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England between November 1931 and November 1935*

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## ABSTRACT

ANTHONY F CARROLL      The debate over rearmament in the  
North East of England between 1931  
and 1935.

M.A. IN HISTORY 1992

The thesis examines the debate over rearmament that took place between the general elections of 1931 and 1935. The period is divided into two. The time between November 1931 and October 1933, and from October 1933 to November 1935. The region is restricted to the area between the Tyne and the Tees, and West to Durham. This area depended for much of its employment and prosperity on the industries of shipbuilding, coal, engineering and iron and steel, and therefore would be much affected by a turn up in production due to rearmament.

The author attempts to gauge public opinion on the rearmament issue by examining the written word, in books, periodicals, documents, newspapers and minutes of groups. The activities of local pressure groups is noted as well as national groups with local branches. Reports of local meetings and demonstrations over the the rearmament issue are examined, as well as the results of local elections and the Peace Ballot organised by the League of Nations Union.

Local politicians provided a lot of information in speeches and articles they wrote at the time as well as books written later. The debate itself, and public opinion, changed as international events influenced the debate. The optimism of the World Disarmament Conference was followed by the pessimism of its failure. Worries over the rise of Fascism, the weakness of the League of Nations and the rearmament of other nations all influenced the debate until the General election of 1935 and the return of a national government committed to rearmament.

THE DEBATE OVER REARMAMENT IN THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND  
BETWEEN NOVEMBER 1931 AND NOVEMBER 1935

ANTHONY FRANCIS CARROLL

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M. A. IN HISTORY

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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1992

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- 8 SEP 1992

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction .....	1
National Setting and Local Scene .....	15
Public Opinion Concerning Rearmament from October 1931 to October 1933 .....	51
Public Opinion Concerning Rearmament from October 1933 to November 1935 .....	114
Conclusion .....	182
Appendix One      1931 General Election .....	196
Appendix Two      1935 General Election .....	197
Appendix Three    Local Peace Ballot Results .....	198
Bibliography .....	205

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## INTRODUCTION

People from outside the North East of England remark on the difference of this region from the rest of England. Once over the River Tees you become aware of having crossed an important border line, which seems more marked than the sensation of entering either Wales or Scotland. When Graham Turner arrived in Stockton on Tees, he was puzzled by the sense that he was in a different part of the world because he could see no physical evidence of the transition.<sup>1</sup> The buildings were much the same, the people looked the same and spoke the same language, the policemen wore the same uniforms. The difference here is not one of architecture, but of people and their attitudes. There can be little doubt that the North East is a distinctive region; there is a sense of historical and cultural identity, and the region has characteristics, largely associated with its economy, which reinforce its sense of identity. The fact is that many North Easterners seem to feel that they belong to a different tribe from the other inhabitants of England, that they are a nation apart and the conviction transmits itself to the visitor. These feelings are not altogether surprising, because for centuries the North East was largely cut off from the rest of the country both by geography and by its extraordinary history.

So far as geography is concerned, the North East has remarkably clear boundaries. On the south is the River Tees, on the north the River Tweed and the Cheviots, to the west the Pennines. But the separation of the area is made all the more profound by the fact that on the far side of all these barriers there are great stretches of sparsely populated territory. South of the River Tees lie the open spaces of North Yorkshire, with York 48 miles from Darlington, and Leeds 60; north of the Tweed and the Cheviots are the Scottish Border hills, with Edinburgh 60 miles away and only small towns in between; to the west is some of the loneliest countryside in Britain. Northumberland and Durham are encircled by what amounts to a broad belt of no-mans land, which has set them apart from other important centres of population in both England and Scotland.

The history of the North East has often reflected this physical isolation. In 1076 William the Conqueror gave to Walcher the military and civil powers of the earldom of Northumbria, but four years later Walcher was murdered at Gateshead and William sent his own half-brother, Odo, to punish the dissidents. Odo duly laid waste the lands between the Tees and the Tweed. The area remained poor and backward for many centuries, and parts of it became, in effect, a separate enclave under the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham, who from time to

time were also Earls of Northumberland. The Prince Bishops were for centuries virtually "as King in Durham".

The North East had for centuries a considerable degree of independence, and the isolation of the North East as a whole from the rest of the country was made worse by the appalling state of the roads which linked it to the South. The city of Newcastle, however, had strong links of its own through the vigorous trade in coal, which it carried on not only with London and the South East but also with the continent. Sunderland was also an exporter of coal.

The first pits to be opened were those close to the estuaries of the Tyne and Wear, because they gave ready access to the London market. Then with developments in transport it became feasible to open pits further from the rivers. But it was not until the nineteenth century and the coming of the Industrial Revolution that the North East really began to be opened up. The development of locomotives had profound effects, opening up further parts of the North East as coal could be carried to the coast and hence to the profitable London market. In 1831 Middlesbrough was a village of 154 inhabitants, but by 1840 it had grown into a busy port of 6,000 people which exported 1,500,000 tons of coal a year.

As the demand for coal increased, the whole Durham field was gradually opened up. The railway system expanded to keep pace with these developments. But the railways did more than help to exploit the coalfield; they also created an enormous demand for iron. Once iron ore had been discovered in the Cleveland Hills then the iron and steel industry became firmly established. By 1900 over a quarter of British steel and a large proportion of iron came from Teesside.

The rapid growth of the sea-going trade in coal also provided a continuing stimulus for the shipbuilding industry in the North East. By 1834 Sunderland was turning out almost as many ships a year as all the other ports of Britain put together.

The phenomenal growth of all these other industries could not be sustained by the existing population. After all, at the beginning of the last century the North East was almost entirely agricultural apart from the relatively small coal-producing areas: in 1800 Newcastle was still a town of 28,000, Durham county had only 100,000 inhabitants and the North East as a whole had a population of only 350,000. By 1900 its population had increased to 2,000,000, and Newcastle had multiplied in size ten times. A good proportion of the increase was accounted for by hundreds and thousands of immigrants who poured in from all over the British

Isles, including sizeable contingents from Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the West Country.

Throughout the century there were bitter battles between the men and their employers, and some of the employers thought fit to be utterly ruthless in the struggle for supremacy. It was indeed a harsh and brutal environment. Partly because of this, many of the fortunes which were made in the North East were spent elsewhere. Even the Anglican Church used the wealth it gathered from its coal mines in Durham for the extension of Christianity elsewhere, much to the disgust of later Bishops. Meanwhile, the financial resources in the diocese were painfully inadequate.<sup>(2)</sup> The church was far from being the only instrument of this sort of exploitation. Not unnaturally, this drain of capital has left behind a marked bitterness. People were made to feel that both they and the North East were simply the tools of profiteers, who cared nothing for them or the area.

When the Depression arrived in the years between the wars, the heavy industries of the North East suffered from it harshly compared with many other areas. This merely served to confirm the suspicions of working class people that they had served their purpose of providing cheap, sweated labour, and that they were now being thrown onto the scrap heap. The North East, they

felt, was always the first to suffer, and there was plenty of evidence of suffering.

One of the problems in the North East has been its narrow industrial base. The North East has an industrial identity developed from the twin pillars of coal and iron. This narrow industrial base is well illustrated by regional employment figures with reference to the coal industry.<sup>'3'</sup> As recently as 1929 nearly two-thirds of the working population in West Durham were engaged in coal mining. It is therefore hardly surprising that the area was so severely hit by unemployment in the 1930s - for example, in 1932 the unemployment in the area rose to 45.8 per cent; in one of the worst districts, Shildon, it was 63.3 per cent. In the North East as a whole in 1932 one worker in every three was idle. Jarrow was severely affected with the closure of the shipyards, but unemployment in Hartlepool and Sunderland averaged 40 per cent in the years 1931-1935.<sup>'4'</sup>

During the Depression fine men decayed and fell apart. Often the bitterness of these men was not directed against the local employers, who were felt to be moved by obscure economic forces beyond their control, but against the southern Establishment and the feudal lords of Whitehall and the City, who had only permitted the suffering because they simply did not care about the North East. The North Easterners felt

themselves to be second-class citizens at the mercy of men who might just as well be foreigners. Furthermore, they seemed powerless to wield the sort of influence which would persuade these men to change their tune. When it came to manipulating the levers of power, they were helpless. In the end they had to resort to the Hunger March.

The hunger marches were not the only evidence of the lack of any satisfactory policy to deal with the plight of the North East, but also an indication of the area's continuing sense of isolation. Its voice, it clearly felt, was not being heard loudly enough at the seat of power, so it marched south till it came within earshot. The interesting thing is that the North East has produced so very few top-flight politicians who have become national leaders. Lancashire has had men like Peel, Gladstone and the Earls of Derby to make it feel that it was at least well connected. Yorkshire had had a Royal connection through Harewood House, not to mention a political connection through the Earls of Halifax and Harold Wilson. The Scots, for their part, have produced a long line of Prime Ministers including Bonar Law, Macmillan and Douglas Home; the Welsh, Lloyd George, Aneurin Bevan and more recently Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. As for the North East, Anthony Eden was born at Windelstone Hall in County Durham, but the family sold their home there in 1935, and in any case

Eden concentrated on foreign affairs. Nor has the area even produced any of the really notable figures of recent Labour administrations; and its senior aristocrats, like the Dukes of Northumberland, have chosen to remain largely aloof from politics in modern times.

So, partly because it felt itself exploited, and partly because it was utterly helpless to affect the course of events, the North East suffered the dreadful punishment of the Depression years bitterly and angrily, and has borne its grudge longer than any other part of England, though it was not the only place which had hard times. The British Government in this depression period has therefore not had a good press from the people of the North East. This period is critical to British history and especially critical to the North East. This is a region which, as already mentioned, was built on the twin pillars of coal and steel. The three main rivers which cross the region: the Tyne, the Wear and the Tees, were major centres of shipbuilding, engineering and heavy industry. The River Tees supported an extensive steel industry and there were large industries connected with arms manufacture on Tyneside. It was therefore severely hit by the economic depression of the period, but ironically it was also in a position to benefit from any upturn in orders that might occur from a rearmament programme.

The period of the early 1930s is interesting for a number of reasons, but is particularly interesting in that it was in this period that much of the discussion took place over disarmament as opposed to rearmament. In 1935 the National Government was re-elected committed to a policy of rearmament, but in the years before the election there was much debate locally and nationally over Britain's defence policy. In 1944 R.B. McCallum wrote that whenever discussion took place about the reasons for the present war, especially in Tory circles, the remark was usually made: "It was all that pacifist nonsense."<sup>3</sup> According to McCallum this meant, broadly speaking, that the country - or at least a sufficient part of it - had been corrupted and misled by false doctrine and false sentiment.

The first World War had had as much affect on the North East of England as it did on the rest of Britain. When World War Two broke out in 1939 there was little cheering in the streets and rejoicing as there had been in 1914. In 1914 the people were unprepared for the true horrors that were to follow. The long casualty lists and the tremendous burdens on the home front destroyed any glamour of war. What followed in the 1920s and 1930s was a determination to avoid war, and for many that meant avoiding an arms race.

It is the main objective of my study to research and examine the condition of public opinion as regards

rearmament and disarmament in the North East of England. The scope of my study will be between the dates of 1931 and 1935, in particular between the two general elections of that time. As already mentioned, the main reason for this time scale is that it was principally between these two dates that the main debate over rearmament took place. When the National Government took office in November 1931 the majority opinion in Great Britain was in favour of disarmament as opposed to rearmament. However, by November 1935 the National Government was re-elected, not solely, but mainly on a policy of rearmament. The debate on this particular issue was therefore ended.

The problem for the government was how far the country at large was willing to go along with its lead on the rearmament question. Would pressure groups and interested parties submit to the government's intention to rearm whatever the differences they had with past and future policies. The question then is how far the region of the North East complied with the rearmament programme and how much opposition there was to it.

For the geographical area, the author intends to examine the region from the Tees to the Tyne, and west to the main areas of population of Durham and Darlington. This part of the region looks to the Tees, Wear and Tyne for its livelihood and is distinguishable notably from the North Riding to the south and

Northumberland to the north. The North Riding and Northumberland are much more rural in nature than the other regions, and tend to be more dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The author does not intend to compare the opinions or attitudes in the North East with other regions or Britain as a whole, as it would be beyond a study of this size. The author's impression from preliminary reading is that there was very little difference between opinion in the North East and the rest of the country on the question of rearmament. However, local factors and events will give the region its own distinctive flavour.

Any study of this type, particularly as regards public opinion, is bound to come up against a number of problems. The question of public opinion is one that is open to debate even today. What, for instance, is public opinion? How can it be described and analysed? What sources should a historian use in trying to assess what public opinion was on a particular issue? Can an individual's opinion be related to public opinion? Do hundreds of private opinions constitute public opinion? Tom Harrison, one of the founders of the Mass Observation organization in the 1930s, noted that "public opinion may be part of private opinion, but it is essentially public, i.e. what you will say out loud to anyone." (4)

The temptation for historians would be to rely on newspapers and in particular the leaders' and readers' letters. But how much is the opinion of the public and how much is the opinion of the reporters? How much are editors influenced by their readers and by their owners? Do newspapers get ahead of public opinion or follow it? Modern studies of the relationship between the press and its readers have thrown grave doubt on the influence of the press and on the nature of the relationship between the press and the public. D.G. Boyce found that many readers took their papers mainly for sport and entertainment and were not influenced by the papers' political stance.<sup>(7)</sup> A.J.P. Taylor argues that newspapers rarely try to influence public opinion, but are content to insert enough news and articles to fill up space.<sup>(8)</sup>

Aware of the problems inherent in studying public opinion, the author intends to rely very much on the written word, aware from the start that those people who put their opinions in print either in books or in letters to newspapers may not always be representatives of the general public. There are the local papers of the time and especially the letters to the editors, and there are periodicals: these in themselves will provide some reflection of public opinion during this period. In addition there are other sources which will reflect the state of public opinion; the size and activities of

any local pressure groups or any national pressure groups with local branches; any reports of local meetings or marches held; books and pamphlets published at the time; any by-elections held in the area during the period; the Peace Ballot organised by the League of Nations Union and any local results or opinions.

The local politicians of the time will provide another useful source of information. Any books or biographies of politicians written at the time or after will be useful, though a distinction will have to be made between what characters said at the time and what they said later. Consideration will have to be given to how much of what politicians said later is either true, or, given the benefit of hindsight, accurate. Finally, there is the election of 1935 and the discussions that preceded it.

## FOOTNOTES

- '1' Graham Turner                    The North Country page 229
- '2' Hensley, Henson                Retrospect of an Unimportant  
Life Volume 2 page 78
- '3' Richard A. Chapman            The North East of England  
page 9
- '4' For a more detailed account of the aspects of  
unemployment on Jarrow see Ellen Wilkinson,  
The Town That Died of Shame.
- '5' R.B. McCallum                 Public Opinion and the Last  
Peace page 171
- '6' Tom Harrison                 "What is Public Opinion?"  
in Political Quarterly  
Volume 11 (October 1940)  
pages 368-383.
- '7' D.G. Boyce                    "Public Opinion and  
Historians" in History 63  
(1978), page 218
- '8' A.J.P. Taylor                 "The Rise and Fall of  
Diplomatic History"  
Englishmen and Others  
page 85.

## NATIONAL SETTING AND LOCAL SCENE

Before looking at the region of the North East in detail and examining the opinions of the people as regards rearmament, it is worth looking at the national setting and local scene. By the national setting is meant the debate that was going on both behind the scenes and in public, over the prickly subject of rearmament. The local scene refers to a look at the local area between 1931 and 1935 and the composition of the region, particularly with regard to how this may have influenced public opinion on rearmament. Therefore the industrial composition of the region will be important as well as unemployment, the political composition and the number of local newspapers.

Great Britain had been severely affected by the depression, which had affected the whole world in the 1930s. The increase in unemployment and the mounting economic problems led to the resignation of the Labour Government and the forming of a National Government, led by Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald's original idea seems to have been that the National Government should be a purely temporary administration, and that when the crisis had been surmounted the party system should operate as before. But MacDonald was induced to agree to the National Government going to the country to seek a "doctor's mandate."

The ensuing general election campaign was unequalled for bitterness. But the result was a foregone conclusion. The National Government won an overwhelming victory at the polls, for of the 615 members of the new House of Commons no fewer than 544 were its supporters. MacDonald had stood at Seaham again, a town which had long been regarded as a Labour stronghold, but he triumphed with a majority of nearly 6,000 over his Labour opponent.

The country in Europe where the world depression had the most dramatic effect was Germany. Reconciliation between Germany and her neighbours had been taking place, and to prove this new-found friendship had real substance, in 1929 reparations payments were revised in the Young Plan. Germany had to pay over a period of 59 years, but the total sum was reduced considerably, to £2,000 million. At the same time, British and Belgian forces withdrew from the Rhineland to placate Germany.<sup>1</sup>

This scene of reconciliation was destroyed by the Depression. The spectre of mass unemployment and financial ruin hit Germany when she was least able to stand it. Loans from abroad ceased. By December 1931 unemployment had reached 5 million and the situation offered opportunities for those parties preaching violence and radical solutions. Re-emerging onto the scene was Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. They had

always maintained that the Young Plan was impossible for the Germans to meet, now clearly they were right. The government of Brüning continued until May 1932 and frequent use was made of President Hindenburg's special powers. Possibly only an economic boom might have saved the Weimar Republic, but instead unemployment increased. The youth of Germany flocked into the SA and the private armies of the Communists. Hitler continued to rage against Weimar, Versailles and Brüning, and promised the German people, "Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer" (one people, one state, one leader). His picture of a united Germany working together for the glory of the Fatherland, destroying Marxists, Jews and all anti-Germans in the process, made a strong appeal to shrewd businessmen and visionary youth alike. The Brüning Government fell in May 1932, and its fall marked the end of the last attempt at genuinely peaceful government in Germany. '2' On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler succeeded Schleicher as Chancellor.

The rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party took place as the Disarmament Conference was beginning. In May 1933 the Foreign Office was claiming that:

" . . . whereas up till a year ago the difficulty in the way of World appeasement might speciously, though not altogether justly, be declared to be the attitude of France, who seemed determined to maintain her

military and political predominance in Europe, the difficulty is now incontestably the threatening and provocative attitude of Germany, who is once more, both spiritually and literally, appearing in her true colours."<sup>(3)</sup>

Adolf Hitler had become Chancellor of the Reich on 30 January 1933 as head of a coalition ministry which included 9 non-Nazi under the leadership of Papen and Hugenberg, representing the Nationalist Right. In the next elections the electorate was faced with a stream of propaganda from the Nazis, denouncing the Red Peril and the Bolshevik plots; all meetings of the Communist Party were banned.<sup>(4)</sup> However, at the elections on 5 March the Nazi party could win only 288 seats, representing 43.9 per cent of the total votes cast. The end of the older parties came on 23 March when, with the exception of the Social Democrats, they all voted in support of the act which conferred dictatorial powers on the Cabinet. Very soon the Reichstag and Reichsrat became all Nazi assemblies; and with the death of Hindenburg on 2 August 1934 the offices of Chancellor and President were combined in the person of Adolf Hitler. The new German regime combined aggressive intention with powerful war potential, and Hitler became at once the greatest personal problem in British diplomacy.<sup>(5)</sup>

Events in the Far East were also threatening. Japan had been equally hard hit by the Depression, and it came at a time when Japan had to expand her trade to

provide for an increasing population. In their annual review of Imperial Defence Policy for 1932 the Chiefs of Staff warned the government of the weakness of the Empire's defences. This warning was made necessary by occurrences in the Far East rather than in Europe. In their report the Chiefs of Staff particularly pointed to the defences of Hong Kong and Singapore, which they noted as being in particularly poor shape. As a result, in the view of the Chiefs of Staff,

"the whole of our territory in the Far East, as well as the coastline of India and the Dominions and our vast trade and shipping lie open to attack." '6'

This state of unpreparedness did not just apply to the Far East. N.H. Gibbs notes that:

"the empire was unprepared for every major commitment which might involve its armed services." '7'

The ports in Britain had obsolete defences, the RAF stood short of a programme announced in 1923. The Army was unable to fulfil any obligations arising from commitments to the League of Nations or the Locarno Treaty. The reasons for this state of affairs are varied, but one reason often quoted was the ten-year rule. This was an assumption that there would be no major war for ten years, and led to a reduction in spending on arms and a subsequent decline in the armed services.

The Chiefs of Staff gave three recommendations. Firstly, that the ten-year rule should be cancelled. Secondly, a start should be made in providing for commitments which were purely defensive and first priority should be given to requirements in the Far East. Thirdly, a decision on these points should not be delayed until after the results of the Disarmament Conference were known.

On 22 March 1932 the report was before the Committee of Imperial Defence; the recommendations were accepted. The Cabinet met on 23 March 1932 and two cautions were added. These led to delays in the implementation of the plan. The Cabinet insisted that the Chiefs of Staff Report must not be taken to justify increased expenditure on defence without regard to the very serious financial and economic situation at the time. Ministers also argued that the subject was closely connected with the question of disarmament and "required further exploration."

It is important to note that the Chiefs of Staff Report was issued at a time of severe economic depression, and at a time when the Disarmament Conference was meeting in Geneva. People's thoughts in Britain at this time were concerned mainly with the domestic scene - unemployment, poverty, means tests and their standard of living. People interested in international affairs were hopeful of the success of the

Disarmament Conference, but the two factors of the economic depression and the Disarmament Conference made it very difficult for a report advocating rearmament to be considered.

The Treasury's view at this time was also important. They argued that with the economic situation a period of recuperation and restricted national expenditure was necessary: expenditure on armaments was to be avoided until the financial situation improved. It was this view that influenced the Cabinet most, and it effectively took the decision to postpone things. In twelve months' time the situation had changed little. On 14 March 1933 the Under-Secretary of State for Air, introducing the Air estimates to the House of Commons, stated that the need for economies was no less pressing than it had been a year before. The 1933 estimates were in fact a further reduction on 1932. A few days earlier Duff Cooper, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, announced the Army estimates, which were £2 million lower than those of 1931.

At the time that the debate in public and behind the scenes was going on, preparations for the World Disarmament Conference were taking place. The Disarmament Conference assembled on 2 February 1932 in Geneva. If there was to be one theme running throughout the conference and one that ultimately led to its collapse, it was the conflicting demands of Germany and

France. The essential problem at the conference was German armaments.<sup>(8)</sup> The French feared Germany and had ample reason to do so. Their distrust was increased by the elaborate dossier on German secret rearmament which they were tempted to publish on several occasions during the conference. France at this time was the strongest military and financial power in Europe, and her government was determined to maintain superiority over Germany until French security was guaranteed by Great Britain, the League or otherwise. Germany pointed to the Treaty of Versailles, which stated that the unilateral disarmament of Germany was to be followed by a general limitation of armaments. Thus Germany came to the conference demanding the abolition of all restrictions on her, except in so far as these restrictions were equally enforced upon all countries. Germany therefore professed to want other countries to disarm to her level, rather than rearm herself.

In Britain at this time the pressure for disarmament and for a successful agreement at the conference was strong. Some, like Lord Lothian, argued that:

"the first condition to reform [the Nazi regime] is that we should be willing to do justice to Germany."<sup>(9)</sup>

For those with similar views the French demand for security met, in the earlier stages of the conference, with little sympathy.

The Disarmament Conference made little real headway against two such opposing views. Much time was spent discussing the prohibition of weapons which could be defined as aggressive, but no agreement was found. The German Government under Von Papen announced on 14 September 1932 that it was to withdraw from the Conference. By December 1932 Germany was back at the conference table with a formula recognising her claim "to equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations."<sup>10</sup> The Disarmament Conference renewed its work in February 1933, but the international situation had taken a turn for the worse. Adolf Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany on 30 January. Shortly after this, Japan left the League of Nations. On 16 March Ramsay MacDonald produced a draft convention attempting to combine those proposals which had appeared to gain a measure of approval. This MacDonald plan was eventually accepted by the General Commission in June as the basis for a future convention. The conference then adjourned until the Autumn.

The conference met again in October 1933, at which point Hitler suddenly announced Germany's withdrawal from the conference and the League of Nations. From

this point (on 14 October) the conference was effectively finished. Attempts to bring Germany back to the conference were made, but without any success; and without Germany nothing could be done.

In 1932 the Chiefs of Staff had prepared their annual review at a worrying stage in the Sino-Japanese dispute. In 1933 their annual review of imperial defence policy took place just before Germany left the Disarmament Conference, but at a stage when the conference seemed doomed to failure anyway. The report talked about the deterioration in the international scene since 1932. Japan and China had signed a truce, but tension in the Far East was still high. In Europe Germany was again becoming a "public menace". She had begun to rearm, and her continuing rearmament might involve Britain, because of her Locarno obligations, in a war on the side of the French. In spite of all these developments nothing had been done to rectify the state of Britain's defence systems described in the last review. The ten-year rule had gone, but nothing had replaced it. The CID saw the Chiefs of Staff Annual Review on 9 November 1933, by which time the Disarmament Conference had for all effective purposes failed. The main recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff were accepted and the Cabinet considered the recommendations and accepted them a week later.

In the light of this report the Cabinet decided on 15 November 1933 to lay down certain guidelines to replace the abandoned ten-year rule. Defence expenditure should be governed by the requirements of the defence of Britain's interests in the Far East, commitments in Europe, and the defence of India. Expenditure was not to be incurred for defence against attack by the United States, France or Italy. A sub-committee of the CID was set up to prepare a report with recommendations for a programme to make good Britain's worst defence deficiencies. This was the origin of the Defence Requirements Committee. Chairman was Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the Cabinet and the CID, and other members were Sir Robert Vansittart (permanent head of the Foreign Office since 1930), Sir Warren Fisher, (Permanent Secretary to the Treasury since 1919) and the three Chiefs of Staff. The first report was presented to the Cabinet at the end of February 1934.

The decision that Germany was the ultimate potential enemy led the committee in its report to put emphasis on the Army's greatest deficiency, the absence of an expeditionary force capable of securing Britain's traditional interests in the Low Countries. The major part of the programme was to be a five-year programme. This estimate took into account financial considerations and the ability of Germany to rearm. Within these limits the programme recommended by the DRC was, for the

Navy, the modernisation of most of its capital ships to keep up with similar action elsewhere - especially in Japan, the building up of essential stores and the modernisation of naval bases. The Army was to have an expeditionary Force for the purpose of defending the Low Countries; and in addition the Army would be responsible for an expanding anti-aircraft defence scheme. The RAF should complete within five years the 1923 scheme of 52 squadrons for Home Defence. Also recommended was substantial reinforcement of the Fleet Air Arm and 10 more squadrons for overseas defence east of Suez. Another problem was also pointed out. The air defences of Britain on the ground and in the air were designed for the protection of London, southern England and the south Midlands only. To cover the North as well, a further 25 squadrons would be necessary together with appropriate ground defences.

