sup>81</sup> He faced criticism at home from Malan, who rejected British subjecthood.<sup>82</sup> Malan's "dual nationality" agitation failed to influence Hertzog, especially after Smuts entered the government in 1934.<sup>83</sup> The British and the Dominion representatives crafted a version of common status ambiguous enough to satisfy all but one of the Dominions.

Representatives of the Irish Free State rejected British subjecthood and all forms of common status. The 1914 British nationality act automatically covered Irish residents because all of Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom. At the 1930 Imperial Conference, Free State representatives pushed for what the Dominions Office called the "extreme view." Delegates called for each Dominion to gain its own national status and

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<sup>80</sup> Report 104/2 6137

<sup>81</sup> Commonwealth relations committee Oct. 1930, DO 35/104/2

<sup>82</sup> Malan speech, Nov. 3, 1932. Malan argued that shared status implicitly accepted the indivisibility of the Crown.

<sup>83</sup> Stallard's Dominion Party remained concerned about preserving South Africans' status as British subjects as evidenced by a peevish letter to the Dominions Office.

allow mutual privileges for other Commonwealth nationals.<sup>84</sup> The Dominions Office viewed this interpretation as a clear attempt to remove any connotation of British subjecthood or allegiance to the King.<sup>85</sup> One Dominions Office memorandum compared the Free State proposal to a pact between France, Germany, and Belgium to treat each others' nationals as citizens within their own borders.<sup>86</sup> The argument encapsulated the differences between the Free State and British view of the Commonwealth. The Free State representatives made sense for an international organization, while the British claims emphasized that the Commonwealth nations shared a common Crown. Free State representatives protested enough to stall any further discussion of the nature of common status at the 1930 Conference beyond the three ambiguous proposals.<sup>87</sup>

The dispute lay dormant until 1934, when the Free State passed a nationality law along the lines of its 1930 proposals. The stakes had grown since the Imperial Conference. The nationality bill fitted with de Valera's legislation that minimized links to Britain and the Crown. The new bill replaced common status with an Irish Free State nationality.<sup>88</sup> The British government objected to the proposals. One memorandum described it as a willful misinterpretation of the ODL Conference Report and attacked the Free State for changing Dominion nationality without consulting the other Dominions.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gwyer Report, Oct 17 DO 35/104/2

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Note on the discussions in 1929 and 1930 on the subject of nationality. It is undated, but seems to have been prepared as part of the British discussions of de Valera's 1934 citizenship act. DO/35112/1 6625

<sup>88</sup> Dowson memorandum, Mar. 21, 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

A British official argued that the Irish bill not only changed common status, but abolished it altogether. This interpretation rejected any mutual recognition of special privileges among Commonwealth countries as maintaining a meaningful common status.<sup>90</sup> Thomas wrote to de Valera to protest. He asserted that common status required allegiance to the king and accused the Free State of changing the common status without consulting the rest of the Commonwealth.<sup>91</sup> De Valera responded that no one in the Free State had ever agreed to the British interpretation of common status.<sup>92</sup>

De Valera and Thomas intensified their rhetoric as the bill worked its way through the Dáil. De Valera declared that there were no British subjects in the Free State and described any British attempt to claim otherwise as “impertinence.”<sup>93</sup> Thomas responded with a speech that linked the Commonwealth to the Crown.<sup>94</sup> He denied that the Irish Free State could take away British subjecthood from its nationals. De Valera rejected this basis for the Commonwealth in a debate in the Dáil.<sup>95</sup> He asserted that the Commonwealth was just another group of states, like a miniature League of Nations. When an opponent asked him if Britain was a foreign country he replied “I think so.”<sup>96</sup> This line worried Thomas enough to commission a report from the Attorney-General, Thomas Inskip, to ascertain whether the Irish Free State had in fact seceded from the

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> J.H. Thomas to de Valera, July 9, 1934 DO/35/112/1

<sup>92</sup> De Valera deptsach, Aug. 24. 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>93</sup> Inskip memo, Dec. 18, 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>94</sup> Thomas speech at Derby, Dec. 1, 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>95</sup> De Valera, speech at Dáil, Dec. 19, 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>96</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 14, 1934, quoted in DO/35/112/1

Commonwealth.<sup>97</sup> Inskip rejected de Valera's heretical interpretation of Dominion nationality and common status and advised Thomas to maintain that Irish Free State nationals were British subjects.

The citizenship bill had little effect on anything but rhetoric. Thomas explained to the Cabinet's Irish Situation Committee that arguing with the Free State government over the meaning of common status "seems useless."<sup>98</sup> The Dominions Office refused to acknowledge that the bill prevented the British Government from considering Free State nationals as British subjects. Frustrated officials fumed at what they perceived as de Valera's faulty interpretation. One memorandum characterized it as "based on a journey into the realm of legal, if not metaphysical refinements, into which it can only be hoped that it will not be necessary for the authorities here to follow him."<sup>99</sup> The debate over the constitutional implications of the nationalities legislation tapered off. British officials could do nothing but register their objections, and de Valera had made his point. The bill passed in 1935 along with an Aliens Bill that defined all non-Free State citizens as aliens, although it exempted nationals from the Commonwealth.<sup>100</sup> The incident passed without any sort of Constitutional calamity.

The abdication crisis provoked a Commonwealth constitutional crisis. King Edward VIII announced his plans to marry Wallis Simpson, a recently-divorced

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<sup>97</sup> Inskip memo, Dec. 18, 1934, DO/35/112/1

<sup>98</sup> Thomas ISC memo, Nov. 1934

<sup>99</sup> DO Note, undated but in reaction to de Valera's speech at the second reading on Jan. 18, 1935. DO/35/112/1

<sup>100</sup> McMahon, 143

American, in November, 1936. The Church and Parliament rejected Simpson as a Queen, and the Prime Minister advised Edward to abdicate. The issue of abdication and succession had consequences for the Dominions' relationship to the Crown. From a Commonwealth perspective, Edward had terrible timing. The Crown had become a sensitive issue in South Africa and the Irish Free State, and the royal scandal added to the pressure.

Both Hertzog and de Valera used the abdication crisis as an opportunity to test their theories about the Crown's relationship to the Dominions. Hertzog pushed the idea of the divided Crown. De Valera used the confusion to install a new Constitution that removed the Crown from the Free State's internal affairs and used it only for matters of foreign policy. De Valera had spelled out his idea for "external association" as early as 1921 and had already drawn up constitutional amendments before the scandal. The abdication crisis, however, allowed him to call an emergency Dáil session and pass it. In both cases, the rows over succession had virtually no effect on the operation of the Commonwealth. The question of the King's relationship to the Commonwealth remained a technical and abstract idea for constitutional lawyers. If anything, the disagreements about succession emphasized the importance of the Commonwealth's more tangible economic and strategic links.

The constitutional ramifications of abdication set off a predictable row between Hertzog and the Dominions Office over the divisibility of the Crown. They disagreed

about the date of the abdication.<sup>101</sup> Hertzog claimed that Edward had ceased to be king when he abdicated on December 10, 1936.<sup>102</sup> The British government argued that the abdication did not take force until each Dominion passed legislation acknowledging it. The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada all passed legislation on December 11.<sup>103</sup> The Dominions Office viewed the South African policy as a potential disaster. Its legal experts believed that Hertzog's reasoning had no merit and deviated from the Common Law treatment of the Crown. More importantly, the Dominions Office interpreted the South African ratification date as another Hertzog assertion of the divided Crown theory.<sup>104</sup> British officials bristled at the notion that South Africa could have a different King from the United Kingdom, even for a single day.

The South African aspect of the abdication crisis became farcical. South African political factions tied the crisis to their interpretation of the Commonwealth. The nationalist newspaper *Die Burger* published an article that insisted that Edward reigned in Britain while the new king, George VI, reigned in South Africa.<sup>105</sup> Hertzog vowed in Parliament never to surrender an inch of South Africa's constitutional liberty in response to a jeremiad from a predictably apoplectic Stallard.<sup>106</sup> Malan attempted to shoehorn a provision for secession into the abdication bill. The Dominions Office admonished

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<sup>101</sup> William Clark to Dominions Office, Dec. 28, 1936, DO/35/531/2/5. The British National Archives recently released this series of documents dealing with the constitutional ramifications of the Dominions. David McIntyre provides the first important analysis of them in *The Britannic Vision*.

<sup>102</sup> Clark telegram to Dominions Office, Jan. 11, 1937, DO/35/531/2/10.

<sup>103</sup> Malcolm Macdonald memorandum, Jan. 16, 1937, DO/35/531/2/12.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Die Burger*, Dec. 15, 1937. Supplied by Clark in his dispatch to the DO, Dec. 28, 1936, DO/35/531/2/5.

<sup>106</sup> Clark telegram to DO, Jan. 19, 1937. DO/35/531/2/14.

Hertzog for reading secret telegrams from the British government about the crisis in his Parliamentary speeches.<sup>107</sup> In the end, the South African parliament accepted the abdication on December 10. The bill had no effect on the Commonwealth relationship.

As with the Irish nationality bill, the British government stood helplessly by as a Dominion passed constitutionally repugnant legislation. The British government had no leverage with South Africa or the Irish Free State in this matter; politicians could not force Dominions out of the Commonwealth, nor could they prevent Dominions from leaving of their own free accord. Therefore, Dominion governments had a free hand to modify the Commonwealth relationship how they saw fit with virtually no consequences. The South African abdication date controversy provided a great example of how the Dominions Office had no choice but to surrender to Dominion governments and how these grave constitutional battles often had no real consequences.

The abdication crisis had a more serious consequence in the Free State when de Valera used it as an opportunity to pass a new constitution. De Valera's constitutional changes came in the midst of new Dominions Secretary Malcolm Macdonald's attempts to improve relations with the Free State. In May 1936, Macdonald submitted a memorandum outlining an ambitious plan to settle outstanding issues between Britain and the Free State.<sup>108</sup> The Coal/Cattle agreement had eased tensions, but the British and Free State governments still disagreed about land annuities payments, the position of the

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<sup>107</sup> Notes on a conversation between Clark and Batterbee, Jan. 25 1937, DO/35/531/2/18. Clark alleged that Hertzog selected passages from the secret telegrams to make it seem like Edward had wanted to make Simpson the Queen.

<sup>108</sup> Macdonald, Relations with the Free State Cabinet Memorandum, May, 1936, DO/35/399/3.

Crown, British defenses at Irish ports, and the Free State's exclusion from the Ottawa preferences. Macdonald hoped to negotiate a lump sum annuities payment and negotiate defense and trade treaties before the Coronation.<sup>109</sup> The tensions from the economic war had made it difficult for de Valera and Thomas to work together, and Macdonald saw his appointment as an opportunity for a fresh start.<sup>110</sup>

De Valera strained relations further with his proposals for a new constitution. The British government learned about the constitution in March of 1936. Officials received intelligence that revealed de Valera's plans to institute external association.<sup>111</sup> External association fitted within what he described as his “method of breaking the imperial ties by a gradual process.”<sup>112</sup> Dulanty notified Macdonald of de Valera's plans in June in a convoluted conversation that conveyed that de Valera wanted British officials to know about the new constitution while emphasizing that they had no right to know or do anything about it.<sup>113</sup> The new constitution would replace the Governor-General with a president and associate with the Crown only in foreign affairs. The changes tested the nature of the Commonwealth and allowed de Valera to treat it as an international organization with minimal acknowledgment of the Crown.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Deirde McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 167.

<sup>111</sup> Report of a conversation between Maj.-Gen. Sir George Franks and de Valera, March 22, 1936, DO/35/399/3.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Macdonald report on conversation with Dulanty, June 10, 1936, DO/35/399/4. Walshe, the Secretary of State for External Affairs accused the British government of “butting in” in Irish affairs when Macdonald informed the King of Irish intentions.

British officials viewed the new constitution as an attack on the Commonwealth. They had a difficult time refuting the changes because Dominion status remained an ill-defined concept. One of the most interesting interpretations came from Attorney-General Donald Somervell, who devised a formula for a minimum standard of Commonwealth association.<sup>114</sup> His three criteria involved recognition of the Crown as the symbol of free association, common allegiance to the Crown, and willingness to cooperate.<sup>115</sup> Somervell characterized de Valera's notions of external association as a violation of those fundamental principles. Despite Somerville's best efforts, there were no agreed criteria for Commonwealth membership. Macdonald told the Cabinet that it was possible that Britain and the Free State could disagree about whether the Free State had seceded.<sup>116</sup> Hailsham suggested treating the Free State as if it was not in the Commonwealth without expelling it. Ramsay Macdonald noted that the constitution threatened wholesale changes to the Commonwealth.<sup>117</sup> Malcolm Macdonald, however, maintained a more optimistic attitude. At worst, he claimed, the Free State would become a friendly foreign country.

The British government had no counter to de Valera's proposed changes. By July, Somervell and Macdonald had become convinced that the Free State could remain in the Commonwealth even with external association. De Valera assured Macdonald that he

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<sup>114</sup> Somervell memorandum on the right to secede, June 16, 1936, DO/35/399/4

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Irish Situation Committee Meeting, June 24, 1936, DO/35/399/4

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

planned to keep the Free State in the Commonwealth.<sup>118</sup> Their conversation highlighted the differences between the de Valera's vision for the Commonwealth and the British position. Macdonald emphasized the importance of the Crown as the bedrock of the Commonwealth and reminded de Valera that it helped justify imperial tariff preferences. De Valera countered that the will to cooperate meant more than any Crown connection or oath of allegiance. De Valera's views prevailed. The British government could not force de Valera to agree that the Commonwealth depended on the Crown without being prepared to force the Free State out. De Valera accepted the Commonwealth as a close-knit international organization bound only by cooperation. De Valera had plenty of reasons to remain in the Commonwealth. Tariff preferences offered an important boost to the Irish economy with its most important trading partner,<sup>119</sup> and de Valera saw full secession as an impediment to a united Ireland.

