

## Liberal internationalism

David Davies, First Baron Davies, briefly served as a Liberal MP but was far more important in putting forward an internationalist alternative to appeasement in the 1930s. By Ewan Lawry.

# Solving the 'Problem' of the Twentieth Century

## Lord Davies of Llandinam's internationalist alternative to appeasement

**D**AVID DAVIES, a biographer wrote, was 'the public-spirited Welshman of his age'.<sup>1</sup> Having inherited a business empire, which he duly expanded, along with £2 million and 100,000 acres of land, Davies and his sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret, cast their philanthropic net wide. Their charitable endeavours included endowing tuberculosis sanatoriums, funding medical research, and building housing for their workers.<sup>2</sup> Like his grandfather and namesake, this 'wealthy, intelligent and attractive young Welsh squire' built a modest political career by being elected, unopposed, as a Liberal in his native Montgomeryshire at the 1906 general election.<sup>3</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan summarised his platform, borrowing elements from both the Liberal and Conservative manifestos, as 'far from radical' by opposing Irish home

rule, but supporting tariffs and welfare reform.<sup>4</sup> Going further, J. Graham Jones described Davies the parliamentarian as 'like some eighteenth-century landowner', rarely participating in Commons debates, partly due to a discomfort at public speaking, and largely neglecting his local party association.<sup>5</sup> From this, one could easily conclude that politics was, at best, a poor third behind an admirable devotion to charity and business or, at worst, a rich man's pastime. But it was a political issue, crossing party lines and rooted in the philanthropic impulse, that dominated the last fifteen years of Davies' life and set him apart from many others in the febrile foreign policy debates of the 1930s.

Determined to build a new order from the embers of the First World War, he devoted himself to a crusade of far greater proportions than any that had animated him before. By devising a plan to radically overhaul international relations, organising the New Commonwealth

David Davies in 1942  
(© National Portrait Gallery, London)

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Society to campaign for it, and pressing his ideas to the forefront of debate, Davies opened another front against the appeasement of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Japanese Empire in the 1930s. It is possible to draw out the importance of this little-known figure to the anti-appeasement cause by close analysis of his books, articles, papers, and the scant secondary literature on this largely obscure topic. Despite being one of several anti-appeasers, it was in applying his views of international relations and bringing together leading figures of the day that Davies helped to challenge appeasement. By drawing out his ideas and activities in this period, it is possible to understand the road to the Second World War in its proper political context and give due credit to those who believed that they could preserve peace.

### Finding a cause

The First World War saw Davies, as a lieutenant-colonel in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, applying his 'fertile imagination' to a rigorous training scheme for his troops and providing, out of his own funds, supplies including field telephones and bicycles.<sup>6</sup> It was an early sign of Davies's organisational flair, creative use of his considerable resources, and a sense of *noblesse oblige*. In peacetime, he applied himself to fighting TB, in wartime he found himself equally moved by the bloodshed and squalid conditions to prevent it from happening again. In June 1916, he was recalled to become parliamentary private secretary to War Secretary David Lloyd George, which placed him at the heart of the plot to make his new political master prime minister. When that was achieved, he was given a position in Lloyd George's cabinet secretariat. However, their relationship soon fractured when Davies, who had initially amused Lloyd George with stories about Wales and impressions of preachers, used a stream of notes to lecture his political master on the war effort and their colleagues. As Owen noted, 'David Davies was a good man himself, and he wanted everyone else to be one.'<sup>7</sup> The result was that he was dismissed in July 1917

on the grounds that there were rumours that Davies was protected from returning to the front by his wealth and Lloyd George felt he should not stay on in these circumstances.<sup>8</sup> In light of his earlier service, it was an entirely unfair charge.

This rift with Lloyd George coincided with Davies' involvement with the early movements that eventually became the League of Nations Union (LNU). It was perfect for a man deeply affected by the suffering of war. Where his charity work saw him using his privilege to help poorer people in Wales, his League work could help save lives around the world. In helping to establish this organisation, a lobbying group to promote the new League of Nations, he joined those hoping to replace a world order dictated by force with one based on sedate dispute resolution. Davies was in a strong position to make the most of this new group. His local status meant that he became chairman of the LNU's Welsh National Council and worked with the leading lights of the internationalist movement, including Conservative peer Lord Cecil of Chelwood, Labour MP Philip Noel Baker, and fellow Liberal Professor Gilbert Murray. They aimed to rally the LNU's rapidly growing mass membership and their Whitehall connections to influence British policy in favour of the League. Davies, 'an imperious, impatient idealist' who often assumed 'that his wealth alone could decide outcomes and that colleagues and opponents could be steam-rolled into submission', quickly emerged as one of its leading members.<sup>9</sup> The charitable spirit that inspired him to invest in sanatoria and housing also motivated his desire to prevent a recurrence of a war that had caused huge social, political, and economic upheaval. Compared to Westminster, where he was never fully reconciled to the compromises necessary to reach the front ranks, the League offered an honourable cause in which he could channel his considerable energies.

