

THE HOARE-LAVAL PLAN  
CATALYST OF THE ROME-BERLIN AXIS

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by  
James M. Sudela  
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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

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The threat to Austrian sovereignty posed by Nazi Germany in July, 1934, and the subsequent threat to European peace represented by Hitler's repudiation of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles in March, 1935, resulted in the creation of the Stresa front, in April, 1935. Stresa signified the height of British, French and Italian solidarity against the increasingly menacing German Reich during the inter-war years, and the desire to maintain the Stresa front against Germany in 1935 weighed heavily in the foreign policies of Britain, France and Italy throughout 1935. Yet, the threat to European peace in 1935 was to come not from the German Wehrmacht, but from Italian colonial ambitions in Abyssinia.

The Italo-Abyssinian crisis represented a direct threat to the theory of collective security embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations, and the failure of the League to provide an adequate solution to the Italo-Abyssinian dispute led to an Italo-Abyssinian War in October, 1935, and sanctions against Italy in November, 1935. Faced with the possibility of a conflict between the League Powers and Italy, which might involve the subsequent withdrawal of Italy


from the Stresa front, the British and French governments pursued a dual policy of limited support for the League of Nations, while attempting to find a basis for a negotiated settlement to the East African crisis. The result of this dual policy was the Hoare-Laval Plan of December 8, 1935. The Hoare-Laval Plan, while undoubtedly conciliatory to Italian claims in Abyssinia, was considered to be the only means by which the authority of the League of Nations could be maintained, and at the same time, insure the continued existence of the Stresa front.

The Italo-Abyssinian dispute was a highly controversial subject in France; however, in Britain, the Italian cause was bitterly criticized and received little sympathy. When the Hoare-Laval Plan was released, on December 9, 1935, the adverse reaction of the British public to the apparent surrender to an aggressor was so acute that the existence of the National government was jeopardized. The British Prime Minister was forced to disown his Foreign Minister and repudiate the Hoare-Laval Plan. The British electorate was convinced that the Hoare-Laval Plan had betrayed their Government's pledge to uphold the principles of the League of Nations, and their response to the Hoare-Laval Plan sealed its fate.

The Hoare-Laval Plan represented the incapacity of the British and French governments to honor their pledged support of collective security. Nonetheless, the British and French Foreign Ministers were political realists and were fully aware of the negation of principles that the

Hoare-Laval Plan represented; yet, they were also convinced that Italian friendship was more vital to European peace than Abyssinian Sovereignty. Hoare and Laval were convinced that the loss of Italy from the Stresa front would result in a rapprochement between Italy and Germany.

The vacillation of the Baldwin government during the week when the Hoare-Laval Plan was under consideration however, revealed a severe lack of credibility in the British government. Faced with political disaster, but fully aware of the effects that a failure to come to terms with Mussolini might produce the British Prime Minister chose to insure his political survival at the expense of European security. When the Hoare-Laval Plan died, all attempts to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian crisis ended, and the true nature of collective security was exposed and found wanting. Mussolini's confidence in the democracies of Western Europe vanished, the Stresa front collapsed, and the foundations of the Rome-Berlin Axis were laid.

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## Chapter I

### THE POLITICAL CLIMATE PRIOR TO THE HOARE-LAVAL PLAN

"The crucial year begins. . ."

Mussolini, 1935.

Adolf Hitler's decision of 16 March, 1935, to re-introduce conscription in Germany and his plans for the creation of a German Wehrmacht of thirty-six divisions, represented the first overt repudiation of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles by the National Socialist state.<sup>1</sup> Soon the whole Reich would fit the description proffered by Rehberg, an eighteenth century Hanoverian statesman, when he spoke of Prussia: 'It is not a country with an army but an army with a country'.<sup>2</sup> The illegal and warlike actions of the German state constituted a direct threat to peace in Europe and the maintenance of collective security.

On 24 March; France, eager to discuss the implications of the new German threat with Italy and Britain, sponsored preliminary talks in Paris.<sup>3</sup> Since they were unable to reach any definite conclusions at the initial Paris meetings, the three governments agreed to a meeting in Italy, which took place on the Iola Bella of Lake Maggiore, at Stresa, from 11 to 14 April, 1935. The British and French delegations, led by J. Ramsay MacDonald and Sir John Simon, and Pierre-Étienne Flandin and Pierre Laval respectively, met with Benito

Mussolini and Count Dino Grandi of Italy, and the talks were resumed.<sup>4</sup>

At Stresa, the three governments concurred in the opinion that the inherent dangers represented by German re-armament had seriously undermined public confidence in the maintainance of European security.<sup>5</sup> They also re-affirmed their allegiance to the Anglo-French-Italian declarations of 17 February and 27 September, 1934, "in which the three Governments recognized that the necessity of maintaining the independence of Austria would continue to inspire their common policy."<sup>6</sup> The delegates had reviewed every diplomatic question then unresolved in Europe during the conference, but no mention was made of Africa, and Mussolini had no doubt expected that subject to be raised.<sup>7</sup>

Forty years before, Italian colonial ambitions in East Africa had been thwarted, and the Italians humiliated, when their army was defeated and its captured soldiers were tortured and mutilated by the Abyssinians at Adowa. In the late nineteenth century, the Italians, French and British had occupied contiguous strips of coastline in Eritrea and Somaliland, and at the time of the Fashoda incident it had served British interests to encourage Italy's claims at the expense of the French. In 1906 the three countries agreed to limit French interests to the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, Britain's to Lake Tsana and the headwaters of the Nile, while the rest of Abyssinia was to remain an Italian "zone of influence."<sup>8</sup>

Since that time Italy had tried peaceful economic penetration of Abyssinia, had sponsored her admission into the League of Nations in 1923, and had concluded a treaty of friendship and arbitration with her in 1928.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the Negus, Haile Selassie, had little control over the tribes outside the political center of the country. Slavery and the slave trade still prevailed in Abyssinia, and raids by the Abyssinians in search of cattle and natives (the latter to be sold in slave markets) had made the anti-slavery campaign one of the most expensive projects of the British administrations in Kenya and the Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

As early as June 1934, a combination of motives -- psychological, economic, and political -- encouraged Mussolini to attempt the conquest of Abyssinia.<sup>11</sup> An Italian victory in East Africa would, as the Duce saw it, serve a threefold purpose: it would consolidate his power in Italy, raise the authority of Italy in Europe and avenge the dreaded massacre of Adowa.<sup>12</sup> Abyssinia was: "Virtually the only independent, non-colonial state in Africa, and it was an obvious field for such ambitions."<sup>13</sup> French and British interests in Africa, however, not to mention their commitments to Abyssinia as a fellow member of the League of Nations, would have to be placated before the Duce could seriously consider any venture in Abyssinia.

Towards the end of 1934, a violent incident at Walwal gave Mussolini the pretext for demanding "an unconditional apology, a large indemnity, and a final solution"<sup>14</sup> to the disputed Italo-Abyssinian frontier. The Abyssinian government

proposed that the dispute be settled by arbitration, and on 3 January 1935, requested the League of Nations to take action under Article 11 of the Covenant.<sup>15</sup> As the League was beginning its initial investigation of the Abyssinian complaint, Franco-Italian talks, which focused in part upon their ambitions in Africa, were being concluded in Rome.

Negotiations between France and Italy had begun on 14 November 1934, and from the instruction which Pierre Laval, the French Foreign Minister, gave Count Charles de Chambrun, the French ambassador in Rome, it is evident that Laval was trying to obtain the support of Italy in the event of a final German breach of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty in return for Italian territorial concessions in Africa.<sup>16</sup> The two governments had few problems coming to terms and by 20 November the only issues which remained to be settled were the extent of Italian territorial claims in Africa, and the precise definition of French economic interests in Abyssinia. According to Robert de Dampierre, a member of the French embassy in Rome, it soon became clear that this last issue was the "key to the agreement."<sup>17</sup> Laval, anxious to complete this Franco-Italian rapprochement, announced that he would leave for Rome on 2 January 1935.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent evidence has proven that it was a mistake for the French Foreign Minister to have gone to Rome before a detailed agreement had been completed. "While M. de Dampierre was probably correct in writing that once he was on his way, 'the agreement could not have failed to be

effected', this does not mean that it was bound to be a satisfactory one. In fact, it was to prove something of a deception for both sides."<sup>19</sup>

The Rome Agreements, signed on 7 January 1935, related to the general policies of France and Italy in Europe. They expressed their mutual intent to uphold the independence of Austria, recently threatened by a Nazi inspired coup, and settled certain African boundary disputes in Italy's favor. The Rome Agreements also gave Italy the right to purchase shares in the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, and resolved outstanding questions concerning the rights of Italian residents in Tunisia.<sup>20</sup> The published accounts of the Franco-Italian Agreements, however, were not complete. Secret arrangements, even more important than the published accounts, were concluded between Laval and Mussolini and centered around the extent of the assurances that Laval supposedly granted to Mussolini concerning the issue of Abyssinia.

Mussolini claimed throughout 1935 that Laval had given him a free hand both politically and economically in Abyssinia. "While not denying that he might have used the expression 'a free hand', Laval always insisted that he had meant it to apply only to the economic sphere and that he had never condoned the use of force."<sup>21</sup> A partial explanation of this divergence of opinion may be found in one sentence of a letter which Mussolini wrote to Laval on 25 December 1935. After a lengthy justification of his interpretation of the agreement that had been reached in the previous January, the Duce added, ". . . of course I do not

mean by this that you gave your consent to this war, which subsequent circumstances have made inevitable."<sup>22</sup> Askew has further elaborated on this point:

A secret publication of the Italian foreign office, Francia: Situazione politica nel 1935, which is among the captured Italian documents in the National Archives in Washington, throws new light on the question. It reveals that there was an exchange of letters on January 7 in which France renounced her political interests to the Djibouti-Addis-Ababa railway. Furthermore, Laval gave assurances of a free hand to Italy to expand in East Africa and to settle once and for all, every question with the government of Ethiopia. On June 18, 1935 the Italian government informed Laval of its intention to secure direct rule over the peripheral zone of Ethiopia as a protectorate over the central part. Laval did not raise objections but pointed out the difficulties in realizing such a program. On August 15, 1935 Laval asked Vittorio Cerruti, the new Italian ambassador, to assure Mussolini of his support but asked that Mussolini not speak of war or place the League of Nations in jeopardy. The Italians were quite correct in judging that Laval was trying to square the circle by giving Ethiopia to Italy with the consent of the negus and without a drop of blood being shed. They also spoke of his policy as being that of a tightrope walker (la politica del filo teso) in an effort to lose neither the old friendship with England nor the new friendship with Italy.<sup>23</sup>

The secret provisions that were attached to the Rome Agreement will not be known until the official French and Italian records have been published, and the verbal assurances may never be known in toto; yet, available evidence indicates that Italian aspirations in Abyssinia were unchecked with the sole exception of the railway zone.

Having secured the cooperation of the French, Mussolini invited the British government on 29 January 1935, "to proceed to an exchange of views in order to insure the

mutual harmonious development of Italian and British interests in Abyssinia."<sup>24</sup> The British Foreign Office replied that "before expressing a definite opinion, it would have to examine the British position and consult its experts."<sup>25</sup> On 6 March an inter-Ministerial Committee to study the question was set up under the chairmanship of Sir John Maffey, Permanent Undersecretary for the Colonies. The study was completed on 18 June 1935, but its results were never released.<sup>26</sup>

Impatient for a British reply, Mussolini's intelligence service photographed secret documents in the British Embassy in Rome "which revealed that the British were not worried about Italian encroachments in Abyssinia."<sup>27</sup> In February of 1936, the Giornale d'Italia in Rome printed a summary of the report which concluded that aside from the grazing rights for British protected tribes, protection for her nationals, and the control of Lake Tsana (the source of the Blue Nile), "there are no British interests such as to impose on H. M.'s Government resistance to an Italian conquest of Ethiopia."<sup>28</sup> The report printed by the Giornale d'Italia was never contradicted by the British, and it is certain that Mussolini's plans in East Africa were patterned so as not to conflict with British interests.

The Abyssinian dispute was still under discussion at Geneva when the three powers met at Stresa in April, 1935. The Abyssinian sections of both the British and Italian Foreign Offices were in attendance, nonetheless, the dispute had been neglected on the official level, and attempts to have it added to the agenda were stifled by the leaders of the British delegation.<sup>29</sup>

As the final draft communiqué was being prepared, Flandin, the French President of the Council, noted Mussolini's comments:

'After having reviewed every international problem which has cropped up. . . ' he halted and asked: 'Should we not add: in Europe?' It was an obvious invitation to the British delegation to speak about Abyssinia. Laval and I, and also no doubt Mussolini, gathered the impression that a tacit acquiescence was being shown by the British Government to Italian ambitions in Abyssinia.<sup>30</sup>

Robert Vansittart, then Permanent Undersecretary at the British Foreign Office, was present at the Stresa conference, and was startled by the implications of Mussolini's statement, and even more so, by the complete silence of the principals of the British mission. He quickly pointed this out to Mr. MacDonald who replied: "Don't be tiresome Van, we don't want any trouble. What we want is an agreement that we can put before the House of Commons."<sup>31</sup> The conclusions of Flandin, Laval and Mussolini were far from correct, but there was no reason at this time for them to think otherwise.

As the Stresa Conference drew to a close the three governments agreed that their future policy would be "the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations."<sup>32</sup> They declared themselves "in complete agreement in opposing by all practical means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe."<sup>33</sup> They further stated that they would act in close collaboration for that purpose.<sup>34</sup>

The Stresa front signified the high water mark of Anglo-French-Italian solidarity against the German Reich during the inter-war years. Yet, the failure to solve, or even mention the crisis in Abyssinia lent a not unnoticed emptiness to their pledge support of the League and collective security.

On 18 April 1935, Laval brought the policy statements agreed to at Stresa before the Council of the League of Nations, which was then in extraordinary session. There the Stresa resolutions were approved by a majority of thirteen votes out of a possible fifteen, with Germany unrepresented and Denmark abstaining.<sup>35</sup>

In May the Abyssinian question had been raised at the League of Nations, and Laval had proposed its deferment until August, in hope that a settlement could be reached before then. Both Britain and France were anxious that they should not be forced to decide between Italy and the League.<sup>36</sup> "To support the League might mean sanctions and sanctions might lead to war. War with Italy might encourage Japan to move against Britain in the East and Germany to move against Austria or even France in the West."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, failure to support the League might lead to serious political crises in both Britain and France.

The unity of contempt directed against German rearmament and solemnly pledged at Stresa and Geneva was soon to suffer its first withdrawal. Conversations between representatives of the British and German governments concerning the limitation of naval armaments had been in progress since

February of 1935. On 18 June, the British government concluded a bilateral naval agreement with the German Reich limiting the total tonnage of the German fleet to 35 per cent. of the "aggregate tonnage of the naval forces of the Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations,"<sup>38</sup> and:

. . .in the matter of submarines, Germany, while not exceeding the ratio of 35:100 in the respect of total tonnage, shall have the right to possess a submarine tonnage equal to the total submarine tonnage possessed by the Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The German Government, however, undertake that, except in the circumstances indicated in the immediately following sentences, German's submarine tonnage shall not exceed 45 per cent. of the total of that possessed by the Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The German Government reserves the right, in the extent of a situation arising which in their opinion makes it necessary for Germany to avail herself of her right to a percentage of submarine tonnage exceeding the 45 per cent. above mentioned, to give notice to this effect to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and agree that the matter shall be the subject of friendly discussion before the German Government shall exercise that right.<sup>39</sup>

The Anglo-German Naval Agreement signified the official acceptance of the already infamous fact that Part V of the Versailles Treaty was obsolete. On 19 June, the naval pact was presented to the House of Commons. The opposition Labor Party, hostile to the agreement, asked:

On what ground could the government argue that it was entitled to go to Stresa and denounce Germany for violating the Treaty of Versailles by introducing conscription when it entered into a private agreement recognising German naval rearmament in violation of that same treaty? By conceding German rearmament, Labour declared, the government had 'yielded to power politics and blackmail' what it had 'refused to international justice and co-operation'."<sup>40</sup>

To this charge the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell replied: "Germany is already constructing a fleet which is outside the limits laid down by the Versailles Treaty; what we have done is by agreement with Germany, to circumscribe the effects which might flow from this decision of Germany."<sup>41</sup>

The British Admiralty had recently learned that the last two pocket battleships being constructed in Germany, the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau, were of a far larger size than the Treaty of Versailles allowed, and of a quite different type. In fact they turned out to be 26,000-ton light battle cruisers, or commerce destroyers of the highest class.<sup>42</sup> The fears that this disclosure aroused in members of the cabinet were reinforced by two much stronger forms of pressure. The first of these arose from the perilous state of Britain's armed forces in the early thirties; the second, from the need of obtaining in the international field some agreement capable of being represented to the Left Wing factions of the British electorate as a positive step in the direction of disarmament. Disarmament was a subject on which the National government at this time was acutely sensitive.<sup>43</sup>

The view of Sir Samuel Hoare, newly appointed British Foreign Minister, concurred with the Admiralty. He also felt that the agreement would serve as a model for other naval powers in the limitation of armaments.<sup>44</sup> Winston Churchill, a Conservative Member of Parliament, saw the naval pact as directly opposed to disarmament, and felt it would spur on a new era of national fleet building. Churchill

also attacked the agreement on the grounds that the Government had concluded it without the advice or consent of France or Italy. The British had compromised the unity achieved within the Stresa front to gain a special type of security agreement.<sup>45</sup>

The debate in the House of Commons ended with a vote of 247 to 44 in favor of the Naval Agreement, with Churchill voting in the majority, although he had been somewhat critical of it. Soon after this vote parliamentary criticism diminished.<sup>46</sup>

The signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was a blatant denunciation of the lofty ideals set forth in the Stresa Agreement and the Geneva Resolutions, and this threat to the League of Nations policy of collective security and indivisible peace aroused protests not only in Britain, but in France and Italy as well.