The abdication crisis put the constitutional reforms back into the spotlight. De Valera agreed with Hertzog that the abdication itself removed the King without any need for further legislation.<sup>120</sup> The British demand for a law confirming George VI's succession put pressure on de Valera. He warned the Dominions Office that the legislation would provoke a row in the Dáil that would feature numerous attacks on

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<sup>118</sup> Meeting between de Valera and Macdonald, July 7, 1936, DO/35/399/6

<sup>119</sup> Mike Cronin argues that no Dominion depended more on British markets than the Irish Free State. See Mike Cronin, "Golden dreams, harsh realities: economics and informal empire in the Irish Free State," in Cronin and Regan, eds., *Ireland: the politics of independence 1922-1949*, pp. 144-64.

<sup>120</sup> Conversation between Batterbee and de Valera, Nov. 29, 1936, DO 114/81

Britain and the monarchy.<sup>121</sup> The Free State, however, needed its own law; de Valera could not accept a British law as valid in the Free State. A Dominions Office official pointed out that the Free State had to act or Edward VIII could remain King of the Irish Free State. De Valera called an emergency session of the Dáil and used the opportunity to pass the constitutional reforms. The Dáil also passed a law acknowledging the succession, but accepted the succession on a different day than the rest of the Commonwealth. George VI technically became king in South Africa on December 10; in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, and the rest of the Empire on December 11; and in the Irish Free State on December 12.

The constitutional changes in the Irish Free State represented the most serious challenge to the Commonwealth status quo, but did not affect its operation. By January 1937, the British and Irish Free State governments agreed that the changes did not alter Commonwealth relationship. The British High Commissioner in Australia trenchantly observed that the new constitution reflected the reality of British relations with the Free State.<sup>122</sup> If anything, the constitutional changes considerably warmed Anglo-Irish relations and helped to better integrate the Free State into the fabric of the Commonwealth. De Valera even told Macdonald that he had taken reforms as far as he could and had become convinced that Ireland had achieved freedom within the

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Telegram from British High Commissioner in Australia to Dominions Office, Feb. 15, 1937, DO/35/890/11

Commonwealth.<sup>123</sup>

The financial settlement between Britain and the Free State (renamed “Eire, or, in the English language, Ireland” in the new constitution<sup>124</sup>) that came into effect in 1938 sacrificed the Crown for more tangible economic links. The financial agreement paid Britain £10,000,000 in a lump sum plus £250,000 annually, transferred three British-controlled ports to Eire, and put Eire on the Ottawa tariff regime.<sup>125</sup> Despite the constitutional change, Eire appeared to be more integrated into the Commonwealth than it had been since de Valera's election in 1932.<sup>126</sup> Much of the success came from the cooperation between de Valera and Macdonald. De Valera told Harding how much he liked working with Macdonald; when Macdonald returned to the Dominions Office after a brief reassignment, de Valera warmly welcomed him back.

The good feelings, however, did not last. De Valera hoped to use the momentum from his victories in constitutional reform to reunite Ireland under his leadership. The 1938 agreement gave him unrealistic expectations. De Valera seemed to believe that better relations with Britain could help him end partition. The Dominions Office observed, however, that the settlement had solved every major issue except partition and

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<sup>123</sup> Conversation between de Valera and Macdonald, Oct. 6, 1937, DO/35/897/4

<sup>124</sup> The renaming of the Free State caused a considerable amount of consternation for the British government. The Dominions Office refused to call the new state “Ireland” as they feared that it established a Free State claim over the entire island. British officials also bristled at having to learn how to pronounce Eire. In the end, the British government concluded that Eire presented least objectionable solution. See also Mary Daly, “The Irish Free State/Éire/The Republic of Ireland/Ireland: ‘A country by any other name?’” *Journal of British Studies*, 46:1 (Jan., 2007), pp. 72-90.

<sup>125</sup> DO 35/893/1

<sup>126</sup> According to Mike Cronin, the 1938 agreements made Eire a part of the informal empire. It also illustrated an acceptance of Ireland's dependence on the British economy despite revolutionary posturing.

therefore freed de Valera to focus all of his attention on it.<sup>127</sup> The British government refused to pressure Northern Ireland into leaving the United Kingdom. By 1939, the good feelings left from the settlement had evaporated in the midst of partition rancor.<sup>128</sup> Despite his bitter feelings toward Britain, de Valera had no plans to leave the Commonwealth. He told British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain that he had to continue to deal with Britain, and the Commonwealth provided more flexibility than a treaty.<sup>129</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, de Valera had proven that his radical constitutional innovations could coexist with the Commonwealth. Imperialist thinkers, however, had begun to question whether they should. Keith had supported the technical constitutionality of de Valera's reforms,<sup>130</sup> but ably raised the point of why he wanted to associate with the Commonwealth at all:

I know that objection is taken by Mr. de Valera and Dr Malan, but do they really believe in the Commonwealth? Or is it worth while trying by dissolving all reality in the Commonwealth to retain in it members whose relations are based on real will? Is it in the real interests of the Commonwealth to interpose obstacles to the secession of the Irish Free State or the Union [of South Africa]? It is impossible for us at present to regard the position of the Irish Free State as other than membership enforced by fear of consequences.

Amery seemed to be all too willing to rid the Commonwealth of Ireland. He labeled Ireland “an achilles heel of Empire” and warned recalcitrant republicans that “the advance of Imperial unity will leave a faded and shrivelled Erin keening her

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<sup>127</sup> Dominions Office note on partition, Feb., 1939, DO/35/893/7

<sup>128</sup> Devonshire to Harding, Feb. 1, 1939, DO/35/893/6

<sup>129</sup> Conversation between De Valera and Chamberlain, March 25, 1937, DO/35/893/7

<sup>130</sup> Inskip blamed Keith for pointing out a loophole in de Valera's nationality legislation that de Valera closed. Inskip memorandum on Irish nationality, Dec. 18, 1934. DO/35/112/1

unintelligible grievance to the Atlantic waves.” Imperial reformers maintained their metaphysical or even spiritual understanding of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, however, had become an international organization bound by trade pacts and defense arrangements.

### **DEFENSE, NEUTRALITY AND WAR**

The constitutional issues affected Dominion neutrality and belligerency. The extent of Dominion participation in British wars had been a crucial issue in the earliest days of the Commonwealth. Mackenzie King refused to participate in a British war without Parliamentary assent during the Chanak Crisis in 1922, and the 1925 Locarno Treaties specifically excluded the Dominions from British military obligations in Europe. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the British and Dominion governments passed responsibility for war to the League of Nations. The Dominions would agree to fight as part of the League’s collective security. By the late 1930s, the League of Nations had failed to keep the peace and nations formed blocs of alliances. The military arm of the Commonwealth had become a vital matter of imperial security.

The Dominions Office files from the late 1930s revealed the British government's lack of preparation for the possibility of Dominion neutrality. Britain’s War Book, the document laying out Britain’s major strategies, counted on participation from all of the

Dominions as late as 1938.<sup>131</sup> British officials clung to the constitutional theory of an undivided sovereignty. The King could either be at war in all of his dominions or none. The British government had failed to uphold the undivided sovereignty doctrine against virtually every Irish or South African challenge in the 1930s. By 1938, a Dominions Office official admitted that “constitutional theories have to give way to the march of events.”<sup>132</sup> The British government continued to hope that the League of Nations could prevent conflict with the Dominions over imperial security. As late as December 1938, a Dominions Office memo suggested that the Dominions would enter a potential war under the auspices of Article 16 of the League Covenant, which called for collective security.<sup>133</sup> The suggestion was the last resort of a desperate department; a Dominions Office memo from a year earlier had described the League of Nations as “crumbling before our eyes.”<sup>134</sup>

Dominion neutrality undermined the British understanding of Dominion status. British officials considered the Crown the most important Commonwealth link. Neutrality fitted with issues like rejection of British subjecthood, secession-mongering, claims about the divisibility of the Crown, and external association on a growing list of Dominion actions that undermined the British interpretation. The Dominions Office approached neutrality as an attack on the Commonwealth's integrity. The Dominions Office denounced neutrality as an impossible heresy in a 1937 memorandum:

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<sup>131</sup> Clark to Harding, Nov. 28, 1938, DO/35/540/1

<sup>132</sup> Dominions Office note on the position of Eire, Sept. 1938, DO/35/543/12.

<sup>133</sup> Dixon memorandum on probable actions of the Dominions in case of war, c. Dec. 1938, DO/35/540/1.

<sup>134</sup> Batterbee memorandum, Dec. 1937, DO/35/543/12

'Common belligerency' has hitherto been generally regarded as one of the axioms of the British Commonwealth and it has been assumed that the abandonment of this doctrine would mean the end of the Commonwealth to the extent that any Member of the Commonwealth which declared itself neutral could no longer be regarded as a member.<sup>135</sup>

The Dominions Office, however, remained pragmatic. The same memorandum suggested that officials devise a “halfway house” policy to enable Dominions to avoid fighting without challenging Commonwealth orthodoxy.<sup>136</sup> The “halfway house” policy would confuse foreign observers, but Batterbee observed that foreign countries should be used to unique and abnormal Commonwealth arrangements that confounded international law.<sup>137</sup>

The British strategy focused on preventing Dominion declarations of neutrality. Officials offered Dominion governments the option of “non-active participation” or “sympathetic (or benevolent) aloofness.”<sup>138</sup> Under this scheme, governments would call up British reservists and pensioners, detain enemy shipping and aircraft, intern enemy civilians, censor the press, supply materials to the United Kingdom while denying the enemy, allow use of ports by British warships, and sever diplomatic links to the enemy.<sup>139</sup> The Dominions Office explained to British High Commissioners in Canada, Australia, and South Africa that neutrality, as recognized by international law, was incompatible with Commonwealth membership and warned that a formal declaration would provoke

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Dominions Office memorandum: Probable actions in case of war, Dec. 1938, DO/35/540/1. The memorandum offered predictions for how each Dominion would react to a declaration of war.

<sup>139</sup> Probable actions, Dec. 1938

grave constitutional difficulties.<sup>140</sup> The Dominions Office advised them to do all they could to prevent the Dominions from issuing a formal declaration of neutrality.

The neutrality question created informal subcategories for the Dominions. The Dominions Office put them in three tiers based on likely participation.<sup>141</sup> Britain could count on Australia and New Zealand, and officials began planning for war in 1938. The plan called for New Zealand and Australian troops to garrison Singapore.<sup>142</sup> British officials remained confident in Canadian participation, although Mackenzie King asserted Canada's right to neutrality. South Africa and Eire seriously considered neutrality in a European war.<sup>143</sup> The varying responses showed how Dominion governments differed in their understanding of the Commonwealth.

Mackenzie King steadfastly insisted that only the Canadian Parliament could declare war for Canada. He sympathized with Britain, but attempted to avoid any public statements that committed Canada to a British war. He did not want to upset Canadian isolationists, but his silence exposed him to attacks from people he called “imperialists and jingos.”<sup>144</sup> He told the British High Commissioner that he felt confident that Parliament would vote for war, and agreed with the Commissioner’s quip that “we possibly have to thank Hitler for the change in attitude in Roman Catholic French

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<sup>140</sup> Telegram to British High Commissioners in Canada, Australia, South Africa, Sept. 28, 1938, DO/35/540/1.

<sup>141</sup> Dominions Office memorandum on probable actions in event of war, Dec. 1938, DO/35/540/1. A similar document reassessed the situation in 1939, DO/35/543/13.

<sup>142</sup> Memorandum on Australian Defense, April 27, 1938. DO/35/543/1. Memorandum on New Zealand defense, May 17, 1938, *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Probable actions, Dec. 1938

<sup>144</sup> Gerald Campbell (UK High Commissioner in Canada) to Harding, Dec. 8, 1938, DO/35/540/1

Canada.”<sup>145</sup> King's speeches, however, occasionally flummoxed British observers. He continued to bristle at any British mention of “consultation” with Canada in foreign policy. He preferred to emphasize his nation’s independence in foreign affairs. Even in early 1939, King would not commit to joining a European alliance, especially one including the Soviet Union. He also claimed that Canadians would not fight in any war that started from conflict in the Balkans or North Africa. The High Commissioner observed that King hoped to stay out of a European conflict as long as possible, barring a direct attack on Britain, France, Switzerland or the Low Countries.<sup>146</sup> The Dominions Office, however, remained confident of Canada's wartime support.

South Africa’s politicians made neutrality an important national issue. Hertzog's alliance with Smuts and split with Malan intensified Malan's calls for neutrality and dampened Smuts's pro-Commonwealth rhetoric. Both Hertzog and Smuts used international organizations to avoid questions about Commonwealth military arrangements. Smuts emphasized South Africa's obligations to the League of Nations, the Kellogg Pact, and the Dominions' specific exclusion from the Locarno Pacts. Hertzog dismissed notions of neutrality as “academic” and “gogga,” a South African expression likening the issue to a small, pesky insect.<sup>147</sup> By 1935, the naval base at Simonstown had become the catalyst for debate. Both Malan and Hertzog agreed that the legal relationship between Simonstown and South Africa paralleled the status of Gibraltar to

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Smuts speech at the Cape Nationalist Congress at Port Elizabeth, Oct. 4, 1933, quoted in Wallinger report, DO/35/108/6.

Spain.<sup>148</sup> Malan, however, argued that South Africa should give Simonstown to Britain to end any debate about South Africa's responsibility to defend it. Hertzog disagreed. He belittled Malan for offering to give away territory before becoming president of his hypothetical republic<sup>149</sup> and viewed the defense of Simonstown as a binding South African obligation.<sup>150</sup>

Hertzog remained a staunch advocate of the right to neutrality. South African neutrality in the late 1930s rested on three central tenets. One associated neutrality with South Africa's freedom as a member of the Commonwealth, bound to fight only by the will of its people. Another related to isolationism. Charles te Water, the South African High Commissioner in London, told Malcolm Macdonald in September 1938 that Hertzog could not commit to fighting a war over Czechoslovakia.<sup>151</sup> Finally, a politically significant section of Nationalist opinion supported Germany. Hertzog contacted Neville Chamberlain in March 1939 and urged him not to encircle Germany.<sup>152</sup> Support for fascism grew in the extremist wings of the Purified Nationalists.<sup>153</sup> Hertzog remained dedicated to his own interpretation of neutrality that allowed South Africa to fulfill its

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<sup>148</sup> Hertzog speech at House of Assembly, Feb. 19, 1935, in *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Hertzog speech at Bethal, Nov. 29, 1935, in *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Oswald Pirow statement, April 15, 1935, in *Ibid.* Pirow explained Hertzog's views in response to a question. Pirow was the Minister of Defense.