Through the 1920s, his newfound devotion to this body became increasingly clear and he achieved a number of personal successes. Most notably, he hosted the 1926 annual general meeting of the Federation of League of Nations Societies in Aberystwyth, an event which helped to

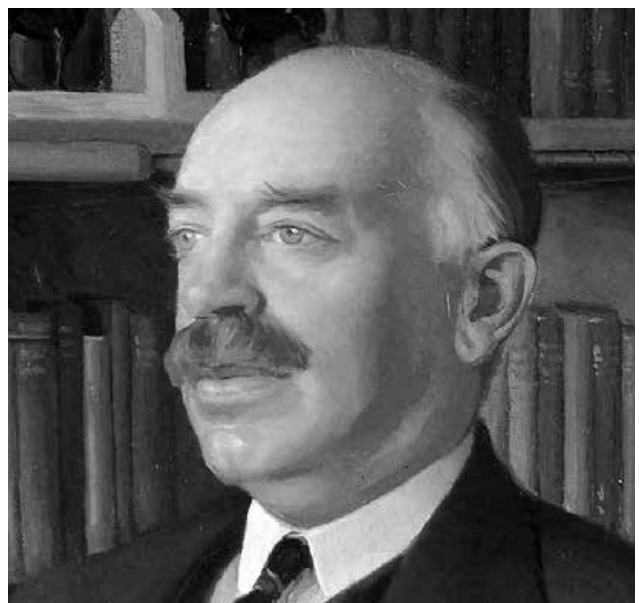
get Germany a seat on the League Council.<sup>10</sup> Though Davies continued to attend Westminster, albeit irregularly, his time there only served to emphasise the stark differences between party politics and extra-parliamentary campaigning for the League. When he attended the House in the years immediately after the First World War, he could often be found voting against the coalition government and criticising its record.<sup>11</sup> When the Liberals were out of office after 1922, though working to reconcile the Asquithian and Lloyd George factions, he continued to attack any policies he disagreed with. This attitude added to the bad feeling left when Lloyd George dismissed him. When added to discomfort at his old master's dubious political fund and his 'Green Book' proposals for all but nationalising rural land, Davies increasingly questioned whether it was worth holding a role he had never really fitted into whilst his real interests, the League and philanthropy, were demanding more time.

It seemed almost inevitable then that Davies would surrender his parliamentary career. For years, he neglected the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association with the same attitude as he held towards his Commons career. Undoubtedly this was, partly, borne of the fact that Montgomeryshire was uncontested until the mid-1920s and so he could afford to indulge his outside interests. And yet, now ready to focus almost entirely on the League, he expected the Montgomeryshire Liberals to select a successor of his choice. Instead, they nominated local solicitor Clement Davies, an ally of Lloyd George, and so, in a fit of pique, David withdrew his considerable financial support.<sup>12</sup> Now just one more constituent, albeit a rich and respected one, it would have been out of character for Davies to meekly retire