'The letters exchanged in London yesterday', wrote Pertinax, a Moderate Right Wing journalist for the L'Echo de Paris, 'are extremely encouraging to Hitler. He has triumphed over the principal (sic) of indivisible peace proclaimed by the French and British Governments in the past'.<sup>47</sup> The Naval Agreement was also bitterly denounced by the pro-League elements in France. But, the pro-Italian elements in France were jubilant and their first reaction was highly significant.

The L'Echo de Paris, the Intransigeant and some of the other papers suggested a subtle form of revenge on England. They said that in view of England's 'betrayal of League principles', there was no longer any reason why France should in future oppose Italy's ambitions in Abyssinia in the name of these League principles

which were so grossly ignored by England when it suited her.<sup>48</sup>

In early February of 1935, Laval and Flandin visited London where they had entered into an agreement with the British government. They declared that neither France nor Great Britain would approach Germany separately, especially when questions relating to German rearmament were involved.<sup>49</sup> The Anglo-German Naval Treaty was in direct contradiction to that solemn pledge, and Laval saw that the British were seemingly uninterested in continental complications, but were desperately concerned about the control of the seas, and were consequently willing to sacrifice the collective peace system of Europe in order to maintain British naval supremacy.

The immediate effect of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement upon Italy was to reinforce Mussolini's aggressive ambitions. "The Duce saw in this episode evidence that Great Britain was not acting in good faith with her allies, and that so long as her special naval interest were secured, she would apparently go to any length in accomodation with Germany."<sup>50</sup> The prima facie cynical and selfish attitude of the British encouraged Mussolini to press on with his plans in East Africa.

The League of Nations had met in May to consider the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, and on 25 May, the machinery for arbitration was set in motion.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the Italians had been carrying on their military preparations with unabated vigor. The dispatch of troops and supplies to East Africa had continued steadily throughout March and April, and in the first week of May the mobilization of another division of regular troops and two Blackshirt divisions was ordered.<sup>52</sup>

In signing the Naval agreements the British government had made it difficult to remonstrate too strongly with Italy about her aggressive designs in Abyssinia. The new Anglo-German protocol exposed the British to the insinuation that when they thought their particular interests (naval supremacy) were involved, they showed little consideration for the declarations of Stresa which they had just urged upon the League of Nations.<sup>53</sup>

It was not until June of 1935 that the British government gave serious consideration to the possible consequences of the Italo-Abyssinian question.<sup>54</sup> It was hoped that relations between Britain and Italy, recently strained by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, could be improved; at the same time, the Foreign Office, well aware of the mounting tensions in Abyssinia, hoped to compromise Italian ambitions with an offer of territorial concessions at British expense.<sup>55</sup>

On 24 and 25 June 1935, Anthony Eden, newly appointed British Minister for League of Nations Affairs, met with Mussolini in Rome. In conversations with the Duce, Eden stressed the "irrevocable"<sup>56</sup> commitment of His Majesty's government to the League and collective security -- the foundations of British Foreign Policy.<sup>57</sup> The desire of the British government to assist the Italian's in finding a peaceful solution to the Abyssinian dispute had resulted in the British proposal to cede to Abyssinia the small port of Zeila, in British Somaliland, in return for territorial concessions to Italy in the Ogaden desert.<sup>58</sup>

Mussolini found the proposal submitted by Mr. Eden grossly inadequate. The British plan would give Abyssinia added strength, as Zeila would provide them with an outlet to the sea and make it possible for the Abyssinians to import arms. The Abyssinians would claim a victory for themselves, and Italy's two colonies in East Africa would then be divided by an Abyssinian corridor. "Abyssinia would point out that concessions had been made not to Italy, whom she detested, but out of friendship for England."<sup>59</sup> The British government would appear as a protector and benefactor of Abyssinia, and Zeila would be considered a virtual gift from the British in exchange for the territorial adjustments the Abyssinians would grant to Italy.

A particularly tactless aspect of the Zeila proposal was that the British had approached the Italians without prior consultations with the French, upon whom the Zeila plan could have had damaging effects. The Italians lost no time in informing Paris that the proposal to give Abyssinia the port of Zeila would undermine French interests in Djibouti, which, thanks to the railway to Addis Ababa, had hitherto been the country's chief port.<sup>60</sup> Coming on top of the Naval Agreement, the British plan was bound to make future co-operation between France and Britain more difficult.

During the Rome discussions of June, 1935, the full extent of Mussolini's designs on Abyssinia were revealed to Mr. Eden:

If Abyssinia came to terms without war, he would be content with surrender of those parts of Abyssinia

which had been conquered by Abyssinia in the last fifty years and which were not inhabited by Abyssinians. The central plateau could, he continued, remain under Abyssinian sovereignty, but only on condition that it was under Italian control. If, however, Abyssinia could not come to terms with Italy upon these lines, then if Italy had to fight, her demands would be proportionately greater. Signor Mussolini then made a sweep of his hand indicating that Italy would then have the whole country.<sup>61</sup>

French policy in Abyssinia had been pre-determined by the Rome Agreements of January, and although the extent of the concessions granted by Laval to Mussolini were never completely known to the British, the increasingly cordial relationship between Paris and Rome governments confirmed the suspicions that the French were not overly concerned about Italian encroachments in Abyssinia.

If a conflict between Britain and Italy seemed inevitable, the best thing for France was to remain aloof, doing nothing to further British interests, but nothing to deter them either.<sup>62</sup> Many Frenchmen still believed that an Italian attack on Abyssinia was compatible with Italy's membership in the League of Nations and with her loyalty to the collective system, and even to the Stresa front.<sup>63</sup> As Colton stated:

A large segment of French public opinion on the right was eager to cement good relations between the two 'Latin' nations, some out of ideological sympathy with fascism, and others out of the belief that such a policy would keep Mussolini from embracing Hitler.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, there is little doubt that a large segment of the French press received financial support from the Italian Foreign Office. It was estimated, in well informed diplomatic circles in Paris, that Italy had spent approximately sixty million

francs on pro-Italian propaganda in French newspapers and magazines during the second half of 1935.<sup>65</sup> Some of the stock themes encouraged in the French press were: the magnificence of Mussolini, Abyssinian barbarism and savagery, and the danger of throwing Italy into the arms of Germany; but the most popular theme of all was the duplicity and hypocrisy of England. Day after day, Frenchmen read that Britain's primary concerns were: Lake Tsana, the Blue Nile, the Sudan, hegemony in the Mediterranean, and not League principles, which she constantly ignored.<sup>66</sup> These charges were easily defended in the light of the recent Naval Agreement with Germany.

British policy, at this time, was in a state of flux. Some advocated that she notify Italy that the British would not tolerate aggression in any form and was ready to go the limit of her own resources and those of the League of Nations to stop it.<sup>67</sup> This policy was advocated by Eden, and to a lesser extent, by Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>68</sup> Another faction was ready to admit the shaky condition of British armaments, the dismal nature of Anglo-French relations, and the need to keep Mussolini in the Stresa front against Germany by allowing Mussolini to have his way against Abyssinia. This was Vansittart's view, and it received support from the Dominion governments, who made it clear that they were not prepared to go to war over Abyssinia. The chiefs of staff were equally opposed to war as was the ailing King George V, who repeatedly told Sir Samuel Hoare, "I am an old man. If I am to go on, you must keep us out of one."<sup>69</sup>

British public opinion in 1935 had been conditioned toward a strong League of Nations policy largely due to the

efforts of Lord Robert Cecil's National Declaration Committee, which was closely associated with the League of Nations Union. Late in 1935, the National Declaration Committee had conducted the largest public opinion poll ever attempted in Great Britain. The initial results of their poll, known as the Peace Ballot, were released in June of 1935, and played an important role in persuading the views of the British electorate toward a pro-League and anti-Italian stance during the Italo-Abyssinian crisis.<sup>70</sup>

The Peace Ballot consisted of five question concerning the attitude that a member of the League of Nations should take regarding violations of the principles of the League Covenant. The fifth, and most important question asked:

'If a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should compel it to stop by (a) economic and non-military measures (b) if necessary, military measures?' Ten million people answered part (a) in the affirmative, with only 635,000 against. The majority in favor of military sanctions 6,784,000 for, 2,351,000 against was less overwhelming but still decisive.<sup>71</sup>

The questions on the Peace Ballot, however, were highly misleading. An affirmative answer given to the final and most important question, would, in effect, amount to a whole hearted endorsement of the extremist view of the function of the League of Nations, and consequently, to a condemnation of the Government, should it fail to respond to the results of the Ballot.

The British Labor Party regarded the Peace Ballot as "a significant experiment in the democratic control of foreign policy."<sup>72</sup> The Laborites now felt that their policy of unwavering

support for the League of Nations in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute enjoyed the support of a great majority of the British people. This assumption would guide the policy of the British Labor Party throughout the East African crisis.

On 13 July, the New Statesman declared: "Abyssinia must be protected, the League's authority vindicated against a bully 'drunk with power and pride'."<sup>73</sup> The Times and the Spectator made common cause with the New Statesman in urging the Government to support the League. "It was a crisis 'in the fate of Europe and the world',"<sup>74</sup> declared the Spectator. The release of the Peace Ballot in June, 1935, signified the height of post war pacifism and "leagueomania"<sup>75</sup> in Britain, and, at a time when peace was being threatened by the crisis in East Africa, all of the pacifist elements in Britain gained strength. The Government was impressed, and policy would have to respond to these sentiments.<sup>76</sup>

On 1 August 1935, representatives of the British, French and Italian governments met in Geneva, and agreed to open conversations in Paris aimed at reaching a settlement of the Italo-Abyssinian dispute. The Three Power Conference convened in Paris on 15 August 1935. Their success, however, was hampered by the failure on the part of the Italian representative, Baron Aloisi, to make any detailed statement as to the minimum terms that would satisfy the Italian government. Mr. Eden, representing Britain, and M. Laval, the French representative, therefore decided to draw up proposals which they felt would be fair to the two parties to the dispute. Their proposals provided for the political re-organization and economic development

of Abyssinia under the supervision of the League of Nations, with the United Kingdom, France, and Italy playing a major role in this enterprise. The results of their discussions were cabled to Rome on 16 August, and on 18 August the Italian reply was received in Paris. Mussolini had considered the Anglo-French proposals inadequate, and refused to discuss the suggestions that had been offered for his consideration. In view of the attitude displayed by the Italian government, Laval and Eden could see no basis for further discussions and on the evening of 18 August, the Conference was indefinitely adjourned.<sup>77</sup>

After the failure of the Three Power talks in Paris it appeared that any hope of a peaceful settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian dispute was lost. By the beginning of September it was clear that a crisis was near. At the meeting of the League Council, on 4 September 1935, the results of the investigation into the Walwal incident were announced by the Committee of Arbitration. In an unanimous decision they declared that "the Italian Government and their agents on the spot could not be held responsible for the Walwal incident, while it had not been shown that the local Abyssinian authorities could be held responsible."<sup>78</sup>

The neutral stand taken by the Committee of Arbitration concerning the Walwal dispute did nothing to ease the increasingly tense situation in East Africa. The constant growth of Italian armies in East Africa, the declaration of Haile Selassie that his country would defend its independence to the last man, and the failure of the League of Nations to find a basis for negotiation in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute led to only one conclusion -- namely, war.<sup>79</sup>

The repeated failures of the League and its apparent impotence in the face of the Abyssinian question generated an increasingly defeatist attitude among members of the British Foreign Office; yet Sir Samuel Hoare felt that there might be a chance to reverse this trend. He decided to make an appeal to the League Assembly on the basis of collective strength which he hoped would revive the lost confidence in the League of Nations that the failure to solve the Italo-Abyssinian crisis had produced.<sup>80</sup>

On 11 September 1935, the British Foreign Minister delivered a speech before the League Assembly that produced profound effects, not only in the Assembly Hall, but in Britain and throughout the world. The British government had decided to support a League policy promising "courageous and energetic British initiative in the championship of the Covenant in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute."<sup>81</sup> In Hoare's words:

If the burden is to be borne collectively. . . If the risks for peace are to be run, they must be run by all. The security of the many cannot be ensured solely by the efforts of a few, however powerful they may be. On behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, I can say that, in spite of these difficulties, that Government will be second to none in its intention to fulfill, within the measure of its capacity,<sup>82</sup> the obligations which the Covenant lays upon it.

Hoare's speech aroused great enthusiasm, and when on the very next day, 12 September, the battle cruisers Hood and Renown, accompanied by the Second Cruiser Squadron and a destroyer flotilla, arrived at Gibraltar, it was assumed on all sides that Britain would back her words with deeds. Policy

and action alike gained immediate and overwhelming support at home. It was taken for granted that neither the declaration at Geneva, nor the movement of warships to the Mediterranean would have been made without careful and expert calculation.<sup>83</sup>

The most striking result of all though, was the immediate rally of the French to the support of the Covenant.

France, [proclaimed Laval] is loyal to the Covenant. . . the Covenant is our international law. . . all our agreements with our friends and with our allies are now concluded through Geneva, or culminate in Geneva. . . Our obligations are inscribed in the Covenant: France will not shirk them.<sup>84</sup>

The speeches of Hoare and Laval, on 11 September 1935, represented the dawn of a new era of collective strength at Geneva. The League, backed by the unequivocal re-affirmations of the British and French governments to the support of the Covenant, rose to a height of power and prestige unmatched in its history. Those who had expressed doubts in the ability of the League to survive the Abyssinian crisis began to disappear.

On 3 October 1935, Italian forces invaded Abyssinia, and on 7 October, the League of Nations unanimously concluded that Italy had resorted to war in disregard of her covenants under Article 12 of the Covenant.<sup>85</sup> The League Assembly met again on 9 October, and approved the Council's decision in favor of sanctions against Italy.<sup>86</sup> The Assembly then set up a Committee of Eighteen to co-ordinate and implement the sanctions against Italy, and they were scheduled to become operative on 18 November, 1935.<sup>87</sup>

As early as August, the threat of sanctions had been raised at Geneva. At a meeting of the Italian Council of Ministers, at Bolzano, on 28 August, Mussolini had replied "that to speak of sanctions is to place oneself on a slope which may possibly lead down to the gravest complications."<sup>88</sup> The grave complications threatened by Mussolini in August, 1935, would continue to grow, and as the effects of sanctions began to be felt in East Africa, so too would Mussolini's threats grow, and their effects would be felt -- especially in Britain and France.

Sanctions had never been applied or even suggested by the League of Nations against any member of the League, or any non-League member, in the course of settling a dispute.<sup>89</sup> This action against Italy was to set a new precedent for the League and would result in diverse reactions throughout the world. The reactions observed in Italy, France and Britain, were the most significant.