The cost of the deficiency programme was estimated at £82 million. However, notable among the committee's arguments was that "moral disarmament" of the population should be ranked not least among the "worst deficiencies."<sup>11</sup> It was claimed that as a result of propaganda, the British people had allowed its defence forces to fall "below the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement of common action by international obligations." In this frame of mind the British people would be shocked by the announcement of a

large defence programme and the Cabinet needed to consider the implications of that shock.

It must be emphasised here that these were not politicians making these pronouncements, but technical advisers. Even they realised that public opinion would be shocked by the valuation of what was needed to place British defences on a secure footing and admitted that "the greatest care will be necessary to educate the nation as to the reasons for the heavy financial outlay involved."

After two months' delay the Cabinet referred the DRC report to the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament on 2 May 1934, and a further three months passed before the Cabinet approved that committee's amended version. The reason for this delay was that during this period the government was much more concerned to keep alive hopes of disarmament than to face the prospect of rearmament.

The Ministerial Committee asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, in consultation with the service departments, to prepare a revised estimate of costs for the whole programme, this time with full regard to political and financial considerations. At the end of June the Chancellor of the Exchequer reported back to the Ministerial Committee on his proposed amendments to the DRC programme in the light of the economic and political situations. Chamberlain made

three broad points. Firstly, the financial situation was still so difficult that the DRC's proposals to meet the worst deficiencies in all three services was impractical, so that ministers must lay down priorities. Secondly, Chamberlain accepted the DRC's identification of Germany as the greatest danger, and drew from it the conclusion that home defence must be given first priority. Thirdly, in Chamberlain's opinion the best defence was a powerful home-based air force which could serve as a "deterrent", with the Army as a second or long-term line of defence. Chamberlain proposed a "startling reduction" in the proposed deficiency expenditure on the Army from £40 million to £19 million.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted, as regards expenditure on the Army, that he was faced not only with the difficulty of finance, but with that of public opinion, which would regard Army expenditure as money spent on making preparations to take part in a war on the Continent. "For political reasons alone, it would be very necessary to spread the Army expenditure over a considerable period in order to avoid criticism."<sup>12</sup> In a subsequent discussion of the DC(M) the Chancellor went even further in acknowledging the influence of public opinion on his revision of the DRC programme. Referring specifically to the Army he remarked:

"If we spend too much the government could be turned out and a successor might do nothing at all. It was therefore a wise calculation to under-provide in some circumstances." '13'

The first public announcements as regards the programme were concerned with the air proposals. The air recommendations of the DRC, although limited to the unambitious programme of 52 squadrons for home and European defence, made generous provision for working and war reserves. However the Chancellor of the Exchequer's proposals recommended a much larger increase for home defence, 38 instead of 10 extra squadrons, and as a saving made no further provision for fleet aircraft and none for war reserves. Lord Londonderry condemned the Chancellor of the Exchequer's plan as "being better designed for public consumption" than for real utility; chiefly on the grounds that it made so little provision for reserves. '14' As N.H. Gibbs points out; both now and later the policy of "window dressing" was designed not only to reassure the public at home, but also "to inspire respect in the mind of a possible enemy." In other words it was a policy of deterrence. '15'

As ever a compromise was reached. This compromise was a programme divided into two parts. First an addition of 33 squadrons for Home Defence in the years 1934-1939, and secondly a programme of reserves to be completed during the years 1939-1942. There were to be

eight further squadrons for service with the Fleet Air Arm and overseas. Once again there was a nod in the direction of public opinion. The final Cabinet statement on the DRC proposals pointed out that:

"Although currents of more or less uninformed public opinion at home ought never to be a determining factor in defensive preparations, they have to be reckoned with in asking Parliament to approve a programme of expenditure. In the present case it happened that the general trend of public opinion appeared to coincide with our own views as to the desirability of a considerable expansion of the RAF for home defence." (14)

In Gibbs' view, these were without doubt the motives which changed a deficiency plan into a rearmament programme.

The programme was approved on 18 July 1934 by the Cabinet and announced to the House of Commons on 30 July 1934. The proposals were defended on the grounds that the Disarmament Conference had clearly failed and because other nations were rearming. Opposition to the programme was divided into two camps, those who believed they did not go far enough and those who believed them unnecessary. At the end of the debate the government defeated the opposition by 404 votes to 60.

The programme that was given to the House of Commons on 30 July 1934 was radically different from what had originally been proposed. The poor economic situation and public opinion against rearmament had led

the government, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in particular, to cut the programme. A balanced programme of £75 million had been amended to one only two-thirds that size, and so altered in distribution that the Air Force gained at the expense of the Army and Navy on grounds that were hardly military. Baldwin in his announcement to the House of Commons on 30 July only mentioned the measures designed to improve the RAF, and even this modest announcement was greeted by the Leader of the Opposition, Clement Attlee, with the words "we deny the need for increased air armaments." '17'

In the view of the public and the Opposition, this programme was seen as rearmament. Yet in the view of many of the Conservative party the programme was too little and too late. Most notable amongst this group was Winston Churchill. Others in the local area included Lord Londonderry, Cuthbert Headlam the M.P. for Darlington and Harold Macmillan the M.P. for Stockton. The government was in a strange position. It had embarked on a programme of spending more on armaments at the same time as following a course of pushing for disarmament at the Disarmament Conference. There were two main factors against this. Firstly, public opinion, the majority of whom were not in favour of increased armaments, and secondly an economic situation which was leading to cuts in many other areas of government expenditure.

The North East of England exemplified many of the economic problems which faced Britain as a whole. In many ways the North East was much worse off than many other regions. For most of the inter-war years, after the initial boom of the years 1919-1921, Britain suffered levels of unemployment unknown in her history. In 1933 there were three million people registered as unemployed. Although unemployment had been a fairly regular feature of the trade cycle in the nineteenth century economy, and although at times larger numbers of workers were thrown out of work, the size and more importantly the duration of inter-war unemployment made it into a new kind of problem. (See Table 1 on page 33)

Unemployment dominated the inter-war period. Between 1931 and 1935 the number of unemployed never fell below one million, while the rate of unemployment averaged 14.2 per cent amongst the insured labour force, or an estimated 10 per cent amongst the total labour force. The full severity of inter-war unemployment is clearly revealed when this latter figure is compared with the average unemployment rate of 1.8 per cent for the 1948-1971 period and account is taken of Beveridge's estimate that inter-war unemployment was between two and three times as severe as that of the period 1883-1913. <sup>(10)</sup>

Looking at the reasons for unemployment, there are two main causes, which both combined to affect the North

East. Firstly, as a consequence of a change in supply and demand conditions as regards Britain, the British staple export industries experienced a period of readjustment in which labour was shed on a large scale.

TABLE 1  
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN SELECTED DEPRESSED AREAS 1933

TOWN	PER CENT OF INSURED WORKFORCE
SALTBURN	91
JARROW	77
CLEATON MOOR	64
STORNOWAY	70
WISHAW	60
CLYDEBANK	54
TAFTS WELL	82
PONTYCYMER	72
MERTHYR	68
ABERTILLERY	66

Source: Glynn's & Oxborrow J. Inter War Britain, page 153.

These industries and thus the unemployed were concentrated in the outer regions, Northern England, Wales and Scotland. Secondly, the expanding industrial sectors valued market proximity more greatly than proximity to raw materials, and this, together with the slow growth of consumer expenditure in the depressed regions, combined to ensure that the new industries were located in inner Britain, e.g. Greater London, the South and the Midlands.

The regional problem thus assumed two dimensions. To begin with there were the very high rates of unemployment in the depressed regions and their below average rates of employment growth. This was compounded by cyclical factors. The depressed regions were heavily committed to producer goods industries which experienced the most pronounced cyclical fluctuations in output and employment.

At the end of World War One the North East economy seemed well set for a continuation of the growth, prosperity and relatively low unemployment levels that had characterised the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>'19'</sup> Such expectations were to be cruelly disappointed. The inter-war difficulties of the region followed from its industrial base being too narrow: the coal-mining, iron and steel, shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries employed approximately two-thirds of its working population in 1914.<sup>'20'</sup> The regional economy was

therefore particularly vulnerable to cyclical and long-run changes in the demand for the products of its industrial base.

Initially, however, these industries were relatively prosperous. Until 1923 or thereabouts the North East in fact enjoyed an advantage relative to other regions from its industrial structure; but thereafter a marked deviation of the regional from the national unemployment rate became clearly evident, the ratio of the regional to the national rate averaging 1.30 over the period 1923-1936.<sup>'21'</sup> (See Table 2 on page 37)

At the macro regional level, the unemployment problem is further illustrated by data for employment destruction by the staple industries group and for overall employment growth. Between 1924 and 1938, the coal-mining, iron and steel, and shipbuilding industries alone, shed over 100,000 workers, equivalent to 27.5 per cent of their combined workforce and 16.8 per cent of the region's total insured male working population.<sup>'22'</sup>

While the North East might appear to be especially poor, too bleak a picture should not be painted. As with many other things generalisation hides some interesting facts. Despite the popular image of uniform mass unemployment pervading the region, the experience of towns such as Jarrow was in fact exceptional. The region contained relatively prosperous centres: there

was a wide dispersion of unemployment rates around the mean. For example, during the relatively prosperous month of September 1929 (national unemployment 9.9 per cent) unemployment rates within the region varied from 6.1 per cent at Consett to 26.8 per cent at Bishop Auckland and 33.1 per cent at Jarrow.

For those actually in work, the 1930s was a period of rising living standards and new levels of consumption, upon which a considerable degree of industrial growth was based. This was the paradox which lay at the heart of Britain in the 1930s, where new levels of prosperity contrasted with the intractable problems of mass unemployment and the depressed areas such as the North East. It was the depressed areas, it is suggested, which "tarnished the picture of recovery and were the basis for the myth of the hungry 1930s." (23) The picture of depression was certainly not evenly spread, but was concentrated in the old industrial areas. This is not to paper over the cracks and make out that really everything was all right. J.B. Priestley visited Stockton in 1933 and described it as being:

"like a theatre which is kept open merely for the sale of drinks in the bars and chocolates in the corridors." (24)

Tables 2 and 3 summarise regional employment trends, showing clearly the magnitude and diversity of the problem.

TABLE 2 - REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES  
(INSURED PERSONS AGED 16-64)  
MINISTRY OF LABOUR DIVISIONS 1923-1937

	1923	1929	1932	1937
LONDON	10.1	5.6	13.5	6.3
SOUTH EAST	9.2	5.6	14.3	6.7
SOUTH WEST	10.6	8.1	17.1	7.8
MIDLANDS	10.7	9.3	20.1	7.2
NORTH EAST	12.2	13.7	28.5	11.0
NORTH WEST	14.5	13.3	25.8	14.0
NORTHERN*				17.9
SCOTLAND	14.3	12.1	27.7	15.7
WALES	6.4	19.3	36.5	22.3
GREAT BRITAIN	11.6	10.3	21.9	10.6

\* The Northern Division, created in August 1936, was based upon parts of the old North East and North West Divisions.

TABLE 3 - REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT GROWTH  
(INSURED PERSONS 16-64)  
MINISTRY OF LABOUR DIVISIONS 1923-1937

	1923-29	1927-32	1932-37	1923-37
LONDON	20.4	- 1.9	22.9	45.2
SOUTH EAST	26.9	0.3	25.3	59.4
SOUTH WEST	17.0	- 2.3	22.1	39.6
MIDLANDS	11.0	- 8.8	30.8	32.4
NORTH EAST	5.1	-12.4	24.0	14.1
NORTH WEST	8.7	-12.1	17.2	12.0
NORTHERN	- 1.4	-21.6	31.3	1.6
SCOTLAND	4.8	-13.2	22.6	11.6
WALES	-15.4	-18.9	25.1	-14.2
GREAT BRITAIN	10.0	- 8.9	23.9	24.3

[SOURCE - ROGER MIDDLETON, "UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE NORTH EAST DURING THE PERIOD", IN R.A. CHAPMAN, PUBLIC POLICY STUDIES, THE NORTH EAST]

Having described the broad characteristics of the North East as an economic region, we can now look at some of the facts of its various unemployment problems. First, long-duration unemployment. Here the area was especially afflicted, with 40.3 per cent of those unemployed at 21 June 1937 in the Ministry of Labour's Northern Division being unemployed for over twelve months.<sup>'25'</sup> This compared with the national rate of 24.5 per cent. The acute troubles of shipbuilding, for instance, affected the North East to an even greater extent than the country at large. The 67,000 tons launched in 1934 represented only 14.5 per cent of the national total, as compared with 42 per cent in 1892.<sup>'26'</sup> Production of ships on the River Tees sank from the record level of 1920 to about one fifth of this three years later.

On the housing front an official survey of 1936 revealed that "Durham and Northumberland were easily the two most overcrowded counties in England and Wales." Sunderland, for example, had 20.6 per cent of all its families living in overcrowded conditions as compared with the average for England and Wales of 3.8 per cent.<sup>'27'</sup> Amongst the health statistics there were appalling figures for infant mortality. For 1935-1937 when the national rate was 58 per 1,000, the rate varied from 97 in Jarrow to 65 in Gosforth.<sup>'28'</sup> In both cases there was a largely common cause: the severe financial

difficulties of North East local authorities, their budgets overstretched by the burden of Poor Law relief payments such that resources were simply not available to ameliorate these, or related, social disadvantages.

(29)

Between the wars the North East was fortunate in its possession of a number of M.P.s able and willing to put the case for regional assistance. Of these Ellen Wilkinson, M.P. for Jarrow, is probably the best known and regarded. Others however, were also of importance. For example, Hugh Dalton, Labour M.P. for Bishop Auckland, who campaigned continually on behalf of the region's unemployed. Harold Macmillan, Conservative M.P. for Stockton on Tees, also served the region well. This cross-party support was of importance, but should not be overstated, nor should the region's electoral history be forgotten. The Labour Party's hold upon the region was "tenuous in the extreme" outside of the mining and shipbuilding constituencies, even within them on occasion, as instanced by the 46.9 per cent of Jarrow's electorate voting Conservative in the 1935 General Election.<sup>30</sup> What this demonstrated was that even given the economic problems faced by the region during this period, coherence and unity at various social levels was far from complete. Conservative M.P.s were sent to Westminster in 1929, 1931 and 1935 from The Hartlepoons, while Darlington, Stockton and Sunderland

all sent supporters of the National Government to the 1931 and 1935 parliaments. In the 1931 general election, Labour did badly in the North East, as in the country as a whole. The predominantly mining constituency of Seaham Harbour gave Ramsay MacDonald a comfortable win, although it did not compare with his huge majority there as Labour candidate in 1929. Even in the general election of 1935, after the worst years of the economic depression, the Labour party's recovery in the region was much less marked than might have been hoped for. Labour made significant gains in the Durham County divisions, and Seaham Harbour gave MacDonald a trouncing, but seats such as Houghton-le-Spring, Barnard Castle and even Jarrow were only won by distinctly narrow majorities.<sup>31</sup>

The region was well served by local newspapers at the time. There were many thriving local newspapers with small circulations, such as the Chester-le-Street Chronicle, as well as larger newspaper concerns with large circulations. For the purpose of the writer's research it is these larger-circulation newspapers which will provide the main source, particularly those newspapers which had a letters page, to gauge public opinion on various matters. The newspapers used are in table 4 as well as in the bibliography.

Of these newspapers there are five in particular which will require the most scrutiny. These are the

Northern Echo, the North Eastern Daily Gazette, the Newcastle Journal, the Sunderland Echo and the Northern Daily Mail. These five are situated in the main five towns of the area and are sufficiently widely spread to give a good idea of the thinking in the region. One newspaper in particular, the Northern Echo, could be classed as a truly regional newspaper as it covers the whole area, rather than just the town it is sold in. It is worth looking at these newspapers in closer detail.

The Northern Echo was first published in 1869 by J.H. Bell, who decided to publish a Liberal Daily in Darlington. The main influence on the Echo during the period 1931 to 1935 was Sir Charles Starmer. He had been instrumental in the formation of the North of England Newspaper Company in the early 1900s. In public life Starmer was a Liberal and he was elected for Cleveland in 1923 only to lose his seat at the 1924 General Election. The circulation of the Northern Echo in the 1930s was approximately 90,000. <sup>(32)</sup>

An example of how the Northern Echo can be seen as a regional newspaper is evident from the following account. During the 1930s it was not uncommon for miners' families to share one Echo in a street. Thus it was not regarded as a "Darlo" newspaper so much as their "own" paper by thousands throughout the coalfield. When Thorne Colliery, near Doncaster, was opened hundreds of Durham miners left the county to work there, and such

was their loyalty to the paper that for years at their request a "Doncaster parcel" was made up daily and sent to newsagents there. <sup>(33)</sup>

The Newcastle Journal first appeared as a weekly newspaper on 12 May 1832. It was founded by John Hernaman and Robert Perring from Leeds, at the invitation of a group of local Tories. Politics was an important part of the 19th century newspaper, and accounts of parliamentary proceedings, reports of speeches by leading politicians and leading political articles from the political viewpoint of the newspaper featured heavily.

The paper continued to progress, and in the 20th century increased in liveliness. This may have been due to a change in the chairmanship of the Northern Counties Conservative Newspaper Company, along with a change in the management of the newspaper. In July 1910 Samuel Story became chairman. He was an important figure in the political municipal, educational and social activities of the north. <sup>(34)</sup>

The circulation of the paper during the 1930s was approximately 40,000. <sup>(35)</sup> On 12 May 1932, the Journal celebrated its centenary. Tributes flooded in, including ones from the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and many local figures. <sup>(36)</sup> As a guide to the political leanings of the Journal it is worth

looking at the tributes. A tribute from the President of the Board of Trade congratulated the Journal on:

"the impartiality of its news columns and the fairness of its editorial columns which place it high among the newspapers of the whole country." (37)

However, a northern tribute from Lord Kirkley says:

"As one who has not shared the political persuasion which it avows, may I say I have always admired and appreciated its manifest honesty and scrupulous fairness in dealing with controversial matters, be they political, religious or social. It is more than fair in its treatment of such matters; it is generous to a degree to those who may venture to express views that differ from its policy." (38)

The editorial comment derived pleasure from such correspondents, stating that congratulations messages could not be charged to party bias. Certainly the Journal no longer exercised such a strong political function as it had done in the previous century, in line with the provincial press in general. To survive in this era it was eager to appeal to a wider audience including all political persuasions in the region.

The Middlesbrough North Eastern Daily Gazette began publication in 1870. Unfortunately there are no circulation figures for the period 1931 to 1935 as the company does not keep figures for this period. The newspaper served a similar area to the one it does now,

namely Middlesbrough, Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby, Redcar and parts of East Cleveland. In 1926 the Gazette was taken over by Allied Newspapers Ltd under the chairmanship of Mr. Edmund Tebbutt.<sup>'39'</sup> Allied Newspapers was the group owned by the Berry Brothers, better known in later years as Lord Camrose and Lord Kemsley. The Allied Newspaper group also included in its ranks the Sunday Times, the Financial Times, the St. Clements Press and newspapers in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Newcastle, York, Blackburn, Manchester, Stockport, Sheffield, Macclesfield, Cardiff and London.

The editor at this time was Mr. J.H. Thompson who took over in 1927 and continued in the chair for 21 years. Born and bred in Middlesbrough, and at one time or another occupying every editorial post on the Gazette on the way to the editorship, Jack Thompson dedicated his life to championing the causes which were for the good of Teesside. Because iron and steel were the very lifeblood of Teesside at the time, Jack made himself an authority on the subject.<sup>'40'</sup>

According to R. Wood in West Hartlepool, West Hartlepool's first purely local paper was established as a direct result of the 1865 General Election.<sup>'41'</sup> The Conservative party conceived themselves so much aggrieved and prejudiced by the perversion and distortion of facts in the newspapers then available that they determined to establish their own newspaper.

The South Durham Herald thus made its appearance in 1866. George Herbert was its first editor. The Northern Daily Mail is the direct descendant of the South Durham Herald. The Conservatives thus had the rare experience of bringing the daily press to a centre without a daily paper of its own. Their triumph was short lived however. In 1878 George Herbert died. The paper struggled on for two years before being closed down. A new owner, Thomas North, took over and reissued the Mail, still on the Conservative side. In September 1884 however, another change of ownership occurred. The Mail was taken over by a new company of which the chairman was none other than the voice of Durham Liberalism, Samuel Storey. The Mail changed its politics accordingly.<sup>'42'</sup> This is the same Samuel Storey who took over the Newcastle Journal in 1910. Records on the Mail for the 1930s are few and far between. Circulation figures are not known by the present owners, but the area it covered included Hartlepool, West Hartlepool and a number of the villages to the north. Its political outlook, with the same owners as the Newcastle Journal, will have been similar to that newspaper.

The beginnings of the daily press in Sunderland occurred on 22 December 1873 when the Sunderland Daily Echo was founded.<sup>'43'</sup> Conventional in layout, its greatest asset was its political standpoint - Radical,

as befitted a stronghold of advanced Liberalism. The Echo was launched by a group of local men, several of whom were active in Liberal circles. The chief proprietor of the new venture was none other than Samuel Storey, who as we have seen, was active in local newspapers. The circulation area of the Echo covered greater Sunderland, as far north as South Shields, and large areas of the Durham coalfield.

TABLE 4  
MAIN NEWSPAPERS IN THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND  
1931 - 1935

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BLAYDON COURIER	(BLAYDON)
DARLINGTON AND STOCKTON TIMES	(DARLINGTON)
EVENING DISPATCH	(DARLINGTON)
THE NORTHERN ECHO	(DARLINGTON)
ADVERTISER AND CHRONICLE	(DURHAM)
GATESHEAD HERALD	(GATESHEAD)
NORTHERN DAILY MAIL	(HARTLEPOOL)
NORTH EASTERN DAILY GAZETTE	(MIDDLESBROUGH)
EVENING CHRONICLE	(NEWCASTLE)
EVENING WORLD	(NEWCASTLE)
NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE	(NEWCASTLE)
NEWCASTLE JOURNAL	(NEWCASTLE)
NEWCASTLE [WEEKLY] CHRONICLE	(NEWCASTLE)
SUNDAY SUN	(NEWCASTLE)
SHIELDS GAZETTE	(SOUTH SHIELDS)
SUNDERLAND ECHO	(SUNDERLAND)

Unemployment in the North East was a major problem in this period and spawned all the other problems associated with it, such as poor health and poor housing. All were much in evidence. The region with its dependence on heavy engineering, shipbuilding, coal mining and iron and steel had a great deal to gain from any upturn in the production of armaments. Its election

results do not suggest that the region was firmly in the pocket of the Labour Party and blindly voted therefore for Labour policies. The region is therefore ideal for the study of public opinion in this period as regards rearmament.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Alan Jamieson Europe In Conflict 1870-1980  
page 223
- (2) N.H. Gibbs Grand Strategy, page 73
- (3) Ibid page 74, quoted from C.I.D.  
1112B, paragraph 7
- (4) W.N. Medlicott British Foreign Policy Since  
Versailles 1919-1963,  
page 123
- (5) Ibid page 124
- (6) N. H. Gibbs op cit, page 78
- (7) Ibid page 79
- (8) W.N. Medlicott British Foreign Policy Since  
Versailles 1919-1963,  
page 102
- (9) Sir James Butler Lord Lothian, page 197
- (10) For a more comprehensive account of the Disarmament  
Conference see N.H. Gibbs, op cit
- (11) N.H. Gibbs op cit, page 98
- (12) Brian Bond British Military Policy  
Between the Two World Wars,  
page 206
- (13) Ibid page 207
- (14) Londonderry, Charles  
7th Marquis of Wings of Destiny, page 206
- (15) N.H. Gibbs op cit, page 106,  
quoting DC(M)(32).120
- (16) CP 205(34) quoted in N.H. Gibbs, op cit  
page 107
- (17) House of Commons Debates 5th series, volume 292,  
Column 2349, 30 July 1934
- (18) W.H. Beveridge Full Employment in a Free  
Society, page 109
- (19) N. McCord North East England. An  
Economic and Social History,  
page 215
- (20) E. Allen, A.J. Odber  
& P.J. Bowden Development Area Policy in  
the North East of England,  
page 1

FOOTNOTES CONTINUED

- (21) M.E.F. Jones The Disaggregation of Inter-war Regional Unemployment Series 1923-1938, page 37
- (22) M.P. Fogarty Prospects of the Industrial Areas of Great Britain, Table 34
- (23) C.L. Mowat Britain Between The Wars. 1918-1940 (2nd Edition) 1963, page 413
- (24) J.B. Priestley English Journey (2nd Edition), page 231
- (25) R. Middleton "Unemployment in the North East during the inter-war period," page 25, in R.S. Chapman, Public Policy Studies, The North East
- (26) D. Dougan A History of North East Shipbuilding, page 87
- (27) G.D.H. & M.I. Cole The Condition of Britain, pages 158, 162-3
- (28) D.M. Goodfellow Tyneside: The Social Facts, page 28
- (29) N. McCord op cit, pages 243-4
- (30) Ibid page 225
- (31) M. Calcott Parliamentary elections in County Durham 1929-1935 Unpublished M. Litt Dissertation
- (32) J.R. Page Darlington Newspapers, page 29
- (33) Ibid
- (34) Michael Preston The Newcastle Journal 1832-1950, page 2
- (35) Ibid page 12
- (36) Newcastle Daily Journal 12 May 1932
- (37) Ibid page 4
- (38) Ibid page 5
- (39) Ian Nimmo The Bold Adventure, page 48
- (40) Ibid page 49
- (41) R. Wood West Hartlepool, page 102

FOOTNOTES CONTINUED

'42' M. Milne

Newspapers of Northumberland  
and Durham, page 117

'43' Ibid

page 93

**PUBLIC OPINION CONCERNING  
REARMAMENT FROM OCTOBER 1931  
TO OCTOBER 1933**

The late 1920s for many people held out the belief that many of Europe's problems could be settled. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of August 1928 was signed by 65 nations. They promised to renounce war (except in self defence) as an instrument of national policy. In May 1929 the Young plan was accepted as the basis for the payment of reparations by Germany and the allies were persuaded by Stresemann to agree to an accelerated timetable for the withdrawal of occupation troops. The Washington and London Naval Treaties kept Britain from involvement in costly naval arms races. The Locarno Treaty guaranteed the existing border between France and Germany and lessened tension in Europe. From 1926 the Preparatory Commission for the forthcoming Disarmament conference met to discuss measures that would lead nations to reduce their armaments. In the autumn of 1931 the 31 nations who would participate in the conference in 1932, agreed to freeze their military budgets at existing levels so that the conference would have a stable basis on which to begin.