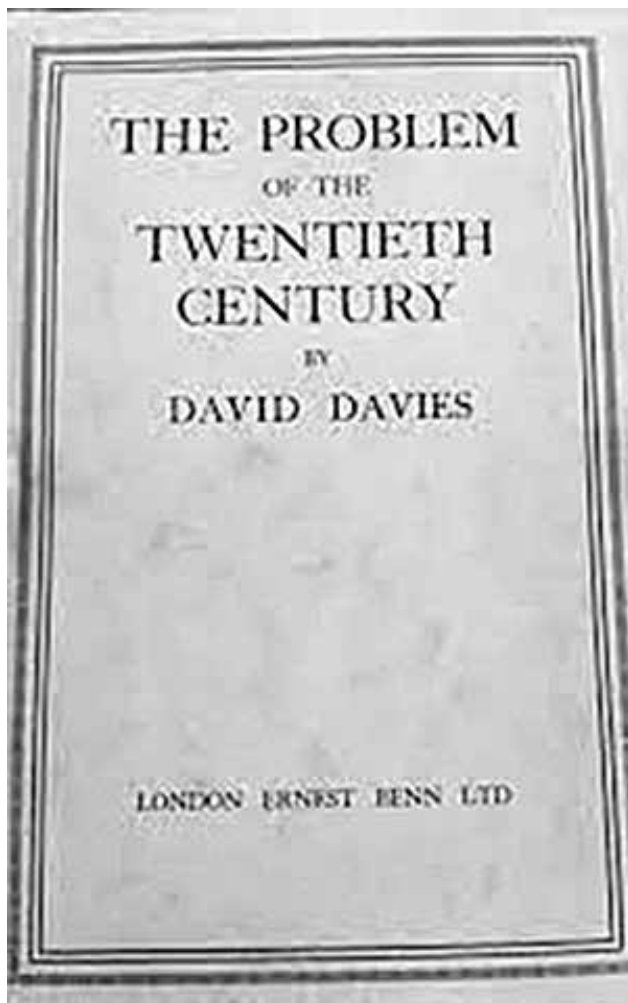
Lt-Col. David Davies, 14th Royal Welch Fusiliers, 1915

David Davies in 1921 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

David Davies in 1935 (portrait by Sam Morse-Brown, photo: Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales)



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from public life. Rather, he threw himself into advancing his thinking on international relations, working with the LNU to gain access to the corridors of power, and exerting influence on the political scene.

### The 'problem'

The first step, and bedrock of all that was to come, was the publication of Davies's first book, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, in 1930.<sup>13</sup> Its central claim was that the League's existing structure was inadequate for fulfilling its primary role: preserving world peace. Though he thought it a good start, Davies identified several key flaws, including the requirement for unanimity for any major decision, the fact that important states were not members (then the United States and Soviet Union), and the lack of adequate machinery to assess and adjudicate territorial claims. These weaknesses, he believed,

risked the 'welfare and progress of the whole human race and the continued existence of civilisation'.<sup>14</sup> By restructuring the League, he hoped to realise the dream of preserving peace through impartial and equitable judicial resolution. It would require a complete overhaul of the fundamental nature of international affairs, but he thought it both possible and, after the advent of industrialised warfare, a necessity.

In a world still coming to terms with the costs of the First World War and a popular fear of aerial bombing, Davies was not alone in reaching this conclusion. The 1920s saw a succession of international attempts to reinforce peace by rehabilitating the defeated powers and outlawing war as an instrument of national policy. The early 1930s, meanwhile, saw the Labour Party electing an unashamedly pacifist leader, George Lansbury, and the National Government, with its huge parliamentary majority, only beginning to rearm in 1935. Concurrently, the LNU went from strength to strength, becoming the largest pressure group in Britain, and embracing politicians from across the spectrum.<sup>15</sup> It was not, therefore, that Davies was isolated since there was clearly a large domestic and global audience for internationalist solutions to preventing war, and here was an idea that could be presented as the natural evolution of the system established in 1918.

That evolution involved three central components: an 'equity' tribunal, a police force, and an executive. The tribunal, composed of leading statesmen, lawyers, and technocrats, would hear the cases of states wishing to revise their borders and, reaching rulings impartially and judicially, could expect to be obeyed. It was unworldly, relying on all states surrendering control over their foreign policies and accepting judgement without reservation. However, Davies' argument went that the tribunal would grant moral authority to those upholding its decisions and, if any country chose to resort to war, the whole world would rally behind the 'victim' to uphold this new order.<sup>16</sup> Any justice system, though, requires a body capable of enforcing its decisions, so this tribunal would be complemented by a

police force, to prevent its collapse into impotency, and an executive, to direct the police and agree to international law. In a largely undemocratic world, Davies saw agreements as meaningless without a threat of force behind them. As he wrote, the tribunal brought 'justice', which 'in turn is dependent upon disarmament; disarmament cannot be obtained without security; and security cannot be purchased without the establishment of sanctions.'<sup>17</sup> As such, it was not, as pacifists wished, a complete rejection of the use of force, but utilising it to enforce peace. Rather, the protection of an international police force ready to deploy overwhelming military might would naturally lead to a voluntary renunciation of the use of force by individual states. In this, though Davies was undoubtedly idealistic, his solution was based on a basic principle: if a justice system worked within states, it could work between them. Viewed that way, and in light of most of the world freely joining the League already, his proposals were an evolution of the existing system and, basically, very simple. Disobedient countries would be treated like disobedient citizens by a legal system based on the rule of law. Law-abiding states would voluntarily give up their arms, rely on the even-handed courts and overwhelming power of the police force, and so a lasting peace could not only be achieved, but constantly enforced against potential threats.