The Italo-Abyssinian crisis had split France into two warring camps. The Left, aided by the Socialist, Léon Blum, and Edouard Herriot, of the Radical Socialist Party, regarded the fascist states as the enemy, and supported vigorous collective action and sanctions against Italy.<sup>90</sup> The Right Wing Conservatives regarded communism as the enemy of France, and were sympathetic to the fascist dictators.<sup>91</sup> The Action Française, which at this time assumed a pro-Italian position, was vehemently opposed to sanctions against Italy and popularized the slogan, "Les Sanctions, c'est la Guerre."<sup>92</sup> In Candide,

Pierre Gaxotte, an extreme Right Wing journalist, explained that "the war party had three factions; Socialism, Communism, and Masonry. Tomorrow the gravestones would bear the inscriptions, 'Died for the Tcheka, Died for the Grand Orient, Died for the Negus'." <sup>93</sup>

In Britain, the Labor Party, reversing its former policy of pacifism, joined with the Labor and Socialist International in agreeing to use all political means at their disposal to persuade the National government to fulfill British obligations as a member of the League, and apply pressure to the Italian aggressor. <sup>94</sup> The leaders of the League of Nations Union urged the National government to comply with the wishes of the majority of the British populace, as evidenced in the Peace Ballot. <sup>95</sup>

There were, however, a significant number of Englishmen who were opposed to the impending sanctions against Italy. On 15 October, Leopold Amery, the most outspoken opponent of sanctions in Parliament, formed a delegation of almost a hundred conservative members of both Houses, and met with Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister. Fearing the likelihood of a European conflict as a result of sanctions, the Amery faction urged the Prime Minister not to resort to force in the Abyssinian dispute. <sup>96</sup> Baldwin replied that he would think over their suggestion, and assured them that "we were not contemplating any such steps as the closing of the Suez Canal or an actual blockade." <sup>97</sup> What he failed to reveal though, was that the Government would back sanctions only to a certain extent, and that the course of Britain's League

policy was directed toward a negotiated settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian crisis.

Doing as much as possible to create a united League front against Mussolini, the British were acutely conscious of their own military weaknesses and the urgent need to repair them. Yet, had they weighed the scales too heavily in favor of rearmament, they would have given the impression in Geneva that the negotiations were bound to fail.<sup>98</sup>

A general election had been scheduled in Britain for the second week of November, 1935. The Labor Opposition Party was convinced that the National government hoped to use the apparent mass support of the League policy which it had proclaimed in September, and the results of the Peace Ballot, to an electoral advantage.<sup>99</sup> The Baldwin government campaigned on a platform supporting collective security and a limited measure of rearmament in order to maintain that pledge of collective defense.<sup>100</sup> The British Labor Party and the trade unions supported the Government and its cause, and although they were easily defeated, their ranks were considerably strengthened.<sup>101</sup> The Opposition Party returned to Parliament determined to see that the Government fulfilled its pledge to the electorate.

On 18 November 1935, the extent of the sanctions imposed upon Italy were revealed. From Mussolini came the reply that Italy would meet sanctions "with discipline, with frugality, and with sacrifice."<sup>102</sup> At the same time, however, he indicated that "he would not tolerate the imposition of any sanctions which hampered his invasion of Abyssinia. If that enterprise

were endangered, he would go to war with any nation which stood in his path."<sup>103</sup>

Aided by Britain and France, the League of Nations Committee charged with devising sanctions had cautiously avoided any that would provoke war.<sup>104</sup> As imposed, the sanctions were to prove ineffectual, but to the Italian people, exposed only to the fascist viewpoint, the very idea of sanctions was a heavy blow. As Fermi noted:

It reawakened the sense of injury the Italians had experienced at the end of World War I, and again they felt rejected by the society of great powers, betrayed in their aspirations to a just share of living space. If Mussolini's rule was too demanding; if some Italians were tiring of him and his unforeseeable moves, if an empire might prove a disastrous expense for a country like Italy; all these, the Italians felt, were internal questions in which other governments had no right to interfere. Sanctions had never before been decreed, and in choosing Italy as the first case, in calling her an aggressor and thus favoring 'barbaric Abyssinia', the nations imposing sanctions were committing an unforgivably unfriendly act.<sup>105</sup>

A sanction against oil, without which the campaign in Abyssinia could not have been maintained, was greatly desired by extreme Left elements in Britain and France.<sup>106</sup> However, it was doubtful whether the United States, a non-League member, could be persuaded to comply with it, since their petroleum exports to Italy in 1935 had more than doubled.<sup>107</sup> On 29 November, the Committee of Eighteen met in Geneva to consider banning all petroleum exports to Italy. Laval, well aware of Mussolini's statement that "he would take an oil sanction as an act of war,"<sup>108</sup> was able to have the meeting postponed until 12 December.<sup>109</sup>

Mussolini's attempts to discuss his Abyssinian ambitions with representatives of the British government in January and April of 1935, although not completely ignored, revealed a failure on the part of the British government to recognize or realize the true significance that Abyssinia was to play in Italian Foreign Policy. In January of 1935, the Italian dictator concluded agreements with the French government during discussions in Rome. Here French and Italian interests in East Africa were reviewed, and the Italian government received assurances, although they appear to have been limited, that France would not oppose Italy's claims in Abyssinia.

The British government somewhat disturbed by the increased tensions in East Africa and the attempts to solve the Italo-Abyssinian quarrel at the League of Nations in June 1935, attempted to solve the Abyssinian dispute at the expense of French interests in East Africa. This move on the part of the British, however, coupled with the recently concluded Anglo-German Naval Agreement, had seriously damaged British credibility not only in Italy, but in France as well.

The failure of the British offer of June, and the subsequent failures of the League of Nations to offer Italy what it considered to be a just settlement to Italian claims in East Africa, had resulted in war with Abyssinia and sanctions from Geneva. Nonetheless, Mussolini's desire to remain within the League of Nations -- and his attempt to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian question -- persisted.

The oil sanction loomed large in the policy centers of Rome, Paris, and London. Should Italian petroleum supplies be embargoed, a conflict between Italy, France and Britain seemed imminent. The British and French governments had agreed that any additional application of sanctions against Italy would be determined only by mutual agreement.<sup>110</sup> The fate of the League, Abyssinia, and the peace of Europe now hung in the balance, and on 7 and 8 December 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare met with Pierre Laval in Paris.<sup>111</sup> There the two Foreign Ministers concluded a proposed settlement to the East African crisis which would save Abyssinia from destruction by the advancing Italian armies, and at the same time, re-establish the Stresa front against Germany. The result of their negotiations was the Hoare-Laval Plan.

## Chapter I

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>3</sup>Luigi Villari, Italian Foreign Policy Under Mussolini (New York: Devin-Adair, 1956), p. 134.

<sup>4</sup>Geoffrey Thompson, Diplomat Front-Line (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Walter C. Langsam, Documents and Readings in the History of Europe Since 1918 (New York: J. P. Lippincott, 1939), p. 236.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Winston S. Churchill, Step By Step (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 85.

<sup>8</sup>Hubert Cole, Laval: A Biography (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Charles L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 542.

<sup>10</sup>C. Pellizzi, Italy (New York: Longman's Green, 1939), pp. 156-57.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935 : Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), 11, 12; "The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreements of 1935 on Ethiopia," Middle East Jour. Winter (1961) 70.

<sup>12</sup> Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: The Gathering Storm (Boston: Riverside, 1948), p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> Mowat, p. 542.

<sup>14</sup> Cole, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Toynbee, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Langsam, pp. 477-79.

<sup>21</sup> William C. Askew, "The Secret Agreement Between France and Ethiopia January 1935," Jour. of Modern History, 25 (1953), 47.

<sup>22</sup> Warner, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Askew, pp. 47-48.

<sup>24</sup> Warner, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> Villari, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Cole, p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> Villari, pp. 132-33.

<sup>29</sup> Churchill, Step by Step, p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight, trans. James D. Lambert (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955), p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Churchill, Step by Step, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Cole, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Langsam, p. 240.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Windrich, British Labour's Foreign Policy (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1952) p. 126.

<sup>41</sup>Langsam, p. 239.

<sup>42</sup>Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup>D. C. Watt, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 : An Interim Judgement," Jour. of Modern History, 28 (1956), 162.

<sup>44</sup>Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>46</sup>Viscount Templewood (The Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), p. 144.

<sup>47</sup>Alexander Werth, The Destiny of France (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1937), p. 172.

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<sup>51</sup>Toynbee, p. 155.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>53</sup>Winston S. Churchill, While England Slept (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1938), pp. 210-11.

<sup>54</sup>Templewood, p. 155.

<sup>55</sup>Sir Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden Earl of Avon : Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, p. 98.

<sup>61</sup> Eden, p. 249.

<sup>62</sup> Eugen Weber, Action Française : Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 258.

<sup>63</sup> Werth, p. 171.

<sup>64</sup> Joel Colton, Léon Blum : Humanist in Politics (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 218.

<sup>65</sup> Werth, p. 173.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Warner, p. 99.

<sup>68</sup> Leopold S. Amery, My Political Life : The Unforgiving Years 1929-1940 (London: Hutchinson, 1955), III, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Templewood, p. 159.

<sup>70</sup> Mowat, pp. 541-42.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Windrich, p. 129.

<sup>73</sup> Mowat, pp. 534-44.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

<sup>76</sup> Templewood, p. 128.

<sup>77</sup> Toynbee, pp. 173-74.

<sup>78</sup> Mowat, p. 176.

<sup>79</sup> Templewood, p. 172.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>81</sup> Toynbee, p. 188.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 173.

<sup>84</sup> Toynbee, p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> Toynbee, p. 530.

<sup>86</sup> Villari, p. 106.

<sup>87</sup> Laura Fermi, Mussolini (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 319.

<sup>88</sup> Toynbee, p. 176.

<sup>89</sup>Fermi, p. 320.

<sup>90</sup>David Thomson, France: Empire and Republic, 1850-1940 : Historical Documents (New York: Walker, 1968), p. 354.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Weber, p. 288.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Windrich, p. 130.

<sup>95</sup>Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 175.

<sup>96</sup>Amery, p. 176.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Templewood, p. 196.

<sup>99</sup>Windrich, p. 196.

<sup>100</sup>Michael Foot, Aneurin Bevan : A Biography 1897-1945 (New York: Atheneum, 1963), I, 212.

<sup>101</sup>Windrich, p. 133.

<sup>102</sup>Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 174.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>105</sup>Fermi, p. 320.

<sup>106</sup>Laval, p. 10.

<sup>107</sup>Keith G. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain  
(London: Macmillan, 1946), p. 272.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>109</sup>Cole, p. 73.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Toynbee, p. 532.

## Chapter II

### The Attempts at Conciliation and The Hoare-Laval Plan

The attempts by the League of Nations Committee of Conciliation and Arbitration to achieve a negotiated settlement in the Italo-Abyssinian conflict had proved unsuccessful by the first week of August, 1935.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the Anglo-French desire to keep Italy in the Stresa front against Germany was to govern the foreign policies of the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay from August until December, 1935.<sup>2</sup> Aware of the growing strength of Mussolini's armies in Italian Somaliland, British and French officials informed the Duce of their willingness to confer with Italy in the hope of settling the Italo-Abyssinian dispute, as the threat of open hostilities was now imminent.<sup>3</sup>

Although Mussolini had rejected a British invitation to take part in a formal conference of the three powers signatory to the Treaty of 1906,<sup>4</sup> he did agree to unofficial talks in Paris between British, French, and Italian representatives. Anthony Eden and Robert Vansittart accordingly went to Paris, on 13 August 1935, where they met with Pompeo Aloisi, the Italian representative to the League of Nations, and Vittorio Cerutti, the Italian Ambassador in Paris, and Pierre Laval and his assistant at the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Léger, in an attempt to reconcile the Italo-Abyssinian quarrel. Their initial result did little more than elicit the extent of Italian claims in Abyssinia.

The Italians emphatically stated Mussolini's dictate for the unconditional annexation of all of the non-Amharic<sup>5</sup> territories of Abyssinia, and an Italian mandate over the rest. The British delegation then made it clear that they could not accept these demands, and re-emphasized to the Italian delegates that what was under consideration was a League of Nations controversy and not an Anglo-Italian dispute. Léger at once recognized Mussolini's unreasonable demands and proffered a plan under which the League of Nations would be urged to give a joint mandate to Italy, France, and Great Britain, for all of Abyssinia, and, at the same time, to obtain the approval of the Negus by the cession of an outlet to the sea. Eden and Vansittart objected to a mandate in any form and made a counter-proposal on three lines:

First, an exchange of territory in which Abyssinia would cede certain tracts to Italy in return for an outlet to the sea; secondly, an economic zone in which Italian interests would predominate; and thirdly, a League framework in which these arrangements would be carried out.<sup>6</sup>

The findings of the Anglo-Franco-Italian talks were coldly received by Mussolini, and while they were never accepted, the meeting had kept the possibility of a compromise open for subsequent discussions of a conciliatory nature.<sup>7</sup>

On 6 September 1935, the League of Nations Council, with Italy abstaining, appointed a Committee of Five of its members<sup>8</sup> to examine the state of Italo-Abyssinian relations, and to propose a "peaceful settlement"<sup>9</sup> to the dispute. The Committee held eleven meetings between 7 and 24 September, and

on 18 September, the initial results of their study were communicated to the representatives of Abyssinia and Italy.<sup>10</sup>

As the Committee of Five was in session, however, events were unfolding elsewhere that would significantly affect the outcome of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis.

At the capital of Eritrea on 8 September 1935, Galeazzo Ciano,<sup>11</sup> the Italian Minister for the Press and Propaganda, who was now serving with the Italian Air Force in Africa, broadcast in English an address to the American people in which he declared that Italy was "in any case decided. . .to consider as closed for ever the period of attempts at pacific collaboration with Ethiopia,"<sup>12</sup> and that the people of Italy were "ready to assume the gravest responsibilities"<sup>13</sup> should that course become necessary.

In Berlin, on 9 September, Bernardo Attolico, Mussolini's new Ambassador to the German Reich, was officially received by Hitler. It was noted that their meeting was unusually cordial, and conversations between the German Chancellor and Attolico indicated the dawn of warmer relations between the two dictators. It was also rumored that the groundwork had been laid for a possible Italo-German rapprochement. The Italian government, however, was quick to deny that it had proposed the negotiation of an Italo-German non-aggression pact.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the possibility that the Duce had even contemplated a Rome-Berlin entente cordiale re-awakened Anglo-French efforts to keep the Fascist state in line with the democracies, and reaffirm the Stresa front.

What was not revealed by Laval until 17 and 28 December, in speeches before the French Chamber of Deputies, was that on

10 September, the British and French Foreign Ministers had held private discussions in Geneva, where they agreed "upon ruling out military sanctions"<sup>16</sup> in the Abyssinian conflict, and "not adopting any measure of naval blockade, never contemplating the closure of the Suez Canal -- in a word ruling out everything that might lead to war."<sup>17</sup> That these agreements were not publicized at the time, and that they were concluded only one day prior to the Anglo-French declarations of unwavering support for the Covenant of the League of Nations in its "entirety"<sup>18</sup> was to handicap all future attempts of the League to coerce Mussolini into abandoning his plans for the conquest of Abyssinia. The contradictory nature evident in the Secret Hoare-Laval Agreements of 10 September 1935 and the joint Anglo-French declarations of solidarity and good faith to the League of Nations Assembly on 11 September 1935, were a worthy assesement of the sentiments of those in control of British and French foreign affairs in the Autumn of 1935.

The French Foreign Minister, having recently completed a treaty of friendship with Mussolini in January of 1935,<sup>19</sup> was convinced that French public opinion would repudiate any breach in the Latin front<sup>20</sup> against the Germans. In Laval's words: "We had to prevent Mussolini from being driven into the German camp. Since the murder of Dolfuss, Mussolini has turned to France. It is all a question of fact, the reconciliation of prudence with principles."<sup>21</sup> G. M. Young revealed that although Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, was an outspoken advocate of firm adhesion to the principles of collective security, "gnawing at the back of his mind was the

innermost conviction that the League could not stop the career of Mussolini."<sup>22</sup> A victim of one-sided disarmament, British military strength in September of 1935 left much to be desired. Winston Churchill in a communique of 25 August, 1935 to Hoare, made it clear that he considered the strength of the British Navy to be far below that of Italy's.<sup>23</sup> He also advised the Baldwin government to beware in playing its part in the collective system, lest it become "a sort of bell-wether or fulgeman to gather and lead opinion in Europe against Italy's Abyssinian designs."<sup>24</sup> The British, he maintained, were "simply not strong enough to be the law giver and spokesman of the whole world."<sup>25</sup> In the 1920's Churchill had strongly opposed disarmament.<sup>26</sup> The failure of the British to maintain an armaments level proportionate to that of the growing fascist states of Europe had jeopardized British prestige in Foreign Affairs by the Fall of 1935, and Mr. Churchill was quick to re-iterate his former warnings. As Mr. Seton-Watson pointed out:

The attitude of the British Government was such as to confirm the Duce in the belief that he could act with impunity; for although it was afterwards able to show that it had during the previous winter sent repeated warnings to Rome as to the grave consequences of an attack on Abyssinia, it wiped out their whole effect, by not even discussing the problem at Stresa.<sup>27</sup>

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In addition, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement,<sup>28</sup> Zeila,<sup>29</sup> and the Secret Agreements of 10 September at Geneva, were to corroborate the suspicions Mussolini harbored against British platitudes in 1935.