<sup>151</sup> Conversation between Charles te Water and Malcolm Macdonald, Sept. 27, 1938, DO/35/540/1.

<sup>152</sup> Hertzog to Neville Chamberlain, March, 1939, DO/35/576/6

<sup>153</sup> See Patrick J. Furlong, *Between crown and swastika: the impact of the radical right on the Afrikaner Nationalist movement in the fascist era*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1991). Furlong traces the parallels between fascist racial policies in South Africa and Europe and argues that the extremes gained enough influence to radicalize the Purified Nationalist Party by 1939. His chapters on the lead-up to the Second World War, however, give the impression that serious fascists remained a minority even within the nationalist movement, and most Afrikaner support for Germany came from resistance to British imperialism and sympathy for Germany as a victim of the Treaty of Versailles.

obligations to Simonstown into September 1939.<sup>154</sup> Clark urged Chamberlain to appeal to Hertzog. Chamberlain sent a telegram to Hertzog on September 2 that urged him to join the other Dominions at war. South Africa declared war only after a high-handed imperial intervention. Patrick Duncan, the Governor-General, refused Hertzog's request for a dissolution of Parliament after it defeated his neutrality bill.<sup>155</sup> Duncan then invited Smuts to form a government, and Smuts put together a coalition that entered the war.

De Valera held fast to the right to neutrality. He had already challenged Commonwealth solidarity on foreign policy in late 1937 when preparing to send a diplomat to represent Eire in Italy. The letters of credence that his government submitted to the King accredited the Irish minister to the King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia. The British government had not yet recognized Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. Harding begged Walshe not to put the British government in such an embarrassing position before the British had a chance to negotiate with Italy.<sup>156</sup> Keith concluded that the united Crown meant that de Valera could unilaterally force the King to recognize Italy's conquest.<sup>157</sup>

De Valera appeared willing to cooperate in defense matters during the negotiations for the 1938 financial agreements. He wanted the British government to return the ports of Berehaven, Cobh (Queenstown), and Lough Swilly that Britain controlled as part of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. De Valera told Malcolm Macdonald in

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<sup>154</sup> Telegram from Clark to Dominions Office, September 2, 1939, DO/35/543/13.

<sup>155</sup> Clark to Dominions Office, Sept. 6, 1939, DO/35/543/13

<sup>156</sup> Conversation between Harding, Dulanty, and Walshe, Dec. 1937, DO/35/892/3.

<sup>157</sup> Keith addresses his frustration with the possible Irish recognition of the King of Italy as Emperor of Ethiopia in a number of articles and letters to the editor in KP 149/2.

1936 that, if Britain returned the ports, the Irish Free State would cooperate with Britain in organizing defenses and would spend money to modernize them.<sup>158</sup> It is unclear whether de Valera had sincerely intended to cooperate with Britain on port defenses. At the meeting with Macdonald, he offered to lavish spending on the ports as a replacement for land annuity payments.<sup>159</sup> By the time of the settlement talks, de Valera had made the port defenses part of his demand for an end to partition. He suggested that a united Ireland would cooperate fully with Britain on matters of defense.<sup>160</sup> The British delegation surprised de Valera by offering the ports unconditionally.<sup>161</sup> British officials happily passed the expense of maintaining the ports onto Eire.<sup>162</sup> De Valera tried to use the war as leverage to push for unification. He remained committed to friendly neutrality, but warned Inskip that the neutrality would be friendly only if partition ended.

Irish neutrality complicated Commonwealth military preparations. The British government continued to treat Eire as an exceptional Dominion. One example of this awkward arrangement involved the supply of secret defense papers to the Commonwealth. British officials had limited Free State access to secret papers during the economic war because they worried about potential leaks. They reconsidered Irish access to papers from the Committee of Imperial Defense (CID) after the Financial Agreement, but worried about sending papers “likely to be of value to any evilly disposed

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<sup>158</sup> Conversation between de Valera and Macdonald, July 7, 1936, DO/35/399/4

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> McMahon, 243

<sup>161</sup> According to an interview between McMahon and Batterbee, *Ibid.*, 244

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

persons.”<sup>163</sup> By mid-1938, Dulanty began attending CID meetings. Walshe requested several key defense documents, including the War Book, and received them. The British government changed its tune in 1939. De Valera planned to hire a military officer to assist with defense preparations. He refused to accept a British adviser, but the British government hoped he would select someone from the Commonwealth. De Valera planned to appoint a French officer instead. The British Air Ministry refused to share its air training manuals with Eire because officials claimed that they did not want it falling into French hands. The protest was hollow; the French adviser never took his post. British officials relented in May and sent the documents.

Irish neutrality set Eire apart from the rest of the Commonwealth. The experience of neutrality, however, may have had more serious constitutional than practical effects. Eire's friendly neutrality overlapped to some extent with British expectations for “passive belligerency.” Two CID officials noted that Eire's most important contributions to a war would involve censorship and economic pressure.<sup>164</sup> In the early days of the war, Eire cooperated with British officials on censorship.<sup>165</sup> Eire's most hostile official action involved the maintenance of official communication with Germany throughout the war in opposition to British wishes.<sup>166</sup> Irish intelligence forces, however, often cooperated with their British counterparts to monitor the German legation. According to Euanan

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<sup>163</sup> Dominions Office note, May 4, 1938, DO/35/543/2

<sup>164</sup> Dixon note of conversation with Col. Ismay and Bridges, June 22, 1938, DO/35/543/2

<sup>165</sup> Paul Canning, *British policy towards Ireland 1921-1941*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 256.

<sup>166</sup> Inskip insisted to Dulanty that severing relations with Germany could also occur in peacetime and in no way threatened Irish neutrality, DO/35543/13

O’Halpin’s account of British intelligence operations in Ireland, the British had secured greater cooperation from a neutral Eire than they would have received from an Eire coerced into the war.<sup>167</sup>

Dominion neutrality had less of an effect on the Commonwealth than British officials had feared. By September 6, 1939, the entire British Empire except for Eire had joined the war. Commonwealth officials collaborated in their war preparations. Even Eire's neutrality favored the Allies.<sup>168</sup> The Commonwealth evolved into a flexible international organization that accommodated constitutional shifts. The Commonwealth that entered the Second World War, however, had diverged from the spirit of the Commonwealth that imperialist intellectuals celebrated. De Valera and Hertzog's vision of the Commonwealth as a looser international organization scrubbed clean of imperial sentiment hardly matched the spiritual harmony that Amery and Zimmern described. Harding noted before the war that any declaration should involve countries and not the king; to involve the Crown only invited Dominion dissension.<sup>169</sup> Eire's neutrality added a fatal blow to a Commonwealth united under the Crown. Neutrality proved that the Commonwealth could remain a viable collection of friendly states only by rethinking the fundamental basis of cooperation and association.

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<sup>167</sup> Euanan O’Halpin, *Spying on Ireland: British intelligence and Irish neutrality during the second world war*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>168</sup> Canning mentions that the government of Eire allowed British airplanes forced to land in Ireland to refuel and get away, rerouted cables to the United States through London to avoid German espionage, and censored the press. Canning, 257-8.

<sup>169</sup> Dominions Office memorandum, Sept. 18, 1937, DO/35/543/12

## CONCLUSION

International and constitutional crises challenged fundamental assumptions about the Dominions' relationship to Britain and to each other in the late 1930s. Imperialist intellectuals argued that the disintegration of the League meant that the Commonwealth had become more important than ever. The two strands of thinking that compared it to the League had never diverged more. The internationalist strand, led by Zimmern, argued that the Commonwealth's most important task was to model international relations for the rest of the world. He sought to “Britannicise” the struggling League by inculcating other nations with the Commonwealth's spirit of cooperation and harmony. The British Empire, in this model, would lead by example to prevent the collapse of the international order. The anti-internationalist strand, personified by Amery, deprecated the League. Amery claimed that a strong, economically integrated Empire would allow Britain to disengage with Europe. He used Commonwealth cooperation as a model for regional integration across the globe. Britain and the Empire would remain in its own bloc. Both of these strands lionized the Commonwealth as a new type of relationship among states.

Amery and Zimmern spread their Commonwealth propaganda even as the Commonwealth fell into a series of constitutional crises. The Dominions Office weathered constant attacks on constitutional norms and official assumptions about the nature of the Commonwealth itself. These attacks, led by the Irish Free State and South Africa, represented nationalist governments lashing out against the vestiges of imperialism. In many ways, however, de Valera and Hertzog's constitutional innovations

provided an alternative interpretation of the Commonwealth relationship that transformed it into a looser collection of sovereign nations united by tangible interests instead of by the Crown. Issues such as secession, Dominion nationality instead of British subjecthood, the divided Crown, external association, and neutrality forced the British government to choose between Commonwealth unity and constitutional pedantry.

Irish and South African changes undermined the importance of the Crown in Commonwealth affairs. De Valera and Hertzog continued to espouse the theory of the divided Crown, which held that each Dominion had a separate King who happened to be the same person. British official opinion viewed this interpretation as heresy. Officials, however, could do little by the late 1930s to stop the Dominions from implementing policies based on it. The divided crown influenced the development of Dominion nationalism. De Valera rejected British subjecthood. He argued that Dominion governments should make mutual arrangements to extend privileges to other Commonwealth nationals. British officials viewed this innovation as a precursor to secession. The divided Crown also became prominent during the abdication crisis. Hertzog and de Valera recognized George VI's succession on different days from the rest of the Commonwealth. In the case of South Africa, the date controversy resulted in little more than an absurd debate between British and South African officials. In the case of the Irish Free State, the abdication opened the door for de Valera's new constitution that divorced the King from his nation's internal policies and acted through him only in external affairs. British officials viewed the constitution as a declaration of a republic in all but name, and once again questioned whether de Valera had seceded. The Irish and

South African assertions made it difficult for British officials to claim that the Crown was the most important link between Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth relationship began to rest more on economic and strategic links.

The constitutional controversies, however, had little effect on the operations of the Commonwealth. Hertzog's assertions of the right to secession and South African nationality never became policy, especially after a union with his more imperially-minded rival, Smuts. De Valera's changes radically altered the relationship to the Crown, but little else. British officials pointed to some hypothetical problems for Free State citizens in Britain and abroad. Irish officials embarrassed Britain by requesting letters of credence from the King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia, which threatened to force the king to recognize the conquest of Ethiopia before doing so on the advice of his British ministers. The nature of the relationship between the Irish Free State or Eire and Britain, however, remained nearly identical. The new constitution and erosion of the Crown made de Valera more amenable to working with Britain. The 1938 Financial Agreement normalized Anglo-Irish economic relations and put Eire on the Ottawa tariff system. Britain traded shared fealty to a largely ceremonial monarchy for a stronger economic partnership.

The neutrality issue had larger stakes than other constitutional problems. The Crown served as an important symbol of the Commonwealth's military alliance. The transformation of the Commonwealth into a loose international organization, however, undermined the idea of a united Empire rallying forth under the King's banner. The

League of Nations and other international pacts had solved the neutrality problem by allowing British and Dominion governments to couch conflict in terms of collective security. All of the Dominions had agreed to fight together as members of the League; they made no such assurances for the Commonwealth. Neutrality, however, remained more of a rhetorical device than reality. All but Eire joined the war (although South Africa required a new government and replaced Hertzog with Smuts). The neutrality question highlighted the increasing importance of the Dominions' regional security concerns and national interests.

The turmoil of the 1930s provided the Commonwealth with a legacy of flexibility and adaptation to circumstance. British officials met virtually every challenge to the Crown with either outright or tacit acceptance. They had no way to impose imperial expectations without forcing countries out of the Commonwealth. British intellectuals and policymakers reluctantly accepted a Commonwealth that functioned more like an international institution. The Commonwealth in 1940 had become virtually unrecognizable from its 1920 form. The ability to change, however, allowed the Commonwealth to endure.<sup>170</sup> Even in its adulterated form, the Commonwealth remained more vital than most of the internationalist organizations from the 1920s and 1930s.

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<sup>170</sup> Holland, 209.

## Chapter VIII: Federal Union

The collapse of the League of Nations in the late 1930s and the beginning of another world war presented writers, scholars, and politicians with another opportunity to reshape the world order. The League's failure to prevent another cataclysm weighed heavily on ardent internationalists who tried to dissect what had gone wrong. The result was an outpouring of articles, books, pamphlets, and columns detailing peace aims and schemes for new international organizations, much like plans devised in the early years of the First World War. One particular branch blamed international tension and economic problems on national sovereignty and advocated for various types of federations involving European, Anglo-American, and even world-wide unions. Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr, champions of imperial federation before the First World War, gained an enthusiastic audience. Imperial federation, however, no longer sufficed to stave off war. They expanded their federation plans to include the entire world.

Federalists abandoned the Commonwealth as a model for international relations. Its evolution since the Paris Peace Conference ran at cross-purposes to the fundamental assumptions behind federation. Federal movements by and large blamed state sovereignty and national interest for the rise in international tension. Federalists argued that national self-interest undermined international cooperation in trade and monetary policy and created an overwhelming obsession with national security. They suggested that sovereign states directed their money and resources towards their war machines, prevented disarmament, and created international power blocs that threatened to turn

local conflicts into world wars. Federalists looked to the history of the United States and compared the competing system of sovereign states with the unwieldy alliance of American republics under the Articles of Confederation. The most influential and widely-discussed work on federation, *Union Now* by the American journalist Clarence Streit, proposed a world federation based on the United States constitution.<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth, on the other hand, had become an organization dedicated to Dominion sovereignty. Federalists were not inclined to emulate an organization that resembled the League of Nations.