To be set against this optimism was a number of events in the same period that seemed determined to place obstacles in the road of any solutions. The death

of Stresemann on 3 October 1929 removed the one German committed to moderate settlements of Germany's grievances. Three weeks later on 29 October the New York stock market collapsed and American capital investment in Europe all but ceased. This triggered a worldwide depression and in Germany had the effect of strengthening the appeal of the extremist parties.

In Britain the Labour Government of MacDonald was caught in the international monetary crisis of 1931. This intensified the problems MacDonald was already having at home and led to an internal political crisis in which the Labour Party split and MacDonald and a few supporters allied themselves with the Conservatives and Liberals.

The General Election of October 1931 resulted in a resounding victory for the new National coalition. The results were:-

Conservatives	473	Liberals	33
Labour	52	National Labour (MacDonald)	13
National Liberals	35	Lloyd George Liberals	4

In the North Eastern region which the author is studying, the results in the election were:-

Conservatives	14	Liberals	4
Labour	2	National Labour	1
National Liberals	4	Lloyd George Liberals	0

(See appendix one)

As Prime Minister, MacDonald was not up to the task. With a huge Conservative majority as the basis of his government he was not in sufficiently good health to

stamp his own ideas on its policies. He was increasingly a figurehead, presiding over a government he did not control. He retired as Prime Minister in June 1935.

Between the 1931 election and the next general election in November 1935 a public debate began over the question of rearmament fuelled by international events.

Memories of the 1914-18 war and fears of the possibility of another ran deep within the British people. In 1914 they had been unprepared, psychologically as well as militarily, for the four years of ruthless and total war. The war came as a nerve-shattering shock to a generation reared in security. Near starvation, crushing financial burdens, and, above all, appallingly long casualty lists destroyed the glamour of war for many in Britain. The four years of war shattered the belief that war was a legitimate method of furthering national ambitions and replaced it with a determination to avoid war and a fear of armaments as a primary cause of war.

The late 1920s and early 1930s also saw some striking manifestations such as the anti-war publications, notably Robert Graves Goodbye To All That (1929) and Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth (1933). No doubt the success of such works a decade after the war tells us something about the mood of the 1920s and 1930s, but in the view of historians they do

not point to a general pacifism so much as to a repudiation, particularly by some of the middle classes, of the kind of appeal that had been used to justify war in 1914-1918.<sup>'1'</sup>

Harold Macmillan notes a change in people's feelings.<sup>'2'</sup> Throughout 1931 to 1935, he wrote in his memoirs, the British people refused even to consider the possibility of another war. The last war had been so terrible that it was "unthinkable" that this degrading and humiliating internecine strife between civilised countries could be repeated. War was not only intolerable, he observed, but incredible. Modern war, it was believed, with engines of destruction even more frightful than in 1914-1918, would prove the end of civilisation.

Thus "pacifism" in various forms, whether under the auspices of the Peace Society or expressed in the famous resolution of the Oxford Union, flourished even as the danger seemed to grow.<sup>'3'</sup> In the North East this "pacifism" was also much in evidence. On 10 July 1931 a letter appeared in the Middlesbrough paper the North Eastern Daily Gazette from Albert Dawson, the Hon. secretary of the Middlesbrough East Liberal Association. The letter encouraged people to sign "No More War" forms which were available from the Association's offices and were being distributed by its members. The declaration was to be presented to the World Disarmament conference

of the League of Nations and requested the gradual disarmament of all nations by agreement.

"The people have their chance," the secretary wrote, "Let them show their government that they want the conference to reduce drastically the futile and expensive burden of armaments." (4)

This letter was by no means an isolated one but is representative of numerous other letters that appeared at the time throughout the region. The majority of these letters were from individuals, but there were many from groups such as the League of Nations Union and from church groups. Most of the letters were asking for the same thing, a commitment from the public to work for peace and to urge politicians and representatives at the Disarmament Conference to press for a 25 per cent cut in armaments. Many letters refer to resolutions passed at various meetings. For example, a resolution was passed at a meeting of the Darlington and Stockton District Methodist Commission held at Stockton on 13 December 1931, urging that all disputes between nations were capable of settlement without resort to the use of armed force. (5) The Sunday after this letter appeared was declared as "Peace Sunday" by the "No More War Movement" and letters appeared in a number of North Eastern newspapers urging people to observe Peace Sunday as a time when "we can look forward to disarmament and peace." (6) The "No More War Movement" was a nationally

organised group which aimed to influence the general public as to the futility of war and apply pressure on particular groups such as politicians with the use of petitions, meetings and general publicity such as the "Peace Sunday". The movement had various regional centres, and the letters placed in the North Eastern papers were organised from the region's headquarters in Benwell, Newcastle.

Even before these letters, others had appeared giving a lead on disarmament. Notable amongst these were the League of Nations Union and church groups. On 5 May 1931 a letter from the Middlesbrough branch of the L.N.U. was calling on the churches to give a lead towards peace.<sup>7</sup> The writer criticised the spending of money on arms. He noted that the world was presently spending approximately one thousand million pounds yearly on armaments. This folly and waste, he argued, could not continue indefinitely. Either nations would go bankrupt or civilisation will be plunged into another world war, probably the latter. This theme of money was present in many letters at this time. With an economic depression biting and money for other projects being cut, many people obviously thought spending on arms was a waste. Indeed, the most popular topic for letter writing at this time, in all the papers examined, was the means test and the unfairness of the system. People were obviously reluctant to see extra money being spent

on armaments while they themselves were subject to the rigours of the means test and general reduction in spending power. Many people looked to disarmament as a means of releasing money into the economy to improve people's standard of living. The strength of feeling about the means test can be seen by the tone of many of the letters and by some of the demonstrations that took place. Typical of these was a riot which took place in Durham in 1933. The Newcastle Journal reported on a riot in Durham when groups from Teesside, Gateshead, Chopwell, Birtley and Chester-le-Street carrying banners saying "Down with the Means Test" converged on the Shire Hall. '8' Their leader was a Mrs Chaytor, who was conspicuous, the Journal noted, by her red cloth hat. '9' Demonstrations, though maybe not riots, on the means test were common, yet the author has found little evidence in this period of demonstrations, violent or otherwise, on disarmament. Meetings yes, but no demonstrations. What these letters showed is that disillusionment with war and fear of its weaponry was leading many in the North East to seek a new method of preserving the peace. They believed that they had fought a war to end all wars and they would not accept the need to maintain huge stockpiles of the weapons of war. The new methods people were looking for took a number of different forms. Many turned to the League of Nations and the League of Nations Union, believing that

the League by the mere fact of its existence, would ensure peace, and they regarded any increase in the Armed Forces as a blow at the strength of the League system. Others looked to the church and its leaders.

This call upon the churches and church leaders to show a lead is a theme that occurs often. People looked to religious leaders to play their part in the cause of disarmament. Whether they looked upon the Church as neutral and therefore something that could be influenced, or whether they thought men of God would naturally be pro-disarmament, is unclear. Whatever the reason, the Church was not to be allowed to sit on the sidelines, and there were many letters calling for their opinions. Typical of these is a letter of 7 May 1931 reminding Christian churches of their obligations in an urgent and important matter and asking them to debate the issue of disarmament.<sup>'10'</sup> The letter was from an individual. To the churches' credit, many of them did debate this issue and a number of resolutions were passed. At the Annual Synod of the regions' Methodists held on 2 May 1932 a resolution was passed expressing a desire for total disarmament and urging all members of churches to pledge themselves to the cause of peace and to take no part in war or in preparation for war.<sup>'11'</sup> Nor did these resolutions stop with churches. On 22 January 1932 the Middlesbrough Rotary Club decided, after an overwhelming vote in favour, to send to the

World Disarmament Conference a cable earnestly praying that the cause for disarmament would be successful. '12'

The anti-disarmers were not as noticeable with their views as the pro-disarmers, but a number of letters and meetings did occur to express the views of the anti-disarmers. One of the most interesting letters along these lines was published on 19 May 1931, from an individual. '13' This writer accused the L.N.U. and the churches of "Gambling with the Empire's Security." He said that public opinion was being duped by disarmament propaganda and he quoted figures from that year's Whitakers Almanack to prove his point. In 1914 according to the figures Britain possessed 96 submarines; in 1931 they had been reduced to 69. The same statistics for other countries were: France 76 increased to 99; Italy 20 increased to 57; Japan 15 increased to 71; USA 47 increased to 137. Britain possesses 908 aircraft, France 1358, Italy 1100 and USA 974. The writer went on to say that the area to be policed by the British Navy exceeded the combined area of all these powers by over five million square miles, and while the possessions of the other powers were comparatively (in the main) near the mother country those of Britain were spread all over the world.

This writer's statistics came in for some criticism over the following weeks. Many letters were published arguing against his viewpoint and particularly his use

of just submarines as a comparison between nations, but this is not what is important. What is important is the sentiment expressed and these sentiments were supported by others in the debate that followed in the letter columns. Macmillan then appears to be accurate when he says that British opinion in this period was sadly confused.<sup>'14'</sup>

The British Fascist movement was also against disarmament though for different motives than the last writer. In their British Fascist Bulletin in the summer of 1932, they called for rearmament.<sup>'15'</sup> They asked, was it economy to cut down Britain's defences until the safety mark had been passed? No nation would deliberately pick a quarrel with another stronger than itself. In a letter in the same bulletin there was criticism of the Labour candidate for Barrow in Furness during the General Election of 1929. The Labour Party candidate stood on a platform which included a commitment to disarmament. Voters could afford to support him then, argued the writer, because the shipyards were busy and they were in work. The Labour candidate retained his seat with a large majority, but, the writer pointed out, one month after the election the socialists were in power, orders for two destroyers and one battleship were cancelled in those very yards, with the result that 6,000 men were discharged in the first

week, and 3,000 followed four days later. Shall we continue to disarm, the writer finished?

The British Fascist Bulletin was a national publication but seems to have been widely available in the area. It is hard to gauge the exact strength of the Fascist movement in the North East, as the author has been unable to find hard evidence of numbers etc. What evidence there is comes from newspaper reports of rallies and meetings and from these it is fair to say that in the early 1930s at least there was some support for the Fascist Party in this area. In September 1931, for instance, the Gateshead Chronicle announced that the Mosley Socialist Party (Fascists) intended to fight in all the wards in Gateshead at the coming municipal elections.<sup>'16'</sup> They were subsequently heavily defeated, but it shows the degree of organisation and commitment that existed. This organisation included local offices just off New Bridge Street in Newcastle at this time, and certain local socialists in the early 1930s believed the problem of fascism was serious enough to justify the formation of the Anti-Fascist League in Newcastle and Tyneside. The ancient hall of the Smith's Guild in Newcastle was hired for the purpose.<sup>'17'</sup> There are also numerous accounts in most of the local newspapers of marches and meetings by Fascists, and meetings being broken up by anti-fascists. Mosley himself came to Newcastle in 1935 to speak at the City Hall, but the

meeting was broken up after 15 minutes because Mosley was howled down by the audience. '18'

The view that defence cuts had gone far enough was not just confined to the British Fascist Bulletin. A number of people expressed reservations over the effect of disarmament on the economy. A letter linking disarmament and unemployment appeared in the Northern Echo on 25 June 1932. '19' The writer referred to the effect on unemployment if disarmament were to continue: the stopping of shipbuilding, he said, would throw thousands out of work. The writer did not believe that money saved from disarming would mean prosperity. His view was expanded upon by another writer, who argued that the effect of disarmament would be to put a larger amount of cash into civilian circulation. This would cause a temporary increase in employment, but would lead to a rise in inflation and to the number of military and naval personnel on the dole. '20'

Another industry aside from shipbuilding that was especially dependant on armaments for its prosperity was Vickers Ltd of Newcastle. According to David Bean, most of Vickers Armstrong workers were Labour supporters. '21' Yet it was under the second Labour Government that the workers got their hardest blow yet. The government's disarmament policy was well meant, argues David Bean, but it was hard to tell that to men and women who depended for their livelihood on armaments. Just before

Christmas 1931 there were proposals to lay off up to 1,000 men. At Vickers during the early 1930s things were at their grimmest. It was tanks which saved the works from complete shut-down. The Chairman of Vickers Armstrong, Sir Charles Craven, said in 1932,

"The tank side of the military business is certainly a profitable one, and I really don't know what we should have been able to do with the machine shops at Elswick without the large orders for tanks secured during the last twelve months." '22'

However these orders were not from Britain but from overseas. During the early 1930s Vickers made tanks and tracked vehicles for India, Poland, the Soviet Union, China, Belgium and Switzerland. They made guns for Turkey and Holland. David Bean notes that it was not until 1937, with rumours of war again in the air, that work started to reach Scotswood Road again. Orders came in from the British government now for tanks and guns, although guns for foreign countries were being produced right into 1939.

Many of the letters and articles which appeared in the latter part of 1931 and early 1932 were in connection with the forthcoming World Disarmament Conference at Geneva. The hopes for this conference were extremely high, and numerous letters appeared in all the papers expressing hopes and prayers for its success. The Durham Miners Association was just one of many groups from this area that forwarded its views

direct to the conference.<sup>'23'</sup> Each lodge received a resolution dealing with disarmament. These were to be debated and one copy of the resolution was to be sent to the Prime Minister and one copy to the President of the World Disarmament Conference at Geneva, through the National Joint Disarmament Committee at Transport House.<sup>'24'</sup> Other resolutions followed from various groups and also from public meetings. At the Newcastle City Council Meeting on 23 December 1931 the Mayor agreed to call a town meeting on the question of disarmament for the purpose of supporting the government in whatever action they might take at the forthcoming conference.<sup>'25'</sup> The town meeting was held on 19 January 1932 at the City Hall, Newcastle, when a large crowd was addressed by Lord Grey. The Prime Minister had been asked to speak at the meeting, but was unable to do so. At the meeting the following resolution was passed:

"This meeting of the citizens of Newcastle urgently desires the forthcoming General Disarmament Conference to result in a real reduction of the armies, navies and air forces of the world, and pledges itself to support his Majesty's Government in their efforts to achieve this end."<sup>'26'</sup>

The resolution was passed with great enthusiasm.

At the beginning of the Disarmament Conference in February 1932 a number of articles appeared in newspapers in the North East. The conference was not a meeting in some far-flung place that merited little

mention, but had captured the imagination of many. The articles had obviously been commissioned by the editors of the papers and varied in their approach to the topic of disarmament and the conference. An article in the Gateshead Herald concentrated on the cost of war, while an article in the Middlesbrough Gazette took the line that the Disarmament Conference might breed war. This last article did not seem to be in keeping with public opinion at the time as expressed through the letter columns of the newspaper, or in tune with the editor's column. It may indeed have been a ploy by the newspaper to fuel debate on the issue. Whatever the motive it led to numerous letters in the following weeks arguing against the sentiment of the article and only two letters supporting the article. The Gateshead article condemned the National Debt and put much of the blame on expenditure on arms. According to this writer British National Debt at the time exceeded the combined debt of the U.S.A., France and Belgium. In 1930-31 the total budget expenditure was £799 million. Of this amount Debt Service took £360 million, defence services accounted to £110 million and war pensions to £52 million. That made a total expenditure on past and future wars of £522 million, or 65 per cent of the total budget expenditure. The total expenditure on the social services was £163 million or 20 per cent. '27'

The unusual Middlesbrough article argued the theory that disarmament could not take place until the countries of Europe felt secure.<sup>'28'</sup> But this was not now the case, the article continued: individual countries on the continent did not feel themselves sufficiently secure against aggression to reduce still further, or to disband their armies. If the conference were to succeed this fear must be cast out: what is more important is that the failure of the conference would increase the fear, and an increase of fear would mean greater risk of war. Was the Disarmament Conference to be the herald of peace, or, as the last forlorn hope of the peace-makers, to be a prelude to war? This interesting article was in some ways prophetic, the Disarmament Conference did fail in its task of reducing armaments and its failure did result in Britain and other countries beginning a programme of rearmament. Whether this was the main cause of this rearmament programme is open to discussion.

Another powerful force operating on the British conscience at this time is recognised by Harold Macmillan.<sup>'29'</sup> This was uneasiness about Germany and her treatment since the end of the war. Britain had won the war but within a few years Macmillan believed the British public began to feel sorry for the Germans. They regretted the vulgarity of the promise in 1918 to squeeze Germany "until the pips squeaked." The

Versailles Treaty was no sooner finished than it came under attack. There was a feeling also, that the Allies as a whole had imposed very strict disarmament upon Germany without carrying out their side of the understanding.

This feeling was expressed in January 1931 in an article by "Senator" in the North Eastern Daily Gazette.<sup>(30)</sup> Senator seems to have been a 'nom de plume' for one of the paper's feature writers. In this article he expressed many of the views mentioned by Macmillan.

"Those who drafted the Treaty of Versailles disarmed Germany at the same time forming the League and promising to disarm themselves. They have not done so, with the result that Germany, rapidly recovering in the economic field, is at a disadvantage."

The writer went on to say that Germany had little power to resist the demands of her late enemies because she had no armies to defend her territories if they should invade her. Germany was thus contemplating a withdrawal from the League in order that she might be free to act alone. And such action could only be a trend towards the east and Russia. The writer predicted a war between a Soviet-German alliance and the Rest. The only way to prevent the development of the danger was to strengthen the League by forwarding the cause for which it was established - justice and disarmament.

Other writers agreed with the views of the last writer. Writing in the Northern Echo on 28 November 1931, one reader argued that the legacy of World War One, especially as regards Germany had led to the present tensions and problems.<sup>(31)</sup> Millions of Germans were still thinking of revenge for their defeat, goaded by the millions of Frenchmen who were still striving, because they could not forget the war, to prevent Germany from rising again.

Like the writers of the last two pieces, many believed that the League of Nations could ensure peace, and looked upon any increase in armed forces as a blow at the strength of the League. As has been mentioned earlier many events in the late 1920s and early 1930s strengthened the belief that armaments could be reduced.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Young Plan, the Washington and London Naval Treaties, the Locarno Treaty and the Disarmament Conference all raised peoples hopes. Britain herself allowed the defence establishment to run down to a lower state than that in 1914 and many countries publicly declared their support for disarmament. While the events of World War One had an important effect on the minds of the British people, it also had a great effect on British defence policy between 1918 and 1935. With Germany defeated and disarmed under the Versailles Treaty, and no other enemy appearing to threaten Britain, the government could

afford to allow its defence requirements to be reduced.

As Patrick Kyba notes:

"this allowed the government to pursue a defence policy which coincided with the British public's distaste for armaments and with the exigencies of the economic situation." (32)

The foundations for this policy, however, were to be tested in the years 1931 to 1935 and led to this debate on rearmament. The problems in Germany grew and led in 1933 to the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and in September 1931 the Japanese invaded Manchuria. The economic crisis, begun in 1929, reached its peak in 1931 and in 1932 the Disarmament Conference began at Geneva.

A little more needs to be said here about the organisation of Britain's armed forces. The army of the 1920s and 1930s was largely tied to the 19th-century principle of organisation. This meant that it maintained one battalion at home for every battalion abroad. While the defence of India was the prime military responsibility the system worked well. But as international tensions altered, the inflexibility of the system became obvious. The needs of India and the Empire had first to be satisfied and then an expeditionary force would be scraped together from what was left. Difficulties began to arise when defence policy required the army to take into account theatres of war outside the Empire. But as long as the main

threat appeared to rest within the Empire the Chiefs of Staff could accept, reluctantly, the poor state of Britain's defences.

In 1931 the Regular Expeditionary Force consisted of 5 infantry divisions, one of which was incomplete, and a cavalry division of 2 cavalry brigades. Imperial commitments absorbed 67 line battalions, leaving 59 line battalions and 10 Guards battalions in the United Kingdom. Of these 69, the expeditionary force required 60, leaving only 9 for the purposes of internal security. These conditions could not be accepted as suitable for warfare in Europe where

"military intervention to fulfil an international obligation, if it were to be effective, would have to be prompt." (33)

As unrest in Germany increased, the possibility that the next war could be a European one rather than an Imperial one became more apparent. As was mentioned in chapter one, this led to the Chiefs of Staff becoming "increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations of the ten-year rule" and their recommendation that it be cancelled. (34) The Committee of Imperial Defence agreed, and in recommending its abolition to the Cabinet warned: "we cannot ignore the writing on the wall." (35)

The important thing to note here is that in the early 1930s, against a background of serious financial

constraint, the government was able to appear to agree with public opinion and allow a reduction in the armed forces. However, the armed forces themselves, and particularly the Chiefs of Staff, were suggesting to the government that spending on armaments should be increased. This in 1932 when the Disarmament Conference was to begin and Britain had already agreed to freeze its military budget. The government, however, perceived no immediate threat to any national or Imperial interest and the British public awaited the opening of the conference with great expectations. In these circumstances, therefore, the new government had ample reason to dismiss any thoughts of rearmament. If the conference, succeeded, and threats to Britain did not materialize, then the government could accept further disarmament and at the same time satisfy the public who had so recently returned them to office. If the conference failed, and threats to Britain's security appeared, then the government could review its decision not to rearm when and if that situation arose. In accepting the recommendation of the CID that the ten-year rule be abolished, it added a caution that its cancellation should not be interpreted as the justification for increased expenditure "without regard

to the very serious financial and economic situation that still obtains." (36)

In the North East of England, the economic problems of unemployment, reduced benefits for the poor, and a reduced standard of living and purchasing power for those in work, led to a debate on the wisdom of spending money on armaments. The debate was not always on the side of disarmament however. A letter on 24 October 1931 criticised the Labour Party for its view that if it were in power it would strive hard for disarmament. (37) The writer made the point that disarmament would lead to the armies, navies and air forces of the world swelling the already bloated ranks of the unemployed. The shipbuilders and aeroplane constructors would be thrown on the scrap heap, and the scrap obtained from military equipment would be used when in normal cases men would be constantly employed making first-class goods. Would it not be better, the writer argued, to wait until the world was in a much sounder condition? This argument is an interesting one and one that was not uncommon. It amounted to saying that countries should disarm when the world economy was stable and unemployment was low, rather than when there was a world recession. The effects of disarmament in the latter case would be to deepen further still the world recession and increase unemployment. A similar letter made the same point and argued that disarming under

current conditions would be dangerous to world peace, because by bringing the unemployment problem to a head it would make normal government impossible, cause revolutions, international unrest and war. (38) The last war, this writer argued, was undoubtedly caused by unemployment.

Many other writers of letters to local newspapers disagreed with the views expressed by the last two writers. They saw the road to prosperity and out of the recession through disarmament rather than rearmament. The following is one such letter which expressed the views of many. (39)

"Delay in disarming," the writer argued, "would mean delaying the effort to remove a chief cause of the world economic trouble. Not only is the world staggering under a burden of armament expenditure of at least £950 million a year; its commerce is being paralysed owing to the sense of insecurity, the lack of confidence; and that lack of confidence is due very largely to unlimited national armaments and to lack of faith in the loyalty of League members towards the Covenant and their other pledges."

The writer went on to say that a successful disarmament conference would therefore be among the first most necessary steps towards world recovery. These views were expressed by many writers in the forthcoming weeks, and on New Year's Eve 1931 the Middlesbrough North Eastern Daily Gazette asked local dignitaries what they hoped for in 1932. Lt. Com. J.M.

Kenworthy, R.N. expressed the views of many when he said that his hope for 1932 lay in the revolt of the common people - farmers, artisans, doctors, shopkeepers, and so on - against the intolerable burden of armaments. He hoped that this would happen in all countries, for all countries were suffering.

The World Disarmament Conference of 1932 was greeted in the North East with hope and optimism. But this hope and optimism was mainly amongst the general public, possibly ignorant of the scale of the task ahead. E.H. Carr makes the point that few well-informed people could regard the prospects of the conference with anything but profound pessimism.<sup>40</sup> The problem therefore arose concerning people's expectations. The general feeling seemed to be one of optimism that the Disarmament Conference would reach some worthwhile conclusion and arms would be reduced. If the conference were to fall short of these objectives, or fail altogether, then people's high hopes would be dashed completely.

Warnings against over-optimism were picked up by some politicians. In Middlesbrough in October 1931 the four prospective candidates for the General Election addressed a meeting held by the League of Nations Union to discuss international peace and disarmament.<sup>41</sup> K. Griffiths, the Liberal candidate for Middlesbrough East, declared to the audience that he would be deceiving them

if he led them to believe that he regarded the conference on disarmament with any great optimism. He believed that it would not be a wise move for England completely to disarm as an example to the world. If she did, he argued, she would lose a very valuable bargaining weapon. Griffiths was successful in the election in November. Others on the platform did not wholly agree. Ellen Wilkinson, the Labour candidate for Middlesbrough West, believed that the only way to prevent war was to disarm. It is a duty, she maintained, to form a public opinion which said that there would be no more war. Mr Young, the Liberal candidate and Ellen Wilkinson's opponent, agreed with her and argued that the part the people could play was to consolidate public opinion in favour of disarmament and popularise the thought of it. Mr Kegie, the Labour Party candidate in opposition to Mr Griffiths, painted a horrific picture of the next war for his audience. It would be possible, with the new poison gases and bombs, to wipe out London in half an hour, he maintained. Aeroplanes were now able to travel at speeds of 400 miles an hour: they should think of the havoc which was possible when fast planes and poison gas and bombs were combined. The country was never in greater danger, and there was never more urgent need of a policy of disarmament. This theme of the power of air

bombardment, as described by Kegie, is one that comes up again and again and one that the author will return to. On 2 February 1932, the Disarmament Conference opened at Geneva attended by representatives from 61 states, including 5 non-members of the League of Nations, and presided over by Arthur Henderson. According to E.H. Carr the course of the conference was directly affected by a proposal made by the British Foreign Secretary in his opening speech.<sup>(42)</sup> Sir John Simon suggested that the conference should consider what came to be known as "qualitative limitation," i.e. limitation of armaments not by numbers but by the complete abolition of certain forms of armament particularly lending themselves to offensive rather than defensive warfare. This clear-cut proposal received widespread support. However, when the matter was looked into by the technical committees to which it was entrusted, it became apparent that no distinction between offensive and defensive weapons would command general acceptance. The Germans had a consistent criterion: all armaments prohibited by the Versailles Treaty were offensive, all others defensive. This point was picked up by opinion in the North East. One writer claimed that

"to prevent Germany resuming her policy of aggression it was decided to prohibit her from possessing warships over 10,000 tons, submarines, large guns and tanks and all chemical warfare preparations."<sup>(43)</sup>

He went on to argue that the definition of "aggressive" armaments in 1919 should remain acceptable in 1932. Another writer was annoyed to find that Britain's representatives were determined to save the large warship and the large tank.<sup>44</sup> He implored British opinion to persuade the government to show a lead by accepting the abolition of the big warship.