In short, the conclusions which the League of Nations Committee of Five had reached by 18 September 1935, recognized the need for "great changes"<sup>30</sup> in Abyssinia; however, they were equally resolved that Abyssinian sovereignty be maintained. The Abyssinian government was impressed with the Report, and accepted their recommendations as a basis for negotiation. Yet, although the Italian Council of Ministers was also inclined to accept, Mussolini rejected the League formulae as soon as he received the official report.<sup>31</sup> In his memoirs, Hoare recalled that the British Foreign Office:

. . . afterwards heard that Mussolini, who had not yet started his war, had been inclined to accept the Report. Unfortunately. . . a premature disclosure in the Press turned him against a proposal that might have been a basis of compromise. A London paper published it before he received it, and what was worse suggested that he could not possibly accept it. Being terribly sensitive when his amour propre was concerned, he felt that it would be humiliating to accept proposals that the London Press expected him to reject and on this account he came out against them.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Hoare was optimistic and regarded the Report prepared by the Committee of Five as "not only sound"<sup>33</sup> but as the "framework"<sup>34</sup> for future negotiations.

On 16 September 1935, the representatives of France and the United Kingdom informed the Committee of Five that their respective governments were "prepared to recognise a special Italian interest in the economic development of Ethiopia,"<sup>35</sup> and, that their governments would "look with favour on the conclusion of economic agreements between Italy and Ethiopia."<sup>36</sup>

The French and British delegations further informed the Committee of Five that:

. . .with a view of contributing to the peaceful settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, their respective Governments are ready to facilitate territorial adjustments between Italy and Ethiopia by offering Ethiopia if necessary, certain sacrifices in the region of the Somaliland Coast.<sup>37</sup>

On the morning of 3 October, 1935, Italian armies under the leadership of General Emilio de Bono crossed the Abyssinian border near Adowa. The League of Nations was quick to declare Italy the "aggressor,"<sup>38</sup> and agreed to implement economic sanctions against Italy on 18 November, 1935.<sup>39</sup>

The emphasis of Britain's League of Nations policy in the Italo-Abyssinian crisis now shifted away from a policy of aggressive coercion, toward one of active conciliation and appeasement. This change was reflected in the diplomatic correspondence between London and Rome in the early part of October 1935.

The Duce's threat, that complete application of economic sanctions, as per Article Sixteen of the League Covenant, would provoke war,<sup>40</sup> was answered by Sir Samuel Hoare in a private communiqué, on 4 October 1935, stating that: 'England would not resort to military sanctions and that she would only reluctantly apply economic sanctions.'<sup>41</sup> And when, on 5 October, Count Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador to Great Britain, reported an alleged statement to Rome, in which the British Prime Minister had countenanced direct intervention against Mussolini in East Africa, Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, acted swiftly to dispel this "embarrassing impression."<sup>42</sup> Vansittart cabled Sir Eric Drummond, the British Am-

bassador in Rome, and instructed him to seek a meeting with Mussolini at his earliest opportunity; again Signor Mussolini was apprised of Britain's aversion to effective sanctions, the application of a blockade.<sup>43</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare commented that:

The question now arose as to whether Mussolini's flagrant challenge to the League and the gas attacks on Adowa that followed the invasion should put an end to all further negotiations. The answer was a unanimous 'No' from Geneva. A compromise had obviously become more than ever necessary, both for preserving European peace and saving Abyssinia from total destruction.

That the Duce was not adverse to discovering a basis for compromise in the Italo-Abyssinian affair was revealed in the proposals outlining his minimum demands in Abyssinia, submitted to Laval on 16 October 1935,<sup>45</sup> which entailed:

an Italian mandate over the non-Amharic regions of Abyssinia plus those parts of the Tigre province which had been overrun by Italian forces since the fighting started, a joint mandate -- in which Italy would play an important, if not predominant, role -- over the Amharic core of the country, the settlement of the disputed frontier with Eritrea and Italian Somaliland in Italy's favour, and the disarmament of Abyssinia.<sup>46</sup>

Upon receipt of an invitation from the French Foreign Minister to compare Anglo-French demands in East Africa with the recent proposals submitted by Mussolini, the British government sent Sir Maurice Peterson, the Abyssinian Expert at the Foreign Office, for talks in Paris, with the Comte de St. Quentin, Head of the African Division of the French Foreign Ministry, in late October 1935.<sup>47</sup>

Prior to Mr. Peterson's departure he was briefed by Sir Anthony Eden, the British Representative to the League of Nations, on the posture he was to assume in Paris. They agreed

to use the Report of 18 September 1935, submitted by the League of Nations Committee of Five as a starting point in the negotiations. They were also prepared to offer Italy Adowa and Adigrat, in the Tigre province, along with some rectifications of Italian claims in the south. Abyssinia was to acquire Assab, in the Italian colony of Eritrea, and the port of Zeila, in British Somaliland. They concluded, however, that Italy would be offered only a "proportionate share"<sup>48</sup> in any League sponsored territorial re-adjustment in East Africa.<sup>49</sup>

The first round of the Peterson-St. Quentin deliberations found Italian claims and British demands in Abyssinia still widely divergent.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the two experts were able to formulate a plan which honored some, but not all, of Mussolini's demands. Their suggestions were, however, rejected in London on 30 October, and were never officially submitted to Mussolini.<sup>51</sup>

As the Italian military campaign in Abyssinia progressed, British efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian crisis gained momentum. Before the end of October, Hoare instructed the British Minister to Addis Ababa, Sir Sidney Barton, to urge upon Haile Selassie, the expedience of initiating a conference with Italy aimed at a peaceful settlement to their dispute, as "Abyssinia's military prospects were even darker than they appeared to be to observers without inside knowledge."<sup>52</sup>

A General Election in England had been scheduled for 14 November 1935. That the Baldwin government was more concerned with its political survival, than with the fate of Abyssinia was revealed in a communique between Robert Vansittart

and Dino Grandi.<sup>53</sup> Shortly after 10 October 1935, a British official had returned from Paris with a new proposal from M. Laval for a solution to the Italo-Abyssinian conflict. Vansittart then informed Grandi that the solution could become effective only after the British elections.<sup>54</sup> Had the British government not miscalculated the ability of the Italian army, or the will of the Abyssinians to resist, there may not have been a need for such a solution.

On 6 November 1935, the League of Nations Committee of Eighteen, whose official function involved the implementation of sanctions, adopted a proposal that would add, among other important articles, oil, to the matériel soon to be denied to Italy. They agreed to meet again on 29 November 1935, to finalize a date for the enactment of their proposal.<sup>55</sup>

The reaction of the British and French Foreign Secretaries to this new lead from Geneva, although consenting to honor the League's initiative, was a stubborn resolve to intensify their attempts at achieving a peaceful settlement to the war in East Africa.<sup>56</sup> On 21 November 1935, the Peterson-St. Quentin talks were resumed in Paris.<sup>57</sup>

During the second round of discussions between the two Abyssinian experts, it soon became evident that the French were more inclined to give Mussolini more concessions in Abyssinia than Mr. Peterson had been authorized to yield.<sup>58</sup> The British expert was convinced, however, "that in no circumstances would the Baldwin government go to war for Abyssinia."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, there was little doubt that the French proposals

were the minimum territorial demands that the Duce would accept,<sup>60</sup> as Laval and Mussolini were known to have been in daily telephonic communication.<sup>61</sup>

By 26 November 1935, the Anglo-French mission was, as Peterson related:

. . .agreed as to the main lines of demarcation, the nature of the assistance to be given the Emperor in ruling the truncated but ethnically consolidated territory which was to remain to him. The compensation Abyssinia was to receive was the cession of a port in either British or Italian Somaliland.<sup>62</sup>

What would ultimately rupture the Peterson-St. Quentin negotiations was the proportion of Abyssinian homelands to be ceded to Italy, and the limitations, if any, that could be placed on the proposed Abyssinian port.

Laval's frequent conversations with Mussolini convinced the French Foreign Minister that the Italians would settle for no less than the entire Tigré province. As it appeared that the Abyssinians would receive a new port, the French government expected guarantees that their rail line from Djibouti, in French Somaliland, to Addis Ababa would not be endangered by a new Italian railway.<sup>63</sup>

Sir Maurice Peterson's instructions had given him the authority to agree to the cession of the Eastern Tigré province only, and, as he was not empowered to agree to the French rail claims,<sup>64</sup> he cabled the Foreign Office in London, filling them in on the status of the negotiations, and calling their attention to the need for additional procedural advice. The Foreign

Office sent him no additional instructions, but informed Sir George Clerk, British Ambassador in Paris, that the Foreign Secretary, and Sir Robert Vansittart would soon be in Paris.<sup>65</sup>

As Warner noted: "What other impression could he -- and, even more important, Laval -- have received than that the British foreign secretary and his senior official adviser were coming to settle the remaining points at issue?"<sup>66</sup>

Throughout the early stages of the second round of the Peterson-St. Quentin talks in Paris, Laval had been convinced that a settlement was near at hand. Mussolini's progress in Abyssinia had been somewhat checked by the onset of heavy rains, and the chances of reaching a basis for negotiation increased daily.<sup>67</sup> Yet, the deadline was quickly approaching when the dreaded oil sanction would be imposed, and when it appeared that the Anglo-French discussions in Paris had reached a deadlock, Laval, pleading prior parliamentary commitments in Paris, was able to have the meeting of the League Committee of Eighteen postponed until 12 December 1935.<sup>68</sup>

The news of the postponed meeting of the League's Committee of Eighteen did little though to temper the irate Italian dictator. On 27 November, it was announced in Rome that:

in view of the proposed oil sanction, the Italian Government -- had found it advisable to order certain troop movements and to cancel certain recently announced permits of three months leave for men now serving with the colours.<sup>69</sup>

The reference of troop movements was a deliberate attempt by the Duce to put pressure on Britain and France. In Britain, it was suspected that the Italian garrison on the Libyan borders of Egypt had been activated. The French, whose forces on the Alpine frontier had been measurably reduced following the Rome Agreements of 7 January 1935, were undoubtedly alarmed.<sup>70</sup>

On 29 November 1935, Laval made it clear to Mussolini that he would consider any hostile moves against England as a breach against the League of Nations, France included. The French President also re-iterated the need to achieve a peaceful solution to the Italo-Abyssinian conflict.<sup>71</sup> From Paris on 30 November, Le Temps cautioned Signor Mussolini against threatening the peace of Europe and urged him to give evidence of a desire to negotiate, or suffer the consequences that the oil sanction was sure to eventuate.<sup>72</sup> The Italian reaction to Laval's re-affirmation of Anglo-French solidarity was revealed in a statement by Mussolini on 30 November 1935. In an attempt to clarify Italian sentiments regarding the oil sanction, the Duce explained that: "when he declared that he would consider the oil embargo as a 'hostile act' he meant only an 'unfriendly act'."<sup>73</sup> The bellicose statements uttered by the Duce, on 27 November 1935, thus verified the statement of Ambassador Drummond in Rome, on 29 November, "that he could hardly believe that at this stage Mussolini would risk a European conflict."<sup>74</sup>

The time that would lapse before Hoare and Vansittart would arrive in Paris to deliberate on the obstacles encountered during the Peterson-St. Quentin talks between 21 and 26 November 1935, was devoted to still further attempts at solving the East African dilemma. Between 3 December and 5 December, Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London and Robert Vansittart held conversations in the British Foreign Office, which, when concluded, as Aloisi recorded, made a good impression on Mussolini.<sup>75</sup> Although these discussions also resulted in a stalemate, they exposed some significant new concessions, previously unrevealed by the British. Vansittart made it clear that the Italian claim to the whole Tigre province could not be realized, as that territory was soon to become an autonomous state, which he indicated would be the result of pressures exerted by Italy on the Abyssinians. He would agree, however, to grant Italian sovereignty over a small part of the Ogaden province, and the valleys of Harar, while a Chartered Company would obtain rights to the economic exploitation of Abyssinia, of almost all of the territories south of the eighth parallel as far as Lake Rudolph. In addition, the Abyssinians would receive an economic outlet on the Red Sea at Assab; and as for central Abyssinia, the Committee of Five and the signatories of the Treaty of 1906 were to guarantee Abyssinian sovereignty in these areas.<sup>76</sup>

Each attempt at finding a basis for settlement in the Italo-Abyssinian crisis had brought progressively favorable results, and on 7 and 8 December 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare and

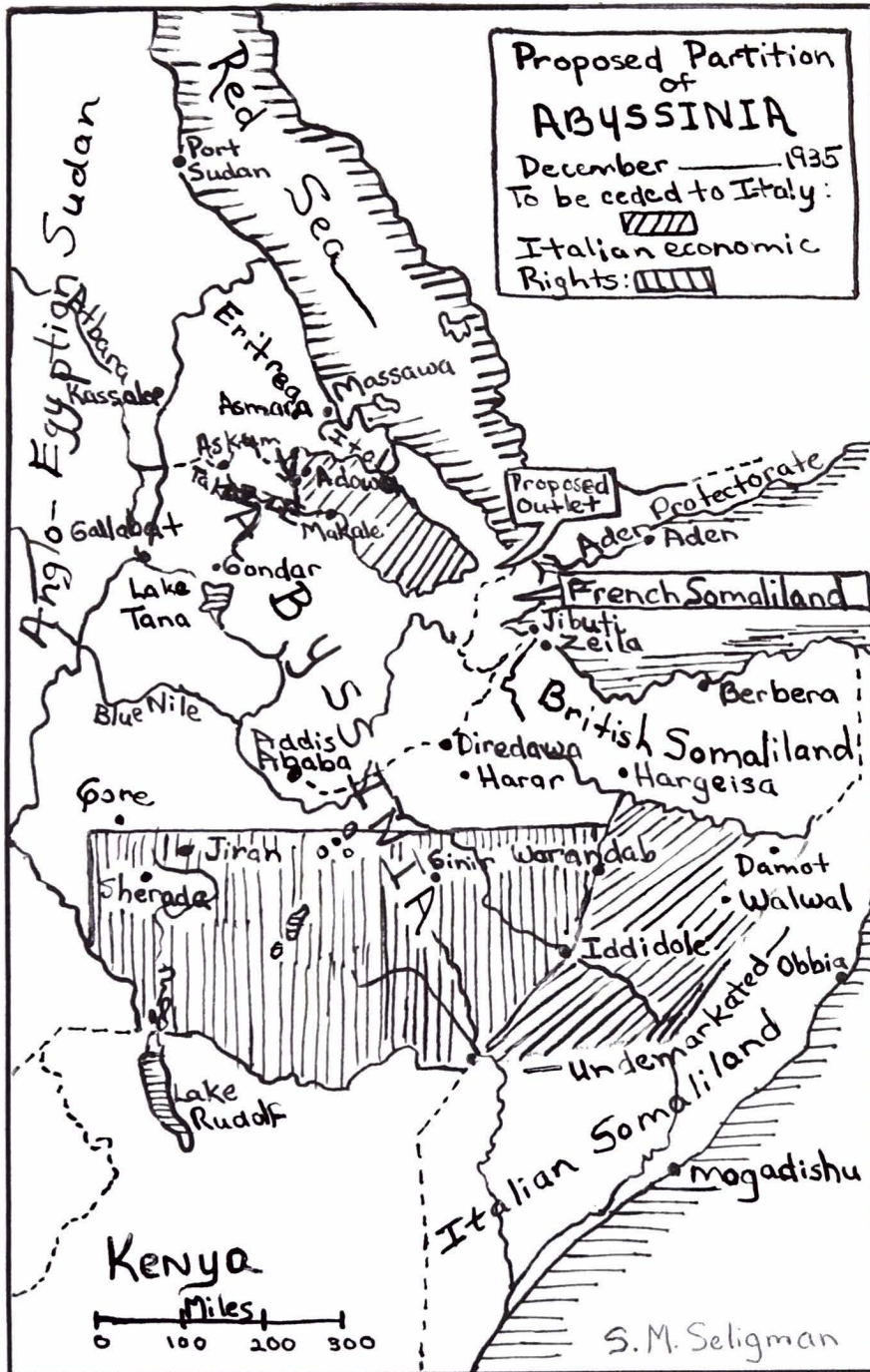
Pierre Laval met in Paris, where the results of the three preceeding months of negotiations culminated in the Hoare-Laval Plan.