Federation schemes revealed the difficulty of integrating the Commonwealth with other nations. Federalists proposed plans that combined the British Empire with the United States or Europe or both. The federalists' attempts to combine the Commonwealth with other groups of nations created problems. A European federation focused on European problems had little value for Australia or New Zealand. The antipodean Dominions and Canada clearly fit better with the United States and shared its security interests in the Pacific. Most federalists, however, planned a larger role for Britain in Europe after the war. The fate of India and the non-self-governing dependencies provoked even more difficulties. Federalism, therefore, inadvertently raised questions about how the British Empire could remain a unit after the war.

The brief popularity of the federation movement in Britain has attracted relatively little attention from historians. John Kendle and Michael Burgess discuss federation in

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence Streit, *Union Now: A proposal for a federal union of the democracies of the North Atlantic*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1939).

the context of British federal schemes involving the Empire, Ireland, and the Home Countries dating back to the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Another school of thought positions imperial federation as an antecedent of post-war European integration.<sup>3</sup> Andrea Bosco in particular names Kerr as a father of European federalism.<sup>4</sup> These works provide important accounts of the origins and progress of the movement and help disentangle the web of competing federal schemes in the late 1930s.

This chapter examines the relationship between federation movements and Commonwealth ideology in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It examines three aspects of the British federation movement. First, it shows how Kerr's growing belief in Anglo-American union incorporated the United States into his Commonwealth ideology. Second, it examines *Civitas Dei*, Curtis's plea for world federation couched within an eccentric, sprawling mix of history and theology. Curtis's three-volume work described the Commonwealth as a divine mission and advocated union between Britain and Australia or New Zealand as the beginning of a world federation. Finally, it looks at Curtis and Kerr's involvement in the transatlantic federal union movement. Curtis and Kerr's ideas mingled with a diverse group of ambitious federal schemes that became

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<sup>2</sup> John Kendle, *Federal Britain: a history*, (London: Routledge, 1997) and Michael Burgess, *The British tradition of federalism*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Mayne and John Pinder with John C. de V. Roberts, *Federal Union: the pioneers*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Andrea Bosco, "Lord Lothian and the federalist critique of national sovereignty" in David Long and Peter Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis: inter-war idealism reassessed*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 247-276, Andrea Bosco, "Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-40)," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, (July 1988), p. 482, and "Chatham House and Federalism," in Andrea Bosco and Cornelia Navari, eds., *Chatham House and British foreign policy 1919-45: the Royal Institute of International Affairs during the inter-war period*, (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1994), pp. 318-335.

dominated by Anglo-American or European federation models. The wider scope of federalism in the late 1930s marginalized the Commonwealth as the basis for international order.

### **PHILIP KERR AND THE TYRANNY OF SOVEREIGN STATES**

Philip Kerr grew disillusioned with the prospect of world peace through the Commonwealth and the League of Nations in the 1930s. In 1931, he wrote to Patrick Duncan, a South African politician and fellow member of Milner's kindergarten, that he hoped the Statute of Westminster had quelled Dominion separatism enough to devote energy to unity.<sup>5</sup> "Though the old Commonwealth has looked pretty dicky during the last few years," he wrote "I am not sure that it isn't really beginning to take a new lease of life."<sup>6</sup> The Commonwealth, however, soon became embroiled in controversy. The next year, Britain started a trade war with the Irish Free State and engaged in acrimonious negotiations with the Dominions over tariff preferences. Kerr, a staunch liberal, saw the Ottawa Agreements as an attack on Commonwealth unity and a betrayal of British principles. He joined Herbert Samuel and other Liberals in resigning from the government.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kerr to Duncan, Jan. 15, 1931. LP 247

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Kerr was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India

The Ottawa Agreements fitted Kerr's criticisms of the League of Nations and international politics. He labeled the proliferation of tariffs in response to the Depression as "economic nationalism" that only worsened economic problems and created a state of economic warfare in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The rancorous Ottawa Conference and collapse of the 1933 London Economic Conference emphasized what Kerr saw as a triumph of national self-interest over the good of humanity. The failure of the World Disarmament Conference further disillusioned him with sputtering international organizations.<sup>9</sup>

Kerr identified national sovereignty as the culprit behind international tension. He had long felt that national states left their goodwill at their frontiers and relations between states were lawless and chaotic.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-1930s, Kerr became convinced that national self-interest had become the single greatest threat to world peace. He delivered a lecture for the Burge Memorial Trust entitled *Pacifism is Not Enough (Nor Patriotism Either)* in 1935 that outlined the evils of sovereign states.<sup>11</sup> Kerr rejected both capitalism and nationalism as causes for war. He cast them instead as symptoms of conflicts caused by the disputes between sovereign states. Kerr argued that national self-

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<sup>8</sup> Kerr, Queen's Hall Liberal Meeting, Oct. 12, 1932. LP 435 In a 1930 Round Table article on the future of the Commonwealth, he wrote that he agreed with Cobden that free trade corresponded to peace and tariffs to war. "Where are we going?" LP 429

<sup>9</sup> The World Disarmament Conference met from 1932-1934, but failed to secure any agreements. Germany withdrew from the conference in 1933. See Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching, "Britain and the World Disarmament Conference," in Peter Caterall and C.J. Morris, eds., *Britain and the threat to stability in Europe, 1918-1945*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 35-56.

<sup>10</sup> Kerr, second lecture at Williamstown Institute of Politics, Aug, 18, 1922. LP 503

<sup>11</sup> Philip Lothian, *Pacifism is not enough (nor patriotism either)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935). The Burge memorial lectures were given in honor of the Right Rev. Hubert Murray Burge, and were dedicated to "forward the cause of international friendship through the Churches and to promote a better and wider understanding of the international obligations of Christian peoples."

interest created artificial barriers to trade and strangled economic growth across borders.<sup>12</sup> Socialism, he claimed, offered no solution; even if every country in the world became socialist, they all would work for their own economic interests.<sup>13</sup> Nationalism in itself did not bother Kerr. He found it dangerous only when it became conflated with hostility to other states.<sup>14</sup> The central problem, according to Kerr, was that sovereign states inherently acted out of self-interest and obsession with national security:

Hence it is the anarchy of sovereign states...which stresses the separateness of every citizen from his fellow man elsewhere, which encourages him to look at international problems only from his own national point of view—to view with fear and suspicion every act by another state which may affect his own state's security or prosperity, to confuse national selfishness and self-consciousness with the great virtue of patriotism.<sup>15</sup>

Kerr saw the League's dependence on sovereign states as its fatal flaw. He defended the League's ideals of peace and international justice, but claimed that it could not function as an organization of sovereign states.<sup>16</sup> Kerr found the idea of a league as fundamentally doomed. He cited the familiar Round Table examples of the League of Delos and the American states under the Articles of Confederation as proof that all leagues inevitably dissolve.<sup>17</sup> Kerr presented four specific reasons why the League of Nations had collapsed. First, the League represented sovereign states with representatives that acted only for their national interests. The League did nothing to

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<sup>12</sup> Kerr, *Pacifism*, 12-13

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 15-16

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 16

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 25

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 27

foster a world or even European patriotism.<sup>18</sup> Second, the Assembly and Council had no real power and, therefore, the League could not compel members to act.<sup>19</sup> Third, the League could not revise a treaty, modify a tariff, or make any significant political change without the consent of all parties involved. Kerr argued that no government would ever consent to a policy that harmed its national interests. Therefore, states refused to cooperate on mutually beneficial policies such as disarmament because they remained focused on national security.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the only way to enforce change came down to war or the threat of war.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the League at root functioned as a global military alliance capable of turning local disputes into world wars.<sup>22</sup>

Kerr maintained that a world federation offered the only solution to international chaos. Peace, he explained, was more than the absence of war; it was a state of society that resolved political, economic, and social issues under rule of law and prohibited violence between any groups, parties, or nations.<sup>23</sup> He argued that a group of sovereign states could never achieve true peace. Kerr pointed out that states enforced peace within their own borders.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Kerr sought to create a single world government that made nations accountable to a single authority that destroyed artificial economic barriers, arms races, and other symptoms of international chaos.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 28

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 28

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 28-9

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 29. Kerr included sanctions as inherent acts of war.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 39

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 7

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8

The lecture lacked a detailed plan for this world government. Kerr favored federation. He did not spell out any details, but called for a global federal government with executive, legislative, and judicial powers, and the ability to tax and claim the exclusive loyalty of its citizens.<sup>25</sup> The federal government that he described closely resembled the Round Table program for imperial federation. A footnote in the printed version directed readers to Curtis's *Commonwealth of Nations* for further details.<sup>26</sup> He referred to the global federation as a Commonwealth of Nations. Kerr maintained his vision for imperial federation expanded to a global scope.

Kerr presented power blocs and alliances as alternatives to his world federation. He noted in the Burge Lecture that the "ominous vertebrae of the world alliance system" had begun to appear.<sup>27</sup> Kerr admitted that alliances could temporarily stave off war.<sup>28</sup> Alliances, he warned, put all international problems in terms of might and security instead of justice and reason. They inevitably escalate local problems to world wars.<sup>29</sup> Kerr, however, accepted the idea of a Western power bloc involving the British Empire,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 41

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 41

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 44

<sup>28</sup> Despite his disdain for alliances, Kerr remained pragmatic about keeping Britain out of war. His calls for appeasement in the late 1930s remain the most controversial aspects of his career. As his biographers have noted, Kerr battled accusations of conspiracy with the so-called "Cliveden set" that sympathized with the Nazis. These biographies, and his papers, show dispel any traces of conspiracy. Kerr spent time at Cliveden, with the Astors, but his connections were friendly and religious. Nancy Astor introduced him to Christian Science and remained one of his most intimate friends. Kerr's sympathies lay with the German people rather than the Nazis, and he hoped that revising the Treaty of Versailles and creating better conditions would convince them to throw off the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, Kerr's connections to Germany certainly revealed either a cynical pragmatism or a bewildering naiveté. When he met Hitler in 1937, he told him that the British would rather see Eastern Europe under German influence than Soviet influence. Both biographies of Kerr reject the "Cliveden Set" conspiracy theories. See David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the quest of world order*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International), 2006 and J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, (London: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 45

France, and the United States. He claimed that the combined might of the three democracies could control the oceans and form an invulnerable bloc that no other state could challenge, much like the *Pax Britannica* of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The proposal reflected his speeches about the Kellogg Pact in the late 1920s. He saw the Anglo-American domination of the seas as the reason why the Pact could succeed. Kerr also floated a scheme for an alliance between the Empire and the greater American sphere of interest. He suggested extending the Monroe Doctrine to the Dominions and South America or a customs and defense union between the Imperial Conference and the Pan-American Conference.<sup>31</sup>

Kerr's turn to world federation and rejection of the League of Nations coincided with his diminishing faith in the strategic unity of the British Commonwealth. He wrote a memorandum for the Round Table in 1934 that claimed that the relations between Britain and the Dominions in defense and decisions about peace and war were the same questions that prompted the Kindergarten to form the Round Table.<sup>32</sup> He became increasingly pessimistic about the Dominions' potential war-time support. Kerr wrote to Loring Christie, a Canadian foreign affairs official and Round Table member, that he hoped the 1937 Imperial Conference could lead to a "real show-down" between Britain and the Dominions over foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> The tension centered on Britain's actions in Europe. The Dominion governments wanted to avoid fighting in another European war.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid 46-7

<sup>31</sup> Kerr's articles "League or Monroe Doctrine?" and "Collective Security or Monroe Doctrine?" appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1936. LP 443

<sup>32</sup> Kerr, memorandum to Round Table, April 30, 1934, LP 277

<sup>33</sup> Kerr to Christie, Jan. 18, 1937, LP 327

Kerr told Christie that imperial sentiment would compel the Dominions to either fight alongside Britain or fall into civil war.<sup>34</sup> He argued that any European war inevitably entangled the Empire and then the United States; the only way for Britain and the United States to avoid European wars was for them to detach from Europe and form a bloc.<sup>35</sup> By 1937, the Dominions had asserted their right to neutrality and a pact with the isolationist United States seemed impossible. Kerr turned to world federation as the only solution.

Kerr's federation movement had religious undertones. The Burge lecture ended with a claim that a supranational federation provided a "method by which the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man can come into visible expression on earth."<sup>36</sup> He called those prepared to work for a federation part of a godly elect:

When there are enough "elect" men and women of the kind in the world, and not before, there will arise that city, foreshadowed in Revelation, in which there is no more war because the Glory of the Lord is the light thereof, and the former things have passed away.<sup>37</sup>

Kerr's speech at the conference on Church, Community, and State, held in Oxford in 1937, shared similar religious themes.<sup>38</sup> The speech, entitled "The Demonic Influence of National Sovereignty," echoed his attacks on sovereignty from the Burge Lecture.<sup>39</sup> Kerr

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Kerr, *Pacifism*, 50

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. The language here shares a sentiment with Curtis's *Civitas Dei*.

<sup>38</sup> The conference was held in July, 1937 and published as *The universal church and the world of nations*. According to the introduction by J.H. Oldham, the conference met to "understand the true nature of the vital conflict between the Christian faith and the secular and pagan tendencies of our time, and to see more clearly the responsibilities of the Church in relation to the struggle." Zimmern also presented at the conference. Oldham, *The universal church and the world of nations*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938), p. vii.

<sup>39</sup> Kerr, "The Demonic influence of national sovereignty," *The universal church and the world of nations*, pp. 3-23.

asserted that citizens owed their loyalty to God over their nation, and that only devout understanding of God could inspire the conditions for world federation.<sup>40</sup> A federation created according to Christian principles ensured democracy and justice.<sup>41</sup> To Kerr, the Christian mission and the ideal liberal state were one and the same.