Germany was not alone in suggesting a criterion for offensive weapons. The Russians put forward the proposal that everything pertaining to war should be abolished. This proposal gained some support in the North East and was in line with the thinking of the League of Nations Union. The proposal was however turned down and for some in the North East this was a good thing.

"The person who thinks the Soviet desires total disarmament is hugging a vain delusion" wrote one disillusioned observer. "Nobody believes the Russians," he continues, "except the soapy sentimentalists. We can no more expect the Soviet to disarm than we can the tiger to extract its own fangs."<sup>(45)</sup>

The belief that the Russians were serious in their proposals was not widespread.

The various commissions looking into the problem of offensive and defensive weapons reported back to the conference in June 1932. On 20 July a resolution was submitted to the conference recording agreement.

- (1) To prohibit air bombardment, to limit the number of aircraft and to regulate civil aviation.
- (2) To limit heavy artillery and tanks above a maximum size not yet determined, and
- (3) To prohibit chemical warfare.

Forty-one delegations voted for this resolution, eight abstained, and two (Germany and the USSR) voted against it. The German delegate announced that Germany would participate in the further work of the conference only if there were "a clear and definite recognition of equality of rights between nations."

Attitudes to the conference in the North East followed a definite pattern during this period. For the first couple of months after the opening of the conference, opinion was expressed in terms of hope and support for a substantive agreement. Then as the conference began to bog down dire predictions for the future of the talks began to surface.

Protests began that the conference was not proceeding towards its objective at a sufficiently rapid rate. The suggested reason for this state of affairs was that the British government had not provided the conference with any sense of direction. The belief that all other nations would follow any lead given by Great Britain was widespread at the time. Organisations and

individuals threw their resources into the fight for disarmament from the moment the conference began, and they were heard again when the conference began to falter.

Amongst the organisations were the churches and the League of Nations Union. Disarmament for the churches was an issue on which they could not remain silent, for they saw it as a question of morals as well as of politics. Thus at one time or another during this early period nearly all the major denominations, either singly or in combination, passed resolutions in support of the Geneva Conference. The churches' overriding objective was that some measure of disarmament be obtained. Throughout the remainder of 1932 several resolutions on these lines were adopted by gatherings, providing evidence of the churches' deep desire for disarmament and their fear of the consequences of failure at Geneva.

Typical of these resolutions was the one passed at the Primitive Methodist Conference at Middlesbrough on 17 June 1932.<sup>(46)</sup> The conference recorded its great concern for the success of the Disarmament Conference now being held in Geneva. The resolution went on to say that the conference could not conceal its profound disappointment that up to that moment no progress had been made towards serious disarmament.

Individuals also felt moved to record their views on the conference and its progress. The following

letter is typical of the change in attitude that occurred. The writer accuses the British government of hypocrisy on disarmament.<sup>'47'</sup> The writer quoted the League of Nations Statistical Year Book of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition as revealing that Great Britain exported war material to the value of £3,493,644 in 1930. Britain's share of the total world value of these exports was 30.8 per cent. Now for two months past the "experts" at Geneva had been tackling the knotty problem of disarmament. The conference had been called chiefly through British influence. The writer asked what conclusions must be drawn? He predicted that the conference would turn out to be a fiasco, and accused Britain of having no intention of disarming. Was it to be expected, he enquired, that those who made vast profits by the sale of armaments would wish for this ghoulis trade to cease?

This theme of private armaments manufacturers growing rich on any rearmament and therefore using their considerable influence to dampen pleas for disarmament is one that occurs regularly. In an article entitled "Profits before Life" the question was asked, who was the only Great Power for whom war pays?<sup>'48'</sup> The answer, the writer argued, was armament manufacturers, who were above states. The writer advocated taking the industry out of private hands as a vital first step towards peace. Another article in a Tyneside Sunday paper,

emphasising that battleships were a "vital need" to shipyard workers, was a grim reflection of the times.

Private manufacture of armaments and their export abroad was a question which interested local politicians. In a debate on trade and commerce in the House of Commons, J.J. Lawson, the Labour M.P. for Chester-le-Street, asked the President of the Board of Trade if he would state the general policy followed by his Department with respect to the granting of licences to export arms to foreign countries.<sup>'49'</sup> The state of the local shipyards was a concern of many of the local M.P.s, particularly those whose constituencies were directly concerned. The Newcastle East M.P. Sir R. Aske, in a written question to the First Lord of the Admiralty, asked whether he was aware of the distress in Newcastle-upon-Tyne owing to the dearth of work in the shipyards; and whether he would have regard to this when orders for building or repairing warships were being placed by the Admiralty.<sup>'50'</sup> This is an example of the dilemma that faced some M.P.s. To support fully disarmament in a constituency whose people depended upon arms manufacture or armament-related industries for a livelihood posed problems for some. It is true to say that disarmament in this period was paid for by the families of the shipbuilders of the North East.

Another individual writer to the newspapers, argued whether it was not possible that all countries had

realised that the only alternative to an all-round reduction or limitation must be a race for supremacy in which no country can afford to compete?<sup>(51)</sup> Great Britain had fully demonstrated her willingness to disarm, but she was even now spending at the rate of £200 a minute on her armaments. Many people seemed to find it hard to understand the slowness of the Disarmament Conference and its lack of results. It was obvious to many that if each nation went to the conference with the idea that not they, but the other nations must disarm, very little progress would be made.

The little progress that was being made was causing concern for many. The Heburn Labour Party and Trades Council passed a resolution recording its deep sense of disappointment with the results of the first period of the Disarmament Conference. It recognised that the continued refusal to fulfil the pledges given to the nations disarmed under the Peace Treaties of 1919, was creating a situation of grave menace both to peace and to economic recovery.<sup>(52)</sup> Negotiations during the recess led to no result and when the conference reassembled in October, Germany's place was vacant. For almost two months the work of the conference was all but suspended. The conference was dominated by the German issue until 11 December when a formula was found. Great Britain, France and Italy recognised Germany's claim to "equality of rights in a system which would provide

security for all nations" and on these terms Germany agreed to return to the conference.

Although it enabled Germany to return to the conference, the declaration of 11 December brought the French demand for security and the German demand for disarmament into sharper opposition. Thus the real struggle over armaments was still to come. Part of the criticism of the Disarmament Conference was of the lack of lead that Britain was giving to the proceedings. There was a feeling that the British government had not provided the conference with any sense of direction. <sup>(33)</sup> The belief that all other nations would follow any lead given by Great Britain was widespread at the time. Great Britain was accused of adopting a non-committal policy at the Disarmament Conference and this was borne out in a letter Ramsay MacDonald wrote to Lord Londonderry the Air Minister,

"We need at Geneva a policy quietly pursued without turning off our way to right or left." <sup>(34)</sup>

and the instructions sent to the British delegation in Geneva were somewhat nebulous on questions likely to cause difficulties. <sup>(35)</sup>

However, the role the government played at the conference gave more cause to believe it was committed to a policy of disarmament than to rearmament. Government action at home also was encouraging for the disarmament movement. The service estimates for 1932

provided for no increase in any branch of the forces, and those for 1933 added to the strength of the navy alone, in accordance with the terms of the London Navy Treaty. In the middle of March 1933 the Prime Minister came to Geneva and laid before the conference what came to be known as the "MacDonald Plan". This plan put the conference in possession for the first time of a complete draft convention containing figures of limitations of men and material for practically every country in Europe. In June the conference adjourned with the now customary expression of hope that private negotiations during the recess would clear up the outstanding points of difference. Hitler had been German chancellor since the end of January and the Nazi regime was fully established. This fact naturally increased the reluctance of the French government to concede Germany's claims. Yet it made it all the more imperative to come to terms with Germany without further delay.

The commitment of the British to finding a solution was again being questioned. But could any Foreign Secretary reconcile the German demand for equality with the French insistence on guaranteed security? The reconciliation of French and German claims was in Britain's interest because her security depended in part at least, on a stable and peaceful continent. Yet the British government followed a policy that was not

conducive to a reconciliation. British ministers refused to offer France security guarantees to compensate for the inevitable increase in German power accompanying a grant of equality of rights and this refusal was the major factor leading to the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference. Questions must be asked about the commitment of some of the delegates. Lord Londonderry for example, wrote to his wife on 17 July 1932:

"We are having a difficult task here and everything goes to show how inopportune a Disarmament Conference is." (56)

Although the German demand for equality and the French insistence on security dominated the conference in 1932; other issues aroused a good deal of interest in the North East. These included the private manufacture and sale of arms, and the abolition of military aircraft. The first problem has already been mentioned and a number of letters quoted, and it was much on the minds of the people. The British government had been called a hypocrite, in that it went along to the disarmament talks at Geneva and yet Britain's share of world trade in arms was 30 per cent. The issue of air bombing was also of interest to the North East as Lord Londonderry came in for a lot of criticism over his stance on air bombardment. The British government wished to retain the bombing aircraft for "police

purposes" in outlying areas of the Empire, and the protest against this stand was long and vocal.

Nationally Major C. Attlee accused the government of pursuing a double policy. He asserted that it supported the League with words but its actions had pursued imperialist interests.

"Witness the failure to make a success of the Disarmament Conference. How could you expect disarmament to be a success with Lord Londonderry as our representative - a man who boasted of his success in securing the retention of air bombardment." (57)

The Bishop Auckland M.P. Hugh Dalton also vehemently criticised Londonderry for his stance at Geneva. At the Labour Party Conference in Edinburgh in October 1936 Dalton vilified Londonderry over his time at the Air Ministry.

"Was it not Lord Londonderry who boasted that we had preserved the use of the bombing aeroplane? He has preserved it, he has preserved it for Hitler and Mussolini. Bombers over Abyssinia yesterday. Bombers over Spain today. Will it be bombers over Britain tomorrow? That will be a proud day for Londonderry if it comes." (58)

As late as 20 January 1939 Dalton was attacking Londonderry again over his policy in this period. In a speech in County Durham, he blamed Londonderry for throwing away the chance of securing an international agreement for the complete abolition of bombing aeroplanes. Germany at that time, Dalton argued, had

practically no air force at all, but as Londonderry told the House of Lords, he himself was responsible for preserving the use of the bombing aeroplane.

Because his base was in the North East, Londonderry's utterances came in for more scrutiny than might otherwise have been expected, and he came in for a great deal of criticism. The Labour Party was doubting the enthusiasm of the Tory Party in the cause of disarmament and Londonderry provided further proof of the strength of the Labour case against the Tory Party on this issue in a speech at a dinner given by the Newcastle Central Division Conservative and Unionist Association. Lord Londonderry referred to the Disarmament Conference and said:

"We might have aimed too high. Some might have believed it was possible to obtain a convention that might eliminate war. But that was an idealistic conception. I do not know whether we can avert war ... I am not sure it is possible for anyone to eliminate weapons of war." (59)

Others were not so quick to condemn Lord Londonderry or Britain's stance at the Disarmament Conference. The editorial of the Sunday Sun on 1 October 1933 forecast the end of the Disarmament Conference and suggested that hopes of agreement on disarmament were doomed. (60) The editor did not blame Britain for this disappointment,

"true, this country has stood out for the right to use aircraft in tribal warfare, but this was not the rock on which disarmament was wrecked. Far bigger obstacles were stumbling blocks."

The editor went on to say that it now devolved upon Britain to review her own armament resources in the light of the new position. Past sacrifices had been in vain, he said, and serious consideration would have to be given to the state of the air forces. It might well be true that England's sure shield of the future was to be her air fighters. If so, there should be no delay in making the shield enemy proof.

As far as air warfare goes, Patrick Kyba points out that in some instances people create the very fictions to which they respond, and the widespread ignorance of the effects of air bombing resulted in a terror of the military aircraft and an insistence that it be done away with.<sup>61</sup> This uncomprehending horror of air bombing, Kyba believes, was one of the principal reasons the vast majority of activists remained so strongly in favour of disarmament in 1933. Research by Mass Observation showed that Kyba's point on air bombing to be true.<sup>62</sup> The idea that attack from overhead would become the final, totally devastating stage in coming wars grew, indeed, to cloud almost all thinking on this subject. It became near obsession. The pattern of British politics and forward planning was gradually overshadowed

by visions of shattering bombardment on the civil population. It was broadly assumed that much of the population would either be killed, shell-shocked or reduced to panic. This argument was not just the fantasy of ignorant civilians the idea was supported by scientific argument, statistical estimates of the highest order.

The later part of World War One had given Britain its first experience of bombing. The North East had suffered its fair share of aerial bombardment with bombs being dropped by Zeppelins on Teesside. In addition civilian casualties in war on English soil were suffered with the bombardment of the east coast towns from the sea in 1914. Indeed the first British soldier to be killed on British soil this century was killed during this latter bombardment at Hartlepool on 16 December 1914. During the First World War the North East suffered heavy losses in the trenches of the Western Front, but here were towns and civilians being destroyed far from the front. After World War One surveys were done by the government to see what the effects of air bombing might be. All reports made grim reading and only helped to alarm the British people. In 1924, for instance, the Air Staff were offering evidence that London would receive 450 tons of bombs in the first 72 hours, with 3,800 being killed and twice as many seriously wounded. In the first month the capital would

have over 25,000 dead. It was not surprising then that the public feared a future war.

In the North East a number of articles appeared trying to describe what another war might be like. J.B. Hobman in the Northern Echo declared that the publication of a book entitled What Will Be the Character of a New War by Victor Gollanz, had done more for disarmament than a dozen smooth-tongued statesmen. <sup>(63)</sup> A new war, Hobman said would have a two-fold character. It would be a petrol war on land and a chemical war in the air, and in each case the civilian would be the main victim. Lord Noel-Buxton described, to a meeting at Middlesbrough Town Hall chaired by Commander Bower, M.P. for Cleveland, what he believed the results of another war might be. <sup>(64)</sup> Buxton said the phrase "women and children first" would take a different and horrible meaning in a modern war. There would be a massacre of innocents at home, while men were mown down at the front. Manoeuvres had demonstrated that no defence could be possible from attacks from the air. Thirty planes could with impunity reduce London to a state where it would have to be evacuated. T.S. Denham, in an article entitled "No Civilian will be Safe in Future War of Planes," explained how civilians will be at risk in any future wars. <sup>(65)</sup>

"When death swoops from the sky,  
there will be immunity for no one.  
The centres of civil population, as

well as dockyards and garrison towns  
will be liable to be wiped out."

In February 1933 a former World War One pilot related his experiences in the war with what could happen now. '66'

"By developing bombing planes, and aeroplanes controlled from a distance the destructive agents used in the last war will be child's play in comparison with those which will be used in the next."

A lot of these predictions turned out to be inaccurate, although the attacks in the latter part of World War Two on Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were beyond anyone's imagination in 1933. What is important, however, is what people believed would happen. It was this belief that kept the momentum of disarmament going. Another factor important at the time was that people actually believed that another war was a possibility. The growth of fascism by this time in Germany, coupled with the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the general economic situation, could not encourage many to think otherwise. The people in favour of disarmament were opposed to German rearmament, and approved the German demand that all other nations should disarm to her level. The pro-disarmers gained a valuable ally, particularly in the North East, when the Labour Party in particular became a supporter of disarmament. From the moment the conference at Geneva opened the Labour Party

began to urge the government to take all steps necessary to bring it to a successful conclusion.

In the North East there was continued criticism of the government's stance on disarmament and its hypocrisy at the Disarmament Conference. In an article entitled "Armament firms make Peace Impossible" A.P. Laurie noted

"that as long as there are vast armament firms in various parts of the world, linked with banks and international financial interests, owning and controlling newspapers and doing their best to push their goods on every nation, there is no use talking about peace."

The writer went on to criticise these firms and urged the government to allow no firm to make a profit from weapons of war. But how, he asked, could a government allow this to go on at home while abroad it attends a world conference dedicated to the reduction of armaments. '47'

Two local M.P.s were also concerned about the resolve of the government to reduce armaments. In a debate on the Air Estimates for 1932, in which it had been announced that there had been a reduction of £700,000 from 1931 figures to £17,400,000, J. Batey, the Labour M.P. for Spennymoor, reminded the Secretary of State for Air that the National government had been returned pledged to a policy of economy. '48' Yet we had before us, he continued, estimates for the Air Force of £17 million and these are being put forward by a

government pledged to economy. There was not much room for congratulations upon that fact. With the estimates for the army and the navy Parliament would have voted the sum of £103 million for national defence. Mr. Batey went on to argue that this was far too much and that the minister could and should have made savings. The M.P. for Chester-le-Street J.J. Lawson, was equally critical over the Army Estimates for 1932.<sup>69</sup> He professed inability to believe that this was the government which went to the country and appealed to the people on the grounds of economy. He asked the government whether it knew anything of the lives of the people who have suffered reductions in their standard of living during the last six months or so.

During 1933 the Disarmament Conference was hopelessly grinding to an end. In the recess of the summer of 1933 the only scheme put forward was a French plan for dividing the disarmament convention into two periods. The first, which would last for four years, would consist of a system of international supervision over armaments and the reorganisation of national armies. Limitation proper would take effect only in the second period. The British and Italian governments agreed with this scheme. On 14 October Sir John Simon formally endorsed it in the Bureau of the conference and within a few hours Germany announced her withdrawal from

the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations and also withdrew from the International Labour Office.

Germany's withdrawal was a major blow, as Germany was the focal point of the disarmament problem. The conference came to an impasse for six months. In February 1934 Anthony Eden, the Parliamentary Secretary to Sir John Simon, visited Paris, Berlin and Rome. During his stay in Berlin, Hitler made an offer to accept any limit for the German army which was equally accepted for the French, Italian and Polish armies, and to fix the German air force at 30 per cent of the combined strength of the air forces of Germany's neighbours or 50 per cent of the strength of the French air force, whichever was the lower. The French government protested against the proposed "legalisation of German rearmament." Finally on 17 April 1934 the French government answered that the recently published German military budget showed the clear intention of Germany to rearm and that France was therefore not prepared to discuss the German proposals. This in effect was the real end of the Disarmament Conference.

Attitudes towards the Disarmament Conference followed a definite pattern during this period. For the first couple of months after its opening opinion was expressed in terms of hope and support for a substantive agreement. Then as the conference began to bog down, dire predictions for the future of the talks began to

surface. Pacifism achieved its period of greatest prominence during 1933. The gospel of total abstention from war was preached throughout the area and country to attentive audiences. Anti-war demonstrations were held in profusion, culminating nationally in a massive protest march through London at the end of July. The intensity with which individuals expressed their desire for disarmament varied greatly during 1933, but there were four main points on which many seemed to agree:

- that there should be all-round abolition of those weapons forbidden to Germany by the Treaty of Versailles;
- that there should be no rearmament by any country;
- that there should be an agreed limitation of expenditure on armaments once the reduction to Germany's level became a reality;
- and that there must be effective international supervision of existing armaments, the manufacture of and trade in arms, and civil aviation.

The pacifists' ideals continued to be complete and universal disarmament, but the realities of the Geneva deliberations began to convince many that expectations needed to be lowered and during this period there was a definite shift of opinion away from total disarmament to an acceptance of stringent reduction and limitation.

Although for many people Hitler's accession to power in Germany in January 1933 spelt the end of the Disarmament Conference and eventually the League of Nations, in the North East the event produced no sudden calls for rearmament. The general impression derived from newspaper files of that time is that Hitler was not taken seriously. His coming to power seems to have been regarded as a purely internal German affair, and it was not thought he could last long. However, there were one or two stirrings among local people and politicians.

In April 1933, only a month after the General Election in Germany which had confirmed the Nazi regime in power, a letter appeared in the North Eastern Daily Gazette from a local Rabbi.<sup>70</sup> He tried to bring to the attention of the readership the treatment of the Jews in Germany.

"A slow process of political economic and cultural extinction of German Jewry is being carried out ruthlessly by the German powers that be. Every effort is being made to ruin economically the 600,000 Jews in Germany, to freeze them out of the country, to oust them from all professions, to deprive them of German citizenship, and to degrade them to a class of helots simply and solely on the grounds of their religious persuasion."

This letter was followed by a mass meeting on 19 April 1933 at the Wesley Hall in Middlesbrough, where leaders of the Christian churches united in a vigorous

protest against the persecution of Jews in Germany. At the meeting the following resolution was passed:

"We citizens of Middlesbrough at this mass meeting wish to express our deep sorrow and concern at the discriminatory treatment of the Jews in Germany. We urge that the strongest efforts be made to persuade the German government to cease anti-Semitic persecution and propaganda and to reinstate the Jews where they have been displaced solely because of their race or creed." (71)

In the months after Germany left the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, feelings were mixed in the North East. A number of letters from individuals were written trying to gain support and donations for a Teesside Anti-War committee and another letter claimed that war was nothing but a form of legitimised murder. (72) There was however a great deal of sympathy for Germany and her situation. In an address at Redcar Lieut. Cmdr. R.T. Bower, the M.P. for Cleveland, took a sympathetic view of Germany's defection from the Disarmament Conference. He explained it with a reminder that the Allied nations had failed to keep their part of the bargain at Versailles. (73) Commander Bower went on to say that too much had been made of Germany's attitude and indeed Germany should have a certain amount of sympathy.

"The rest of Europe," he said, "has failed to disarm as they should have done after Versailles."

However, he did not blame Britain for this, on the contrary, Britain had made great sacrifices and was in a position of danger owing to the present weakness of her defence forces.

The editor of the Middlesbrough North Eastern Daily Gazette was a little more cautious and concerned about the events unfolding in Germany.<sup>'74'</sup> In an editorial entitled "A warning to Hitler" he welcomed an initiative by President Roosevelt which would contribute to world peace. The initiative was proposed for a pact of non-aggression on similar lines to the Kellogg and Locarno pacts. It signified, the editor argued, the end of American isolation and an acknowledgement that the United States was equally concerned with the rest of the Powers in the preservation of the peace of the world. What concerned the editor was the idea that, but for the revival of sabre-rattling in Germany and the open espousal of the gospel of force, many nations might have viewed with detachment the exploits of Hitlerism within the boundaries of the Reich. As it was, fear and suspicion had once again dispersed the gradually developing atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill amongst the nations of Europe. So long as the present mood in Germany prevailed, France was bound to feel that disarmament on her part would be tantamount to an invitation to Germany to launch a new attack. The editor was expressing the view that things had been

getting better in Europe up until the rise of Hitlerism. There had been more chance for peace, but the attitude of Germany was destroying that. He welcomed the initiative of President Roosevelt, in that it sent a warning to Adolf Hitler; and he argued that the Roosevelt declaration would probably impress upon Hitler the wisdom of more moderate counsels.

The Oxford Union motion not to fight for King and Country occurred also in this period and there was much discussion in the area about this. Most letters and articles were in sympathy with the resolutions passed at the Oxford, Manchester and Leicester Unions. A typical letter appeared in the Sunday Sun from a Durham undergraduate who argued that

"to wage war against millions of people I do not know, on behalf of millions more I don't know, seems to me to be the essence of folly." '75'

The sentiments expressed by the Oxford Union motion and by the speech of Lieut. Cmdr. R.T. Bower M.P. do seem to have been the majority view as expressed in the newspapers; but the editor of the North Eastern Gazette was not alone; there were a number of other cautious voices. Although the Disarmament Conference seemed doomed, one North Easterner asked what would happen if the Disarmament Conference succeeded and Britain disarmed. '76' "Where will that leave the major industries of the North East, the shipyards, the arms

factories, the steel works, the railways and the coal mines? Yes, it may raise a lot of money, but who is to say that it will be spent wisely and indeed spent in the North East. The money will go to pay off debts and pay the unemployment benefit to those thrown out of work in the North East. Warships are not waste," he says, "if we lose the work they provide, what is there to take its place?"

Another M.P. did not agree with the sentiments of Commander Bower's speech at Redcar. Charlton Curry, M.P. for Bishop Auckland, expressed disappointment at the withdrawal of Germany from the League and the Disarmament Conference in a speech in Bishop Auckland. '??' It was hard to deny, Curry said, that the situation in Europe today was more serious than it had ever been since the war. Curry condemned in severe terms the Hitler regime in Germany including the persecution of Jews, Catholics and Socialists. He believed, however, that Hitler did not express the real opinion of the German people, and it would be foolish if Britain's justifiable rage at the actions of Hitler allowed its opposition to Hitler to run into an anti-German panic here.

An important event regarding the role of the trade unions occurred in this period with the General Council of the Trade Unions Congress calling a special conference of unions to discuss action to be taken in

the event of war.<sup>78</sup> This resolution instructed the General Council in conjunction with the Co-operative Movement and the Labour political movement to organise among the workers an intensive campaign against war preparations, emphasising the growing acuteness of the war danger, the appalling nature of modern methods of warfare, and urging that they should work within the International Federation of Trade Unions for an uncompromising attitude against war preparations, a boycott of war even when it should be declared, and an organised refusal to assist in any shape or form in measures calculated to help in the prosecution of war. Although this event did not take place in the North East it was widely reported in the local press and the unions of the North East were well represented at the meeting. This resolution is important because it committed the unions actively to discourage any preparations for war and called for action after war has been declared.

Other local politicians recognised from these early days that Hitler should be treated with more caution and seriousness. Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Prime Minister and M.P. for Seaham, recognised from an early stage that Hitler's Germany was not a new version of the Kaiser's Germany, but a phenomenon of a quite different and much uglier kind. "I shall not see peace again in my lifetime," he told his son Malcolm when he heard that Hitler had taken office, "I hope you will see it in



yours."<sup>79</sup> When the news of the Reichstag fire reached London, he forecast that it would lead to "the development of brutal dictatorship in Germany."<sup>80</sup> By the beginning of March 1933, only a little more than a month after Hitler had become chancellor, he was beginning to fear,

"the dissolution of Europe through a Germany ruled by tyranny."<sup>81</sup>

Hugh Dalton was also concerned very early on by the rise to power of Hitler. In March 1933 Dalton had been booked on a lecture tour of German cities: these were cancelled on the ground that Dalton did not want to claim privileges of free speech denied to many Germans. Instead he visited friends in Berlin. This visit was to change Dalton's views on Germany dramatically. Over four days, he acquired an "overpowering sense of a vulgar abandonment of reason."<sup>82</sup> "Returning to England felt like an escape, Germany is horrible," he wrote. "A European war must now be counted among the probabilities of the next ten years."<sup>83</sup> On his return to the North East there was a major change in emphasis in Dalton's attitude.