At the onset of the negotiations between the two Foreign Ministers an Anglo-French declaration of mutual support in the Mediterranean was concluded in the event of an Italian threat against the League Powers. However, Laval had informed Hoare during their discussions that French assistance for the British against Mussolini could not be expected immediately, and that French naval dockyards were not large enough to tender British capital ships.<sup>77</sup> Thus it appeared that the British would be forced to bear the brunt of an Italian attack without significant French support should the oil sanction be imposed. If the Italians were faced with defeat, they would much rather go down fighting the champions of the League than face the ignominy of a second Adowa, caused by a shortage of supplies.<sup>78</sup> That these were vital elements in convincing the British Foreign Minister of the need for a negotiated settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian dispute cannot be denied.

It was essential to the success of the negotiations that their proceedings should be conducted under the precaution of secrecy, so as to avoid hints and speculation, before the British government, the League, and the parties to the dispute had received the official transcripts of the discussions. On 6 December 1935, officials at the Quai d'Orsay informed journalists, French and international alike, that "they must write nothing on the affair; it was to be kept strictly secret."<sup>79</sup>

The British delegation consisting of Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir Robert Vansittart, Sir George Clerk, and Maurice Peterson, met with Pierre Laval, Alexis Léger, the Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, Monsieur Rochat, his Chief of the Cabinet, and the Comte de St. Quentin for preliminary talks, in Paris, on 7 December 1935. These discussions, lasting nearly three hours, convinced the British that the provisional plan developed during the Peterson-St. Quentin talks of November were now inadequate, as Mussolini had now occupied an extensive part of the Tigré province, including Adowa, and it was unlikely that he would surrender his conquests. Hoare was then informed that the Rases,<sup>80</sup> who had recently gone over to the Italian side, would create a serious problem for the Negus, if their territories were given back to Abyssinia. Sir Samuel Hoare then agreed to include additional Italian concessions in the Tigré province, but insisted that in return, these concessions would have to be compensated by the guarantee of an Abyssinian port, and a reduction of Mussolini's claims in the rest of Abyssinia.<sup>81</sup>

The only problems which then remained to be solved were: the location of the Abyssinian port, the exact boundaries to be adjusted pertinent to frontier rectifications and territorial changes, and the character of the economic sphere of influence to be awarded to the Italians in the non-Amharic regions of the south. With these points unsettled, the joint Anglo-French delegation adjourned for the night, after publishing a communique to the effect that they had found a common basis for future negotiations.<sup>83</sup>



The Hoare-Laval talks continued on the morning of 8 December 1935, and by the end of the day the diplomats had succeeded in drawing up a plan that they felt would serve as a basis for compromise and end the hostilities in East Africa.<sup>84</sup>

The Anglo-French agreement, soon to be known as the Hoare-Laval Plan, effectively settled the disputed points of the meeting of 7 December. The French demand that the cession of territories in the Tigré province in Italy's favor be compensated by the cession of the British port of Zeila to Abyssinia, was compromised by Sir Samuel Hoare, who insisted that the Italians provide the territory and facilities at Assab, and that the British government would only be prepared to cede British territory if the Emperor preferred the port of Zeila in British Somaliland.<sup>85</sup> The text of the Plan read in part:

Ethiopia will receive an outlet to the sea with full sovereign rights. It seems that this outlet should be formed preferably by the cession, to which Italy would agree, of the port of Assab and of a strip of territory giving access to this port along the frontier of French Somaliland.<sup>86</sup>

In regard to the disputed boundaries and frontier rectifications, the Italians were given control of the Eastern Tigré province. The new borders were limited on the south by the River Gheva, and on the west by a line running from north to south passing between Axum (on the Abyssinian side) and Adowa (on the Italian side). In the Ogaden province the new Italo-Abyssinian frontier was to start from the trijunction point between the frontiers of Abyssinia, Kenya and Italian Somaliland, and would follow a north-easterly direction meeting

the frontier of British Somaliland where it intersected the forty-fifth meridian.<sup>87</sup> It appears that the British delegates had sustained a reduction in the earlier French demand for the cession of the entire Tigré province to Italy.<sup>88</sup>

The only question which still remained to be solved was the extent of the economic rights Italy was to receive in Abyssinia. Theoretically, Italy had been guaranteed economic concessions in the Non-Amharic portions of Abyssinia under the provisions of the Three Power Treaties of 1891 and 1906. The center of that zone, the Ogaden province, had never been under the jurisdiction of the Negus, and was a virtual hot-bed of bandits and slave merchants.<sup>89</sup> It was concluded that:

The limits of this zone would be: on the east, the rectified frontier between Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland; on the north, the 8th parallel; on the west, the 35th meridian; on the south, the frontier between Ethiopia and Kenya.<sup>90</sup>

In this zone Italy, under the supervision of the League of Nations, "would enjoy exclusive economic rights."<sup>91</sup>

Following the conclusion of the negotiations, and on Hoare's return to the British Embassy, he was confronted by the Embassy Press Secretary, Charles Mendl, and several inquisitive journalists, seeking an interview. After giving them a brief synopsis of the nature of the Anglo-French discussions, he assured them that the proposals were "only provisional"<sup>92</sup> and could only be considered valid after they had been "referred first to the two Governments, and secondly to the League."<sup>93</sup> He then requested that they refrain from making

any allusions to the Plan, until the Abyssinian and Italian governments had published the contents of the proposals. And, as Hoare noted: "They appeared ready to fall in with my request."<sup>94</sup>

The Hoare-Laval Plan, concluded on 8 December 1935, was then communicated to the British Government for its approval before being sent to the three parties in the dispute: The League of Nations, Italy and Abyssinia.<sup>95</sup> The Plan embodied the only practical solution to end the war in Abyssinia, and strengthen the weakened Stresa front. The alternatives were total indifference on the part of the British and French governments, or the prospect of a war with Italy, and public opinion was adverse to both. What was most remarkable was the reaction to the course that was followed.

## Chapter II

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Chapter I, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1965), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935: Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), II, 169.

<sup>4</sup>Chapter I, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Non-Amharic -- either desert or lands recently conquered by Abyssinian tribes. Primarily: centers of slavery and depopulation.

<sup>6</sup>Viscount Templewood, (The Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), p. 161.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>8</sup>The United Kingdom, France, Poland, Spain, and Turkey.

<sup>9</sup>Toynbee, p. 182.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, pp. 183-84.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>19</sup>Chapter I, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>France and Italy.

<sup>21</sup>Templewood, p. 168.

<sup>22</sup>G. M. Young, Stanley Balwin (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p. 216.

<sup>23</sup>Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948) pp. 170-71.

<sup>24</sup>Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 30's. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 82.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Basil H. Liddel Hart, The Liddel Hart Memoirs 1895-1938 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), I, 131-32.

<sup>27</sup>R. W. Seton-Watson, Britain and the Dictators: A Survey of Post-War British Policy (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 361.

<sup>28</sup>Chapter I, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>Chapter I, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Templewood, p. 172.

<sup>31</sup>Toynbee, p. 195.

<sup>32</sup>Templewood, p. 172.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Chapter I, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup>Chapter I, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup>Chapter I, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup>Jürgen Gehl, Austria, Germany, and the Anschluss 1931-1938  
(London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 120-121.

<sup>42</sup>Colvin, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Templewood, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup>Colvin, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup>Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 109.

<sup>47</sup>Colvin, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup>Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden Earl of Avon: Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 327.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Colvin, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup>Warner, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup>Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 365.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Toynbee, pp. 275-77.

<sup>56</sup>Salvemini, pp. 363-64.

<sup>57</sup>Maurice D. Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Constable, 1950), p. 116.

<sup>58</sup>Eden, p. 327.

<sup>59</sup>Peterson, p. 118.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>66</sup>Warner, p. 117.

<sup>67</sup>Colvin, p. 81.

<sup>68</sup>Toynbee, pp. 278-79.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>71</sup>Salvemini, pp. 380-81.

<sup>72</sup>Les Temps, 30 November 1935.

<sup>73</sup>Salvemini, p. 381.

<sup>74</sup>Eden, p. 330.

<sup>75</sup>Pompeo Aloisi, Journal (25 Juillet 1932-14 Juin 1936)

traduit par Maurice Vaussard (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), p. 326.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Seton-Watson, p. 362.

<sup>78</sup>G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, A Short History of International Affairs 1920-1938 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), p. 414.

<sup>79</sup>Geneviève R. Tabouis, They Called Me Cassandra (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 267.

<sup>80</sup>African tribal chieftans, inhabiting the non-contiguous borders of Abyssinia.

<sup>81</sup>Templewood, p. 179.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>83</sup>Aloisi, p. 126.

<sup>84</sup>Templewood, p. 180.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Toynbee, p. 296.

<sup>87</sup>Toynbee, pp. 295-96.

<sup>88</sup>Chapter II, p. 11.

<sup>89</sup>Templewood, p. 181.

<sup>90</sup>Toynbee, p. 298.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Templewood, p. 182.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Toynbee, p. 301.

## Chapter III

### THE HOARE-LAVAL PLAN

#### EXPOSURE AND DEATH

The shroud of secrecy that surrounded the Hoare-Laval negotiations in Paris of 7 and 8 December 1935, was an accurate gauge of the tensions that the search for a peaceful settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian War had created. The crisis that confronted the Anglo-French governments in the winter of 1935 involved a choice between principle and reality. In principle they were pledged, along with the other members of the League of Nations, to uphold the sovereign rights of Abyssinia. In reality though, what was more important for the maintenance of European security in 1935 was Italian friendship, and not Abyssinian independence.

In Britain, the Baldwin government, victorious in the General Elections of 14 November 1935, had promised unwavering support for the principles inherent in the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>1</sup> The National government was well aware that any deviation from those campaign pledges was certain political suicide. The French, critical of Laval's financial policies which had had little effect in relieving the economic crisis in that country were even more skeptical of his foreign policies, especially in regard to Abyssinia and the League.<sup>2</sup>

The state of British armaments left the English in no condition to risk a war with Italy,<sup>3</sup> and in France it was reported that some units of the French armed forces would refuse to fight against Italy.<sup>4</sup> Anglo-French policy was determined

to avoid war with Italy at all costs, and although it appeared that the concessions awarded to Mussolini in the Hoare-Laval Plan were a gift from the French and British governments, they were the only means left to restore the prestige of the League of Nations, and at the same time keep Italy in the Stresa front against Germany.

Sir Samuel Hoare left Paris on the evening of 8 December 1935. His destination was Switzerland, where he planned to recuperate from the seven tedious months he had spent in the Foreign Office since June of 1935.<sup>5</sup> Before his departure, however, he entrusted the final draft of the Hoare-Laval Plan to Maurice Peterson, and dispatched him immediately to London where he was to deliver it to Sir Anthony Eden.<sup>6</sup> It appears that had Sir Samuel considered the text of the proposals of such an explosive character, he would have returned to London himself and delivered the Plan to the Cabinet instead of taking a holiday. Nonetheless, as Hoare embarked on his journey to the Alps, plans for the defeat of the Plan were already in motion.

Geneviève Tabouis, a well known journalist for L'Oeuvre, a left wing Paris newspaper, and an outspoken opponent of the Laval regime, in abject disregard of the forty-eight hour period of secrecy imposed by Laval and the Quai d'Orsay, succeeded in acquiring enough information about the Hoare-Laval Plan to publish a virtually complete account of the Plan by the morning of 9 December 1935. There is no doubt as to her intentions. In her memoirs Mlle. Tabouis recorded that: "I might be able to ruin its chances. . . public opinion would rise against it

in France, England, and Italy, and also at the League."<sup>7</sup> It seems that she was well aware of the reaction Europeans would take toward an apparent surrender to the Italians.

Laval had taken almost every precaution to insure the secrecy of the Plan, and had even instructed the Director of Information at the Quai d'Orsay, Pierre Comert, to see that the Bourse<sup>8</sup> was watched for any possible breaks in the story.<sup>9</sup> At 2:00 A.M., on 9 December, the French Premier's telephone rang and he was informed that the Plan had been published, in detail, by Tabouis in L'Oeuvre and by Pertinax<sup>10</sup> in L'Echo de Paris.<sup>11</sup>

The events which followed the disclosure of the Plan and Laval's immediate reaction are significant in refuting the implications leveled by Professors Toynbee and Seton-Watson, namely, that Laval was responsible for the premature release of the Plan.<sup>12</sup> Tabouis, who would have rejoiced at any opportunity to blame Laval for the disclosure of the Hoare-Laval proposals, reported that Laval was "furious"<sup>13</sup> when he learned of their exposure. Immediately after learning where the leaks had occurred Laval phoned Jean Piot, editor of L'Oeuvre and said: "I forbid the printing of this article!"<sup>14</sup> Laval went on to say that he would have Tabouis "arrested"<sup>15</sup> for disregarding the explicit orders of the President of the Council to maintain the secrecy of the Plan.<sup>16</sup> Laval's violent reaction to the premature revelation of the Plan, and the precautions he took to intercept any leaks in the Paris Press seem to verify his efforts to insure the success of the temporary news ban.

In addition, Laval summoned Vansittart to the Quai d'Orsay in the early morning hours of 9 December 1935, where the British Under-Secretary was informed of the leaks and instructed to notify the London government.<sup>17</sup> The timing of Tabouis' account and Vansittart's meeting with Laval further discredit the charges leveled by Toynbee and Seton-Watson, that the French Premier had disclosed the secret proposals.

The premature revelation of the Hoare-Laval Plan seriously affected the attempts of the British and French governments to settle the Italo-Abyssinian crisis. As Maurice Peterson, the Abyssinian expert at the British Foreign Office arrived in London with the official draft of the Plan, copies of L'Oeuvre and L'Echo de Paris were reaching the newsstands of Paris. Within a few hours not only French, but world-wide public opinion would be passing judgement on the merits and faults of the recently concluded Paris proposals before the British government had reviewed the Plan.

Since the British Foreign Secretary was on holiday in Switzerland, he was unable to explain and defend the merits of the proposed Anglo-French settlement. Thus the Baldwin government was faced with two alternatives: either reject the Plan, which with each hour was being attacked by hostile elements in Britain, or accept the Plan out of loyalty to their Minister's decision.

Laval had already given his imprimatur to the proposals, and as he was both Foreign Minister and President of the Council, their acceptance by the French government was virtually assured.

Hoare's position as spokesman for the British Foreign Office led to the assumption that his approval of the Plan coincided with the wishes of the Baldwin government. However, the air of silence surrounding the National government after the premature release of the Hoare-Laval Plan cast a shadow of doubt over the course that British foreign policy was following. In addition, the suspicion that the League and Abyssinia had been deserted in favor of a deal with Mussolini continued in Great Britain.

It was entirely possible that Laval may have refused to support any extension of the sanctions against Italy had Hoare refused to agree to the proposed pact. This assumption might have weighed heavily on the choice that the Baldwin regime was faced with on 9 December 1935. As early as September, 1935, the British government clearly indicated that any League of Nations action against Italy would be determined by the collective actions of the League.<sup>18</sup> It was clear that Laval was not about to sacrifice the recently concluded Franco-Italian alliance of January, 1935, before a final effort to reach a settlement in the East African crisis had been attempted. Were the Baldwin government to reject the Hoare-Laval Plan, such action would unmask the true nature of their pledge of collective support for the League Covenant. Anglo-French co-operation or retreat and surrender to the Italian aggressor had become the central question.

The British Cabinet met to consider the Paris peace terms on the evening of 9 December, 1935.<sup>19</sup> The Baldwin

government had the utmost respect for Sir Samuel Hoare and in political circles he was considered a "shrewd and cautious"<sup>20</sup> public official. They agreed that whatever had prompted the Foreign Secretary to approve the Paris Plan must have been vital to the success of the negotiations, and although the Cabinet was somewhat divided they agreed to accept the proposal out of loyalty to their colleague.<sup>21</sup> It appears then that the British Cabinet in approving the Hoare-Laval Plan had placed a personal loyalty on a higher plane than their obligations to public responsibilities for which they had been elected. This mistake was to threaten the very existence of the National government.<sup>22</sup>

The tide of public opinion that mounted throughout Britain following the release of the Hoare-Laval Plan and its approval by the Baldwin government was, as Mowat noted, one of "stupefaction first: then. . .humiliation and shame."<sup>23</sup> To some it appeared that the promises disclosed in the recent election campaign were a mere political ploy intended to lure voters into supporting the National government. That the election strategy was successful, and at the apparent expense of the League and Abyssinia further incensed the British electorate. Yet, there was a small minority in Britain who favored the Hoare-Laval Plan and as the storm created by the Anglo-French Plan broke they made a futile attempt to encourage support for the proposals.