Kerr's world federation represented an evolutionary step in imperial federation. He maintained his belief in federalism from the Round Table days and kept his faith in the British Commonwealth as a building block for world peace and example of international cooperation.<sup>42</sup> He turned his attention to Anglo-American union by the late 1920s. Kerr's new world federation depended on a close relationship between the United States and the British Empire. He told the delegates of the unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference at Sydney in 1938 that the Commonwealth's destiny rested with the United States.<sup>43</sup> Kerr, therefore, had not changed his federalist philosophy significantly since the Round Table days. He maintained a faith in federation and the Commonwealth model. By the late 1930s, he had expanded his concept of the Commonwealth from the British Empire to include the United States and eventually the world.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 19-20

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 20

<sup>42</sup> He told an American audience in 1939 that they should follow the Commonwealth model with the Pan-American union. Kerr, Pilgrims speech, London, July 13, 1939. LP 403. Kerr could take belief in the Commonwealth as a model too far. When he met Hitler and his advisers in 1937 as an unofficial British representative, he told him that the British would rather see Eastern Europe under German influence than Soviet influence if they respected national sovereignty. He explained that the Commonwealth provided a model for supporting national governments with German minorities. Given the nature of the Nazi regime, Kerr's suggestion for a German Eastern European Commonwealth was risible.

<sup>43</sup> Kerr, speech at Second Unofficial Commonwealth Conference, University of Sydney, Sept. 3, 1938, LP 370.

## LIONEL CURTIS AND *CIVITAS DEI*

Curtis maintained a faith in imperial federation and a belief that Commonwealth cooperation would fracture the Empire. He remained skeptical about Dominion sovereignty and had a dim view of the achievements of the 1926 Imperial Conference.<sup>44</sup> The Irish and South African claims for neutrality or passive belligerency reinforced his belief that the Empire would fight together only as a federation.<sup>45</sup> Curtis's hopes for imperial federation, however, remained out of step with the direction of Commonwealth policy and imperial reform ideology in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Curtis remained active in the Round Table, though he felt increasingly marginalized. He wrote to the "inner moot" (Kerr, Robert Brand, and Lionel Hichens<sup>46</sup>) to call for a younger Round Table, hinted that his time had passed, and lamented that the Round Table had consistently ignored him.<sup>47</sup> Kerr responded that Curtis portrayed himself as "the lonely Titan deserted by all your colleagues including myself."<sup>48</sup>

Curtis remained active in international politics. The Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, which he co-founded, blossomed into an influential foreign policy think tank. He also joined the Institute of Pacific Relations and

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<sup>44</sup> Curtis to Herbert Hume Wrong, April 25, 1926, LP 224

<sup>45</sup> According to Kerr. Kerr to Grigg, April 26, 1933, LP 269

<sup>46</sup> Robert Brand and Lionel Hichens were members of the Kindergarten and original Round Table members. By late 1920s and early 1930s, Brand had become an executive at Lazard Brothers bank and Hichens ran the Carnell Laird shipping, steel-making, and armaments firm. Both remained active in Round Table circles and served as unofficial advisers to the British government. Hichens died in 1940 in a German bombing attack.

<sup>47</sup> Curtis memorandum to Kerr, Hichens, and Brand, Aug. 6, 1930, RTP 811

<sup>48</sup> Kerr to Curtis, Aug. 27, 1930, LP 252

became interested in China. His attempts to amalgamate the IPR with Chatham House caused controversy with Australians who rejected the IPR as American propaganda.<sup>49</sup> He published *The Capital Question of China* in 1932 in which he laid out a compact guide to Chinese history and suggested that the British could guide China's transformation into a democratic state.<sup>50</sup>

The international turmoil of the early 1930s brought Curtis's focus back to the Commonwealth. He wrote to the Round Table that the League had shown the folly of international cooperation in a 1932 memorandum.<sup>51</sup> He suggested that British delegates to the upcoming unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference in Toronto should advocate for the creation of an imperial assembly as the first step towards organic union.<sup>52</sup> Curtis claimed that a true world commonwealth remained the only solution for international tension.<sup>53</sup> A month later, he wrote the Round Table again to suggest that a union of the British Commonwealth (including a sovereign India) would lead to closer relations with the United States and then Scandinavia and the Netherlands as the kernel of this world government.<sup>54</sup> The memorandum reiterated Curtis's belief in the Commonwealth as the basis for an international federal government. The League's struggles and the international economic crisis proved to him that only federations could

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<sup>49</sup> Frederic Eggleston to Curtis, Nov. 17, 1927 and Curtis to Eggleston, Jan. 10, 1928, LP 21. Eggleston was part of the Australian branch of the Round Table and the Australian Institute of International Affairs.

<sup>50</sup> Curtis, *The capital question of China*, (London: Macmillan, 1932).

<sup>51</sup> Curtis memorandum on the imperial problem for Round Table meeting at Blickling, Sept., 1932, RTP 811

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Curtis memorandum for Blickling meeting on Oct. 17, 1932, RTP 811

harmonize international relations. He became increasingly convinced that competing sovereign nations led inevitably to war. In 1910, Curtis had argued that imperial federation had become the only way to save the British Empire. By the early 1930s, he had become certain that only world federation led by the Commonwealth could create a lasting peace.

Curtis's fear of impending international chaos compelled him to write *Civitas Dei*, his masterwork of imperial philosophy. Like the *Green Memorandum*, *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, and *The Capital Question of China*, *Civitas Dei* opened with a long historical narrative. Unlike those other works, the first volume of *Civitas Dei* did not include a detailed program of reforms. It contained Curtis's explanation of the fundamental principles behind ideal human government. His efforts resulted in a narrative that interweaved a history of Western Civilization with his own views on Christianity, philosophy, and government. Curtis planned to publish two additional volumes that outlined his plans, but he wanted to publish a statement on his fundamental philosophy first. He noted that reviewers would attack his plans and ignore his grander ideas.<sup>55</sup> *Civitas Dei* appeared in 1934.

*Civitas Dei* traced the emergence of a type of government that Curtis referred to as the commonwealth. He defined the commonwealth as "a state whose members have acquired the faculty of making decisions for themselves and obeying them as laws. Its

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<sup>55</sup> Curtis wrote to Malcolm that he was not sure he could finish the subsequent volumes and that it was more important to explain the fundamental ideas behind his reform plans before going into detail. Curtis to Malcolm, July 21, 1934, CP 113

essential feature is the sovereignty of laws based on its own reading of facts.”<sup>56</sup> The first volume of *Civitas Dei* elucidated the origins of the commonwealth in history and religion. Curtis hoped to convince his readers that a commonwealth was not only a superior type of government, but one ordained by Jesus as the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The Prophet had become a preacher.

Curtis depicted the history of Western civilization as a battle between the commonwealth and authoritarianism. This historical interpretation remained consistent with Curtis’s earlier writings.<sup>57</sup> He located the origins of commonwealth in Athens, no doubt inspired by Zimmern’s 1911 *Greek Commonwealth*.<sup>58</sup> Curtis interpreted Athenian democracy as a superior form of government and the means to bring out the best in human society:

In a Commonwealth, the safety of life and property, and the power of the state to secure such safety, are not treated as ends in themselves. They are necessary means to the ultimate end, which is a continuous growth in the characters and minds of the citizens, a continuous improvement in their sense of devotion to each other and also in capacity to judge rightly of measures which tend to the general welfare.<sup>59</sup>

Curtis blamed the League of Delos for unraveling the Athenian commonwealth. He argued that Athens became an empire because the member nations paid for Athenian

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<sup>56</sup> Curtis, *World Order (Civitas Dei)*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). This is the American edition of *Commonwealth of God*, which contained all three volumes of *Civitas Dei*. The second and third volumes appeared separately in 1937, and *Commonwealth of God* came out in 1938. Curtis republished all three volumes under the title *Civitas Dei* in 1950 which took stock of recent developments since the end of the war.

<sup>57</sup> See Curtis, *The commonwealth of nations; an inquiry into the nature of citizenship in the British empire, and into the mutual relations of the several communities thereof*, (London, MacMillan and co., 1916).

<sup>58</sup> Alfred Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911). See also Jeanne Morefield, “‘An education to Greece’: the Round Table, imperialism, theory, and the uses of history,” *History of Political Thought*, 28 (2007), pp. 327-361. Morefield explains how Zimmern’s ideas about Ancient Greek democracy influenced the Round Table.

<sup>59</sup> Curtis, *World Order*, 52

naval defense. The Athenians eventually consolidated their power through control of the League treasury.<sup>60</sup> Curtis saw obvious parallels between the League of Delos and the British Empire and League of Nations. He compared the Greek nations that paid for Athenian naval support to the position of the Dominions. To Curtis, who embraced historical analogies, the League of Delos explained why Dominion sovereignty would break up the Empire. He also likened Ancient Greece to a model of contemporary Europe on miniature scale: “[Its] numerous states, though deeply conscious of a civilisation common to them all, were acutely jealous of their separate sovereignties.”<sup>61</sup> Curtis often used the League of Delos as a cautionary tale for the futility of leagues and the superiority of federal government. “International governments will repeat their record of failures so long as the minds of governments are set on the task of avoiding collisions with each other,” he warned.<sup>62</sup>

*Civitas Dei* depicted authoritarianism as the natural enemy of the commonwealth. Curtis viewed rule by divine right as the inevitable result of tyranny and dismissed the Roman Empire as a hotbed of tyranny. He credited Rome with the spread of the rule of law, a trait which he attributed to Greek influence.<sup>63</sup> The rule of law, however, came from a republican assembly that became increasingly estranged from the interests of the entire republic and eventually fell into the hands of military dictators. He concluded that the Romans undermined their system of law and administration through

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-3

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 286

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 93

authoritarianism.<sup>64</sup> “Had migratory hordes from the north not appeared to destroy it,” Curtis claimed, “the Roman Empire would still have collapsed for lack of subjects with the public spirit to hold it together.”<sup>65</sup>

Curtis portrayed the development of a true commonwealth as a holy mission. The key phrase in his interpretation of religion was “Kingdom of Heaven.” Curtis rejected the notion of the Kingdom of Heaven as a post-apocalyptic state.<sup>66</sup> He equated this interpretation with Jewish nationalism from the time of Jesus that portrayed the Kingdom of Heaven as the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel to dominion over the world.<sup>67</sup> Curtis based his idea of the Kingdom of Heaven on what he believed to be Jesus’s true meaning. Jesus’s Kingdom of Heaven, according to Curtis, meant the establishment of an earthly society based on the idea that men owed each other an infinite duty:<sup>68</sup>

The Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus conceived it consisted of men serving God by serving each other, the desire to serve increasing by exercise, and depending on guidance on experience of facts interpreted by reason and conscience. For so and not otherwise could reason and conscience be made to grow, and with their growth the inclusion of all men in one society would become possible.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, Curtis claimed that his political ideas came from Jesus himself. According to Curtis, Jesus had not been describing a kingdom, but a commonwealth of God; at that time, Jesus lacked the word to describe it.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 106

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-9

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 161

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 166

Curtis held two men responsible for the separation of the commonwealth idea from the church. He claimed that Paul created a church that became spiritually authoritarian and hierarchical.<sup>71</sup> He blamed Augustine for the revival of Christian transcendentalism that denounced the earthly cities and described the Kingdom of God as coming only after apocalypse.<sup>72</sup> Augustine's emphasis on the apocalypse had two deleterious effects. First, it created "unconscious habits of mind" that favored short-term political decisions based on the belief that the world could end at any moment.<sup>73</sup> Second, Augustine called for the separation of the earthly from the spiritual, which facilitated conflict between earthly authorities and the Church.<sup>74</sup> Curtis argued that the conflicts between church and state usurped the unity and order of the Christian world until the English Parliament revived the idea of the commonwealth in the thirteenth century. Curtis therefore offered his political reforms as the realization of Jesus's true vision after centuries of corruption:

The reader whose patience has lasted to this point may well ask why he should be wearied with chapters on constitutional history which is or should be familiar to every child who has passed through a high school. The answer is that I see in these threadbare and commonplace details the first beginnings in the Christian era of the process whereby that creative and potent idea, the Kingdom of God, as viewed and expounded by Jesus of Nazareth, is destined to be realized. I believe that the process here begun will still be continued, till the rule of law produced from the mind and conscience of those who obey it will not be confined to their national frontiers. I look forward to a time when the commonwealth will no longer be limited to the national state, when nations, conscious of their own distinctive histories and structures, will have learned to function as organs of one international commonwealth.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-9

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-19

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 283

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-3

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 279-80

*Civitas Dei's* first volume received mixed reviews, but Curtis was glad that it attracted any attention at all. Oxford's press rejected the manuscript, and Macmillan published it at Curtis's expense.<sup>76</sup> The book sold more copies than expected, and Macmillan agreed to publish the next two volumes on standard terms.<sup>77</sup> Curtis benefited from his Round Table connections in the British and Commonwealth press. His friends Edward Grigg in the *Observer*, D.O. Malcolm in the *Round Table*, and James Meston in *International Affairs* (the Chatham House journal) gave sympathetic reviews, as did the *Times*, which was edited by an old Kindergarten chum, Geoffrey Dawson.<sup>78</sup> Almost every review of the first volume found problems in his historical claims. Favorable reviewers insisted that Curtis's message overcame the historical flaws. Several reviewers praised Curtis, but panned *Civitas Dei*. Harold Nicolson, for example, closed his review attacking Curtis's historical acumen with a recommendation for people who enjoy "imaginative pictures of history and religion and being left with a comforting feeling that we can all, by a little self-sacrifice, contribute to the far-off divine event." The *Canadian Forum* review lionized Curtis as a distinctly moral imperialist who stood apart from the Amerys and Chamberlains who promoted the "grosser type of commercial imperialism" and the "suave and over-polished casuists" like Zimmern and Kerr, but it dismissed *Civitas Dei* as the scattershot conclusions of a nineteenth-century liberal English

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<sup>76</sup> Curtis to Jerome Greene, Oct. 6, 1935, CP 10

<sup>77</sup> Lavin, *Curtis*, 270

<sup>78</sup> Grigg's review appeared in the *Observer* on April 1, 1934, and James Metson's *International affairs* review appeared in the July, 1934 issue. CP, 151. The D.O. Malcolm review appears in *Round Table* v. 34 (Dec. 1933-Sept. 1934), pp. 820-828.