"There are some ugly beasts prowling today in the international jungle," he told a Bishop Auckland audience. "Britain should give clear warning that she will not hesitate to apply the full weight of economic and financial boycott against any nation that, in violation of solemn

covenants which all have signed, resorts to war." '84' "If economic sanctions failed, it might be necessary for the League to resort to military sanctions as well." '85'

Other North East politicians were not convinced that the public were aware of the evils Hitler represented. In his autobiography Manny Shinwell wrote that among the middle and upper classes the view was that there was nothing dangerous in Hitler's rise to power. '86' He had to deal with people in his audiences who wanted to know what was wrong with Hitler's methods. The public recognised that Hitler was a Fascist, but this word then carried little of the impact it was to have later. People were also inclined to regard Hitler as the most effective adversary of Russian-style Communism in Europe. Shinwell believed that for about half of the local population and the British public at large, this was sufficient justification for his existence. Neither the Jewish community with their knowledge of the anti-semitism of the Nazi party, nor the trade unions who were concerned about the forced amalgamation of German labour organisations in a Nazi-controlled Labour front, could materially alter the widely held view that Hitlerism was "a good thing."

Harold Macmillan took the same view as of the public's view of Hitler. He wrote later that amongst the public the first manifestations of Hitler did not cause undue anxiety, '87' and gave a number of reasons

why he thought this was the case. The British public had of course seen Mussolini and Fascist Italy, but the results had not seemed too bad. On a less serious note, they found it hard to take Hitler seriously due to his Charlie Chaplin moustache and his everlasting raincoat.

My own research does not however bear out Shinwell and Macmillan's views of how the public saw Hitler. As has already been mentioned there were mass meetings in Middlesbrough protesting against persecution in Germany of the Jews in April 1933 only one month after Hitler came to power. As early as 12 December 1931 one writer was referring to Hitler in pessimistic terms.<sup>(88)</sup>

"The blonde beast has raised it's head again. We are entitled to be unquiet about the future."

Other letters expressed their disgust at the goings on inside Germany. A rally in London of some 50,000 Jews against the persecution of their fellow men and women in Germany in July 1933 was widely reported in the North East and a number of letters appeared urging people to support the boycott of German goods.<sup>(89)</sup>

Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations seems to have confirmed people's fears that a war was a distinct possibility. The headlines at the time expressed these fears. "War clouds Gathering Over Europe" was one headline, followed a few days later by "Peace and War in the Balance" and "Disarmament or Mad Race to

Destruction?"<sup>90</sup> The editorial summed up many views at the time when it described the recent events as Europe's "Hour of Fate."<sup>91</sup> The editor was aware that there was a tendency to thrust all the blame for the failures at Geneva upon German shoulders. While he believed Germany should share some of the blame, the editor was even more convinced for the need for disarmament rather than rearmament.

"A rearmed Germany under Hitler could be a menace to the safety of Europe. But that is precisely the reason which makes disarmament the more imperative, for certain it is that, unless her neighbours disarm, Germany, overtly or covertly, will re-arm."

The editor's views seem to reflect accurately the views of many as gleaned from the newspapers of the time, up to October 1933. There was a general fear that war was a very distinct possibility. Germany, and in particular Hitler, was perceived as a major problem to the stability of Europe. Yet many people seemed to see that stability being restored through disarmament rather than rearmament. There was much sympathy for Germany's position and understanding of her need for equality. People tended to feel that other countries should disarm down to Germany's level and that in this, Great Britain should play the lead. Lloyd George in the North East in May 1933 had given a speech calling it an injustice to

prevent the Fatherland from achieving equality with the rest of Europe. '92' The speech was well received.

This is not to say that during the period October 1931 to October 1933 there was no one arguing against disarmament and Britain's participation at the Disarmament Conference. There was, but their numbers seem to have been small, and organised anti-disarmament pressure group activity during this period was slight.

Anti-disarmament opinion during the first year of the Geneva deliberations was a weak, fragmented phenomenon. Nor was there much of a body of opinion proposing rearmament in 1932. Nevertheless the mere fact that such opinion exists is important, for it is evidence that the pro-disarmament sentiment which began to sweep the area at the time was not universal, and in this nucleus one can perceive the origins of the pro-armament opinion which was first to offset and then to overtake the pro-disarmament forces when circumstances changed.

Articles and editorials as well as letters had begun to appear favouring some form of rearmament. Many of the letters took the view that Britain had shown a lead by allowing its armed forces to run down. It was now the time to build those forces back up as other countries had not followed the lead and Britain's defences were in a perilous state. Typical of these was an article which appeared in the Northern Echo in

October 1933.<sup>(93)</sup> The Northern Conservatives Conference in Newcastle passed a resolution "urging upon the government the vital necessity of embarking upon the production of an extensive naval armament programme." The reasons given were the attitudes adopted by the other great powers and the tragic plight of all shipbuilding areas.

Anti-disarmament opinion did gather strength in 1933. The tide was slowly beginning to turn. Although pro-rearmament opinion had a long way to go before it would become dominant, from the time Germany left the Disarmament Conference, its cause began to gain momentum.

The role of the press in the North East at this time is interesting, as to whether it made or reflected public opinion on the rearmament issue. When the Disarmament Conference began the press was unanimous on its fear of war and its desire for peace. All the papers carried articles describing the background to the conference and carried articles wishing for success at Geneva. In this respect the press was no different from those individuals and groups who expressed opinions on the subjects of disarmament and rearmament. The press did not seem to get ahead of public opinion on the issue of rearmament. The letters pages gave space to discussion of disarmament, and the editorials commented fairly on the developments at Geneva. During the

conference it was obvious at times that the newspapers throughout the North East had commissioned articles to be written. This was noticeable in February 1932 when air bombardment was a topical issue. Some of these articles were not in line with public opinion or even in tune with the editorial columns and many letters followed. However these occasions were rare, and it has been argued that editorial columns are the least read part of newspapers.

On the whole the press attitude seemed to be one of waiting, on either public opinion, or the conference, to come to a definite conclusion before it became committed emotionally to either side of the disarmament question.

### Footnotes

- (1) Martin Pugh The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939, page 286
- (2) H. Macmillan Winds of Change, page 384
- (3) On 9 February 1933 the Oxford Union passed a motion "that this House will under no circumstances fight for its King and Country" by a majority of 275-133, See Decision by Default, page 32, P. Dennis.
- (4) North Eastern Daily Gazette (hereafter Gazette)  
10 July 1931
- (5) The Northern Echo (hereafter Echo)  
14 December 1931
- (6) See The Northern Echo 15 December 1931  
North Eastern Daily Gazette 14 December 1931  
Hartlepool Daily Mail 15 December 1931
- (7) Gazette 5 May 1931
- (8) Newcastle Journal 11 May 1933
- (9) For a longer account of the Durham riot see, Ian Turner, "Civil Disorder in the North East between the Wars," in North East Labour History, No. 18, 1984.
- (10) Gazette 7 May 1931
- (11) Echo 2 May 1932
- (12) Ibid 22 January 1932
- (13) Gazette 19 May 1931
- (14) H. Macmillan op cit, page 384
- (15) British Fascist Bulletin Summer 1932 No.21
- (16) Gateshead Chronicle 4 September 1931
- (17) For further recollections see, "Telling it how it was: the struggle against Fascism in the Thirties," in North East Labour History No.18, 1984. This reminiscence was from L. Edmonson.
- (18) Ibid

### Footnotes Continued

- (19) Echo 25 June 1932
- (20) Gazette 13 July 1932
- (21) David Bean Armstrong's Men, page 26
- (22) Ibid page 27
- (23) Other groups included the League of Nations Union, the No More War movement and many church groups.
- (24) Durham Miners Association Minutes, 1932 (D/DMA 13)
- (25) City of Newcastle Council Minutes, 23 December 1931
- (26) Newcastle Journal 20 January 1932
- (27) Gateshead Herald February 1932
- (28) Gazette 10 February 1932
- (29) H. Macmillan op cit, page 386
- (30) Gazette 28 January 1931
- (31) Echo 28 November 1931
- (32) Patrick Kyba Covenants Without The Sword  
Page 13
- (33) Army Council Memo 1 April 1931, D.W. 32/3483, cited by Peter Dennis Decision by Default, page 28
- (34) Ibid page 29
- (35) C.P. 104(32): Cabinet minutes 23 March 1932, cited by Dennis op cit, page 29
- (36) Dennis op cit, page 29
- (37) Sunderland Echo 24 October 1931
- (38) Gazette 16 July 1931
- (39) Ibid 31 December 1931
- (40) E.H. Carr International Relations Between the Two World Wars (1919-1939), page 145

### Footnotes Continued

- (41) Echo 22 October 1931
- (42) E.H. Carr op cit, page 185
- (43) Newcastle Daily Chronicle 12 May 1932
- (44) Gazette 13 May 1932
- (45) Echo 17 May 1932
- (46) Ibid 18 June 1932
- (47) Gazette 17 June 1932
- (48) Gateshead Herald September 1933
- (49) Hansard, House of Commons Debates Vol.260,  
Col.1495, 7 December 1931
- (50) Ibid Vol.262, Col.1812,  
9 March 1932
- (51) Hartlepool Daily Mail 22 June 1932
- (52) Jarrow Labour Party Minutes 1922-1965  
D/X 33/1, No date
- (53) P Kyba op cit, page 19
- (54) Letter from MacDonald to Londonderry, February  
1932, cited in, Londonderry, Wings of Destiny,  
page 56
- (55) A.C. Temperley The Whispering Gallery of  
Europe, page 174
- (56) Letter from Londonderry to his wife, 17 July 1932,  
cited in, Martin Gilbert, Britain and Germany  
Between the Wars, page 54
- (57) Londonderry op cit, page 145
- (58) Ibid page 151
- (59) Gateshead Herald November 1933
- (60) Sunday Sun 1 October 1933

### Footnotes Continued

- '61' P. Kyba op cit, page 32
- '62' For a detailed look at people's perceptions of a forthcoming war see Living Through The Blitz, Chapter 1, by Tom Harrison
- '63' Echo 25 February 1933
- '64' Ibid 13 November 1933
- '65' Sunday Sun 22 November 1933
- '66' Ibid 12 February 1933
- '67' Echo 16 November 1932
- '68' Hansard House of Commons Debates  
Vol.262, Col.2047,  
10 March 1932
- '69' Ibid Vol.262, Col.1698,  
8 March 1932
- '70' Gazette 3 April 1933
- '71' Ibid 20 April 1933
- '72' Ibid 4 April 1933
- '73' Echo 25 October 1933
- '74' Gazette 17 May 1933
- '75' Sunday Sun 12 March 1933
- '76' Ibid 28 May 1933
- '77' Echo 19 October 1933
- '78' Ibid 7 September 1933
- '79' D. Marquand Ramsay MacDonald, page 749
- '80' Ibid quoted in his diary on 28  
February 1933
- '81' Ibid diary 2 March 1933
- '82' B. Pimlott Hugh Dalton, page 227

Footnotes Continued

- '83' H. Dalton Fateful Years (diary 29-30 April 1933), pages 37-41
- '84' Daily Herald 6 May 1933
- '85' Dalton Papers Draft Speech August 1933
- '86' E. Shinwell I've Lived Through It All, page 118
- '87' Macmillan op cit, page 385
- '88' Gazette 12 November 1931
- '89' Echo 26 July 1933
- '90' Gazette October 1933
- '91' Ibid 9 October 1933
- '92' Echo 19 May 1933
- '93' Ibid 2 October 1933

PUBLIC OPINION CONCERNING  
REARMAMENT FROM OCTOBER 1933 TO  
NOVEMBER 1935

The re-election of the National Government in November 1935 meant that the debate over rearmament was effectively at an end. Rearmament became a major priority of the government from November 1935 and its victory in this election freed it from any worry that the majority of the public were not behind it in this decision. In October 1933, when the Germans left the Disarmament Conference, the general public opinion in the North East was in favour of peace through disarmament. The departure of the Germans and the general fear of war did not, up to October 1933, lead to any sustained call from organised groups for rearmament to begin. Rather, groups like the Anti-War Movement and the League of Nations Union plus many individuals were vocal in their continued support for disarmament.

This period from October 1933 to November 1935 is an important one if we are to understand the reasons why this change took place. Some people in the North East still hoped that the Disarmament Conference would reconvene and find some solution to the problem. However the French announcement on 17 April 1934 that France would not disarm to any degree seems to have finished off this belief. Lord Londonderry, who was

present at the Disarmament Conference, wrote later that he was aware of the danger of the rapid rearmament of the Reich; and as a means of preventing it, seeing, as he believed, that Britain was not disposed to rearm, he worked all the time to bring the German representatives back to Geneva "where we could at least talk with them." '1'

Lord Londonderry's idea at this time was to invite the Germans to return to Geneva and grant them equality. When he wrote during the war, he knew that this was looked upon as a complete surrender to German policy, giving Germany a domination over the rest of the world. '2' He did not believe this, Germany he argued, was obsessed by fear on one hand and by a sense of inferiority on the other. The Germans saw the French armed forces on the one side and the Poles on the other: and no government would stand in Germany unless it were prepared to restore German prestige and render Germany secure from attack. On 16 June 1934 Londonderry expressed his misgivings at the turn of events, at a political garden party given by the Duke of Hamilton at Dungaval: '3'

"We find ourselves the only nation which has reduced armaments. Everywhere we are faced with increased forces. We cannot remain impassive. The sands are fast running out. Increase of armaments is nowhere more menacing than in the air and we know that this situation is causing grave anxiety."

Harold Macmillan was also becoming increasingly worried by the international situation and Germany leaving the Disarmament Conference. In Stockton on 21 March 1934 Macmillan addressed the Youth branch of the Stockton League of Nations Union. In his speech Macmillan took a similar line to that held by Londonderry.<sup>4</sup> He argued that Britain had done everything for the policy of disarmament: she had taken the lead in disarmament, and had disarmed more than any other country. But Macmillan felt that there was a kind of feeling of despair which said,

"Let us keep ourselves to ourselves and away from the foreigner, and not bother about European affairs at all."

Macmillan believed that this isolationist view, which he saw as prevalent, was a dangerous one that would surely lead to war. Instead he argued that Britain must be prepared to go,

"With all its force for the collective system, and so shoulder our responsibilities as honest people of a responsible nation."

The government began in this period to find itself stuck on the horns of dilemma. When Germany left the conference it was condemned for its role in the unsuccessful deliberations, and denounced for its plans to rearm in the air. It was pressed to give a lead in disarmament to the conference, and at the same time it was expected to guarantee the world's peace and

security. Another problem that hampered the government at this time was provided by those individuals and groups within the country who believed that Great Britain could delay rearming no longer. This opinion appeared in several forms: as anti-pacifism, as warnings that both country and Empire were in danger by sea and by air, as conviction that a military strong Britain would be a force for peace, and as the belief that the country's obligations to the League of Nations required powerful armed forces.

To many minds, Britain's post-war history of disarmament by default had brought the country to a situation fraught with danger already. Great Britain depended upon sea traffic to import her food and to export her manufactures in peace or war, and thus the demand arose that the country have a strengthened navy in the interests of national survival.

Together, these different arguments led inexorably to one conclusion - Britain was weak militarily, and therefore, in a threatening world, she must rearm. In this period from October 1933 to November 1935 support for rearmament gained strength. Thus, at the very time the government was being urged to give the world a lead in disarmament, it also had to contend with increasing pressure from those who wished it to rearm.

The role of the Labour Party is important in fashioning public opinion in this period. In the run up

to the Disarmament Conference the Labour Party was seen very much as the party for disarmament. In 1933 Ben Pimlott argues Labour was essentially a pacifist party.<sup>'5'</sup> By the end of 1937 it had become a party that believed in armed deterrence, a party that urged collective security through the League of Nations, and a party that bitterly opposed Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. The architect of this remarkable change, according to Pimlott, was Hugh Dalton.

Dalton had always believed in the necessity of the threat of sanctions, while pressing for disarmament all round. Even after the Nazi victory in Germany, he continued to take disarmament seriously. He remained, as he put it to friends in 1935, a "bloody-minded pacifist" in favour of a strong League policy.<sup>'6'</sup>

There seems then to be a consensus emerging between these three North East notables, Londonderry, Macmillan and Dalton, that Britain should fully support the League and that in fact disarmament had gone far enough. This view was also held and expressed at the same time by the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee (DRC). As noted in chapter one, the DRC report painted an alarming picture of the state of Britain's defences and recommended a massive rearmament programme. The report was presented to the Cabinet on 8 March 1934. The government was faced with a serious problem once the report was submitted. It had already been attacked by many for

failing to achieve anything at Geneva. It had even been accused of not seriously wanting any result out of the Disarmament Conference. As it became known that the government was giving some thought to rearmament, it was denounced by those who thought the case for disarmament had not yet been lost. At the same time the government was being pressed by politicians such as Macmillan and the public to fulfil Britain's obligations to the League and to be a force for world peace. All this required powerful armed forces.

These conflicting views expressed themselves in the North East and showed the dilemma the government was faced with. A feeling grew that the Disarmament Conference was doomed and that Britain had disarmed to a dangerous level. At the same time there were many who still held out hope, either that the Disarmament Conference would be revived or that rearmament would not take place. Typical of these views are the following letters which appeared in 1934. On 17 May under the heading "Women and Peace," a letter appeared from an individual informing the readers of a meeting at which the following resolution had been passed.

"We urge the government to strengthen our defence forces to such a figure as will be conducive to the future security and peace of the country." '7'

On 27 August however, a letter appeared urging the powers to get Germany back to Geneva. '8' The writer

urged that rearmament was not the answer to Europe's problems; the problem lay in the hatred and distrust embodied in the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The writer argued that Europe could isolate Germany, but could co-operate with her to the lasting benefit of all concerned and to the definite prevention of another European war.

Local M.P.s were also critical of any increase in armaments. In a debate on the army estimates for 1934 the Labour M.P. for Chester-le-Street J.J. Lawson, criticised strongly the increase in spending,<sup>'9'</sup> and linked with this the fact that more people were being rejected for army service because of health reasons than ever before. This situation existed, Lawson argued because money was being taken for the defence services which ought to be going to feeding and clothing the people and keeping them in decent health so that they would be fit, if and when they wished voluntarily to offer themselves for military service. Other M.P.s were linking this increase in spending on the army and especially the navy with the employment situation in the North East. The Conservative M.P. for Jarrow, W.G. Pearson, in questions on the Royal Navy, asked the First Lord of the Admiralty the number of warships on order or building on the Clyde, Tyne and at Barrow and the estimated value of the work in each area.<sup>'10'</sup> The answer was that the value of the orders placed on the

Clyde was £5.6 million, the Tyne £2.5 million and at Barrow £2.6 million. Pearson asked whether "the Right Honourable Gentleman was aware that unemployment is highest on the Tyne and will he bear that fact in mind in placing further orders." This was a line of questioning and a theme that was to occur again and again over the next few years.

Other groups from different parts of the political spectrum were expressing their news. At a Women's Institute National Conference in Newcastle in late 1933 the Chairwoman in her address urged the conference to cultivate the international spirit, particularly now when there were so many rumours of war.<sup>'11'</sup> In the same city in February 1934 the annual meeting of the Council of the Northern Counties National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations expressed confidence in the National Government's foreign policy but also passed the following resolution.<sup>'12'</sup>

"This Council, whilst appreciating and endorsing the efforts of the government towards world peace, views with considerable apprehension the unprotected state of the British Empire, the inadequate provision for the necessary Forces of the Crown, and insists that steps be taken without delay to place these forces on a footing commensurate with our commitments to protect the people of these islands and those of our people beyond the seas."

Many more articles and letters began to appear across the whole of the North East as regards the state

of Britain's armaments and defence. Compared to the period up to October 1933 this sudden increase was most notable. It may have been that people and groups who had remained quiet during the Disarmament Conference began to become more vocal as its failure became more apparent. For whatever reason they became much more noticeable. This view was not just expressed by the Conservative Party. The Jarrow Division of the Labour Party was stirred by an address on Fascism by Dr. E. Conse, a young German Socialist Leader and a refugee in Britain.<sup>'13'</sup> Dr. Conse described conditions in Germany and said that Hitler had reduced unemployment only by preparing for war. He predicted that at the first sign of internal difficulties in Germany there would be a war. At the same time an expressed pacifist was noting some reservations about the state of Britain's defences.<sup>'14'</sup> In a letter to the Northern Echo the writer admitted he was an advocate of universal disarmament, but said he thought that it was possible only through agreement. For Britain to disarm in the face of growing armaments in all other countries would be sheer folly and to invite aggression.

The decision to rearm was not made without fear of the possible political consequences. According to Patrick Kyba, discussions in the Cabinet show clearly that the government knew that any measure of rearmament would meet with intense disapproval by a large section

of the electorate, and thus, he believes it prepared its case with care.<sup>'15'</sup> It began to warn the public of the possible need for rearmament, Kyba notes, as early as November 1933. Four months later the omens were more certain. During the air estimates debate in March, which announced the two-squadron increase in the RAF, Baldwin, the Lord President of the Council promised the House that "this government will see to it that in air strength and air power this country shall no longer be in a position inferior to any country within striking distance of our shores."<sup>'16'</sup>

At the same time that this debate was going on in public, and indeed also in the Cabinet, another series of articles in the North East had heightened the debate on a future war and the shape it might take. Under the headline "Britain Facing Risk of Aerial Attack - Air Defences Inadequate" an article challenged the adequacy of the present forces to protect the country, the Empire and aerial communications against attack from the air.<sup>'17'</sup>

A similar article on 12 December 1933 was entitled "Can we Defend Our Capital From the Air?"<sup>'18'</sup> In this article Air Commodore J.A. Chamier came to the conclusion that without a substantial increase in spending on the air force, the capital could not be defended. The author calculated that a minimum of 18 squadrons was needed to defend London alone, but there

were in fact only 13. He went on to emphasise, however, that in the air, as in all forms of war, attack was the surest form of defence, and he argued for a maximum of 29 heavy bombing squadrons. At present, he said, Britain had 24, but of these 5 existed only in cadre, or skeleton form.

In Parliament too, questions were being asked which must have worried the general public about the events in a future war. Sir N. Grattan Doyle, the Conservative M.P. for Newcastle North, asked the Prime Minister whether he was aware of evidence that experiments were being made and secret German plans perfected by the Luftgasangriff department for the destruction of human beings in war by aircraft carrying deadly disease germs; that experiments had been made concerning the vulnerability of underground railways in London and Paris; whether he had considered the evidence, and what action if any, he proposed to take?<sup>'19'</sup>

Probably the most frightening of the articles was one by Captain A.O. Pollard V.C. M.C. D.S.O. published on 19 April 1934.<sup>'20'</sup> Although writing as an individual, his obvious decorations and experience gave him more authority than others to write on this subject. In the article Pollard described the effects of an enemy attack upon a large city and used emotive language:

"At the first onslaught the streets  
would be filled with thousands of

casualties; the corpses piled in heaps amid the wreckage of buildings, motor cars and trains. The survivors of a large city attempting a panic-stricken flight into the country would be caught in an impasse and slaughtered while they screamed for mercy."

Captain Pollard went on to say that the aeroplane had robbed Britain of its insular immunity and that either Germany or France was in a position to bomb London, or almost any part of Great Britain, without warning. The Captain held out little hope to his readers. He argued that effective civilian defence, i.e. shelters was impossible. Perfect air defence is unattainable. What he seemed to advocate was parity of air forces, so that if nothing else one could drop bomb for bomb. This would not prevent casualties at home, but it would force the meaning of aerial bombardment into the minds of the aggressors in no uncertain manner.

These articles must have increased the consciousness of the people in the North East as far as aerial bombardment was concerned. These articles together with the areas experience of war from the air during World War One, may well have led many to question the belief in disarmament. Those who believed in rearmament were spurred on to be more vocal in their beliefs, while there were still many who advocated that the only way to peace was through reduction in arms.

As it was the government decided that the D.R.C. recommendations of 8 March 1934, were unacceptable, both to public opinion and in the existing state of the economy to the Treasury. What could be done? It was now that Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the lead in the formulation of defence policy. He maintained that the problem was not so much to fight a war, as to deter one. This could be done by the establishment of an air force based in Britain of a size and efficiency calculated to inspire respect in the minds of any enemy. Chamberlain claimed that this could only be done by cutting down on all other commitments, including Imperial Defence. The Cabinet supported Chamberlain and decided that the British Expeditionary Force should be abandoned. The Cabinet, probably bearing in mind public opinion on air warfare and memories of World War One, believed that it fully reflected public opinion on this issue. The Peace Pledge Union was becoming active. The works of the war poets were receiving public acclaim. The creation of a B.E.F. to repeat the horrors of the Somme was felt to be politically out of the question.<sup>(21)</sup>

On the basis of the D.R.C. recommendations, as modified by the Ministerial committee, the government initiated its rearmament programme. The White Paper on defence, which was presented eventually on 11 March 1935, was couched in moderate language for the Cabinet

was particularly concerned lest public alarm be aroused.<sup>(22)</sup> The White Paper referred to Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference in October 1933 and to Hitler's decision to leave the League of Nations, which Japan had also done. Many other nations were rearming, and the Disarmament Conference had collapsed. In these circumstances, the White Paper stated, the government could see no alternative to building up Britain's defences.