The Right and Center of the Tory Party welcomed the Paris Plan. They felt that the Hoare-Laval Plan was the only way to reach a settlement with Italy and end sanctions, though, of greater importance, was their desire to see the downfall of

the League of Nations.<sup>24</sup> The Right Wing Conservative Press, led by the Saturday Review of Lady Lucy Houston, strongly favored the dissolution of the League.<sup>25</sup> The Evening Standard of Lord Beaverbrook, and the Daily Mail of Lord Rothermere actively supported the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>26</sup> It was also alleged that some members of British royalty supported the Anglo-French terms. At the trial of Henri Pétain, in 1945, Laval claimed that the Prince of Wales had persuaded George V to support the Plan.<sup>27</sup> The former Prince, who became the Duke of Windsor in 1936, was quick to deny this charge; however, as Hoare noted in his memoirs, George V actively supported the Hoare-Laval Plan and personally insisted that his ministers hasten its conclusion.<sup>29</sup>

Those who supported the Paris proposals were in certain fear that a failure to come to terms over the Italo-Abyssinian conflict might encourage an Anglo-Italian War. Furthermore, their contempt for the League of Nations was continually being strengthened by the League's inability to settle the East African crisis. The advocates of the Hoare-Laval Plan were ready to sacrifice Abyssinia in order to maintain the Stresa front. Their real fear though was not Mussolini's armies, but the rapidly growing legions of the German Reich. Nonetheless, the violent reaction echoed by the majority of the British public made the pleas of those in favor of the proposed Plan little more than cries in the wilderness.

Labor men, Liberals and Left Wing Tories were dismayed by the apparent reversal of Britain's League policy.<sup>30</sup> The League of Nations Union -- whose Peace Ballot had indicated the desire

of the British public to resist aggression by military sanctions should economic sanctions prove ineffective -- were enraged. They passed a motion at their General Session urging that:

. . .in no circumstances would the government countenance any proposals more favourable to Italy than had been obtained by peaceful negotiations before the invasion of Abyssinia.

It is clear that the members of the League of Nations Union were not aware of the threats Mussolini had made pursuant to the projected application of the oil sanction, or the vulnerability of British armed forces, especially in Egypt and the Mediterranean to an Italian attack.

The Manchester Guardian, The Economist, and even The Times were strongly opposed to the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of The Times and normally devoted to the Baldwin government, labeled the proposed tract of territory in Eritrea to be ceded to Abyssinia in the proposed Plan a "Corridor for Camels."<sup>34</sup> The Times was to take a leading role in opposing the Hoare-Laval Plan; however, The Times desertion of the Baldwin government could have been caused by a reason apart from the apparent departure of the government's support of the League of Nations. It is possible that Mr. Dawson held a grudge against the Prime Minister for not having taken him into his confidence prior to the premature release of the Anglo-French Plan. The devotion of The Times to the success of the League, however, was unconfirmed by Mr. Dawson's reluctance to advocate any positive suggestions toward fulfilling British obligations to the League.<sup>35</sup>

The most damaging reaction to the Paris Plan was not found in the British Press, but rather in a popular outcry. Angry voters, who had recently elected the National government on a platform of firm support for the League Covenant, complained bitterly. They felt that their votes had been obtained under "false pretences."<sup>36</sup> The newly elected Conservative Members of Parliament, who had advocated the program of the Baldwin regime, were the first to receive complaints. The Times reported that in a single morning one Member from a University district had received nearly four-hundred letters, and that they unanimously indicated that the Anglo-French proposals: ". . .were a violation of the programme of support for the League of Nations on which the General Election was fought."<sup>37</sup> It should be kept in mind, however, that the overwhelming response exhibited by the University constituency reflects several inequities in judging the response: in the first place, the youth in a University Community would probably tend to support a League of Nations concept as opposed to the traditional Balance of Power concept shared by most elders; secondly, the University held a preponderant advantage in regard to literacy as opposed to a non-University constituency; finally, the University constituency was more conducive to political action and reaction in contrast to a non-University constituency. Nevertheless, four-hundred letters in one morning was a great expression of disgust.

The indignation expressed by public and political figures towards the Paris proposals prompted the Prime Minister to attempt an explanation of the Hoare-Laval Plan and the

conditions which necessitated its approval. The Labor Opposition Party opened the debate of 10 December 1935 in the House of Commons with a condemnation of the National government for abandoning the election platform advocated by the Baldwin regime in November.<sup>38</sup> The Prime Minister then delivered a defense of the government's recent Paris policy, indicating that his:

. . . lips are not yet unsealed. Were these troubles over I would make a case, and I guarantee that not a man would go into the lobby against us. . .<sup>39</sup>

Mr. Baldwin's cautious attempt, however, to silence the contempt aroused by the apparent reversal of British League policy fell on deaf ears. The Prime Minister's implication that he was hampered by a veritable threat to National Security in his desire to reveal the events that prompted the Cabinet to approve the Hoare-Laval Plan did little to placate the angry House of Commons.

Clement Attlee, leader of the Labor Opposition Party, was quick to question Baldwin as to the authority under which the Paris negotiations were conducted.<sup>40</sup> The Prime Minister replied:

. . . that the Committee of Co-ordination at Geneva has approved negotiations by the French and United Kingdom Governments in an attempt to find a basis for settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian dispute. . .<sup>41</sup>

Minutes later Sir Anthony Eden stated that:

. . . the Co-ordination Committee of the League, the Committee of 50 members who have been co-operating to carry out sanctions. . . specifically approved of attempts to find a basis of discussion between the two parties. . . [Italy and Abyssinia.]<sup>42</sup>

These statements were made in an attempt to dispel any rumors that the British and French governments had acted behind the back of the League of Nations. Their comments, however, were far from true.

On 2 November 1935, M. van Zeeland, the Belgian representative to the League of Nations introduced a motion before the League Committee of Co-ordination to the effect that the representatives of the British and French governments be entrusted with the mission of seeking a solution to the crisis in East Africa. The minutes of the Co-ordination Committee recorded that: "the Committee took note of the desire expressed by the Belgian delegate."<sup>43</sup> It appears that Baldwin and Eden interpreted these events as a mandate from the League of Nations authorizing the French and British governments to carry on the work of conciliation formerly delegated to the now defunct Committee of Five. It should have been perfectly clear to the two senior British Ministers, however, that the Committee of Co-ordination had only been empowered to devise and implement the sanctions against Italy. The Committee of Co-ordination did not legally represent the Assembly of the League, nor the League Council, which had assumed the duties of the Committee of Five.<sup>44</sup> Although the League of Nations was aware that negotiations concerning the Italo-Abyssinian dispute had been initiated by the British and French governments in Paris, it is now clear that they were unauthorized by the League.

The British Labor Party was unimpressed by the feeble attempts of Baldwin and Eden to console the angry British

electorate in their speeches of 10 December 1935. They considered the Paris Plan in direct conflict with the will of a vast majority of the country, "a gross violation of the League of Nations, and . . . a betrayal of the Abyssinian people."<sup>45</sup>

Baldwin had chosen to ride out the storm of protests caused by the Hoare-Laval Plan. Convinced that his Foreign Secretary could provide an adequate defense for the Anglo-French Plan, the Prime Minister assured the House of Commons that when Sir Samuel Hoare returned from Switzerland, the suspicions aroused by the Paris proposals would be resolved.<sup>46</sup> What was unfortunate for the Baldwin government, not to mention the Foreign Minister, was that the return of Sir Samuel Hoare was delayed for a full week. The Foreign Secretary suffered a compound fracture while ice-skating in Switzerland and did not return to London until 18 December.<sup>47</sup>

During the interval that lapsed between 10 and 18 December 1935, such adverse opposition to the Hoare-Laval Plan arose in Great Britain that Alfred Duff Cooper, the British Secretary of War, remarked: "During my experience of politics I have never witnessed so devastating a wave of public opinion."<sup>48</sup> It appeared that nothing short of a miracle could salvage the rapidly waning prestige of the National government which had entrusted its future survival to the integrity of one man -- Sir Samuel Hoare.

Following its approval by the British Cabinet, copies of the Hoare-Laval Plan were dispatched to Rome and Addis Ababa. In addition, the Italian and Abyssinian governments received

urgent requests from the British Foreign Secretary encouraging them to take immediate steps toward the approval of the suggested Anglo-French proposals stressing the importance of an early settlement to their dispute.<sup>49</sup> The date when the proposed oil sanction would be imposed at Geneva was fast approaching and the Baldwin government, unwilling to provoke Mussolini into committing an overt act against the League, felt that the proposals agreed upon in Paris would surely satisfy the Italian dictator. It appeared to many Britons that their Government had thrown Abyssinia to the Italian wolves. Yet, as evidenced by the report of Sir John Maffey, Permanent Undersecretary for the Colonies, completed in June of 1935,<sup>50</sup> the Baldwin government realized that the survival of Stresa far out-weighed the importance of the survival of Abyssinia.

The adverse reaction to the Hoare-Laval Plan was by no means confined to the British Isles. In France, the Laval government, having emerged victoriously from recent debates in the Chamber of Deputies concerning its financial program experienced its smallest majority of the session over the Anglo-French proposals.<sup>51</sup>

In his defense of the Plan, on 17 December 1935, Laval insisted that the Anglo-French terms were consistent with the Covenant of the League and the proposals submitted by the Committee of Five in September of 1935. The French Premier then made it clear that the Paris terms were only: 'a number of suggestions'<sup>52</sup> that would be presented to the League. He stressed the fact that the League of Nations would constitute the final

authority in regard to the proposed Italo-Abyssinian settlement.<sup>53</sup> The reception that M. Laval's statements received from the Chamber of Deputies, however, was far from re-assuring.

The Left attacked the Hoare-Laval Plan as a blatant renunciation of the principles enshrined in the Covenant of the League. Léon Blum of the Socialist Party, Pierre Cot of the Radical Socialists, and Gabriel Péri, the Communist Deputy and editor of L'Humanité agitated for the downfall of the Laval government. The Republican Centre Party of Paul Reynaud maintained an uneasy silence during the frenzied debates and it appeared that Laval's success was indeed threatened. However, the French Premier was able to command the undivided strength of the Right Wing, many of whom were avowed Fascists and sympathetic to the Italian cause; when the votes were counted the Government emerged with a majority of fifty-two.<sup>54</sup> It appears that although the Chamber of Deputies was somewhat hostile to the foreign policy of the Laval regime, they were content to display their contempt for the Hoare-Laval Plan by weakening the prestige of the Laval government.

Prior to the conclusion of the Hoare-Laval negotiations in Paris of December 1935, an Anglo-French Naval Agreement of Mutual Co-operation in the Mediterranean had been concluded.<sup>55</sup> Apparently two things loomed large in the minds of the French Deputies and sobered their reaction to the Anglo-French Plan. Should the Hoare-Laval Plan fail, the Italian threats leveled against the League in the event of an extension of sanctions to include oil might become a reality, and in the minds of the French

public this increased the likelihood of a Franco-Italian War. More important, however, was the fact that Laval had received the solid backing of the Right Wing during the debates, and although they did not constitute a majority in the Chamber, they were an extremely active and strong majority whose influence could not be disregarded. Had the France Parliament refused to endorse the Hoare-Laval Plan and had it become necessary to activate French pledges to the League of Nations, the Rightist minority might have effectively interfered with the mobilization of the French fleet should the Anglo-French Naval Agreement of December, 1935 come into effect.

Although it was probably unknown to most Frenchmen at the time, General Maurice Gamelin revealed in his memoirs that the French Intelligence Service received reports, in November of 1935, that German plans for the re-occupation of the Rhineland were in preparation.<sup>56</sup> Confronted with a possible threat from Germany, the preservation of Franco-Italian good-will became vital. The Abyssinian question was a dangerous threat to the Rome Accords of January 1935, and yet, an even greater threat to the Stresa front against Germany. The French were unwilling to sacrifice Stresa for Abyssinia.

The initial reaction of the Italian Press to the Hoare-Laval Plan was adversely affected by the growing discontent exhibited toward the Plan in England. The Facist Press felt that the British public had failed to recognize the European implications evident in the Italo-Abyssinian conflict -- foremost being the future of the Stresa front.<sup>57</sup> It seemed that the British were

blinded by the lofty ideals of the League of Nations, which up to this point had produced few favorable results.

The Italian government, however, received the proposed settlement warmly, and although Mussolini expressed his appreciation to the British and French governments for their efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement to the East African crisis, he deferred any official pronouncement on the Plan until the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, which would meet on 18 December 1935.<sup>58</sup> A strategic move par excellence, Mussolini was able to effect a further postponement of the dreaded oil sanction, which was re-scheduled at the request of Laval and Eden until the meeting of the League Council. By mere coincidence, it too had been scheduled for 18 December.<sup>59</sup> Although the Duce could not have foreseen the course which the League Committee of Co-ordination took on 12 December 1935, his timing was unquestionably perfect. Should the French, the British, or the Abyssinians reject the proposed settlement before the League Council met, he had reserved the right to declare Italy for or against the Plan until the last minute.

When rumors of the Hoare-Laval Plan reached Addis Ababa the Negus refused to believe that the British had deserted Abyssinia and the League. In a statement to a correspondent of the Manchester Guardian the Emperor re-affirmed his faith in the London government and commented: "It is not like them to do so."<sup>60</sup> This report further aggravated the injured pride of the British electorate and intensified the growing resentment toward the Baldwin government that the proposed Anglo-French Plan evoked.

On 11 December 1935, M. Wolde Mariam, the Abyssinian Minister in Paris, expressed views that were re-affirmed by Haile Selassie following his official receipt of the Hoare-Laval Plan. The Abyssinian Minister made it clear that:

If there is any question of handing over territory to Italy we shall fight till no Abyssinian is left alive rather <sup>61</sup> than yield of our own free will to the aggressor.

It appeared that even before the official copy of the Plan had been communicated to the Negus, it would receive an unfavorable reception. And, on 16 December 1935, Haile Selassie called the Anglo-French proposals 'a negation and abandonment of the principles on which the League was founded'.<sup>62</sup> The reaction of the Abyssinian government bewildered the angry British public. Although not every Briton could understand the detailed and complex character of the Anglo-French Plan; yet, a great many were aware that it was Italy that had been declared the aggressor, and that it was against Italy that sanctions were now being imposed. It appeared that Sir Samuel Hoare's speech of 11 September 1935, at Geneva, which had ushered Britain into the forefront of the League Powers, and the speeches and promises of the recent General Election had been disregarded in favor of a surrender to the Italian aggressor. In merely five weeks, the popularity of the National government had plummeted from the height of power and prestige into a whirlpool of distrust and malcontent. By 17 December 1935, the Hoare-Laval Plan had so disrupted the British people that threats of censure were common in both Houses of Parliament.

Sir Samuel Hoare returned to London amid this confusion, on 16 December 1935. And, although he was confined to his home by his physicians, he recorded in his memoirs that: "Baldwin . . . came to see me, and . . . gave me the impression that he also agreed with me. His last words were: 'We all stand together'".<sup>63</sup> It appears that the Prime Minister had not lost faith in his Foreign Secretary, who was scheduled to defend the Hoare-Laval Plan in the House of Commons, on 18 December 1935.<sup>64</sup>

The British Cabinet met sans Hoare, on 17 December 1935, and it was during their caucus that it became evident that the protests of the angry public had even affected some of the members of the Cabinet. The Manchester Guardian reported that: "A third of the Ministers in the Cabinet were threatening to resign if the Paris peace terms were not unequivocally repudiated. . .".<sup>65</sup> It was evident that those Cabinet Members who had previously expressed doubts over the Anglo-French Plan, but had nonetheless approved it, were now having second thoughts about their actions. On 17 December, the British Labor Party had moved to censure the Baldwin government, stating that:

. . . the terms put forward by the government as a basis for an Italo-Abyssinian settlement conflicted with the expressed will of the country and with the Covenant of the League of Nations, to the support of which the honor of Great Britain was pledged. . .<sup>66</sup>

The British Labor Party was following the true traditions of the Loyal Opposition, yet, regarding the Hoare-Laval Plan,

the Opposition Party had received the wide support of the British public, and also, the apparent support of a great many Nationalists.