Protestant.<sup>79</sup> The *Irish Independent* offered the most scathing review: the author took exception to the book's latent anti-Catholicism.<sup>80</sup>

The attention heartened Curtis and inspired him to churn out the second and third volumes. Both came out in 1937. The second volume was an ambitious account of the history of the entire world from the Mongols to the moment the manuscript went to the printer.<sup>81</sup> Curtis intended to explain how the world got to its current state. He wrote the third volume to show how to apply the principles of the commonwealth to modern politics.

The second volume traced the emergence of the commonwealth from the grip of medieval autocracy. Curtis emphasized the evolution of democratic states and the international lawlessness caused by sovereign states. The second volume picked up from the end of the first and depicts a competition for authoritarian power in the West between the Catholic Church and monarchies. He argued that the primacy of the Church fell away for three major reasons. First, global exploration in the fifteenth century revealed the impossibility of Papal rule over the entire world. Second, governments in England and Holland resisted Papal authority, especially in the New World. According to Curtis, the English and Dutch commonwealth governments “were not based on the principal of authority, but, all unconsciously, on those which Christ had seen as the true relation of

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<sup>79</sup> “Dieu, est-il Anglais?” *Canadian Forum*, Aug., 1934, CP 151

<sup>80</sup> Review of *Civitas Dei* in the *Irish Independent*, May 24, 1934, CP 151

<sup>81</sup> Curtis seemed to want a larger scope in the first volume as well. In 1932, he wrote to Francis William Pember, Warden of All Souls College that he had to lift a lot of material that he intended to use in *Civitas Dei* for *The Capital Question China*. Presumably, that meant the historical overview of China from the first part of the book in the style of his *Civitas Dei* histories. Curtis to Pember, May 10, 1932, CP 6.

men to God and of men to each other. Those policies had undermined the habit of obedience to Rome.”<sup>82</sup> Finally, absolutist Catholic states in Europe became more powerful than the papacy.<sup>83</sup> His illustrations of the growth of the democracy remained consistent with the history of democracy that he had developed during the Round Table period.<sup>84</sup> According to Curtis, English parliamentary democracy developed into a commonwealth, then it grew with the Anglo-Scottish Union, then the American federalists perfected the form (although felt the American president had too much power), finally, in South Africa, the British Empire became a Commonwealth of Nations dedicated to nurturing self-government for its component nations.<sup>85</sup>

Curtis emphasized expansion and empire as the most important driving forces behind the revival of the commonwealth. To Curtis, the colonization of the New World served as a battle between England’s commonwealth idea of government and Spanish or French authority for control of the New World.<sup>86</sup> The American colonies nurtured the federalism, which Curtis described as one of the most important ideas in the history of humanity. Federal governments allowed for the spread of a commonwealth across a vast continent, and, as Curtis would later argue, across oceans. The second volume also reflected Curtis’s paternalist hopes of gradually spreading self-government in the British

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<sup>82</sup> Curtis, *World Order*, 816

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 816

<sup>84</sup> Captured in the Green Memorandum and the *Commonwealth of God*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 619

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 369

Commonwealth into Africa and Asia, after British colonial officials deemed them ready.<sup>87</sup> He remained suspicious of the evolution of the Commonwealth into a series of sovereign states linked legally by the tenuous connection of a shared Crown, and he wondered how the Dominions' separate foreign policies would harmonize with those of future African and Asian Dominions.<sup>88</sup>

Curtis wrote the third volume about the realization of the commonwealth. It began with a chapter entitled a "confession of faith" that reiterated his belief in a clear distinction of right from wrong.<sup>89</sup> He wrote that the freedom to discern good from evil gave people the choice to act for good. That choice formed the basis of a society that was "ordered in accordance of the law of God."<sup>90</sup> Curtis viewed history as a series of conflicts between societies reflecting the law of God and the forces of authority, whether it came from Catholicism or Islam or secular regimes such as the Nazis or the communists.<sup>91</sup> He claimed that a scientific view of society had shown the failure of authoritarianism; as long as societies held a belief in a single absolute truth, they would inevitably come into conflict with societies that did not share that belief.<sup>92</sup>

Curtis proposed that a global commonwealth based on his religious interpretation provided the only solution to international conflict. The commonwealth had already spread to national governments such as Britain, the Dominions, and the United States.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 709

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 709

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 847

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 849-50

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 862

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 861-2

He claimed that a federation of two or more commonwealths would provide the only basis for a true international government.<sup>93</sup> He noted that the League of Nations had failed because it did not provide a solution to nationalism. A true international organization, he argued, required a League of Nations police force loyal to the League above any constituent nation.<sup>94</sup> Curtis described the international commonwealth as a federation in which at least two national states share a single government body responsible for peace and war. This federal body would tax individual citizens and not the national constituent states and therefore would draw its authority from the people and not the states.<sup>95</sup> He predicted that the international federation would eventually claim loyalty from its citizens, much like how Americans became loyal to the federal government over the states.<sup>96</sup>

The British Commonwealth served as the cornerstone for Curtis's world federation. The problem with the British Commonwealth, according to Curtis, came from Dominions acting like sovereign national states without having accepted full responsibility for peace and war.<sup>97</sup> He advocated for a federal union of Great Britain with Australia, New Zealand, or both.<sup>98</sup> Curtis viewed this federal union as an example, and hoped to "construct the first foot-bridge across the gulf in men's minds which now

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 903

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 912-914

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 915-6

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 917-918. Curtis acknowledged that, in the case of the United States, federal patriotism came at the cost of a civil war, but he viewed that as proof that Americans devoted their lives to the cause of union.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 941-2

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 933

prevents the world from passing from the national to the international commonwealth.”<sup>99</sup> He explained that he picked Australia and New Zealand because their strategic interests compelled them to defend areas of mutual concern: the routes through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea.<sup>100</sup> He argued that technology had overcome the vast distances that had previously made such a federation impossible. Curtis did not mention that, by 1936, the Australian and New Zealand governments remained more committed to the British Empire than those of Canada, South Africa, or the Irish Free State, but it probably influenced his model. He recognized that the initiative had to come from Australia or New Zealand.<sup>101</sup> Unlike his *Problem of the Commonwealth*, which contained a detailed plan to construct an imperial federation, he left the details for later. He stipulated only that the federation must have a legislature, executive, and tax base responsible to the federal government.

Critics attacked the second and third volumes. Unsympathetic critics were baffled by his eccentric interpretation of history and his strong religious themes. They characterized his federal union of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand as unfeasible. Even Kerr wrote in an otherwise friendly review in the *Listener* that he did not agree with Curtis’s historical assertions.<sup>102</sup> One reviewer called the book a “*reductio ad absurdum* of a rationalistic liberalism;”<sup>103</sup> another wrote that “Mr. Lionel Curtis might be summed up

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 933

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 935

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 933

<sup>102</sup> Kerr’s review appeared in the Aug. 11, 1937 issue of *The Listener*, CP 152.

<sup>103</sup> “A British Mouse,” review of *Civitas Dei* in *Student World*, second quarter, 1938, CP 152.

as holding that the New Testament is essentially the prologue to the Statute of Westminster.”<sup>104</sup> Harold Laski dismissed book two as “the incantations of a mystic,” and compared his Curtis’s of the British Empire’s mission as equivalent to Japan’s program.<sup>105</sup> Not surprisingly, Irish critics savaged Curtis’s treatment of Ireland and blatant anti-Catholicism.<sup>106</sup>

Curtis found some measure of support in the Dominions. He expected hostile reviews. He wrote to Abe Bailey, a Round Table patron from South Africa who funded much of the organization’s early activities, that he was surprised by the book’s warm reception in Australia and New Zealand. He attributed the positive review to friends he had made in the local press; Curtis’s papers contain relatively positive reviews from the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, the *Johannesburg Star*, and an interview from the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>107</sup> Bailey took out a full-page advertisement in the *African Star* that featured a picture of him wearing a tuxedo, adorned with orders, and staring down a glowering Hitler. In the ad, Bailey claimed that he sent Hitler a copy of *Civitas Dei* inscribed with the mysterious message “To Herr Hitler: With every good wish and hope that you will see stupidity does not rule the Western Nations and does not allow Japan to get control of the East with the sea communications. Abe Bailey.”<sup>108</sup> Curtis told Bailey that he had planned to skip the upcoming Unofficial Commonwealth Relations

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<sup>104</sup> F.H. Soward, “Need World Commonwealth, Thinks Curtis,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, Feb., 1938, CP 152

<sup>105</sup> Harold Laski, “The mystic in politics,” *New Statesman and Nation*, Nov. 6, 1937, CP 152.

<sup>106</sup> “‘Stage’ Irish History,” *The Irish Press*, July 20, 1937, CP 152 and “Mr Lionel Curtis’ Queer Speculation” *Irish Independent*, , Dec 28, 1937, CP 153.

<sup>107</sup> CP 152-153

<sup>108</sup> Ad from *The African World*, CP 152

Conference in Sydney because he feared a hostile reception in Australia. The outpouring of support, however, caused him to change his mind. The Conference went well for Curtis. He, Kerr, and Zimmern were awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Melbourne, and his appearance led to speaking engagements about federalism throughout North America.

After years of feeling out of step with developments in the Commonwealth, Curtis had finally found himself in step with internationalists. His consistent warnings about the League of Nations resonated with disillusioned League supporters. The collapse of the international order and preparations for another world war had inspired no shortage of new solutions. Intellectuals and policymakers no longer dismissed schemes of international federation as impossible or undesirable. Federation did not become a mainstream mass movement, but, after nearly twenty years, Curtis had found an audience.

#### **FEDERAL UNION AND THE COMMONWEALTH**

Kerr and Curtis had remained consistent about their thoughts on international federations since the Round Table convened in 1909. Their attempt at imperial federation gave way to Dominion sovereignty and a Commonwealth that more closely resembled the League of Nations than the Union of South Africa. The collapse of the international order and fears of war in the late 1930s expanded interest in federation beyond the British Empire. Curtis and Kerr shared a belief that peace could be secured

only by a federation that embraced the whole world. They viewed the Commonwealth as the core of this world federation. Their federation schemes put the Dominions at the vanguard of a new international order. Curtis thought that the Commonwealth itself could lead a call for federation; Kerr became convinced that the only chance of success involved Anglo-American union. By the end of the 1930s, other intellectuals despaired of the international situation and discussed federation. By the beginning of the Second World War, they had joined a movement.

Internationalists turned to federation as the League faltered. Plans for a European federation occasionally bubbled to prominence in the 1920s; Richard Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergi created a Paneuropa organization, and Aristide Briand proposed a European federation scheme at the League of Nations 1929. Wayward internationalists looked for explanations for the League's failure. One explanation, most prominently expounded by the British international relations specialist E.H. Carr, attacked the entire edifice of international cooperation as a utopian chimera subject to the reality of power.<sup>109</sup> Many internationalists, however, refused to give up on the idea of international cooperation. Some of them agreed with Kerr and Curtis that national self-interest was the fundamental problem and looked for a way to transcend it. Federation offered a novel approach to international chaos.

Proposals for federations multiplied in the late 1930s. This process mirrored the early years of the First World War when books and pamphlets that promoted endless

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<sup>109</sup> E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, (London: Macmillan, 1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).

varieties of international organizations had flooded the book stores and newsstands.<sup>110</sup> An *International Affairs* review article listed nearly twenty books, articles, or pamphlets dealing with various flavors federal union from 1939 and 1940 alone.<sup>111</sup> The *Spectator*, under the editorship of Wilson Harris, became a hotbed for discussions about federalism in Britain. Writers differed about the members of a federation, the structure of the government, the membership of the Soviet Union and India, and other details. Many offered their own sample constitutions.<sup>112</sup> Federalists, however, agreed that national sovereignty caused international disorder and war. Works written before the war promoted federation as the only way to peace, and those that came out during the war made federation a cause to fight for.

The most influential work on federation was Clarence Streit's *Union Now: A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Democracies of the North Atlantic* published in 1939. Streit went to Paris as an intelligence officer with the American Peace Commission at the end of the First World War. He attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and then became a foreign correspondent. In 1929, the *New York Times* sent him to Geneva to cover the League of Nations. Streit wrote that his experience at the League convinced him that no association of sovereign states would cooperate in any meaningful way. Any league of sovereign states inherently defends the rights of states. Federal

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<sup>110</sup> The flourishing of various schemes for international organizations is covered briefly in Chapter 2.

<sup>111</sup> Helen Liddell, "War and Peace Aims," *International Affairs Review Supplement*, 19:1 (June, 1940), pp. 11-21.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Clarence Streit, *Union now*; William Ivor Jennings *A federation for Western Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940); R.W.G. Mackay, *Federal Europe: Being the Case for European Federation together with a Draft Constitution of the United States of Europe*, (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1940).

unions, he argued, would defend the freedoms of individuals.<sup>113</sup> Like Curtis and Kerr, he reached for historical precedents. Streit cited not only the League of Delos that always appeared in Curtis's work, but also leagues in Switzerland and the Netherlands as failed associations.<sup>114</sup> The United States in 1787 provided his favorite historical example of federation. He argued that the states (described by Streit as American republics) faced more imposing obstacles to union in 1787 than states faced in 1939, but only needed 100 days to produce a constitution.<sup>115</sup> "Why then can we not [federate] now in time for us to benefit by it and save millions of lives?" he asked. "Are we so much feebler than our fathers and our children that we can not do what our fathers did and what we expect our children to do?"<sup>116</sup>

Streit proposed the immediate amalgamation of fifteen democracies into a federal union. It would consist of Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Eire, The United States, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Finland. He explained that he selected those countries because they formed an Atlantic zone connected through trade, financial and business ties. They also shared what he described as a Greco-Roman-Hebrew culture and a common Teutonic/Celtic race.<sup>117</sup> Streit claimed that that the combined population, resources, and ability to control the seas of the fifteen states rendered them invulnerable to attack.