In the North East public opinion was still mixed on the subject of rearmament, but the majority opinion as expressed seemed to favour disarmament. However, as already mentioned, the people who favoured rearmament were becoming steadily more noticeable. Letters to newspapers in this sense were increasing and more people were ready to express their concern over how far disarmament had gone. The failure of the Disarmament Conference and Germany's departure from the League of Nations undoubtedly raised fears. The spectre of bombardment from the air and the large number of civilian casualties that were expected to ensue made people worry about disarming any more. Many people also seemed to believe that peace could only be secured through an effective League of Nations. This meant that Britain needed to take more of a lead in promoting peace and gaining the respect of others. Britain needed to be armed. There was much support for the League after the

failure of the Disarmament Conference, and most people seemed to believe in it. The following letter is typical of this view,

"I contend that only a combination of all the great nations of the world, bound in honour to mete out swift retribution to any one aggressor of its written laws, will preserve world peace." (23)

On the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War One the Sunday Sun carried an article by Countess Haig under the heading "Did 7,239,292 Men Die in Vain?" (24) She feared they did. It had been suggested, she said, that an international organisation of women against war should be formed; but while agreeing that women can be great peace builders, she doubted whether such an idea was practicable. Peace, she believed, would not be achieved by the speeches of women from the rostrum and international conferences. No, the problem of peace was the problem of changing men's hearts - a problem that had defied the centuries. The task and duty of women was to teach the folly of war in their homes and among their friends. While it is obvious that Countess Haig saw no role outside of their home for women, it is interesting the widow of General Haig was worried about the rumours of war and that the dead of the Great War might have died in vain.

The majority opinion was still in favour of disarmament, with those in favour of rearmament

beginning to emerge. The North Eastern Daily Gazette's editorials changed markedly over this period. On 9 October 1933 the editorial was urging the countries at the Disarmament Conference to

"either disarm or face the consequence of a ruinous race in armaments culminating in another world war, in which civilisation itself would be engulfed." (25)

By 31 October 1934, only a year later, the Gazette was arguing quite differently. In its editorial it stated that

"Disarmament is temporarily a lost cause. To admit so much is not to resort to blank despair or to sacrifice ideals, but rather to face unblinkingly the uncompromising facts." (26)

The editorial went on to argue that Britain dare not remain disarmed. With the vast responsibilities of the Empire she had reduced her land, sea and air defences to the edge of risk in the hope that others would follow the example. They had refused to do so.

The editor of the Northern Echo at this same time was critical of the government, and in particular Lord Londonderry, when they admitted abandoning hopes of securing disarmament by agreement. (27) The public had been prepared, the editor argued, for the declaration that the air arm was to be strengthened; but the country would await, not merely with interest but with anxiety,

the promised explanation why this course should have been taken. The editor asked the government:

"will a huge new building programme by the British government lead to reduction of any other country's air fleet, or is it likely to quicken fears and stimulate building?"

The Co-operative Party meanwhile was still criticising the government for the role it played in the Disarmament Conference. In its Annual Report of 1934 the party argued that opportunities had been thrown away by the government at a time when a bold and courageous lead might have influenced for good international feeling on the question of disarmament.<sup>(28)</sup> The British government, the report continued, hesitated, its insistence on the right to continue bombing from the air, and its objection to the abolition of the private manufacture of arms had had inevitable results. Instead of the ex-allied countries and others reducing arms, opinion seemed to be moving in the direction of Germany and her late allies, rearming themselves up to a standard of parity. This same National Conference in 1933 had passed a resolution which said that the Disarmament Conference so far had failed, largely owing to the policy of the National Government.

Several major shifts in press opinion were occurring in this period, which accentuated trends evident in public opinion at the time. Firstly the pro-disarmament section of the press came to despair of the

eventual success of the Disarmament Conference and turned on the government bitterly for its role in causing the failure. Secondly, several papers came to regard the League system of collective security as the main hope for the Disarmament Conference and preservation of peace. Thirdly, some papers which would have denounced any thought of rearmament a year before came to the reluctant conclusion that, however abhorrent it was, some rearmament might be necessary given the current international situation.

Thus again as with public opinion, the government came under attack from two different directions - from those in the press which blamed it for the downfall of the Disarmament Conference, and from those which wanted it to launch a major rearmament programme immediately. On this issue it seems that the press generally did get ahead of public opinion. Opinions in the press and in editorials advocated rearmament much more strongly than the public through letter columns or at meetings. Whether the press influenced public opinion is hard to measure, but is unlikely. What was more likely is that editors and reporters, possibly more in touch with events, came to conclusions on the success or failure of the disarmament cause far more quickly than the general public, who seemed to hold on to hope far longer.

Public opinion was therefore still split between those who believed that Britain had disarmed

sufficiently and that now was the time to rearm, and those who clung to the belief that Britain's best course of action was to continue disarming and impress upon other nations that this was the best course. The former view was becoming increasingly prevalent. Under the heading "We Must Arm" a following writer in the North Eastern Daily Gazette criticised those who talked of any more reduction in armaments.<sup>'29'</sup> He recalled World War One and its horrors and suggested that Britain should not deliberately weaken its powers of resistance and leave herself open to the insults and attacks of any Power which chose to force a quarrel upon it. He believed that Europe was an armed camp and that the methods of the ostrich would not do for Britain.

Other articles and speeches appeared which helped to reinforce the view that rearmament was necessary. Lord Londonderry, speaking in Darlington, told his audience that

"We went to the Disarmament Conference with our own defences sadly neglected - neglected in the belief that if we could persuade people to adopt a real disarmament policy there was no need to fill up these gaps and put our services, in such a condition of strength as would justify what many people would call the bare minimum of security."<sup>'30'</sup>

Lord Londonderry went on to say that

"public opinion in this country - and it is seldom at fault - is

demanding in very tempered and sober terms that the defences of this country should be set in order and placed on such a footing as will satisfy the majority."

Sir John Foster Fraser argued that Britain was nearer to war now than in 1913, and predicted a world clash in 1936.<sup>'31'</sup> The same writer in another article took a behind the scenes look at Germany and France and came to the conclusion that Britain must rearm.<sup>'32'</sup> In a similar mood J.M. Bullock put forward the view that compared with the next war, the World War "will seem child's play, almost a honeymoon."<sup>'33'</sup> All of these articles pointed to Germany as the danger to peace. The government was also aware that the greatest threat was from that quarter and tried to make it clear that its programme of rearmament was designed to convince Hitler that an air attack on Britain would be a costly venture.

The public meanwhile were not convinced, as the government seemed to be, that Germany was a threat. A debate ensued in the local press around whether Germany should be trusted or not. Writing in the Sunday Sun one writer argued that in some of its policies the Nazi government was right.<sup>'34'</sup> Another writer urged people to have trust in Germany, who he described as having nothing but peaceful intentions:<sup>'35'</sup>

"Seeing that Hitler served in the last war, and in the ranks, he would not let even a dog go through what he himself, like many of us on this side, went through. Hitler, in my

opinion, must by his very make up essentially be a man of peace."

This letter provoked an angry response from many in the following weeks and typical of some of the replies was one under the heading "Mad Dog of Europe."<sup>36</sup> The writer of this letter urged Germany to show its peaceful intentions and return to Geneva and the Disarmament Conference, but this was not before a sustained and vitriolic attack:

"When a mad dog is caught, it is thought advisable to destroy it. Germany was not destroyed in 1918 but allowed to survive but under close restraint. These restraints have proved to be not strong enough and a very grave responsibility rests upon the shoulders of those who allow that dog to escape again."

Differing views of the situation continued to be expressed, sometimes by people with interests in the argument over whether rearmament should begin. At the launch from their Wallsend yard on 22 September 1934, of the Australian Cruiser Sydney C.S. Swan, Vice Chairman of Messrs. Swan, Hunter and Wigham Richardson Ltd., expressed the view that "the Tyne have the skilled shipbuilding workmen, all that is required now is for the Admiralty to send along more orders."<sup>37</sup> Further emphasising his hope that the Admiralty would give orders for the Tyne. Swan uttered this warning:-

"If the present situation lasted they should not be able in this country to find the skilled labour necessary to build ships, in the

event of another war, to the same extent as they had done."

Stanley M. Bruce, High Commissioner for Australia and formerly Prime Minister of Australia, echoed many of Swan's views and stressed that Britain's navy was the greatest insurance for peace in the world. He went on to say that

"Britain and Australia have done their best in recent years, to bring about disarmament, but we recognise there is a point to which you can disarm yourself which, so far from promoting peace, may become a menace to the thing we wish to achieve."

One would not expect the Vice Chairman of a warship-building firm to be a pacifist, and Swan had an obvious interest in rearmament, knowing it would mean an upturn in orders for his firm. However, his views will have been noted by the work force, who if faced with a shortage of orders and the prospect of being laid off might come round to the view that rearmament would be a good thing, if only in their own economic terms.

With regard to Germany, the general tone of many letters at this time was one of sympathy. Many felt that Great Britain and the rest of Europe had to come to some accommodation with Germany and that this should be sooner rather than later. The pro-disarmers were still to the fore in the North East, and those in favour of rearmament were - in 1934 - still quiet. Even given some of the pessimistic articles that had appeared and

the tension in Europe, letters such as the one below from a local branch of the Society of Friends still appeared. (38)

"There is evidence that a large number of thoughtful men and women are emphatic in their belief that the teachings of Christ can be translated into practical politics."

The writer urged the churches and all people of good will to bring all their influence to bear on the government to take steps to deal with the matter. The tone and content of this letter and others of the same order that appeared, could well have been written two or three years earlier, before the Disarmament Conference had begun. The disappointment of the failure of the conference does not seem to have depressed markedly many of the pro-disarmers.

At a rally of Northern Women Liberals in West Hartlepool on 2 December 1934 the call was still for disarmament. (39) This rally was attended by representatives from 40 constituencies from Berwick to Teesside and it supported the speakers' call for disarmament not rearmament. The rally ended by urging everybody to support the questions on the Peace Ballot and vote for peace.

The Peace Ballot was a private referendum organised in 1934-1935 by the League of Nations Union. The hope was that every person over the age of 18 years would answer a series of questions presented to them by

entering either "yes" or "no". The questions were as follows:

1. Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?
2. Are you in favour of an all round reduction of armaments by international agreement?
3. Are you in favour of the all round abolition of national, military and naval aircraft by international agreement?
4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?
5. Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by:
  - (a) economic and non-military measures, and
  - (b) if necessary military measures.

The ideals of the ballot were well supported. Religious leaders of all denominations and leaders of some thirty other organisations interested in peace unanimously supported the referendum. No political party opposed the Peace Ballot. The ballot was well worked for in the North East, there were many letters urging people to vote in the ballot and register their

feelings. It is worth looking at the Peace Ballot in more detail.

Martin Ceadel believes that it was not a scientific test of opinion.<sup>'40'</sup>

"In technical terms the Peace Ballot was pre-scientific since, in its bid to mobilize the whole country, it made no attempt to generate any form of sample: thus only those approached and prepared to cooperate featured in its results."<sup>'41'</sup>

The Peace Ballot did not produce a random sample and Ceadel goes on to argue that those opposed to the League will have been under-represented because they will have refused to take part or may not have been asked. However, the size of the turnout and the consistency of the results still leaves the Peace Ballot as an important test of public opinion.

In all throughout the country over 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million answers were recorded and in some areas there were notable turnouts. In Stockton on Tees the turnout was 66 per cent, Consett 60 per cent, Newcastle 32 per cent and Tow Law 91 per cent. The average poll for the whole country was 36.3 per cent.

Of the questions on the Peace Ballot the last question was probably of the greatest value. To 5(a) 10 million people answered in favour and only some 600,000 against. To 5(b) 6,784,000 voted "yes" and 2,351,000 voted "no".<sup>'42'</sup> Many claims have been made for this ballot. Some claimed that it showed how "pacifist" the

British people were. "Gracchus" in his book Your MP suggests otherwise.<sup>'43'</sup> Every "pacifist" in the country had worked for it, he argues, canvassed, whipped up support for it. Yet on the vital last question the vote was nearly 3-1 against the "absolute" pacifist position. Over 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million people were clear; it would be right to fight. That was the verdict of the Peace Ballot on the question of military resistance to aggression. "Gracchus" believed that the people of a free and independent Kingdom told their rulers, as clearly as they could, what they were feeling. They were not pacifists: they were against war (which is sometimes rather a different thing).

Martin Ceadel believes that the interpretation on questions 1,2,3 and 4 are fairly straightforward.<sup>'44'</sup> It is question 5, he argues, that remains the hardest to interpret. "Over the years it has been treated both as a sign of public willingness to stand up for international justice (by W. Churchill, for example)<sup>'45'</sup> and also as a sign of pacifism (by F.A. Walker, for example)."<sup>'46'</sup> Ceadel feels that the difficulty of sustaining the former interpretation lies in the smallness of the "yes" majority to part (b). He found that when the "yes" vote to military sanctions is given as a percentage of all voters, it falls from 74.3 per cent to only 58.7 per cent. This is hardly an overwhelming call for defiance of all aggressors.

Martin Pugh feels that "the findings of the Peace Ballot are not to be interpreted as proof of pacifism."<sup>(47)</sup> "Some 6.7 million people," Pugh noted, "voted for applying sanctions including military ones against aggressor states who flouted arbitration by the League, only 2.3 million opposed this."<sup>(48)</sup> Thus support for the League, Pugh argues, ought not to be equated with pacifism.

In the North East of England the votes were very similar to the national figures, if not more non-pacifist with regard to question 5(b). In the results from the region that the writer managed to unearth, in Middlesbrough (East and West Division), Hartlepoons (West Hartlepool and Hartlepool), Darlington, South Shields and Tynemouth the answers to question 5(b) were as follows:

MIDDLESBROUGH	YES	22,449	NO	4,786
HARTLEPOOL	YES	13,465	NO	2,814
DARLINGTON	YES	14,125	NO	3,756
SOUTH SHIELDS	YES	23,962	NO	7,827
TYNEMOUTH	YES	13,174	NO	3,761

[SEE APPENDIX 3 FOR THE FULL RESULTS OF TOWNS IN THE NORTH EAST AND THEIR ANSWERS TO THE PEACE BALLOT.]

Against a national average of 3-1 this was roughly 4-1 against the "absolute" pacifist position for Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, 3.5-1 for Darlington and Tynemouth and 3-1 for South Shields. If the above results are consistent this would leave the region more non-pacifist than the country at large. My research

seems to show that people in favour of disarmament tended to be much more vigorous in their campaign than those in favour of rearmament. Indeed those in favour of rearmament tended to be critical of the Peace Ballot and advocated a boycott of it. Some newspapers in the region, notably the Newcastle Daily Journal, were lukewarm in their approach. However, the Peace Ballot may have come at a time when the tension within Europe, the rearmament of other countries and the failure of the Disarmament Conference, had led people to believe that absolute disarmament was not the right course.

In the north of the region at this time there was much debate and controversy going on concerning the holding of a tattoo in Ravensworth Park in Gateshead. The arguments on both sides encapsulated much of the disagreement that was going on over rearmament generally, with strong emotions on both sides. The Gateshead Herald began the argument in February 1934 with an editorial heading "Who is for Peace."<sup>49</sup> The editor criticized Gateshead Town Council for agreeing to supply the services of the Borough Fire Brigade for the military tattoo to be held in Ravensworth Park in the summer of 1934. The only opposition on the Council to the proposal came from the Labour group, who argued that it would be official support for a military display admittedly designed to advertise the army and induce young men to join up. All over Europe, the Labour group

argues, the same sort of displays were going on, to rouse the martial and military passions of the various peoples, and prepare their minds for war.

Opposition to the tattoo came from many groups. At the Gateshead Council meeting in April three letters of protest were read out.<sup>(50)</sup> They came from the National British Women's Total Abstinence Union, the British Anti-War Movement (Gateshead Branch), and the Gateshead Labour Party and Rates Council. A debate in the Council meeting ensued over the rights and wrongs of the tattoo. Arguments in favour of it tended to come from the Conservative group and were along the lines that it would bring much needed publicity and some money to the town, and why should they not be proud of their army. Councillor Ruth Dodds summed up many of the arguments against the tattoo when she said that her previous words that the mothers of the town were against the tattoo were now proved.

"They knew it was designed to entice their sons to enlist, and no mother, even though her boy was unemployed, wanted him to join the army. The military came to the distressed areas where the young men were desperate through lack of work, to run a recruiting campaign under cover of charity."

The arguments continued up to the tattoo as to whether it should be held or not. Many letters criticized the holding of the tattoo when Henderson was at Geneva trying to disarm. "The tattoo's newspaper

campaigns and perpetual talk of war are the means by which the unilateralist and armament interests try to overcome the opposition of ordinary people to the idea of war."<sup>(51)</sup> The Gateshead Herald noted that from all over they were getting protests against the tattoo, "the glorification of military ideas, the effort to tempt our young men, for whom the Capitalist system is too incompetent to find honest work, into the ranks of the fighting forces."<sup>(52)</sup>

Many political and non-political groups were against the holding of the tattoo. The Gateshead Labour Party and Rates Council called a conference for 30 June the Saturday before the tattoo, which was to be addressed by E. Shinwell.<sup>(53)</sup> All who stood for peace and were against the glorification of war by military display were urged to attend. The Durham County Council Education Committee and the Newcastle City Council Education Committee both refused to sanction special school parties to the tattoo. The Durham Teachers Association passed a resolution asking its members not to press for facilities for taking school children to see the tattoo.<sup>(54)</sup> Thirty-nine Free Church Ministers of Newcastle and District signed a letter which appeared in the Evening Chronicle protesting against the tattoo.<sup>(55)</sup> The letter explained that the ministers could not reconcile the holding of a military spectacle with the message of their churches. Despite all the

protests the tattoo went ahead and was a great success, attended by thousands. But the protests that arose showed the depth of feelings that existed. However, supporters of the tattoo could argue that its success and the attendance of so many reflected their side of the argument. What is not clear of course is how many of those who attended could be regarded as in favour of rearmament. What is beyond doubt is that the protesters against the holding of the tattoo were certainly not in favour of rearmament and indeed were more likely to support disarmament.

Another interesting development on Tyneside was the issue of a newsletter "The Gun" by the Militant Group of Workers at the Elswick and Scotswood factories of the Vickers Armstrong Group.<sup>(56)</sup> The publication was a newsletter dedicated to encourage and build up strong trade union and workshop organisation. It attempted to improve the conditions for the members by putting pressure on the management. There was a letter page for workers to air their grievances, articles on local and national political events, details of demonstrations, and lead articles criticizing not only the management of Vickers, but also the government, the ruling classes and the Royal Family. The newsletter was unashamedly communist and reached sales of over 750 in one issue. It cost 1d. The author has only managed to find 5 surviving issues of The Gun. It seems to have begun

publication in the summer of 1934 and ran to about 6 pages. There is no evidence to say when it ceased publication.

There is nothing unusual in finding a newsletter written by workers trying to improve their pay and conditions, particularly when it is a large factory in a heavily industrialized area. What is interesting for the author's research is that The Gun was written by a group of anti-war workers at a factory committed strongly to the manufacture of armaments. Of the 5 issues that remain, 3 carry anti-war material. Issue Number 5 on 9 November 1934 carries a long article on page 5 describing the situation in Europe and commenting that the evidence points to very grave possibilities. The speed-up in the manufacture of munitions, as shown by production at Elswick for India, China and the British government, was evidence that preparations both of a diplomatic and technical character were well advanced. The writer then asked that "the workers must redouble their efforts to stop war." In this connection, he noted his pleasure that Gateshead Number 6 A.E.U. had passed a resolution against war and in favour of the affiliation of the A.E.U. to the Anti-War Movement.

In issue Number 11 printed on 21 December 1934 under the title "Vickers In On £770,000 Deal To Arm Poland," the writer was very critical of the part

Vickers was playing in the arming of "Fascist" Poland for the drive against the Soviet Union. The article continued by saying that a scheme is already afoot to provide for a large-scale mechanisation of the Polish Army. The Fascist government of Marshal Pilsudski had arranged through Vickers' agents in Warsaw for the purchase of an immense fleet of armoured cars fitted with light field artillery. The final issue to survive, issue Number 20 from 3 May 1935, contains two anti-war cartoons.

The importance of The Gun is that workers were campaigning against war and against the manufacture of armaments and munitions in the clear knowledge that if their campaign was successful they could well be out of a job. However, its denunciations were purely rhetorical. There is no evidence from the surviving issues that the writers encouraged the Vickers workers to give up their jobs or strike against the sale of their products or even sabotage production. The views expressed in The Gun closely followed those of the Communist Party Great Britain and sales of the newsletter seemed to have been restricted to within the Vickers Armstrong Group. No letters appear from individuals outside of the factory.

Throughout 1935 and up to the General Election the debate continued as to the various merits of rearmament and more to the fore came opinions regarding the

necessity of rearmament. Within this period the introduction of conscription in Germany and the impact of the Abyssinian War was important. The government, now fully committed to rearmament, justified it on two grounds. The main reason it gave was that rearmament was necessary if Britain was to provide effective support to the League against an aggressor. The second reason was that British security demanded some measure of rearmament in the air. The reaction of the public was predictable. Disarmers denounced the rearmament decision while those calling for rearmament welcomed the increases, though some believed that the government had not gone far enough. Attacks on the government were not long coming.

Many letters criticized the money spent on the rearmament programme and questioned where this extra money was coming from:

"This week the Prime Minister supported the increased expenditure on armaments of nearly £10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million and this after declaring that £2 million is the most that the government can afford to devote to distressed areas. Does this mean that the demands of the armament makers and vested interests are more insistent than the needs of the poor?" (57)

This letter was from an individual and refers to the increased expenditure announced in March 1935. Reports of German rearmament continued to reach Whitehall throughout the first half of 1935 and the

government felt compelled to respond with additional rearmament. The Defence White Paper was tabled in March 1935 and the Service estimates which accompanied the paper increased expenditure on the armed forces by over £10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million to nearly £125 million. In April the government appointed a full-time chairman of the supply board. In May it decided to proceed directly with construction of the aircraft which came to be known as the Spitfire and Hurricane. Two months later it brought before Parliament supplementary estimates of more than £5 million for the R.A.F.

There was in the North East much support for the government action, as well as many attacks. Many looked back to the last war, and both sides of the rearmament debate found evidence in the war to argue their case. Some argued that the high death toll amongst the British was due to the fact that the Germans had better arms, and that therefore "it is the duty of the government to get very busy and be prepared," as one individual wrote.<sup>(58)</sup> Others emphasised the arms race that occurred before World War One and saw parallels in the events of 1935.

"When will men realise that competition in arms finally leads to war, and general increase in arms means that the last state is worse than the first?"

wrote one writer to the Newcastle Chronicle.<sup>(59)</sup>

In the debate in the House of Commons two of the regions' M.P.s were particularly scathing of the government's increased spending plans. Interestingly none of the area's M.P.s spoke in favour of the increased spending in the debates, though they voiced their approval elsewhere. H. Johnstone, the Labour M.P. for South Shields, in a long speech criticized the increase in spending on the army and said it was not only unnecessary but a direct result of the failure of the government's foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> He believed that the government was now, because of the failure of the Disarmament Conference and events in Germany, being forced into panic measures, rather than trying to find political solutions. In the same debate the Labour M.P. for Chester-le-Street, J.J. Lawson picked up a theme he had touched on in a similar debate in 1934, that many men were being rejected by the army as being physically unfit.<sup>61</sup> This was hardly a sign of the well-being of the nation, and he hoped that "if the government are in the mood to spend extra money on the army, when it comes to the question of considering spending money to keep men employed and well fed they will show the same enthusiasm." Lawson went on to criticize the increase in the estimates and said:

"on this side of the House we are no more in love with the present creed of the Germans than is anyone else, but governments in the past have

withstood it to some extent, and have relied upon collective action to give hope of security to the word. If ever there was a time when the statesmen of this country and of the world should take note of the ordinary man in the street it is the present time." (62)

Editorials in the local newspapers argued the case for rearmament. The fear of Germany and her rearmament, especially in the air, led to the editor of the North Eastern Daily Gazette backing the government in its decision that Britain would not be outbuilt either in the air or on the sea. (63) The editor of the Northern Echo also agreed with the government and believed "that rearmament was the only practicable course." (64) In May the North Eastern Daily Gazette gave great prominence to an article by S.R. Campion. The article was a review of a book by John Brown from South Shields named I Saw for Myself. Mr. Brown had been inside many of the German armament factories and if what he said was true, Campion argued, Germany would not only set the pace in aerial armaments, but in very other kind of equipment in modern warfare. (65)

The government came in for intense criticism from people in the North East, over its decision to rearm. The number of letters on the subject increased markedly in all the local newspapers as the debate continued. One individual argued that the armaments race put the country back to pre-1914 years. (66) The contention, the

writer argued, that Great Britain had practised unilateral disarmament to the brink of danger, while other countries had continued to rearm, could not be borne out by an examination of the effective strengths of the different powers, either at sea, on land or in the air. Many others agreed. The Peace Council called the government's White Paper "calculated hysteria" and argued that it had finally capitulated to those elements in the Cabinet and the Conservative Party which had never believed in the purpose of the Disarmament Conference nor in the efficiency of "international machinery" for the promotion of peace.<sup>67</sup> Two young ministers accused the "democratic" Prime Minister of opposing the sides of the people who took part in the Peace Ballot and showed that the great majority of the people of this country favoured the reduction of armaments.<sup>68</sup>

One individual was worried about the White Paper's effect on Britain's foreign policy.<sup>69</sup>

"The publication of the White Paper has come as a severe blow to all those who have been working in the cause of peace during the last few months. It is indeed a disastrous document both as regards its effect on foreign opinion and as regards its attempt to justify the new increases in the estimates."

A group of 44 clergymen and ministers in Newcastle were so upset by the White Paper that they sent a letter signed by all to the Newcastle Journal.<sup>70</sup> Entitled

"Challenge to Peace", the letter expressed grave concern at the recent turn of events and deplored the definite announcement on the part of the government of a policy of armed strength. They believed that the increased spending on arms was unwarranted in view of the rigid economy, which was observed in dealing with the widespread economic distress and with the question of education and social services.

On an individual level, however, the letters to the newspapers suggested that the government's rearmament proposals were generally supported. About three times as many letters supported the government as attacked it. Many of the letters echoed the same theme. They acknowledged that the government had worked for disarmament, but that this policy had failed and now was the time reluctantly to rearm. Typical of these is the following letter from a person who called himself a Liberal.

"The government has worked hard to bring about a general disarmament of nations and in so doing has reduced our own defensive forces until they are below safety point. Now the government is compelled as a duty to our own people to try to remedy this state of things." ('71)

Other letters pointed to the threat from Germany and asked what option the government had. We could not blink our eyes at facts, argued one writer, we all knew Germany was building planes at two a day, yet we never

heard of Germany holding a Peace Ballot.<sup>'72'</sup> The announcement by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle that he believed that work should be provided for the unemployed by constructing twelve underground shelters around Newcastle, for use by the public in case of air raids, was applauded by the editor of the Sunday Sun.<sup>'73'</sup> The editor acknowledged that zealous peace propagandists would deplore the proposal; but he believed that there would be a larger body of opinion in favour.

Other letters in support of the government's decision to rearm flooded in. Many believed, as the next writer quoted did, that it was inevitable given the present state of Europe.