Sir Samuel Hoare had guaranteed the Government that he could and would win the support of the House and the nation in his defense of the Paris proposals. Nonetheless, Stanley Baldwin, faced with the collapse of his government due to the controversial Plan, withdrew the support he had given to his trusted colleague and the Paris Plan. Almost as if he was embarrassed by his actions, he induced Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to convince Hoare that the proposals were inadequate, and that in the light of the general opposition to the terms the Foreign Secretary should withdraw his support of the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>67</sup>

The British Prime Minister had been forewarned that should Hoare present his defense of the Paris terms before the House of Commons, on 19 December 1935, "he might be faced with a perilous position."<sup>68</sup> The premonition of political disaster coupled with the adverse reaction of the British electorate to the Hoare-Laval proposals motivated the British Prime Minister to retreat from the policy of conciliation exhibited in the Anglo-French Plan and revoke the unquestioned support he had invested in his Foreign Secretary.

On 18 December 1935, faced with the repudiation of the Italo-Abyssinian Plan by his superior, Sir Samuel Hoare resigned his post as British Foreign Secretary.<sup>69</sup> From the moment of his arrival in London, Hoare was confronted with

the violent and adverse reaction to the Plan he had approved in Paris, not only by his colleagues in Parliament, but by the British public as well. "Convinced," he wrote:

. . .that a Foreign Secretary must broadly represent his countrymen's views, and that owing to a series of mishaps and misunderstandings I had lost the confidence that had previously been shown me from so many quarters, I at once resigned my office.<sup>70</sup>

The former Minister was given the opportunity, however, to justify the Anglo-French Plan before the House of Commons, on 19 December 1935. In his defense of the Hoare-Laval Plan, the ex-Minister indicated that at no time had the policy of the British government deviated from that of firm adherence to the principles of the League of Nations.<sup>71</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare was convinced that "nothing short"<sup>72</sup> of the proposed Anglo-French Plan could maintain Italian friendship and save Abyssinia from destruction by the advancing Italian armies. The former Cabinet Member further emphasized:

Now that we are entering upon this new chapter of the war, it is essential, if collective defence is to be real and effective, that we go beyond the period of general protestations and that we should have actual proof by action from the member states that are concerned. . . .We alone have taken these military precautions. There is the British Fleet in the Mediterranean, there are British reinforcements in Egypt, in Malta and Aden. Not a ship, not a machine, not a man has been moved by any other member state. Now that the negotiations have failed, we must have something more than these general protestations of loyalty to the League. . .<sup>73</sup>

It was evident that should the proposed oil sanction be imposed, and Mussolini's threats of aggression against the League of Nations materialize -- British, and only British --

forces would bear the brunt of an Italian attack. The former Minister stated that his policy had at all times been motivated by the desire for a peaceful solution to the East African crisis and concluded his speech before the House of Commons by stating that his conscience was clear, and reaffirming his belief that the Hoare-Laval Plan was 'the only course that was possible in the circumstances'.

Sir Samuel Hoare's defense of the Hoare-Laval Plan had revealed the true status of the League's system of collective defense, and a great many Members of Parliament were now awakened to the critical position in which the Italo-Abyssinian dispute had placed the British government. Yet, many were also confirmed in their belief that the Foreign Secretary had been used as a "scapegoat"<sup>75</sup> by the Baldwin regime, and refused to believe that he had acted alone.

Archibald Sinclair, leader of the National Liberal Party, was convinced that the Foreign Minister had negotiated the Hoare-Laval Plan with the full knowledge and consent of the Government, and queried:

Why is Sir Samuel Hoare thrown to the wolves when the man ultimately responsible still sits on the treasury bench? The Prime Minister cannot divest himself of the supreme responsibility by sacrificing a colleague.<sup>76</sup>

Clement Attlee, of the Labor Opposition Party, felt that the credibility of the Government had been irreparably damaged by its attempt to award the Italian aggressor and abandon their avowed dedication to the principles of the League Covenant -- a major factor in the National government's

recent victory at the polls.<sup>77</sup> The Laborites, although sympathetic to the plight of Sir Samuel Hoare, still advocated the fall of the Baldwin regime.

The survival of the National government was in certain danger when the Prime Minister rose to defend the actions of his government, on 19 December 1935. Prior to the debate, Baldwin had heard rumors of an alternative government under the leadership of Sir Austen Chamberlain, and as he was not aware of the position that Sir Austen would take in the debate, he was faced with the danger of a revolt from within his own party.<sup>78</sup> Visibly shaken by the events of the past week, the Prime Minister mounted the Speaker's platform and delivered a weak, but convincing explanation of the dilemma into which the crisis in East Africa had thrust the British government.

The British Prime Minister replied that the Government was confronted with the possibility of an Anglo-Italian conflict in East Africa or the Mediterranean, and that due to the speed of modern warfare he had, somewhat hastily, approved the proposed Anglo-French Plan. Yet, when he recognized the affront to the "honor and conscience"<sup>79</sup> of his countrymen which his assent to the Hoare-Laval Plan had evoked, he could only repeat that his judgement had been at fault. The Prime Minister further stated that:

Never throughout that week had I or any of my colleagues any idea in our own minds that we were not being true to every pledge that we had given in the election. . . I am anxious as any one on any bench in this House not only to preserve the League of Nations but to make it effective. . . It is perfectly obvious now that the proposals are absolutely and completely dead. . .<sup>80</sup>

The consummate political skill in which Mr. Baldwin was able to reverse the tide of opposition that had nearly submerged the National government -- as a result of the Hoare-Laval Plan, was reflected in Parliament's reaction to what only minutes before had appeared to be his coup de grace.

As early as 11 December 1935, Mr. Vyvyan Adams, a Conservative Member of Parliament, had introduced a motion to censure the National government's policy as reflected in the Anglo-French Plan. The Labor Opposition Party then introduced a similar motion to censure, but this was countered by a Conservative amendment which offered an alternative to Mr. Adams' resolution. The amended Labor motion, although less severe than the Adams resolution, represented the least amount of approval that a government must obtain from its supporters in order to remain in office.<sup>81</sup>

During the closing stages of the debate, on 19 December 1935, Clement Attlee, leader of the Labor Opposition, introduced a proposal against the Government in an attempt to cast doubt on the honor of the Prime Minister.<sup>82</sup> It was apparent that the Opposition Party was endeavoring to make Party capital out of the perilous position of the National government that had been provoked by the Hoare-Laval Plan.

The Anglo-French peace terms had undoubtedly caused a "profound revolt"<sup>83</sup> in the House of Commons. And, although Sir Austen Chamberlain, who represented the back-bench Conservatives in the House, had expressed full accord with the charges leveled by the Opposition, he was somewhat disturbed by Mr. Attlee's

recent affront to the Prime Minister. When the vote was called the Chamberlain faction, which could have sounded the death-knell of the Baldwin regime, voted for the Government.<sup>84</sup>

It appears that Sir Austen Chamberlain supported the Baldwin government out of respect for the personal honor of the Prime Minister.<sup>85</sup> However, Chamberlain was well aware of the vacancy in the Foreign Office and if the Opposition had carried the debate, it was evident that his chances of securing that position would be nil.<sup>86</sup>

The Baldwin government survived the attack in the House of Commons on 19 December, with a margin of 232 votes.<sup>87</sup> Although a comfortable majority, the support given to the National government was not a true measurement of the contempt which the Hoare-Laval Plan had evoked. The debate had revealed that the foreign policy of the Opposition was more dangerous than that of the Baldwin government, and that some Laborites had even favored the destruction of the League.<sup>88</sup> The victory of the National government was a victory in numbers only.

On 22 December 1935, the British Prime Minister appointed Anthony Eden to fill the post recently vacated by Sir Samuel Hoare.<sup>89</sup> Anthony Eden was respected throughout Britain as an ardent champion of the League of Nations. This strategic move was the first step taken by Baldwin in an effort to recover his lost prestige and emerge from the depths of mistrust that the Hoare-Laval Plan had produced.

In Mr. Baldwin's words, the Hoare-Laval Plan was "absolutely and completely dead."<sup>90</sup> The Anglo-French Plan

for the settlement of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis was the last attempt by Britain, France or the League of Nations to achieve a negotiated settlement to the East African dispute.

The strategy employed by Mlle. Tabouis and Pertinax in their efforts to insure the defeat of the Hoare-Laval Plan had worked to perfection. Although the two French journalists had directed their attack primarily at the Laval government in their desire to insure its defeat; simultaneously, they had exposed the Baldwin government to the gravest threat to the existence of any British government during the inter-war period.

The adverse reaction expressed toward the Anglo-French Plan in Britain during December of 1935, the National government's repudiation of its Foreign Minister and the proposals it had approved on 9 December, was unprecedented in British history. Yet, of greater importance was the raison d'etre for this unparalleled act which revealed either an apparent lack of communication between the highest officials of the Government, or a negation of the principles which the Government had repeatedly pledged to support.

It appears, however, that the lack of communication in Britain and the apparent desertion of League principles which the Hoare-Laval Plan exposed in December of 1935, was the result of a failure on the part of the National government to fully inform the British public to the realities of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis. Had it not been for the premature disclosure of the Anglo-French Plan, the initial approval given

to it would have withstood the attacks leveled against it in Parliament. Yet, the untempered reaction of the British electorate to this apparent surrender to the aggressor forced the Baldwin government to repudiate the Minister whose name was so closely attached to the unpopular Plan and reverse the policy it had deemed as the only possible course of action.

The reaction of the British electorate, however, was not against the Hoare-Laval Plan itself, but against the denial of the principles which it represented. Had they been aware of the state of British armaments, the vulnerability of British forces in Africa and the Mediterranean, and the gravity of the Italian threats against the League of Nations; their contempt for the Anglo-French proposals would have been somewhat, if not altogether different.

Nonetheless, the repudiation of the Plan by the overwhelming majority of the British public, more than any other factor, was responsible for the defeat of the Hoare-Laval Plan, which subsequent events would prove as, in Mussolini's words: "the last resort of indecision in the face of reality."<sup>91</sup>

## Chapter III

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Chapter I, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Manchester Guardian Weekly, 6 December 1935.

<sup>3</sup>Chapter II, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Geneviève R. Tabouis, They Called Me Cassandra (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 263.

<sup>5</sup>Viscount Templewood, (The Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), p. 190.

<sup>6</sup>Maurice D. Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Constable, 1950), p. 121.

<sup>7</sup>Tabouis, p. 268.

<sup>8</sup>the collective output of the French Press.

<sup>9</sup>Tabouis, p. 269.

<sup>10</sup>Andre Giraud: a Moderate Right Wing journalist for L'Echo de Paris.

<sup>11</sup>Tabouis, p. 269.

<sup>12</sup>Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935: Italy and Abyssinia (London: Humphrey Milford, 1936), II, 301; R. W. Seton-Watson, Britain and the Dictators (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 359.

<sup>13</sup>Tabouis, p. 269.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1965), p. 80.

<sup>18</sup>Chapter I, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935.

<sup>20</sup>Anthony Eden, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden Earl of Avon : Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 339.

<sup>21</sup>Charles L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 560.

<sup>22</sup>It is ironic that the above mentioned confusion of loyalties -- public vs. private -- evident in the British Cabinet in December 1935, corresponds closely to the confusion of loyalties apparent in the United States in 1973, evident in the Watergate conspiracy and its associated complications.

<sup>23</sup>Mowat, p. 559.

<sup>24</sup>Manchester Guardian Weekly, 13 December 1935.

<sup>25</sup>Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 69.

<sup>26</sup>Toynbee, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup>Marguerite Potter, "What Sealed Baldwin's Lips?" The Historian, 27 (1964), p. 26.

<sup>28</sup>Duke of Windsor, A King's Story : The Memoirs of the Duke of Windsor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), p. 384.

<sup>29</sup>Chapter I, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup>Manchester Guardian Weekly, 13 December 1935.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 473.

<sup>32</sup>Chapter I, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup>Manchester Guardian Weekly, 19 December 1935; The Times Weekly Supplement, 26 December 1935; The Economist, 21 December 1935.

<sup>34</sup>The Times Weekly Supplement, 26 December 1935.

<sup>35</sup>B. H. Liddel Hart, The Liddel Hart Memoirs 1895-1938 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), I, 289.

<sup>36</sup>Toynbee, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup>The Times Weekly Supplement, 19 December 1935; See also: The Times and the Manchester Guardian, December, 1935 - January, 1936.

<sup>38</sup>Thompson, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup>Documents on International Foreign Policy 1935, ed. E. L. Woodward (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1955), II, 350.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Windrich, British Labour's Foreign Policy (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1952), p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> Documents on International Foreign Policy, II, p. 356.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>43</sup> Toynbee, p. 286.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>45</sup> Windrich, p. 134.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> Eden, pp. 346-47.

<sup>48</sup> Duff Cooper (Viscount Norwich), Old Men Forget (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> Documents on International Foreign Policy, II, pp. 357-60.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter I, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 6 December 1935; Ibid., 20 December 1935.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Werth, The Destiny of France (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1937), p. 202.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935; Tabouis, p. 270.

<sup>55</sup> The Times Weekly Supplement, 2 January 1936.

<sup>56</sup> General Maurice Gamelin, Servir : Le Prologue du Drame, 1930-Aôut 1939 (Paris: Plon, 1947), p. 175.

<sup>57</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 27 December 1935.

<sup>58</sup> Toynbee, p. 362.

<sup>59</sup> F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), II, 671.

<sup>60</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 13 December 1935.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 20 December 1935.

<sup>63</sup> Templewood, p. 185.

<sup>64</sup> Baldwin's biographer, G. M. Young, made no mention of this meeting.

<sup>65</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid; Windrich, pp. 134-35.

<sup>67</sup> Templewood, p. 185.

<sup>68</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935.

<sup>69</sup> G. M. Young, Stanley Baldwin (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p. 217.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 217-18.

<sup>71</sup> The secret Hoare-Laval Agreements of 10 September 1935, were still unknown to Parliament. Chapter II, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup> Templewood, p. 185.

<sup>73</sup> Toynbee, p. 318.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>75</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935.

<sup>76</sup> The Times Weekly Supplement, 26 December 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 20 December 1935.

<sup>78</sup> Mowat, p. 560

<sup>79</sup> Toynbee, p. 319.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 314-15.

<sup>82</sup> Mowat, p. 561.

<sup>83</sup> The Times Weekly Supplement, 26 December 1935.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Thompson, p. 94.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>87</sup> Manchester Guardian Weekly, 27 December 1935.

<sup>88</sup> The Times Weekly Supplement, 26 December 1935.

<sup>89</sup> Toynbee, p. 533.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>91</sup> Keith G. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1946), p. 256.

## Chapter IV

### ITALO-GERMAN RELATIONS IN 1935 AND THE BIRTH OF THE ROME-BERLIN AXIS

In Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler expressed a desire to conclude an Italo-German Alliance;<sup>1</sup> however, the Nazi inspired coup in Austria of July, 1934, and the mobilization of Italian forces on the Brenner Pass in response to the German threat to Austrian independence, cast serious doubts as to the likelihood of an alliance between the two fascist states. Faced with a well equipped Italian Army, and due to the limited extent of German rearmament in the summer of 1934, Hitler was forced to temporarily abandon his plans to bring Austria within the borders of the Third Reich. The German Chancellor lost face and Mussolini lost his temper, referring to Hitler as a "horrible sexual degenerate and a dangerous fool."<sup>2</sup> Friendly relations between the two fascist dictators seemed to vanish in 1934.

Pierre Laval, the French Foreign Minister, viewed this breach in Italo-German relations as a perfect opportunity to renew Franco-Italian solidarity. On 7 January 1935, the French and Italian governments concluded the Rome Accords, in which the two Latin nations agreed to uphold the independence of the Austrian state.<sup>3</sup> Italy appeared to be moving closer to the democracies of Western Europe, and within one month of the official repudiation of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles by the German Reich, that re-alignment was complete.<sup>4</sup>

The creation of the Stresa front in April of 1935, resulted in an additional guarantee of Austrian sovereignty and marked the height of Anglo-French Italian solidarity against Germany during the inter-war years.<sup>5</sup> Non-Aggression pacts between France, Russia, and Czechoslovakia followed the Stresa Agreements, and by June of 1935, the German Reich was virtually surrounded by a cordon of nations, aware of her growing strength and pledged to resist any aggressive German moves that threatened European peace.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the threat to European peace in 1935 was to stem not from Pan-German ambitions in Austria, but from Italian imperialist designs in East Africa.