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<sup>113</sup> Streit, *Union Now*, 6

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 14

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-1

“Together these fifteen own almost half the earth, rule all its oceans, govern nearly half of mankind,” he declared.<sup>118</sup> “The facts are: Fifteen democracies together practically own this earth and do not know it.”<sup>119</sup>

Streit claimed that his plan represented no threat to a nation’s language, customs, or type of government. He argued that sovereign states homogenized their population more than federations because they required powerful centralized governments.<sup>120</sup> To his critics that feared the creation of a super-state, he countered that current nations were already super-states. His union would create a unified citizenship, trade policy, monetary system, postal and communications network, and defense force.<sup>121</sup> National governments would control no arms of their own. He theorized that the union’s free trade unified monetary policies within its borders would enable “economic disarmament.”<sup>122</sup> Streit claimed that overwhelming might of the union would eliminate the threat of war, which would divert money spent on arms and diplomats to more productive channels.<sup>123</sup> Streit’s union legislature would determine seats by population, but he assured reader that the populous United States would not dominate the assembly.<sup>124</sup> Like many federalists, he assumed that politicians would vote on political rather than national lines.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 182

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-8

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

Streit nurtured a grandiose vision for the federal union as the nucleus of a world federation. He intended to gradually expand membership, but felt that the fifteen states he named would allow the best chance for initial success. In the meantime, the union would remain a good world citizen. Streit suggested that the union could join an organization like the League of Nations and even coexist with the autocracies. The union, he wrote, was not a holy alliance against them.<sup>126</sup> He hoped that the union would serve as an example to the rest of the world and help foster democracy. He speculated that the union would inspire citizens in autocratic states to overthrow their governments and “prove themselves worthy” to join.<sup>127</sup>

Streit’s plea for action and appeal to citizens over government made *Union Now* the most influential and popular work on federalism in Britain and the United States. It offered a clear solution for international strife in desperate times, and it put the onus for change on ordinary people. The book urged readers to form Union political parties and send postcards to their representatives.<sup>128</sup> Streit told Curtis that the “Now” in *Union Now* had galvanized supporters into action. Dorothy Thompson, the widely-read columnist for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, took up the union cause. Organizations for various types of regional or world federation existed before *Union Now*, but the Streit book helped to boost their popularity.<sup>129</sup> Streit’s *Union Now with Britain*, a book published in 1941 that

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 114

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 115

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-4

<sup>129</sup> Britain’s Federal Union, for example, was formed in 1938, but the organization grew larger when it arranged for cards with its address to appear in new editions of *Union Now*. Andrea Bosco notes that the influx of new members influenced by *Union Now* conflicted with Federal Union’s pan-European bent.

called for an immediate union of the United States with Britain to end the war, identified federal union organizations in the United States, Britain, all of the Dominions, India, and Argentina.<sup>130</sup> Not all federalists accepted Streit, but *Union Now* became an important starting point for their discussions.

*Union Now* remained controversial. Ardent league enthusiasts such as Zimmern, Harold Nicolson, and Smuts found Streit's plan unworkable. Some federation enthusiasts and sympathizers felt Streit had gone too far.<sup>131</sup> William Ivor Jennings, a constitutional lawyer who worked with the British Federal Union organization and drafted a constitution for European federation dismissed Streit's effort as a "very jejune copy of the Constitution of the United States."<sup>132</sup>

One of the most devastating attacks on *Union Now* came from George Orwell, who criticized the book as another post-war peace scheme designed to preserve the West's imperial proletariat in Asia and Africa.<sup>133</sup> Streit paid little attention to the fate of colonized peoples in *Union Now*. Orwell pointed out that the fate of India and its millions occupied a page and a half in *Union Now*. Streit advocated the transfer of colonies and dependencies to the union government where they could be trained to self-

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Andrea Bosco, "Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-40)," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, (July 1988), p. 482.

<sup>130</sup> Streit, *Union now with Britain* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941).

<sup>131</sup> Federation enthusiasts who attacked Streit include Harold Nicolson, Mackay, Wilson Harris, and Lionel Robbins. Harris and Robbins debated about federation in the issues of the *Spectator* that appeared weekly from March 22 to April 19, 1940. Wilson Harris, "Federal Union Examined-I," *Spectator*, 164:5829 (1940:Mar. 15) p.354 is the first article in the series. Nicolson attacked Streit in his "People and Things" column, *Spectator*, 164:5820 (1940:Jan. 12) p.43. Mackay criticized Federal Union in *Federal Europe*.

<sup>132</sup> Jennings, *Spectator*.

<sup>133</sup> George Orwell, "Not counting niggers," in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *George Orwell: the collected essays, journalism & letters*, (Boston: D.R. Godine, 2000), v. 1, pp. 394-397. The article originally ran in the July, 1939 edition of the *Adelphi*.

government and eventually join the union as equal members.<sup>134</sup> It seems unlikely that Indians would accept such a plan. Indian nationalists panicked when Curtis visited in 1917 because they believed he was part of a conspiracy to give the Dominions a say in India's administration. It is difficult to believe that they would accept a transfer of authority to a federation or any authority other than full self-government. Orwell saw Streit as well-meaning and praised his book as the best of the liberal peace plans. Nevertheless, he could not accept any peace plan that cast Britain and France as "sheep" against the German and Italian "wolves." No state could call itself a champion of freedom while it oppressed dependencies in colonial servitude.<sup>135</sup>

Kerr and Curtis quickly converted to Streit's cause. Curtis met Streit during his *Civitas Dei* speaking tour of North America in 1938 and was elated to find a kindred spirit.<sup>136</sup> He sent Streit a rapturous letter that praised him as more important than Washington or Hamilton and declared that the achievement of federal union would be mankind's greatest achievement since the end of slavery.<sup>137</sup> By the time that Curtis returned to Britain in early 1939, he decided to abandon his antipodean union scheme and adopt Streit's union plan. He told a friend that Streit's plan was better than anything he

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<sup>134</sup> Kerr agreed with Streit. He wrote to Hodson to criticize his *Round Table* review that suggested that India should have full membership in Streit's union, claiming that a British withdrawal from India meant immediate civil war. Instead, he thought India should have the same relationship to the union as it currently has with Britain. This attitude is not surprising since Kerr chaired the India Franchise Committee in 1932 that worked out many of the 1935 constitutional reforms that ceded self-government to Indian provinces.

<sup>135</sup> Orwell, *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Lavin, *Curtis*, 283

<sup>137</sup> Curtis to Streit, Feb. 9 1939, CP 13.

had come up with<sup>138</sup> and urged everyone in his considerable rolodex to read it.<sup>139</sup> Curtis also promoted *Union Now* in a speech at Chatham House.<sup>140</sup> Kerr also converted to Streit's cause. He wrote in his review of *Union Now* in the *Christian Science Monitor* that Streit had done for international affairs what Adam Smith and Charles Darwin had done for economics and science.<sup>141</sup> He explained to Smuts that: "In a curious way the future of the world lies between Marx's 'Das Kapital', Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', and Streit's 'Union Now.'"<sup>142</sup> Kerr had some problems with Streit's constitution (though he found it far more practicable than Curtis's plan), but he prioritized the spread of federation over constitutional details.<sup>143</sup>

*Union Now* galvanized Curtis and Kerr into political action. They became involved with a British group called Federal Union, started by Patrick Ransome, Charles Kimber, and Derek Rawnsley. Kimber and Rawnsley, press officers for oil companies, and Ransome, an attorney, came to federation as a response to the Munich Crisis in the fall of 1938. Streit had no influence on them at first; none of them had read *Union Now*, and they supported a European union without the United States. Kerr and Curtis attached themselves to the Federal Union in the spring of 1939.<sup>144</sup> Curtis saw something of his younger self in the men. He wrote to Kerr, "I suggest we model our attitude towards

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<sup>138</sup> Curtis to G.V. Ferguson (editor of the Winnipeg Free Press), March 16, 1939. CP 13

<sup>139</sup> Curtis's papers include letters recommending Streit to Victor Bulwer-Lytton, E.J. Harding, Henry Wickham-Steed, Arnold Toynbee, and Abe Bailey. CP 13 and 14.

<sup>140</sup> Curtis, "World order," *International affairs*, 18:3 (May-June 1939), pp. 301-320.

<sup>141</sup> Kerr, "The ending of war," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1939. LP 370

<sup>142</sup> Kerr to Smuts, April 5, 1939, LP 385

<sup>143</sup> Kerr to Hodson, quoted in Bosco, 475

<sup>144</sup> See Bosco, "Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-40)" for a full treatment of the Federal Union organization.

these young men the way in which Lord Milner treated us when we were founding the Round Table.”<sup>145</sup> Curtis and Kerr became essential parts of the group. Kerr drafted and funded *The Ending of Armageddon*,<sup>146</sup> the group’s first pamphlet, and he and Curtis reached out to people like the Astors, Ernest Bevin, Barbara Wootton, Kingsley Martin, Wickham Steed, and Lionel Robbins.<sup>147</sup>

Federal Union struggled to overcome the divisions within the British federation movement. Rawnsley, Kimber, and Ransome advocated a European union and opposed union with the United States. The success of *Union Now* brought droves of supporters to Federal Union. Kimber and Rawnsley shrewdly arranged to package copies of *Union Now* with the address for Federal Union, but they had trouble with the new members who preferred Streit’s Anglo-American plan to their pan-Europeanism. Kimber resented Curtis and Kerr’s attempts to steer the organization towards Streit’s plan. He complained that they hijacked Federal Union to make it into an agency for *Union Now* propaganda, and claimed that Curtis attempted to have him removed and replaced by a pro-Streit leader.<sup>148</sup> Andrea Bosco suggests that the division over the United States destroyed Federal Union.<sup>149</sup> Kerr’s departure also hurt the organization. He cut his public ties to the organization when he became the British Ambassador to the United States in 1939.

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<sup>145</sup> Curtis to Kerr, April 2, 1939, LP 386

<sup>146</sup> Kerr, *The ending of Armageddon*, (London: Federal Union, 1940).

<sup>147</sup> Bosco, 484-5. Bosco cautions against ascribing too much to Kerr and Curtis. He notes that the papers of most of the founders have been destroyed or lost. The Curtis and Lothian papers contain much of the correspondence about the organization that has survived, but it may overstate their influence. On the other hand, it is clear that Federal Union gained legitimacy from their involvement.

<sup>148</sup> Charles Kimber, “Federal Union” in Peter Catterall and C.J. Morris, eds., *Britain and the threat to stability in Europe 1918-45*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. ??

<sup>149</sup> Bosco, 482

He figured that the last thing the British government needed was an ambassador calling for union with the United States. Kerr had no opportunity to direct Union propaganda after the war; he died in Washington in December 1940.

Curtis did not limit his *Union Now* propaganda to Federal Union. He tried to spread the word of federation to every organization he belonged to. Curtis's enthusiasm created problems for the Chatham House World Order papers. The series consisted of papers dealing with a wide scope of international issues.<sup>150</sup> The outbreak of war complicated Curtis's plans for publication. Chatham House became a semi-official foreign policy research center for the British government, and several members wanted to halt publication because many papers dealt with peace aims.<sup>151</sup> Curtis's ardent federalism also played a role. Some members feared he would try to turn Chatham House into a federal propaganda outfit.<sup>152</sup> Curtis threatened to resign and then took a less active editorial role.

Curtis remained focused on a federation inspired by the Commonwealth. He wrote a pamphlet called *Decision* in 1941 that criticized Streit and other federalists for hewing too close to the American model.<sup>153</sup> Curtis argued that Streit's federal union had too much control; states would be unwilling to join a union that controlled tariffs and

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<sup>150</sup> Planned World Order papers included John Fischer Williams on federation, Gilbert Murray on the League of Nations, William Beveridge on economics, and Percy Horsfall on the failure to transcend national sovereignty. Chatham House Publication Committee meeting, Nov. 17, 1939, CP 111

<sup>151</sup> Astor memorandum, Nov. 7, 1939, CP 111

<sup>152</sup> G.M. Gathorne-Hardy to Curtis, Jan. 30, 1940, cP 111. See also, Lavin, *Curtis*.

<sup>153</sup> Curtis, *Decision* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1941).

immigration.<sup>154</sup> He knew from experience how much the Dominion governments valued those powers. His new proposal rejected immediate Anglo-American union. He proposed a Commonwealth defense union that mined the spirit of the early Round Table years. The proposal returned to his overwhelming concern to make the Dominions responsible for defraying the cost of imperial defense. *Decision* rehashed the Commonwealth Parliament and taxation scheme from *The Problem of the Commonwealth* in 1916. The most important feature he carried over was a “first charge” on Dominion treasuries based on population that paid for defense.<sup>155</sup> Curtis suggested that a Commonwealth federation provided the best example of “organic union” to the rest of the world.<sup>156</sup> Other states willing to pay their share of defense could join. Curtis claimed that an eventual union between the Commonwealth and the United States would end war.<sup>157</sup> He was convinced that the Commonwealth had to unite in order to show the way because the United States was a commonwealth of provinces, while the British Commonwealth was a true commonwealth of nations.

## CONCLUSION

Curtis and Kerr’s world federation movement echoed their ideas about imperial federation from the early Round Table days. In many ways, their beliefs in federation

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-52

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-8

required only minor deviations from the plans they had hatched during the First World War. Curtis's *Decision* plan simply added European countries to the Imperial parliament, and Kerr's claims that Britain's control of the seas ensured world peace became a belief in the combined sea power of the Commonwealth and the United States. The League's failures and the Commonwealth's constitutional crises validated their distrust of international organizations. The Paris Peace Conference had rendered imperial federation obsolete, but twenty years later, Curtis and Kerr had the opportunity to revive the idea and extend it to the rest of the world.