"There is no possibility of security and stability in Europe if Germany is allowed to continue to pile up arms without protest. She is the sole cause of unsettlement amongst the powers. Are we to go to our knees to her and beg her to desist?"<sup>'74'</sup>

A number of letters also came in to the Newcastle Journal in response to the letter signed by the 44 ministers who criticised the increased spending. Typical of these letters is the following one from an individual who argued that Britain had by example "pared our defences to the bone" but signally failed to get any European nation to emulate us.<sup>'75'</sup> The writer continued,

"we only had a skeleton army in August 1914, when treaties were termed "scraps of paper" and war was forced upon us. Do the ministers desire us to be at the mercy of treaty scappers and ruthless belligerents."

Larger groups were also busy making their views known on the government's proposals. It is noteworthy that no groups of the non-political type were in favour of this rearmament step. All were against it. Whether the explanation is that support for disarmament was more naturally found among the religious groups (and left-wing political groups) is unclear, but whatever the reason the number opposing rearmament was large. Among those making themselves heard, or organising rallies at this time, were the Society of Friends, the League of Nations Union, the British Legion and various religious groups.

The Middlesbrough branch of the Society of Friends wrote to the Northern Echo voicing their deep regret and concern over the government announcement of its programme for an increase of expenditure on arms.<sup>'76'</sup> The local branch of the League of Nations Union expressed its concern and anger over the government's White Paper at a meeting in Durham on 8 March 1935.<sup>'77'</sup> The principal speaker at the meeting was Miss K.D. Courtney, Chairman of the British Organisations Committee at Geneva during the Disarmament Conference. She accused the government of vacillation

on the question of armaments and denounced the White Paper as provocative and a contradiction of the plan put forward by the government at Geneva. The line of thought running throughout the White Paper, Miss Courtney argued, was that Britain was looking to her own armaments for security and not to the general building up of an understanding through the League of Nations. The President of the North East area of the British Legion, Brigadier General Riddle, expressed his and the Legion's views in a letter to the Newcastle Journal.<sup>'78'</sup>

"During the past months belief in the desire of the Great Powers for peace has been waning . . . The great race in armaments has been revived."

Brigadier General Riddles said that he thought the government's decision to increase its armaments was tardy, and that the British Legion deplored the cause, rather than the action.

Politicians were especially vocal at this time, as was to be expected. Supporters of the government were busy defending its position and arguing the case for rearmament, while members of the Opposition were suitably employed advocating the case of disarmament. Harold Macmillan, at an address to the Stockton Brotherhood, urged people to "be ready to fight for peace".<sup>'79'</sup> If people believed in the collective system, Macmillan continued, they must be ready to fight for it. If they wanted peace they must be ready to

sacrifice for peace. The Co-operative Party at its National Conference was critical of the government.<sup>(80)</sup> In a resolution it accused the government of reducing by its actions the influence of Great Britain in the promotion of world peace. The overwhelming Conservative majority in the National Government had forced its policy of rearmament and its belief in force of arms upon Parliament.

Two differing views on the rearmament programme were given by C.M. Headlam, the M.P. for Barnard Castle, and Arthur Shepherd, the prospective Labour candidate for Darlington. Colonel Headlam argued at a meeting in Durham that if the Air Force was not increased the government should be impeached.<sup>(81)</sup> Colonel Headlam had just visited Germany and told his audience that the country was rapidly emerging from the state of despair and despondency in which it had been a short time before. He was concerned with the differing attitudes in Germany and Britain towards the military:

"When I see that bodies like the London County Council are now emulating the County Council of Durham and declaring against anything in the nature of fostering the national spirits such as is fostered in cadet corps and the like, and compare it with the training going on among the youth of Germany and Italy, then I am left wondering what the future portends for us all."

Shepherd took a different line.<sup>82</sup> He argued that the poor were at the mercy of air attack. Any attack on Britain from the air would hit the poorest most as they could least afford to equip their homes properly and were most unlikely to leave their homes to flee into the countryside. The poor, he said, would be wiped out in their teeming tens of thousands. Shepherd, addressing an audience at Darlington, asked what had the National Government done about bombing aeroplanes. Many countries were ready to abolish the bombing aeroplane. All they needed was a lead. Many of them had begged for one. But what had the government done? Lord Londonderry had said that he had the utmost difficulty in preventing the bombing aeroplane being done away with. What hope was there for any real peace in such circumstances?

Sir Luke Thompson, the Conservative M.P. for Sunderland, in a speech there, attacked the Labour Party for the stance on disarmament.<sup>83</sup> According to the Socialists, he argued, Britain should disarm and rely upon the good services of other nations in a collective effort if any emergency should arise. That was too ludicrous a thought for it to be taken seriously, he adds. It seemed foolish to hope that if attacked, Britain could receive assistance from outside.

This theme of collective security and relying on other nations in a crisis, was to occur again and again.

The Conservatives and supporters of the National Government were enthusiastic in their defence of rearmament. The country had done all it could, in their view, to bring about a reduction in armaments, but Britain had been the only country that had reduced its arms. Now that the international situation was unstable and Britain's defences too weak, rearmament had to take place. The Labour Party and the opposition to rearmament obviously condemned it. But they must have an alternative. This alternative was the League of Nations. Britain should not be rearming, but relying on the collective security offered by the League. Typical of the Labour Party's views was a speech by Manny Shinwell the prospective candidate for Seaham, at a rally at Wingate: '84'

"I do not believe the British people want war," he said. "Nor do I believe the National Government are anxious to precipitate another conflict, but we must think not in terms of the immediate situation, but of the future."

We could not afford, Shinwell went on, to allow dictators to go on the rampage. All the economic pressure the League of Nations could muster should be used to curb any dictator's frenzied activities. This did not mean more militarism, but an economic boycott which would make any nation realise what it was up against.

Similarly in a speech at Ashington on 21 July 1935 Herbert Morrison, the leader of the London Socialists, criticised the government's foreign policy and argued that the government was not keeping the cause of peace and not fully utilizing the machinery of the League of Nations. '85' Morrison declared that war and peace must be one of the main issues at the next election. The Labour Party in particular was associating itself strongly with the League of Nations and its policy of collective security and economic sanctions. This was a balance to the rearmament policy of the National Government. The problem for the Labour Party was that the credentials of the League of Nations had been tarnished by its relations with Japan and Germany.

The dispute between Abyssinia and Italy provided the first real test in this period of the public's determination to sustain the League of Nations. The public's reaction to Italy's demands and eventual invasion of Abyssinia confirmed the Peace Ballot results. Italy's actions provoked an outburst of support for Abyssinia. Abyssinia was seen as the underdog and deserving of public sympathy. She was also a member of the League and therefore entitled to the protection of the collective system. Support for Abyssinia became identified with support for the League itself.

The League, for many, was the only means of ensuring peace. Many looked to it for firm action against Italy, who was seen as the "bully" in this dispute. The public at large decided that Mussolini was an aggressor and was determined to restrain him, by sanctions through the League, from committing wholesale murder.

"In the crisis that faces the world today, all real lovers of peace must unite in preserving the only barrier to war that we have left." (86)

The Abyssinia/Italy conflict was also seen as a real turning point for the League. If the League acted in a united fashion and successfully stopped this war, then there would be no further talk of war. This was seen as a real test for the League in the eyes of the public.

"Either we succeed this time in keeping the peace," wrote one concerned writer, "and an enormous victory for the future, or we go back to barbarism." (87)

There were, however, organisations and individuals against the use of the League, either because they saw it as being no good or they believed that Britain would be dragged into a war. The British Union of Fascists organised the collection of signatures at demonstrations and parades as a protest against entering upon another European "war to end war". Numerous individuals also did not see that the League of Nations would prevent

war. An example of one of these is the following letter which appeared on 12 August 1935. '88'

"The League is only a representative gathering, and if a member fancies leaving it, what is there to prevent it? At present Mussolini is the one who fancies a "trot round" on his own. Perhaps another member will leave next week for a little diversion."

The Abyssinian war and the lead up to it certainly received widespread coverage in the North East press. There was much pessimism when the League failed to prevent the outbreak of the war, but much hope that the League, once sanctions had been applied, would bring a swift end to the conflict.

Early in the dispute an unusual about-turn by the T.U.C. caused some outbursts in the region's press. On 5 September 1935 the T.U.C. pledged itself to a course of action in regard to Italy which it was clearly recognised might lead to war. The persuasive eloquence of Sir Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the T.U.C. convinced the congress that brute force was the only effective argument with a bully. It was an extraordinary volte-face for the T.U.C. to advocate war after having denounced it for years, and having even gone to the length of discussing such methods as a general strike to prevent it. '89'

It was this dispute between Italy and Abyssinia and the League of Nations' attempts to settle the dispute,

that seems to have crystallized many people's views over rearmament. The number of letters coming into the local newspapers concerning the dispute and the number of speeches made increases dramatically. The majority were in favour of force being used to stop Mussolini. In an interview with the Newcastle Journal the Conservative M.P. for Newcastle North, Sir N. Grattan Doyle, was extremely critical of pacifists. '90'

"The behaviour of the so called "pacifists" at a time like this is astonishing," he said. "They adopt a truculent troublesome attitude, urging the imposition of sanctions upon the warlike nations and in the same breath they cry: But we must have no means of reprisal or defence: interfere with armed nations, but do not let's have any arms ourselves."

A typical letter is one from an individual who argued that the present disturbed condition of the world was a warning that peace could not be enforced by passing resolutions against war, nor even by signing peace treaties and pacts. '91' Foreign powers, the writer argued, were not impressed by paper agreements: they were impressed by the armed strength of the people with whom they negotiate.

There were also some attempts to link the rearmament that was taking place with the benefits that might occur for the economy of the region. In an editorial on 7 June 1935 the editor of the Newcastle Journal expressed disappointment that no part of the

North East was to share in the great volume of aircraft production which the government was authorising.<sup>'92'</sup> The editor argued that the North East was ideally placed for these factories. It was isolated to some extent from bombing, and raw materials and skilled labour were present. He hoped the situation would change.

A message of hope to the unemployed was brought by Admiral of the Fleet Sir R. Keyes M.P. to the Jubilee rally of the British Legion in the Royal showfield at Newcastle.<sup>'93'</sup> Keyes argued that the government's decision to put Britain's defences in order must provide work for many thousands in shipbuilding and engineering areas like Tyneside. In a similar vein the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Councillor R.S. Dalgliesh, speaking at the launch of a ship at the Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson Ltd yards at Walker, called on the government to "rebuild our navy."<sup>'94'</sup> Referring to a statement said to have been made by Mussolini, that England was a third-rate power, Councillor Dalgliesh warned that if such were the case the country would be more liable to attack and would need a stronger navy for defence purposes. In Newcastle about 24,000 men and women were still out of work, and 70,000 were out of work on Tyneside. "I implore the government of this country," he said, "to do something to help us in the great responsibility of providing work."

Mussolini's troops were barely three weeks into Abyssinia when the Prime Minister announced that elections for a new parliament would be held on 14 November 1935. The government fought the election on three distinct platforms: its record of economic achievement, its devotion to the League of Nations, and its desire to begin a rearmament programme sufficient to make a full contribution to collective security.

As with all General Elections things got off to a very brisk start with candidates having to be adopted and speeches made. Also as with many General Elections no one factor could be said to be responsible for the result. In the North East a number of local issues were important. The general state of the economy was a particularly important factor, as it had had enormous effects on the region. High unemployment, the rundown of the coal industry, shipbuilding, iron and steel and the shipyards were of concern. Many M.P.s in the region would have liked to fight the election on domestic policies alone, but the unsettled state of Europe and the government's commitment to rearmament made it impossible. In his speech at his adoption as Labour Party candidate for Chester-le-Street, J.J. Lawson criticised the government for avoiding home problems and declared that so far as he was concerned the fight in his constituency would be on the "home front."<sup>(95)</sup>

However many politicians did concentrate a great deal on international affairs (see Table 5, on page 166).

The foreign policy of the last and future governments was undoubtedly an issue. Both the major parties - Labour and Conservative - tried very hard to make out that they were the party of the League of Nations. Sir L. Thompson, the Conservative M.P. for Sunderland, referring to the international situation in a speech in Sunderland, said the position could not have been handled half so safely or half so effectively by any other type of government. '96' He went on to support the system of collective security,

"We do not want armaments for armaments sake," he declared, "surely we have proved that by the way in which our defence forces have been sacrificed in the cause of disarmament to the point of peril."

The newspapers made their influence felt through editorials and the news of their political correspondents. The editor of the Middlesbrough North Eastern Daily Gazette declared in his editorial on 24 October 1935 that "we must rearm:" '97'

"Reluctantly, the majority of our country men have come to the conclusion that in a world dominated by international mistrust and suspicion, our own course is to strengthen our own defences to resist attack and increase our influence in preserving peace."

TABLE 5  
ISSUES AT THE 1935 GENERAL ELECTION: CANDIDATES'  
ADDRESSES

SUBJECTS MENTIONED IN CANDIDATES' ADDRESSES	NAT. GOVT. %	LAB %	LIB %
<u>REARMAMENT</u>			
(A) MODERNISATION STATE OF PREPAREDNESS	86	29	38
(B) FEAR OF MASSIVE REARMAMENT	-	85	38
NEARNESS OF WAR	11	49	15
DISARMAMENT*	42	71	48
LEAGUE OF NATIONS	90	90	93
PEACE BALLOT	2	20	8
GERMANY	2	7	3

\* Labour candidates not referring to disarmament were generally contesting seats in London and the south east areas already sensitive to the need for air defence.

[SOURCE: TOM STANNAGE BALDWIN THWARTS THE OPPOSITION,  
PAGE 29]

The political correspondent of the Newcastle Journal meanwhile was being very critical of the Labour Party. '☞' The Socialists no doubt remembered, he wrote, that at least three by-elections had been won by their candidates during the last year or so on the question of peace at any price. They were hopeful of running a General Election on the same issue. But they

did not have the option of choosing their own time to fight, and this explained why they had to swallow the speeches made earlier in the year. The League of Nations, he continued, seemed to have upset socialist tactics without knowing it. Hence the peculiar similarity of their news on certain defence problems to those of the government they have accused of war-mongering. These comments are typical of the view of the Newcastle Journal in this period. Editorials consistently came out in favour of the return of the National Government and the political correspondent later went so far as to call some of the Labour candidates "liars." (99)

Many of the Conservative Party were justifying the calling of the General Election by saying that it was essential that Baldwin should be able to speak with the voice of the whole of Britain. (100) Sir N. Grattan Doyle, the Conservative M.P. for Newcastle North, told his constituents that it was obvious that when a government was dealing with a crisis and action had to be taken involving grave possibilities, it must test the feeling of the country to see whether the electors were behind it in its present policy. (101) The General Election, in the view of the Conservative Party, was an attempt to secure a vote of confidence in the National Government at a time of international crisis. It seemed to leave the Labour Party in no man's land. By

supporting tough measures, including military ones, against Italy, it was in effect supporting the National Government. By supporting only economic sanctions as proposed by the League, and rejecting any idea of rearmament, it was providing an opposition to the government but at a time when the League was being seen as increasingly impotent. The Labour Party attempted to fight the election on domestic issues but found itself having to defend its foreign policy. At his adoption meeting as the Labour candidate for the Hartlepoons, Captain C. Goather argued that the government was telling the country that greater armaments were a necessity. (102)

"Well I don't advocate singing psalms to lions, I say arm up to the level required by the Covenant of the League of Nations and not beyond it. If we have money to spend, spend it on social services."

The government did not have it all its own way in the election campaign in the North East. The campaign was noted in this area for its rowdyism as many meetings were broken up or disturbed by hecklers or fighting. Feelings ran high. The Newcastle Journal got particularly concerned about the campaign and devoted an editorial to some of the behaviour. (103) The following headline and story was typical of many in the campaign. "Rowdies break up election meetings in North East." (104) Election rowdyism was reported from many parts of the

North East the previous day, the article explained. Lady Londonderry had been howled down when attempting to speak in Newcastle Central Division with cries of "War Monger;" Cabinet ministers had not been permitted to express their views, Ramsay MacDonald and James Thomas had been refused a hearing at Murton. These were not organised campaigns to break up meetings, but seem to have been quite spontaneous.

TABLE 6  
DISTRIBUTION OF VOTES 1929 - 1935

	<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>OPPOSITION</u>
1929	8,656,729	13,989,433
1931	14,568,251	7,092,540
1935	11,810,552	10,215,152

[SOURCE: PATRICK KYBA, COVENANTS WITHOUT THE SWORD. PUBLIC OPINION AND BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY 1931-1935, PAGE 180]

The General Election of November 1935 resulted in a victory for the government, but with a reduced majority.

The results were:

CONSERVATIVES	387	LIBERALS	16	NAT	4
LABOUR	154	NATIONAL LAB	8	OTHERS	8
NATIONAL LIBERALS	34	IND. LIBERAL	4		

GOVERNMENT TOTAL 433    OPPOSITION TOTAL 182

In the North East region the results in the election were:

CONSERVATIVES	9(14)	LIBERALS	1(4)	NAT	-
LABOUR	12( 2)	NATIONAL LAB	-(1)	OTHERS	-
NATIONAL LIBERALS	3( 4)	IND. LIBERAL	-		

(1931 RESULTS IN BRACKETS)

Nationally the number of votes for the opposition increased markedly but the first past the post system disguised the extent of this movement. [See Table 6]

Historians point to a number of reasons for the National Government's success. Stevenson and Cook note a number of reasons worth mentioning.<sup>'105'</sup> Since the last election the National Government had not only kept the country free of financial crises, but had also presided over a general increase in the country's prosperity. Unemployment had been falling and the general expectation was that it would continue to decrease. It was this expectation which explains why many electors in areas of heavy unemployment voted for the National Government rather than for Labour.

In the course of the 1935 campaign the government made announcements that naval contracts were going to shipyards with heavy unemployment regardless of the size of the tenders. Thus it was announced that Palmer's shipyard would reopen in Jarrow. The surprising feature of the 1935 Jarrow election result is not that Ellen

Wilkinson won for Labour, but that the margin of her victory was so narrow.

Political factors also favoured the National Government. The Conservative Party presented a united front to the country from mid-1935, just as Labour Party unity was beginning to break down. The Labour Party was suffering from the resignations of Cripps, Ponsonby and Lansbury and the death of Arthur Henderson. To add to this it elected as leader a politician unknown to the electorate at large and then let it be known that Attlee was only a stop-gap.

On average, in the 230 constituencies in the country in which there was a straight fight between Labour and Conservative in 1931 and 1935, there was an average swing to Labour of approximately 10 per cent. In the North East area that the author is studying the average swing was only 8.1 per cent. Less than the national average. However, Stevenson and Cook note that some particular areas and sub-areas showed very marked divergencies from the national pattern. <sup>(106)</sup>

In the case of the major provincial boroughs, these variations of swing were significant. In Portsmouth and Plymouth, it could be argued that the rearmament question was a factor keeping the pro-Labour swing low. Constituencies with a high percentage of naval or military voters showed swings much below the average. In Portsmouth North there was only a 1.8 per cent swing

to Labour, in the Gillingham division of Rochester only 3.9 per cent, and a low swing in Plymouth Sutton. In the North East there were swings of only 2 per cent in Sunderland, 1.9 per cent in Stockton and 5.1 per cent in the Hartlepoons. [See Table 7, page 176] To this list can be added such seats as Dartford (3.7 per cent) or Petersfield, with its large military camp. In addition, a variety of towns dependent on steel and susceptible to rearmament orders also showed low swings (St. Helens 6.1 per cent, Warrington 5.5 per cent, Westhoughton 6.9 per cent, Widnes 6.1 per cent).

The Labour Party must have been disappointed with the swings in the North East and particularly in the Newcastle and Gateshead area. In two Newcastle constituencies, in which Labour faced a straight fight with Conservatives, there were swings of only 6.9 per cent in the North and 7.9 per cent in the West; in the East division, against a Liberal National, there was a swing of only 4.8 per cent. In Gateshead the swing was 9.6 per cent. While in Jarrow, a town which had suffered a great deal in terms of unemployment since 1931, the swing was only 7.2 per cent. However, Palmer's shipyard was just being reopened and there was undoubtedly a fear that if Labour was elected the rearmament programme might be halted. These results were doubly disappointing, for Newcastle and Gateshead

had been among the worst Labour results in the North East in 1931.

In terms of seats won the results for the North East were quite a turn around (see appendix 2). The number of Labour seats went up from 2 in 1931 to 12 in 1935, while Conservative seats fell from 14 to 9. Undoubtedly economic issues were important in determining the result of the 1935 General Election, but from my research foreign policy issues also played a major part. The government made rearmament an important issue in the 1935 election campaign: it declared openly and often its intention to rearm if it was re-elected. No one could doubt that nationally the public had made its decision in favour of rearmament. Locally the result was no so clear. The movement towards Labour and away from the Conservatives signalled that in this region at least the debate over rearmament was not yet won.

The seats won by Labour were an improvement on 1931. However, as the percentage swings show, the movement to Labour was not so decisive as first seems. In 17 of the 25 seats examined the swing to Labour was less than the national average. Of the other 8 seats only Seaham with a swing of 24.5 per cent stands out as an exceptional result for Labour and here the Ramsay MacDonald factor could well be the explanation. The rearmament debate undoubtedly was a factor in the low

swing to Labour. The major population centres of Teesside, Wearside and Tyneside stood to gain in economic terms from an upturn in orders if rearmament was to proceed. The Conservatives were in favour of rearmament and a vote for them could be seen as a vote for jobs. While the number of Conservative seats fell, the swing to Labour was low. The electorate was undecided in this region as yet, whether to give support to rearmament or not.

When this debate in the region was eventually won, is not completely clear. J.J. Lawson, the Labour M.P. for Chester-le-Street, had been a consistent critic of the government between 1931 and 1935 and had continually argued against rearmament. In 1935 he was re-elected, committed again to fighting rearmament. But in 1936 he wrote a parliamentary sketch, in which he said: "War is coming as sure as night follows day."<sup>107</sup> The sketch was entitled "Watch Winston" - a man whose voice, Lawson recalled after the war, was then one crying in the wilderness.<sup>108</sup>

In April 1939, Lawson was asked by Sir John Anderson, the Lord Privy Seal, to accept the post of Deputy Commissioner for Civil Defence in the Northern region. Labour did not, he recalled, agree with Chamberlain's policy, but the country knew war was coming. Neither Chamberlain's appeasement policy, nor any combination of wisdom or power on this earth, could

divert those German leaders from their purpose.<sup>'109'</sup> In Lawson's view the debate in the North East was not won until 1936, and maybe even later. Whether it was events in that year that finally convinced many in the region is unclear. The Spanish Civil War, when many people from the North East went to fight "fascism", may certainly have had an affect. The Rhineland crisis or the aftermath of the Abyssinian crisis could also have been important. What seems to be clear is that in the period 1933 to 1935 in the North East of England there was a definite movement away from disarmament. That is not to say that people clearly wanted rearmament, but they seemed to be saying - enough! We have reduced our armaments as far as we are going to.

TABLE 7

PERCENTAGE SWINGS TO LABOUR IN 1935 GENERAL ELECTION

BARNARD CASTLE	5.1
BISHOP AUCKLAND	13.7
BLAYDON	13.0
CHESTER-LE-STREET	10.4
CONSETT	11.7
DURHAM	9.5
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING	10.2
JARROW	7.2
SEAHAM	24.5
SEDFIELD	11.1
SPENNYMOOR	15.0
GATESHEAD	9.6
HARTLEPOOLS	5.1
MIDDLESBROUGH EAST	4.4
MIDDLESBROUGH WEST	0.3
NEWCASTLE CENTRAL	3.4
NEWCASTLE EAST	4.8
NEWCASTLE NORTH	6.9
NEWCASTLE WEST	7.9
STOCKTON	1.9
DARLINGTON	5.5
SUNDERLAND	2.0
SOUTH SHIELDS	8.1
TYNEMOUTH	6.0
WALLSEND	6.0
AVERAGE SWING	8.1

## FOOTNOTES

- '1' Londonderry Wings of Destiny, page 107
- '2' Ibid Page 118
- '3' Ibid page 111
- '4' North Eastern Daily Gazette (hereafter Gazette)  
22 March 1934
- '5' Ben Pimlott Hugh Dalton, page 225
- '6' M.A. Hamilton Remembering My Good Friends,  
page 290
- '7' Gazette 17 May 1934
- '8' Ibid 27 August 1934
- '9' Hansard House of Commons Debates,  
Vol.287, Col.618,  
15 March 1934
- '10' Ibid Vol.287, Col.1908,  
14 February 1934
- '11' The Northern Echo (Echo), 20 November 1933
- '12' Newcastle Daily Chronicle (hereafter Chronicle),  
20 February 1934
- '13' Echo 16 April 1934
- '14' Ibid 10 June 1934
- '15' Kyba Covenants Without The Sword,  
page 112
- '16' Hansard House of Commons Debates,  
Vol.286, Col.2078,  
8 March 1934
- '17' Gazette 25 November 1933
- '18' Ibid 12 December 1933
- '19' Hansard op cit, Vol.291, Col.1902,  
4 July 1934
- '20' Echo 19 April 1934
- '21' David Dilks Retreat from Power, page 110

### Footnotes Continued

- (22) R.B. McCallum Public Opinion and the Last Peace, page 48
- (23) Gazette 1 March 1934
- (24) Sunday Sun 5 August 1934
- (25) Gazette 9 October 1933
- (26) Ibid 31 October 1934
- (27) Ibid 20 July 1934
- Lord Londonderry had announced in a speech in the House of Lords the week before he had more or less abandoned hope of securing disarmament by agreement.
- (28) Annual report of the Co-operative Party to the National Conference of the Co-operative Party Easter 1934 (D/SHO 137)
- (29) Gazette 12 March 1935
- (30) Echo 23 October 1934
- (31) Gazette 4 June 1934
- (32) Ibid 20 July 1934
- (33) Ibid 31 August 1934
- (34) The Sunday Sun (Sun) 5 August 1934
- (35) Gazette 7 September 1934
- (36) Ibid 14 September 1934
- (37) Sun 23 September 1934
- (38) Gazette 16 November 1934
- (39) The Hartlepool Daily Mail (Mail), 3 December 1934
- (40) Martin Ceadel "The First British Referendum: the Peace Ballot 1934-35, in English Historical Review 95(1980), pages 810-39
- (41) Ibid page 830

### Footnotes Continued

- (42) Dame Adelaide Livingstone The Peace Ballot, page 49
- (43) Gracchus Your M.P., page 19
- (44) Martin Ceadel op cit, page 832
- (45) Winston Churchill The Second World War: The Gathering Storm, pages 132-3
- (46) R.A. Walker The Blunder of Pacifism, pages 105-11
- (47) Martin Pugh The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939, page 287
- (48) Ibid
- (49) Gateshead Herald (Herald), February 1934
- (50) Ibid April 1934
- (51) Sun 10 June 1934
- (52) Herald June 1934
- (53) Ibid
- (54) Chronicle 17 May 1934
- (55) Ibid 25 May 1934
- (56) The Gun - issued by the militant group of workers at Elswick and Scotswood, (Twas 1975/67/1-5)
- (57) Gazette 8 March 1934
- (58) Ibid 25 March 1935
- (59) Chronicle 18 March 1935
- (60) Hansard op cit, Vol.229, Col.867, 18 March 1935
- (61) Ibid Vol.299, Cols.860-1
- (62) Ibid Col.866
- (63) Gazette 2 May 1935
- (64) Echo 18 March 1935

Footnotes Continued

- (65) Gazette 16 May 1935
- (66) Echo 11 March 1935
- (67) Ibid 6 March 1935
- (68) Mail 9 March 1935
- (69) Journal 11 March 1935
- (70) Ibid 13 March 1935
- (71) Echo 14 March 1935
- (72) Ibid 15 March 1935
- (73) Sun 10 March 1935
- (74) Journal 9 March 1935
- (75) Ibid 19 March 1935
- (76) Echo 15 March 1935
- (77) Ibid 11 March 1935
- (78) Journal 29 March 1935
- (79) Gazette 29 March 1935
- (80) Annual Report of the Co-operative Party,  
Easter 1934, (D/SHO 137)
- (81) Echo 19 March 1935
- (82) Ibid 17 August 1935
- (83) Sunderland Echo 1 April 1935
- (84) Journal 7 October 1935
- (85) Ibid 22 July 1935
- (86) Gazette 21 September 1935
- (87) Ibid
- (88) Mail 12 August 1935
- (89) Trade Union Congress, Weymouth 5 September 1935,  
report from Gazette, 6 September 1935

### Footnotes Continued

- (90) Journal 10 August 1935
- (91) Ibid 26 July 1935
- (92) Ibid 7 June 1935
- (93) Chronicle 8 July 1935
- (94) Journal 31 August 1935
- (95) Ibid 28 October 1935
- (96) Sunderland Echo 26 October 1935
- (97) Gazette 24 October 1935
- (98) Journal 6 November 1935
- (99) Ibid 13 November 1935
- (100) Lady Londonderry - speech at a meeting of the Newcastle West Division of the Conservative and Unionist Association reported in Journal, 25 October 1935
- (101) Chronicle 18 October 1935
- (102) Gazette 29 October 1935
- (103) Journal 8 November 1935
- (104) Ibid
- (105) John Stevenson and Chris Cook,  
The Slump, page 242
- (106) Ibid page 256
- (107) Sunday Sun 26 April 1936
- (108) Jack Lawson M.P. A Man's Life, page 181
- (109) Ibid page 180

## CONCLUSION

The period from November 1931 to November 1935 was a volatile one in terms of international relations. Between the two general elections a public debate began fuelled by international events, over the question of rearmament. The re-election of a National Government ensured that rearmament would be the keystone of Britain's defence policy from 1935 on. It showed that majority opinion in the country now accepted the decision to rearm.