Mussolini's plans for the Italian colonization of Abyssinia had received the tacit approval of France during the negotiation of the Franco-Italian Agreements of 7 January, 1935.<sup>7</sup> Although Italy's attempts to receive similar assurances from Britain in late January of 1935 were officially ignored, the information supplied by the Italian Intelligence Corps -- taken from the British Embassy in Rome -- indicated an apparent lack of British concern in respect to Italian claims in Abyssinia.<sup>8</sup> Mussolini's East African ambitions were also unaffected by the growing threat of the German Wehrmacht in Europe. The Italian dictator was confident that the newly established Stresa front would deter any additional German attempts to threaten Austrian independence. In addition, Mussolini's confidence was further strengthened by reports from the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Commendatore Cerruti, and the Italian Undersecretary for Foreign

Affairs, Fulvio Suvich. Their reports in June, 1935, indicated that Germany was no longer a power of great importance, and that German policy had changed significantly as a result of the display of Italian military strength at the Brenner Pass in July of 1934.<sup>9</sup> German policy had changed, but the motives and direction indicated by the Italian diplomats were far from correct.

Surrounded by potential enemies and virtually a political outcast in Europe, Hitler attempted to relieve the tense status of Italo-German relations that had been frozen since their clash at the Brenner Pass in 1934. In a speech from Berlin on 21 May 1935, the Führer declared that: "Germany neither intended nor wished to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria nor effect an Anschluss."<sup>10</sup> The German Chancellor was convinced that given adequate preparation, and not unmindful of their common ideologies, relations between the two fascist states could be improved. The new German strategy was based on the ability to weaken the Stresa front. Stresa represented a purely defensive allignment, and the Führer knew that if even the slightest disunity should creep into the Anglo-French Italian Pact it could be exploited to "endanger"<sup>11</sup> the Stresa front. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the growing dispute between Italy and Abyssinia would provide Hitler with that weakness. The German dictator's desire to re-establish good relations between Germany and Italy in 1935, however, met with strong opposition in the Third Reich.

humiliation of Italy. Should Italian Fascism fail, Germany's isolation on the Continent would be complete, not only politically, but morally as well. In a conversation with the Polish Ambassador, Józef Lipski, in August, 1935, Hitler made it clear that he would regard the defeat of Mussolini as "a disaster."<sup>19</sup>

By September of 1935, it was evident that Mussolini's Abyssinian enterprise would bring him into direct conflict with the League of Nations. All attempts to achieve a negotiated settlement to the East African crisis had failed, and it was apparent that the Duce was not adverse to war. The British and French governments feared that League action against Italy might drive Mussolini into the German camp, and this implied the risk that Italy might abandon Austria. Yet, although both Britain and France realized the impending danger to Austrian independence, they were unwilling to take any actions to safeguard Austrian sovereignty without a mutual guarantee of support. Both governments were reluctant to take the lead in offering that guarantee.<sup>20</sup>

On 9 September, 1935, the new Italian Ambassador to Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, was received by Hitler. The meeting between Attolico and the Führer resulted in no more than a recognition of a community interest between the two fascist states.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, this thaw in Italo-German relations seems to have confirmed Anglo-French suspicions that an Italo-German Alliance was imminent. On 10 September, the British and French Foreign Ministers concluded secret agreements in Geneva, which would cripple any attempts by the League of

Nations to restrict Italian movements in Abyssinia should the East African crisis intensify.<sup>22</sup> Due to their reluctance to risk a conflict with Italy, the two Foreign Ministers had sacrificed the only leverage that could make the Covenant of the League of Nations work: that of effective sanctions.

The failure of the League of Nations to solve the East African crisis had aroused serious doubts as to the League's ability to enforce collective security. Then, on 11 September 1935, Hoare and Laval delivered speeches before the League Assembly in Geneva in which they pledged that the British and French governments would extend unequivocal support in the form of collective defense -- principles which were embodied in the League Covenant. The members of the League rallied around this new lead taken by Britain and France, and it appeared that any additional Italian threats in Abyssinia would be backed by strong measures from the League of Nations.<sup>23</sup>

When the proceedings of the League's Assembly on 11 September 1935, were reported in Germany, it appeared that the new stand taken by the British and French governments would result in a certain clash between Italy and the League Powers. The fear of an Italian defeat was a constant worry to the German Chancellor, and in a conversation with Mussolini on 2 October 1935, the day before the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Ulrich von Hassell, the German Ambassador in Rome, relayed Hitler's misgivings. As Robertson noted:

The Führer was vehemently anxious that Fascism should survive, but he stressed the fact that 'the time for the struggle between the dynamic and the static nations was by a long way premature.'<sup>24</sup>

It appears that as early as October, 1935, Hitler had envisioned Germany and Italy locked together in a European conflict. However, the cautious advice disclosed in von Hassell's statement revealed Hitler's lack of confidence in Mussolini's ability to triumph over the Abyssinians and the League of Nations. The Führer's skepticism about the chances of an Italian success were further reinforced by reports from the German Military Intelligence Corps, which had estimated that the Italo-Abyssinian conflict would last at least three years.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the advantages to be gained from the Abyssinian crisis were clear to Hitler, and the policy of the Third Reich during the Italo-Abyssinian War was one of benevolent but cautious neutrality.<sup>26</sup> Abyssinia represented the diversion from Austria that had constituted the biggest obstacle to an Italo-German Alliance. As the Führer saw it, either Mussolini's Abyssinian campaign would, as German Intelligence had predicted, be prolonged and weaken Italy's position in Europe, in which case Hitler could occupy Austria; or the Duce would succeed in Abyssinia, defying Britain, France and the League, and at the same time destroying the Stresa front. In either case Germany would win.

The only avenue of escape left to the Western Powers in order to prevent a drastic change in Mussolini's Austrian policy was a compromise with Italy over Abyssinia. As early as July of 1935, Hitler was aware of this hazard. Franz von Papen, the German Ambassador in Vienna, had written: 'It remains more probable that a compromise will be made at the Negus's

expense -- at the cost perhaps also of a notable blood letting of Italy'.<sup>27</sup> The possibility of a settlement of this sort was a constant torment to Hitler and his Ministers during the winter of 1935;<sup>28</sup> and when the Hoare-Laval Plan was revealed in the French Press on 9 December, 1935, it appeared that the one misfortune that could have resulted had occurred.<sup>29</sup>

Hitler's reaction to the Hoare-Laval Plan was noted by Józef Lipski in a conversation on 18 December 1935. In Lipski's words:

I gained the impression that Hitler was alarmed over the fact that, in the event of a liquidation of the Abyssinian conflict by compromise between Great Britain and France on the one hand and Italy on the other, a united front of the Powers, strengthened by the recent Pact between Paris and Moscow, would reappear.<sup>30</sup>

Thus it appeared to Hitler that Germany was again isolated. The Führer's hopes for a common Nazi-Fascist front, and a possible Italo-German settlement over Austria, were ended. Yet, on the very same day, 18 December, the resignation of Sir Samuel Hoare in response to the adverse reaction of the British public to the Anglo-French proposals was announced in Berlin; and when this was followed by the repudiation of the Hoare-Laval Plan by the British government on 19 December, Hitler must have breathed a great sigh of relief.<sup>31</sup>

Deserted by Britain and France, and regarded as a criminal at the League of Nations, Mussolini could turn but in one direction: toward Germany. On 7 January 1936, Mussolini received the German Ambassador, Ulrich von Hassell. The discussions which followed were to have a momentous influence

on the future of Austria, but of much greater importance, these discussions signified the birth of the Rome-Berlin Axis. In the course of their conversations Mussolini made it clear that the Stresa front and the Hoare-Laval Plan were 'dead'.<sup>32</sup> Italy now desired an Italo-German rapprochement, and as evidence of the Duce's willingness to improve relations between the two fascist states, Mussolini informed the German Ambassador that Austria should have a foreign policy parallel to that of the German Reich. Mussolini went on to say that: "Italy would have no objection if Austria were to become a 'German satellite'."<sup>33</sup>

Hitler's ambition to secure an Italo-German Alliance was now within reach, and it was evident that Mussolini was willing to offer Austria's independence in return for German friendship. The first stage in the union of -- in Hitler's words, the 'dynamic nations',<sup>34</sup> -- was now underway. Although it would be late 1936, before the Italo-German Alliance would become official, Ambassador von Hassell, writing in December, 1936, summarized the long-term development of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and recalled that: "Mussolini had first warmed up to Germany in January, 1936."<sup>35</sup> Significantly, this was shortly after the Hoare-Laval Plan had become a matter of public record.

## Chapter IV

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 625.

<sup>2</sup> Hubert Cole, Laval: A Biography (New York: G. P. Putnam's Son's, 1963), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter I, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hajo Holborn, A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945 (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 767.

<sup>7</sup> Chapter I, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> E. M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans 1933-1939 (New York: Citadel, 1967), p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Gehl, Austria, Germany, and the Anschluss 1931-1938 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 118.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Wiskeman, The Rome-Berlin Axis : A History of the Relations Between Hitler and Mussolini (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p. 47; Jozef Lipski, Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939, ed. Wacław Jędrzejewicz (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Wiskeman, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter I, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Wiskeman, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> Gehl, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Campbell-Johnson, Sir Anthony Eden (London: Robert Hale, 1955), p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Chapter II, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Chapter I, pp. 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Robertson, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Hitler was convinced that the Abyssinian crisis would lead to the fall of the Stresa and the League, and he hoped this would lead to better relations between the two fascist states.

<sup>27</sup>Wiskeman, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Chapter III, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup>Viscount Templewood (The Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), p. 190.

<sup>31</sup>Chapter III, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup>Robertson, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid; Robert Whealey, "Mussolini's Ideological Diplomacy : An Unpublished Document" Jour. of Modern History, 39 (1967) 434.

<sup>34</sup>Robertson, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup>Whealey, p. 437.

## Chapter V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The threat to European peace represented by German rearmament in 1935 was well recognized by the former allies of World War I. At Stresa, in April, 1935, the governments of Britain, France, and Italy -- determined to protect the status quo of Europe -- pledged their unequivocal intent to resist any additional threats to European security from the nascent German state. The most significant aspect of Stresa, however, was the alignment of Italian Fascism with the democracies of Western Europe. Italo-German relations had reached an impasse following Mussolini's confrontation with the Nazi state in July, 1934, and the Stresa front revealed the true extent of the breach between the two fascist states. The ability of the British and French governments to insure the survival of the Stresa front was to dominate Anglo-French Foreign Policy throughout 1935. Should Stresa collapse, the British and French were certain that an Italo-German rapprochement would soon follow.

The growing dispute between Italy and Abyssinia at the League of Nations was apparent to the members of the Stresa Conference. Yet, when the final draft communiqué of their discussions was concluded, it revealed their intent to limit their guarantee of peace to Europe alone.

The Italo-Abyssinian crisis posed as a perplexing problem for the major powers of Europe in 1935. In the Treaty

of 1906 between Britain, France and Italy, the British and French governments had designated Abyssinia an Italian sphere of influence. Yet, repeated attempts on the part of Italy to settle the outstanding differences between the two countries had resulted in failure. The pressures of an expanding population and the need for new areas for economic expansion encouraged Italy to persist in East Africa. Then, in December, 1934, a border incident between Italians and Abyssinians initiated the struggle that led to open warfare in October, 1935, and resulted in the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in 1936. This conflict incited un-heralded anti-Italian sentiments throughout Europe and posed a severe threat to European peace in 1935.

The Italo-Abyssinian question had been under investigation at the League of Nations as early as January, 1935, and by May, the negotiations at the League had reached a deadlock. Italian armies and supplies continued to reinforce the borders of the Italian colonies in East Africa throughout the summer of 1935. By September, all League attempts to achieve a settlement to the Italo-Abyssinian crisis had failed, and as the Abyssinian Emperor remarked, under no circumstances would Abyssinian territory be surrendered to Italy; it appeared that war in Africa was imminent.

The adversity exhibited in the positions taken by Britain and France toward Italy's East African policy at the League of Nations in May were in direct contradiction to their former gestures of indifference; and the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935 had undermined Italian confidence in the future

of the Stresa front. Fearing further double-dealing on the part of the British and French, Mussolini sought to improve Italian relations with the German Reich.

Confronted with a possible Italo-German Alliance, the British and French governments were faced with two alternatives. They could either oppose Italian ambitions in Abyssinia, which might result in a clash between Italy and the League Powers and would surely destroy the Stresa front; or they might modify their pledged support for the League of Nations, and, at the same time, initiate negotiations under the auspices of the League that would offer a settlement to the East African dispute, and thus preserve the Stresa front as well.

On 10 September 1935, the British and French Foreign Ministers concluded secret agreements in Geneva that would inhibit the League's actions against Italy, and in turn effectively conceal their actions from the League. By October, 1935, the Italo-Abyssinian conflict had become a full scale war, and when sanctions were declared against Italy, the race between effective sanctions and a negotiated settlement to end the Italo-Abyssinian conflict was on.

Attempts by the British and French governments to find a basis for settlement to the East African crisis had made little progress throughout October and November, 1935. By December, it was clear in the Foreign Offices of London and Paris that with or without sanctions Mussolini was not about to surrender to the League. Then, on 7 and 8 December, the British and French Foreign Ministers, meeting in Paris,

concluded a plan that they felt would solve the Abyssinian conflict; this was the Hoare-Laval Plan.

The British Cabinet approved the proposed Hoare-Laval Plan on 9 December 1935, and on 10 December, the Hoare-Laval Plan was communicated to the governments in Rome and Addis Ababa. After a heated debate in the Chamber of Deputies in which Premier Laval's majority was somewhat reduced, the Hoare-Laval Plan was approved by the French government. The initial reaction of the Abyssinian government to the Hoare-Laval Plan was unfavorable. Nonetheless, the Negus did not reject it, and requested that it be submitted to the League Assembly for debate.<sup>1</sup> In Italy the Hoare-Laval Plan received a warm reception, and although Mussolini did not immediately accept the Plan, he deferred any further comment on the proposals until meeting with his Council of Ministers.

The meetings of the League and the Fascist Grand Council were both scheduled for 19 December 1935. Yet, in the week that elapsed between the approval of the Hoare-Laval proposals by the British Cabinet and the expected date of the replies by the Abyssinian and Italian governments to the Hoare-Laval Plan, the British Foreign Minister was forced to resign and the British government repudiated the Plan. In short, the Hoare-Laval Plan died.

Throughout 1935, the British public had been conditioned to expect strong support for the principles of the League of Nations. The Peace Ballot, Sir Samuel Hoare's speech of 11 September at Geneva, sanctions, and the election platform of

the National government in November had reinforced their devotion to the League. The Hoare-Laval Plan represented a blatant repudiation of those convictions and implied a surrender to Italian aggression and a retreat from collective security. Between 9 and 17 December, 1935, public opinion in Britain -- outraged by the apparent duplicity of the National government as exhibited in the Hoare-Laval Plan -- severely threatened the existence of the Baldwin regime. The adverse reaction of the British electorate to the Hoare-Laval Plan compelled the British Prime Minister to disown his colleague Sir Samuel Hoare in the Foreign Office and to repudiate the Plan.

Not many of the angry Britons could have understood the true significance of the Anglo-French proposals; their reaction was based upon principle while the Hoare-Laval Plan was based upon reality. Faced with the decision to abandon the Stresa front and risk an Italo-German Alliance, or submit to limited Italian claims in Abyssinia, the British and French governments found Italy more vital to European security and agreed to re-insure the Stresa front. Mussolini's decision to remain in the League and his acceptance of the Hoare-Laval Plan,<sup>2</sup> confirmed his desire to remain in the Stresa front. Yet, when the Hoare-Laval Plan died, so did Stresa, Abyssinia and the League.

Italy's brief alignment with Britain and France against Nazi Germany came to an end, and on 7 January 1936, an Italo-German rapprochement was forged. Thus, the freeze that had surrounded the relationship between the two dictators since their confrontation at the Brenner Pass began to thaw.

## Chapter V

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), II, 671.

<sup>2</sup> L. S. Amery, My Political Life : The Unforgiving Years 1929-1940 (London: Hutchinson, 1955), III, 184; Mussolini cabled Count Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London, and told him to inform the British government that Italy had accepted the Hoare-Laval Plan as a basis for negotiation. However, Grandi withheld this information until after rumors that Hoare was going to resign were confirmed.

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