Curtis and Kerr's new federation schemes reflected the changes in the Commonwealth since the First World War. They formed the Round Table and proposed imperial federation in order to better integrate the Dominions into Britain's imperial security apparatus. In 1916, Curtis and Kerr assumed that the effective deployment of the resources of the whole Empire ensured its security. By 1939, they felt less secure. They turned to federation with nations outside of the Commonwealth. Federation with other nations, however, raised problems that did not exist for the Round Table in 1916. The potential relationship between Britain, its colonies, and a federal government remained unclear. European federation left the Dominions in an awkward position. The federation debate revealed a central problem with imperial reform. Reformers' emphasis on the special relation between Britain and the Dominions and their attempts at economic integration limited Britain's association with other nations. The federal union efforts of the late 1930s fell apart, but previewed the post-war tension between Britain's commitment to Europe and the Commonwealth.

The federal movements in the late 1930s ran at cross-purposes to the evolution of the Commonwealth as an international organization. The Commonwealth reinforced national sovereignty while cooperation remained a vague goal with few concrete avenues of collaboration. The federal union movement in Britain rejected the Commonwealth's trajectory. Kerr and Curtis revived their imperial federation schemes from the First World War. Followers of Streit looked to the American constitution as their model. Curtis and Kerr remained steeped in the Commonwealth ideology that lauded the close ties between Britain and the Dominions, but they rejected the Commonwealth organization as a model for international relations.

## Chapter IX: Conclusion

British intellectuals and policymakers developed the Commonwealth as a way to maintain imperial unity as the Dominions gained sovereignty during the 1920s and 1930s. They portrayed the Commonwealth as a new relationship among sovereign states that enabled close cooperation on defense and economic matters. Commonwealth ideology emerged in an environment of experiments in international government. British commentators and officials discussed the Commonwealth alongside other international organizations, especially the League of Nations. They viewed the Commonwealth as a component of the League or a superior alternative. They offered the Commonwealth as a model of international cooperation to other nations. Commonwealth ideology informed the British approach to foreign relations.

Imperialists in Britain and the Dominions formed a powerful Commonwealth ideology. Imperial reformers disagreed about the Commonwealth's structure, the importance of the Crown, and its relationship to the League of Nations, but their ideas about the Commonwealth shared several important features. They shared a faith in the British Empire as an innovation in government that extended justice and liberty to all of its inhabitants. They agreed that the Dominions should remain a part of the British Empire, even after they became sovereign, independent states. They believed that all colonies and dependencies should aspire to independence within the Commonwealth, and that the British Empire's role was to shepherd them towards self-government. Imperial

reformers claimed that the shared history, government traditions, and imperial sentiment gave the Commonwealth a special connection that enabled coordination, cooperation, and good-will beyond any other group of states. Commonwealth ideology remained an essential part of British approaches to both imperial and foreign relations.

The Commonwealth served as a British contribution to ideas about international relations in the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars have recently turned to histories that transcend the nation-state. Akira Iriye has identified international non-governmental organizations as a driving force behind a global consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Other historians, notably Susan Pedersen, have recently called attention to the League of Nations.<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth rarely fits into the discussion about the growth of international organizations. I have shown how Commonwealth ideology contributes to the understanding of international government. Imperial reformers before the First World War envisioned the British Empire as a new global government, either as a federation with delegates from four continents or a closely integrated organization of sovereign nations. British delegates to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference based their understanding of international relations on Commonwealth ideology. Commonwealth ideology shaped

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<sup>1</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global community: the role of international organizations in the making of the modern world*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002) and "Beyond imperialism: the new internationalism," *Daedalus*, 134 (Spring 2005), pp. 108-116. Other works include A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002) and See David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global transformations: politics, economics and culture*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) and Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*.

<sup>2</sup> See Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League," *American historical review*, 112 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1091-1117 and Frank Trentmann, " in "After the nation-state: citizenship, empire, and global coordination in the new internationalism," in Philippa Levine, Kevin Grant, and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond sovereignty: British Empire and transnationalism, c. 1880-1950*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 34-43.

the British approach to international for influential British writers and academics to high-ranking officials and politicians.

Historians have begun to study the links between Commonwealth ideology and internationalism.<sup>3</sup> Alfred Zimmern, in particular, has drawn recent scholarly attention for his connections between the Empire and the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup> Jeanne Morefield's work on Zimmern has provided an excellent framework for his intellectual roots in liberalism and gives an important reminder of the limitations of his Commonwealth ideology when it was applied to the dependent Empire.<sup>5</sup> Kerr, Curtis, and Amery have also been subjects of biographies that trace their beliefs.<sup>6</sup> They all appear in work about

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<sup>3</sup> See David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of international relations*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See J.D.B. Miller, "The Commonwealth and world order: the Zimmern vision and after," *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth history*, 8 (1979), pp. 159-174, G.K. Reating "Globalism, Hegemonism and British Power: J.A. Hobson and Alfred Zimmern reconsidered," *History*, 89 (2004), pp. 381-398, Paul Rich, "Alfred Zimmern's cautious idealism: the League of Nations, international education, and the Commonwealth," in Long and Wilson, *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis*, 79-99. Mark Mazower has connected Zimmern's ideology to his role in the creation of the League of Nations. Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without swords: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005) and "'A liberal in a muddle': Alfred Zimmern on nationality, internationality, and Commonwealth" in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of international relations*.

<sup>6</sup> For Curtis, see Deborah Lavin, *From empire to international commonwealth: a biography of Lionel Curtis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and "Lionel Curtis and the idea of the Commonwealth" in Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse, eds., *Oxford and the Commonwealth*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 97-112. See also Daniel "Lionel Curtis: imperial citizenship and the quest for unity," *The historian*, 66 (2004), pp. 67-96. Biographies of Kerr include David P. Bilington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the quest of world order*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International), 2006 and J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, (London: Macmillan, 1960). For Amery, see W. Roger Louis, *In the name of God, go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the age of Churchill*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992) and Richard S. Grayson, "Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s," *Twentieth century history*, 20 (2006), pp. 489-515.

the Kindergarten and the Round Table.<sup>7</sup> These works, however, tend to be self-contained portraits of single figures. My work extracts a Commonwealth ideology, identifies a split between internationalist supporters of the League of Nations and League skeptics, and investigates the effect of this ideology on Commonwealth and international policies.

The Commonwealth has been overlooked in scholarly accounts of internationalism for two reasons. First, it was a British ideology that did not translate outside of the Empire. The Commonwealth was confusing enough for members; it was impenetrable to outsiders. The United States Senate viewed the Dominion seats in the League Assembly as a ploy for more British votes. The Ottawa Agreements made little sense for Britain's trading partners with most-favored-nation clauses. Commonwealth ideology found its way into federalist circles. The European federalist Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and the American federalist Clarence Streit drew on the Commonwealth as an inspiration. Commonwealth ideology, however, tended remain within the confines of the British Empire.

The other reason why the Commonwealth rarely appears in scholarship on interwar internationalism is because the interwar Commonwealth itself has attracted scarce attention. Scholarly interest on the Commonwealth as a whole has waned since the 1960s and 1970s. These works have emphasized the Commonwealth as an agent of

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<sup>7</sup> See John Kendle *The Round Table movement and imperial union*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) and Walter Nimocks, *Milner's young men*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968) on the Round Table and Kindergarten.

decolonization, especially after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> The Dominions became afterthoughts in comparison to the more dramatic struggles of colonies in Asia and Africa for independence. Recent work on the British Empire has returned attention to the Empire as a whole and returned the Dominions to prominence.<sup>9</sup> These scholarly analyses have continued to examine the relationship between Britain and the Dominions in terms of empire, sovereignty, and independence. I have examined the Commonwealth as an agent of internationalism, where intellectuals and policymakers transferred their experiments in imperial administration to the realm of international relations.

Commonwealth cooperation in practice remained nebulous and disorganized. There was no centralized body to coordinate action.<sup>10</sup> Imperial conferences met infrequently, and constitutional issues tended to dominate the proceedings. Commonwealth communications went through the Dominions Office. Economic conferences often included recommendations for further integration, but resulted mainly in vague agreements or short-lived organizations such as the Empire Marketing Board. The most significant Commonwealth economic policy, the imperial tariff preferences signed at the Ottawa Conference in 1932, revealed that Britain and the Dominions often had contrasting economic goals. The conference fell into bitter disputes over trade preferences. The major economic policy that tied the Commonwealth together remained

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<sup>8</sup> The three classic works on the Commonwealth are J.D.B. Miller, *Britain and the old Dominions*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth experience*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969); and W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth: Origins and impact 1869-1971*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)

<sup>9</sup> See Philip Buckner and Francis R. Douglas, eds., *Rediscovering the British World*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), and John Darwin, *The empire project: the rise and fall of the British world-system, 1830-1970*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> The Commonwealth Secretariat was not formed until 1965.

Dominion dependence on British markets, capital, and monetary policy. Economic relations mainly took the form of bilateral agreements between Britain and the Dominions. Britain remained the center of the Commonwealth despite the rhetoric of equal status.

Historians have generally treated the Commonwealth in the interwar period in terms of growing Dominion sovereignty. R.F. Holland emphasized the economic conflicts between Britain and the Dominions in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> He argues that the Ottawa agreements indicated a disparity between British and Dominion interests. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins have shown how the British government continued to dominate Dominion economies because of Dominion dependence on British markets, capital, and sterling.<sup>12</sup> These economic trends provide valuable insight into the inner workings of the Commonwealth.

I argue that the Ottawa agreements and other financial arrangements served as vital underpinnings for the Commonwealth ideology. Ian Drummond suggests that the Ottawa agreements had little effect on British and Dominion economies.<sup>13</sup> I show how the Ottawa agreements had an important political value. The Ottawa agreements provided a tangible link among Commonwealth countries as more traditional imperial symbols became less prominent. The British government tied tariff rates to Dominion status and used preferences to distinguish the Irish Free State from the “Ottawa

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<sup>11</sup> R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance*, (London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688-2000* (New York: Longman, 2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

<sup>13</sup> Ian Drummond, *Imperial economic policy, 1919-1939: studies in expansion and protection*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974).

Dominions.” The British and Dominion governments portrayed the tariffs as evidence of Commonwealth economic cooperation.

Historians have examined the constitutional changes in terms of decolonization. The South African and Irish Free State governments challenged the centrality of the monarchy in the Commonwealth.<sup>14</sup> South African and Irish nationalists emphasized their countries’ right to neutrality and secession in the 1930s. Éamon de Valera’s 1937 constitution removed the king from Free State politics except in external affairs. Historians have tended to refer to the changes in terms of Dominion nationalism and antipathy towards British imperialism. In the case of Ireland, scholars have examined policies in terms of the League of Nations and self-determination.<sup>15</sup>

I suggest that the Hertzog and de Valera offered a plan for the Commonwealth that minimized the role of the Crown, but allowed for close cooperation. During the 1930s, the Commonwealth was divided between two different visions for its future as an international organization. The British government emphasized the importance of the Crown and the Dominions’ place in the British Empire. The imperial interpretation acknowledged the Dominions’ sovereignty, but also stressed the value of their connection to an imperial economic and defense network. The other vision, advanced most

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<sup>14</sup> See Holland, *Commonwealth alliance* and W. David McIntyre, *The Britannic vision : historians and the making of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1907-48*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) on Commonwealth constitutional change in the interwar period.

<sup>15</sup> See Donal Lowery, “New Ireland, old empire and the outside world: the strange evolution of a ‘dictionary republic,’” in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan, eds. *Ireland, the politics of independence, 1922-49*, (London, Macmillan, 2000), and Deidre McMahan, “Ireland, the empire, and the Commonwealth,” in Kevin Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.182-193), and Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations 1919-1946: international relations, diplomacy, and politics*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996).

forcefully by Éamon De Valera, attacked the symbols of Empire. He, and other nationalists in the Dominions, offered an interpretation of the Commonwealth as an international organization bound only by free association. Both of these ideas accepted many aspects of the Commonwealth ideology. De Valera agreed that the Commonwealth could have uniquely close relations, and he accepted tariffs that marked Commonwealth relations as different from other international relations. The two ideas differed in the role of the Crown and the Commonwealth's military obligations.

The amorphous nature of the Commonwealth limited its ability to coordinate policy amongst its members, but it also made it flexible. The Commonwealth in 1940 bore little resemblance to the Commonwealth found in ideology. It was held together by a tariff agreement, a shared connection to a ceremonial monarch in certain instances, and its members' claims that they all belonged to an organization called the Commonwealth. On the other hand, the Commonwealth's ability to accommodate changing expectations became the quality that allowed it to endure as other international organizations crumbled.<sup>16</sup> De Valera and Hertzog's erosion of royal overtones became crucial when India joined the Commonwealth as a republic that recognized the Crown as a symbol of association in 1947. British battles with de Valera had also allowed officials to give up their insistence on royal connections. In 1947, India joined the Commonwealth as a republic that recognized the Crown only as a symbol of association. In the 1960s, new nations formed from former colonies in Asia and Africa dominated the Commonwealth. Any lingering ideas of economic integration dried up once Britain joined the European

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<sup>16</sup> R.F. Holland, *Commonwealth alliance*, 209.

Economic Community and abandoned its role as the main Commonwealth market.<sup>17</sup> The Commonwealth shifted so far from its imperial roots that it has even begun accepting members that were never part of the British Empire. Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995 and Rwanda joined in 2009.

The Commonwealth in the 1920s and 1930s maintained a powerful hold on the British imagination as both an imperial and international organization. It served as a model for international relations and shaped the creation of the League of Nations. Commonwealth ideology persisted despite foreign skepticism and the contentious reality of actual Commonwealth relations. The Commonwealth weathered constitutional crises, trade disputes, and a world war by taking on the trappings of an international organization. The Commonwealth was not only about Dominion sovereignty, British domination, and decolonization. It came about and developed in a distinctly international context where the ideas of imperial reform mingled with and were shaped by a revolution in thought about international relations.

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<sup>17</sup> See Alex May, ed., *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: the Commonwealth and Britain's applications to join the European Communities*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

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