In 1931 public opinion could have been said to be in favour of peace through disarmament, and most people regarded the Disarmament Conference as the way through which this aim could be realised. The strength of the disarmament movement grew steadily throughout 1932 and 1933. Many looked to the League of Nations and its collective system to provide them with security. However, when the Disarmament Conference disbanded without any agreement the League remained the only focus of their attention. The dilemma for many now was the fact that one could not advocate disarmament while supporting the maintenance of a collective system of security. The capability of the collective system depended upon the strength of the armed forces of those nations which adhered to it. With the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany, pro-disarmament opinion found it

difficult to deny the need for arms or to criticize a government which promised that any rearmament it might undertake would be used primarily to defend the League.

The period the author has studied has fallen into two distinct halves - the time from November 1931 to October 1933, and the period from October 1933 to November 1935. In the first period it was still felt that war was unthinkable and pacifism was much in evidence. The horrors of the first war were still present in people's minds, and problems on the international scene did not seem to constitute a need for more arms. The Disarmament Conference at Geneva heightened the optimism of many people in the North East that war would be banished, and many resolutions were sent from groups in the area expressing this hope.

The economic depression of the period put pressure on the government to disarm. It was hard to justify rearmament when the people were being called on to make great sacrifices. With Germany disarmed and no other enemy appearing, Britain could afford to disarm. The government could therefore disarm and appear to agree with public opinion on this issue.

In the first period disarmers were to the fore. There were some concerned about the pace of disarmament and advocating some rearmament. They were worried about the effects of unemployment and Britain leaving itself open to attack. They were, however, few in number.

With the collapse of the World Disarmament Conference there was a notable change in the public's attitude. People began to become more pessimistic, and calls for rearmament from individuals, politicians and editors began to increase. There was a particular fear about Hitler and the rearmament of Germany. But the disarmers were still in the majority and most people still believed that peace could be brought about by disarmament.

By November 1935 this feeling had changed. The National Government was re-elected and one of the main planks of its election campaign was rearmament. For much of the inter-election period Labour's trump electoral card was seen to be the "peace and war" or "rearmament - disarmament" issue. Thus a plea for even limited rearmament was electorally inexpedient. However, from early 1935 this was no longer the case. When an increase in armaments did come in 1934, the majority opinion in the region, as expressed through the newspapers, meetings and M.P.s was that it was wrong. The disarmers were still to the fore. However, many more articles and letters began to appear across the whole of the region as regards the state of Britain's armaments and defence. Compared to the period up to October 1933 this sudden increase was most notable. Nationally too, the government received widespread criticism when it announced increases in the size of the

air force. But the White Paper on Defence, of March 1935 met with very little hostility outside the House of Commons. As Arthur Woodburn, Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party, put it after his party's disastrous showing at by-elections in May 1935, "the positive passion for Peace which gave us such a powerful plea in earlier elections was not so effective under the shadow of Hitler's threats."<sup>1</sup>

Other by-elections show that from late 1934 on the "peace and war" issue was beginning to turn in the National Government's favour. The East Fulham by-election of October 1934, when a Conservative majority of 14,000 was turned into a majority for Labour of 4,800, is often quoted as an example of people being in favour of disarmament. However, this interpretation has been largely discredited by critical examination of the evidence.<sup>2</sup> The constituency was far from being a safe Conservative seat. In 1929 a Conservative was returned by 1,700 votes and in 1935 by 1,000 votes. The unusual result was the 14,000 majority of 1931. It is therefore not so remarkable that the seat fell to the Opposition in a mid-term by-election. The by-election was not fought mainly over defence, but more on the domestic economy and housing. To be set against this loss was the comfortable Conservative victories in seats where their candidates espoused rearmament, such as

Basingstoke and Twickenham in 1934 and Aberdeen South in 1935.

In the North East of England the Labour Party was the majority party, but there were still some good results for National Government candidates and some disappointments for Labour. The Conservatives held three Newcastle seats, Stockton and Darlington as well as the Hartlepoons, Wallsend and Tynemouth. As noted in Table 7 the average swing to Labour was only 8.1 per cent against a national average of 10 per cent and there were notable low swings in Sunderland, Middlesbrough West, Stockton and Jarrow. The economy may have had an effect on the result, but rearmament was a central issue in the region in the 1935 General Election campaign. The view was expressed that Britain had done its bit and had shown the lead in disarmament. Others had not followed and now was the time to reverse the decline in Britain's defences before it was too late. Rearmament meant an increase in shipyard orders, as well as an increasing demand for iron and steel and coal. The North East was well placed to benefit from any up-turn in the economy due to increased rearmament.

In May 1935 the Liberal Party abandoned its opposition to limited defence increases, thereby dissociating itself from the Labour Party, which clung to its disarmament policy right up to the election. On the eve of the election, the churches proclaimed their

support for the National Government, primarily because of its advocacy of limited rearmament. But apart from questions of security and conscience, defence was a bread and butter issue, and in the dockyard towns and towns with armaments factories, with each announcement of orders the government's popularity increased. (3)

The end of the period was notable for a number of reasons. The Peace Ballot organised in 1934 published its results in 1935. The Ballot achieved a great deal of publicity and there were many good turnouts in the North East. Criticism can be made of the ballot, particularly the wording of the questions, but to those in favour of disarmament it was a great success. The results of the ballot were used to show that the government did not have the support of the country in embarking on a programme of rearmament. The results in the North East were consistent with the country as a whole and were slightly more non-pacifist if anything.

The Ballot could mean all things to all people, and was used by politicians at different ends of the political spectrum to argue for different things. Martin Ceadel believes the meaning of the Ballot was accurately summarised by the Daily Herald in an editorial on the day following the Albert Hall rally of 27 June:

"From the result of the Peace Ballot one fact stands out with inescapable clearness. The solid mass of British public opinion demands a policy based not on isolation, not on particular alliances or particular antagonisms, but on the collective system which is embodied in the League." '4'

The Ballot can be seen as a reliable indicator of genuine public support for collective security. That is not the same as support for disarmament. The Abyssinian crisis, Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland and later Franco's rebellion in Spain brought home to people that support for collective security also meant rejection of disarmament.

The Ravensworth Park Tattoo aroused a great deal of debate in the Tyneside area and encapsulated much that was going on nationally. In May 1935 for instance, the celebrations of the King's Silver Jubilee called to mind the great military and naval achievements of the nation, as well as its present political stability in comparison with developments in Europe. The naval review at Spithead, also in 1935, was the best attended for many years. Many people were undoubtedly against the tattoo and the "militarism" it represented. There was a strong feeling that the depressed area of the North East was being used as a recruiting ground for the army. Many people urged a boycott of the tattoo, ranging from political and women's groups to individuals. The tattoo

went ahead and was a great success, being well attended; but there was undoubtedly a great deal of feeling against it.

One of the most interesting written documents from the author's point of view was the newsletter at the Elswick and Scotswood factories of the Vickers Armstrong group entitled "The Gun". The newsletter was strongly communist and dedicated to increasing union strength in the factory, but it was also anti-war. A number of articles appeared, criticising the rearmament programme and scornful of Vickers itself and its role in rearming the countries of the world. The author has found no evidence of unions openly advocating rearmament as a means of improving employment prospects, though evidence of unions being strong disarmers is also disappointingly scarce. However, the existence of a militant group dedicated to disarmament within an armaments factory is evidence of some feeling amongst workers on this issue. Unfortunately it does not show that there was a great depth of feeling on this issue within the workforce. The newsletter was strongly unionist and most of the articles were dedicated to improving working conditions. What it does show is that a group of militant workers in an armaments company shared a feeling widely spread in the community as a whole, but as mentioned in the last chapter there was no call within the newsletter for

strike action or sabotage which would have shown a greater depth of feeling amongst the workforce.

Mussolini's troops were barely three weeks into Abyssinia when the Prime Minister announced that elections for a new House would be held on the 14 November. The newspapers during this time exerted a particular influence, and many editorials began to argue the case for rearmament. The government made rearmament an important issue in the campaign; it declared openly and often its intention to rearm if re-elected. The issue was debated widely during the campaign. The fear of Germany was increasing, and particularly the fear of war in the air. On an individual level the letters to the local newspapers suggest that the government's rearmament proposals were generally supported. At a ratio of about 3-1 there were more letters supporting the government than attacking it.

The turning point in 1935 for many may have been the dispute between Abyssinia and Italy. For those people who believed in disarmament and collective security, their worst nightmare seemed to be realised. Here was a defenceless country being bullied and then attacked by a much larger armed nation and the mechanism of collective security did little. This focused in many people's minds that one could not support collective security without some support for rearmament to back up that collective security. For the supporters of

rearmament it justified everything they had been saying and was a good opportunity for the government to call an election.

Nationally the election was a victory for the government, though with a reduced majority. Regionally the Labour Party did better and increased its representation in the region from 2 M.P.s in 1931 to 12 M.P.s in 1935. However the swing to Labour in the region was below the national average and one can argue that the debate over rearmament was not yet won in the North East according to the election statistics. The examination of some of the sources suggests that the debate was being won, though the victory was not yet achieved. Letters in support of rearmament were now to the fore and whereas in the first period from 1931 to October 1933 it was the rearmers who were quiet, the tendency now was for the disarmers to be on the retreat.

The issue at stake was how far the region at large was willing to follow the government's lead in the "security arena", acknowledging that in order to defend "Britain's way of life" against the "fascist" challenger they had to comply with the government's "rearmament" programme whatever the differences with past and future policies.<sup>(8)</sup> It is hard to give a definite answer to this question. Certainly there was vigorous opposition to rearmament between the two general elections, both from individuals and from groups. This opposition

diminished towards the general election with the failure of the World Disarmament Conference and the deterioration in the European situation. But it seems to have been a reluctant population that began to call for rearmament, and Labour, though doing well in 1935 in the region, will not have seen their increased vote as an overwhelming backing of disarmament.

The main sources of the author's research are given in the bibliography. The newspapers provided a great deal of the material, both in terms of the public's opinion through the letter columns and records of public meetings and the views of the editors. It has to be remembered of course that writers to the letters page might not always be representative of the general public. Some of them may write because they hold strong views and want these views known, while others might just like to see their names in print. However, with all research you can only rely on what has been written and not what has not.

The M.P.s from the region also provided a lot of material. Again, as with newspapers, there are inherent weaknesses with some of the material. Harold Macmillan and Manny Shinwell in their books, written after the period in question, are quite vocal about rearmament and critical of some of the things that went on. However, when the author examined the parliamentary records in Hansard, no occasion was found between 1931 and 1935

when these two politicians spoke in the House of Commons on this particular issue. Unfortunately theirs was not an isolated case. The contribution, with a few notable exceptions, of the M.P.s in the region to the debate over rearmament was very poor. Indeed one M.P. from the region, W.G. Gritten, the Conservative M.P. for the Hartlepoons, failed to speak in the House of Commons on any issue in this period. One of the notable exceptions was J.J. Lawson, the Labour M.P. for Chester-le-Street. His commitment to disarmament in this period was total and his contribution in Parliament through questions and speeches far outshone any of the other M.P.s in the region.

The Trade Unions in the region provided some material, but the debate over rearmament and disarmament does not seem to have figured strongly on the agenda of many meetings. Judging from the minutes of many of the meetings, local issues and the problems many of the members were having during the economic depression, dominated events. As with many documents there are problems getting them even if they exist. The unfortunate practice of groups like the TGWU destroying documents after five years does not help the researcher's task. Material from political groups was also weak or sparse. The re-organisation of some local political parties as constituency boundaries have changed has led to either the destruction or loss of a

lot of material. Unless more groups, political or otherwise, make an effort to deposit their materials in archive departments or record offices the problem will continue.

The minutes for Council meetings produced some useful material as resolutions were discussed and passed. The fact that these meetings are minuted officially and the minutes deposited publicly, has obviously been important in preserving these records. Unfortunately there were no by-elections in the North East between 1931 and 1935. These would have given a better indication of public opinion on the issue of rearmament at a time when it was being fully discussed.

## FOOTNOTES

- '1' Quoted in Stevenson and Cook, The Slump, page 244
- '2' Pugh The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939, page 288
- '3' Stevenson and Cook op cit, page 245
- '4' Ceadel "The First British Referendum: the Peace Ballot 1934-1935 in English Historical Review 95 (1980) page 835
- '5' Schmidt, G. The Politics and Economics of Appeasement British Foreign Policy in the 1930s, page 247

## APPENDIX ONE

### 1931 General Election

Below are listed the 25 constituencies within the area I am studying and the winners in the 1931 General Election.

1	BARNARD CASTLE	C.M. HEADLAM	C
2	BISHOP AUCKLAND	A. CURRY	L. NAT.
3	BLAYDON	T.B. MARTIN	C
4	CHESTER-LE-STREET	J.J. LAWSON	LAB
5	CONSETT	J.P. DICKIE	L. NAT.
6	DURHAM	W.MCKEAG	L
7	HOUGHTON	R. CHAPMAN	C
8	JARROW	W.G. PEARSON	C
9	SEAHAM	RAMSAY MACDONALD	N. LAB
10	SEDFIELD	R. JENNINGS	C
11	SPENNYMOOR	J. BATEY	LAB.
12	GATESHEAD	T. MAGNAY	L. NAT.
13	HARTLEPOOLS	W.G. GRITTEN	C
14	MIDDLESBROUGH E.	E.J. YOUNG	L
15	MIDDLESBROUGH W.	F.K. GRIFFITH	L
16	NEWCASTLE CEN.	A. DENVILLE	C
17	NEWCASTLE E.	SIR R.W. ASKE	L. NAT.
18	NEWCASTLE N.	SIR N. GRATTAN DOYLE	C
19	NEWCASTLE W.	DR. J.W. LEECH	C
20	STOCKTON	H. MACMILLAN	C
21	DARLINGTON	C.U. PEAT	C
22	SUNDERLAND	L. THOMPSON	C
23	SOUTH SHIELDS	HARCOURT L. JOHNSTONE	L
24	TYNEMOUTH	A.W. RUSSELL	C
25	WALLSEND	IRENE WARD	C

C	CONSERVATIVE
L	LIBERAL
LAB.	LABOUR
L. NAT.	LIBERAL NATIONALIST
N. LAB.	NATIONALIST LABOUR

## APPENDIX TWO

### 1935 General Election

Below are listed the 25 constituencies within the area I am studying and the winners in the 1935 General Election.

1	BARNARD CASTLE	C.M. HEADLAM	C
2	BISHOP AUCKLAND	H. DALTON	LAB.
3	BLAYDON	W. WHITELEY	LAB.
4	CHESTER-LE-STREET	J.J. LAWSON	LAB.
5	CONSETT	D. ADAMS	LAB.
6	DURHAM	J. RITSON	LAB.
7	HOUGHTON	W.J. STEWART	LAB.
8	JARROW	E. WILKINSON	LAB.
9	SEAHAM	E. SHINWELL	LAB.
10	SEDFIELD	J.R. LESLIE	LAB.
11	SPENNYMOOR	J. BATEY	LAB.
12	GATESHEAD	T. MAGNAY	L. NAT.
13	HARTLEPOOLS	W.G. GRITTEN	C
14	MIDDLESBROUGH E.	A. EDWARDS	LAB.
15	MIDDLESBROUGH W.	F.K. GRIFFITH	L
16	NEWCASTLE CEN.	A. DENVILLE	C
17	NEWCASTLE E.	SIR R.W. ASKE	L. NAT.
18	NEWCASTLE N.	SIR N. GRATTAN DOYLE	C
19	NEWCASTLE W.	DR. J.W. LEECH	C
20	STOCKTON	H. MACMILLAN	C
21	DARLINGTON	C.U. PEAT	C
22	SUNDERLAND	SIR N. FURNESS	L. NAT.
23	SOUTH SHIELDS	J. CHUTER EDE.	LAB.
24	TYNEMOUTH	A.W. RUSSELL	C
25	WALLSEND	IRENE WARD	C

C	CONSERVATIVE
L	LIBERAL
LAB.	LABOUR
L. NAT.	LIBERAL NATIONALIST
N. LAB.	NATIONALIST LABOUR

## APPENDIX THREE

### Peace Ballot Results

Below are listed the results for various towns in the region. This is not a complete list, as no regional results were published as such. These are a list of those towns whose results were published in the local newspapers and that the author managed to find. For the national results see Chapter Two. The questions are listed below.

1. Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?
2. Are you in favour of an all round reduction of armaments by international agreement?
3. Are you in favour of the all round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?
4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?
5. Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by
  - (a) economic and non-military measures and
  - (b) if necessary military measures?

**AMBLE**  
(51 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	1,613	27
2	1,544	88
3	1,458	164
4	1,563	78
5A	1,481	52
5B	1,267	162

**AYCLIFFE**

	YES	NO
1	240	0
2	197	10
3	189	19
4	199	8
5A	195	4
5B	133	41

**BARNARD CASTLE**  
(74 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	4,932	27
2	4,718	212
3	4,451	419
4	4,635	210
5A	4,588	149
5B	2,342	1,059

**BELFORD**

	YES	NO
1	1,729	29
2	1,443	275
3	1,291	396
4	1,459	189
5A	1,490	136
5B	1,086	266

**BISHOP AUCKLAND**  
(60 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	22,584	419
2	21,801	1,419
3	20,427	2,424
4	21,745	1,114
5A	20,376	1,065
5B	13,091	2,922

**BISHOPTON &  
GT. STANTON**

	YES	NO
1	266	2
2	216	48
3	201	73
4	256	28
5A	230	23
5B	230	37

**BRANDON & BYSHOTTLES**  
(70 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	7,454	40
2	7,309	173
3	7,105	353
4	7,208	215
5A	7,130	141
5B	5,114	840

**CONSETT**  
(54 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	12,912	327
2	11,740	1,477
3	10,803	2,310
4	12,114	1,013
5A	12,023	528
5B	7,817	1,542

COXHOE

	YES	NO
1	1,078	17
2	1,007	106
3	966	170
4	998	94
5A	1,010	65
5B	590	244

CROOK  
(63 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	7,654	53
2	7,053	183
3	6,801	428
4	6,951	266
5A	6,775	233
5B	4,848	1,084

DARLINGTON  
(46 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	20,836	327
2	19,471	1,468
3	17,648	3,147
4	19,206	1,400
5A	18,958	825
5B	14,125	3,756

ESTON

	YES	NO
1	9,174	140
2	8,607	710
3	7,711	1,391
4	8,668	557
5A	8,352	438
5B	5,794	1,596

FERRYHILL & WEARDALE

	YES	NO
1	10,165	450
2	9,786	729
3	9,430	1,185
4	9,559	956
5A	9,329	1,186
5B	9,016	1,499

FISHBURN

	YES	NO
1	923	2
2	905	35
3	848	82
4	839	34
5A	817	0
5B	101	0

HARTLEPOOL  
(35 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	3,826	74
2	3,596	282
3	3,395	433
4	3,585	242
5A	3,377	187
5B	2,803	541

HORDEN

	YES	NO
1	3,996	62
2	3,813	231
3	3,636	396
4	3,777	261
5A	3,694	203
5B	2,981	654

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING  
(80 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	14,762	216
2	14,213	683
3	13,637	1,241
4	14,208	645
5A	13,651	593
5B	8,568	1,740

HUTTON HENRY

	YES	NO
1	846	8
2	798	50
3	758	98
4	813	38
5A	815	27
5B	735	98

KIRKBY STEPHEN

	YES	NO
1	591	15
2	558	46
3	513	83
4	547	40
5A	520	23
5B	349	87

MIDDLESBROUGH  
(EAST & WEST)  
(41 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	33,402	612
2	31,699	2,031
3	28,815	4,770
4	30,995	2,410
5A	30,351	1,744
5B	22,449	4,786

MIDDLETON ST. GEORGE

	YES	NO
1	338	44
2	305	71
3	283	100
4	303	68
5A	304	43
5B	243	68

REDCAR  
(45 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	6,324	177
2	5,993	499
3	5,319	1,103
4	5,925	460
5A	5,754	339
5B	4,426	1,160

ROTHBURY

	YES	NO
1	240	2
2	211	30
3	200	40
4	211	40
5A	223	9
5B	176	34

SALTBURN  
(40 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	1,192	12
2	1,133	52
3	1,040	117
4	1,077	71
5A	1,062	36
5B	794	186

**SEDGEFIELD**

	YES	NO
1	807	11
2	693	118
3	637	154
4	728	64
5A	703	66
5B	612	103

**SHILDON**

	YES	NO
1	5,427	76
2	5,189	253
3	4,928	521
4	5,190	227
5A	5,037	176
5B	3,244	824

**SKELTON  
(65 PER CENT TURNOUT)**

	YES	NO
1	1,824	7
2	1,727	102
3	1,609	211
4	1,690	125
5A	4,625	196
5B	3,981	724

**SOUTH SHIELDS  
(45 PER CENT TURNOUT)**

	YES	NO
1	35,429	1,547
2	32,386	4,558
3	29,618	7,224
4	33,406	3,381
5A	1,936	37
5B	1,638	193

**SPENNYMOOR**

	YES	NO
1	5,156	72
2	4,935	289
3	4,718	486
4	4,785	344
5A	4,625	196
5B	3,981	724

**TOWLAW  
(92 PER CENT TURNOUT)**

	YES	NO
1	2,019	13
2	1,984	44
3	1,974	51
4	1,991	26
5A	1,936	37
5B	1,638	193

**TRIMDON COLLIERY**

	YES	NO
1	749	10
2	719	31
3	712	53
4	697	53
5A	703	32
5B	457	145

**TRIMDON GRANGE**

	YES	NO
1	1,122	13
2	967	21
3	944	49
4	935	28
5A	909	30
5B	737	162

**TYNEMOUTH**  
(53 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	19,485	620
2	17,806	2,000
3	16,204	3,495
4	17,810	1,837
5A	17,420	1,357
5B	13,174	3,761

**WEST CORNFORTH**  
(78 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	1,510	49
2	1,435	70
3	1,351	158
4	1,452	74
5A	1,485	357
5B	585	8

**WEST HARTLEPOOL**  
(34 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	14,391	406
2	13,250	1,444
3	12,205	2,349
4	13,496	976
5A	13,104	707
5B	10,662	2,273

**WHITLEY BAY**  
(46.5 PER CENT TURNOUT)

	YES	NO
1	20,370	1,265
2	9,054	2,323
3	9,934	1,363
4	9,948	1,239
5A	9,969	708
5B	7,959	1,820

**WILLINGTON**

	YES	NO
1	3,413	32
2	3,216	116
3	3,235	241
4	3,241	144
5A	3,134	126
5B	2,414	378

**WINGATE**

	YES	NO
1	1,299	13
2	1,288	25
3	1,233	49
4	1,255	23
5A	1,207	89
5B	1,200	105

**WOLSINGHAM**

	YES	NO
1	1,163	12
2	1,085	81
3	998	150
4	1,084	69
5A	1,043	47
5B	706	244

**WOOLER**

	YES	NO
1	637	12
2	566	88
3	504	138
4	588	50
5A	555	37
5B	383	75

YARM (70 PER CENT TURNOUT)

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	YES	NO
1	996	33
2	864	141
3	782	224
4	863	122
5A	858	96
5B	713	193

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