Davies devised three schemes in order to establish this international police force (IPF). One involved a quota system, by which member states would mobilise their militaries in a crisis and join something akin to modern United Nations peacekeeping forces.<sup>18</sup> The second was for a dedicated army, navy, and air force to be permanently mobilised.<sup>19</sup> But, recognising flaws in both schemes, Davies proposed a third that combined both, with a permanent, rapid-reaction force to be reinforced by national levies when needed.<sup>20</sup> In peacetime, these national units would be utilised by member states to maintain order within their own borders, the implication being that member states would retain autonomy over domestic issues. National contingents would, however, not be strong enough to

overwhelm the IPF or to attack another state. As a composite, the permanent force would negate the possibility of member states breaking commitments, whilst leaving them with a degree of sovereignty, but unable to attack one another. The IPF would be commanded by a 'high constable', a post initially rotated amongst the Great Powers and then appointed on merit, who would command other 'constables' for the navy, air force, artillery, and chemical weapons.<sup>21</sup> Their headquarters would be in Palestine, as a meeting place of religions and buttressed by defensible deserts and oceans, with bases in strategic locations, such as Gibraltar and Panama.<sup>22</sup> The high constable then, would be answerable to the third component of Davies' new League, the executive. He envisioned a committee of the Great Powers, with permanent seats, and smaller countries, joining on a rotational basis. In this respect, his executive presaged the United Nations Security Council, with the task of instructing member states to mobilise their quotas, issuing orders to the high constable, and giving member states a stake in decision-making. The final result would be a world state, with individual countries maintaining sovereignty over internal affairs, but part of a greater whole, in which defence and foreign policy were permanently internationalised.

Whilst there was a clear logic to Davies' thinking and, being such a simple proposition, it could theoretically work, the problems were legion. For instance, the Palestine headquarters would also house the IPF's arsenal. It is difficult to see how stockpiling weaponry in a region, even then riven by political violence, could have been anything but disastrous. The scheme would also require the abdication of a large degree of sovereignty, the surrendering of territory for bases, and trust in the IPF and other nations to act swiftly against aggressors. Achieving such compliance required a great deal of goodwill and favourable circumstances, neither of which could be taken for granted as the Great Depression was tearing through the global economy. In the end, the 1930s would both vindicate his analysis and challenge his solution. At the time of writing, most of the Great Powers were League

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members, so it was not unreasonable to design the system in anticipation of the eventual accession of the United States and the Soviet Union. However, within three years of publication, Japan and Germany had withdrawn, with Italy following in 1935, thereby terminally undermining the League's claim to moral authority. Italy had already proven, in the 1923 Corfu Incident, that it could bombard a fellow League state, whilst Geneva acquiesced to its demands, and no other country would act to stop it. And yet, there is no denying the simplicity of the proposition in *The Problem* and the obvious fact that Davies had clearly thought about the technical details in some depth. He was seeking to address the flaws in the League that would prove to be its downfall and, though it has been described as demonstrating 'a somewhat tenuous appreciation of the balance of forces in the world', it was, at least, an attempt to adapt the existing system before its collapse.<sup>23</sup>

By comparison, his fellow internationalists, including Lord Cecil and Gilbert Murray, whilst offering token support, tended to simply repeat the mantra of rallying behind the League, but

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not how to make it work. Admittedly, Cecil and other LNU leaders had to be more circumscribed in order to hold that broad-based organisation together, but it was Davies who attempted to bridge the gap between what proved to be an inadequate League and a secure peace. Undoubtedly, it sounded as radical then as it does in our more cynical age. It is true that it was a time of unorthodox ideas, with Lloyd George adopting the new Keynesian thinking to tackle unemployment, the rise of the British Union of Fascists, and birth of the Social Credit Party. All of

which proposed to institute similarly large-scale, radical reform to solve society's ills. But it was also an era in which governments were regularly elected on the basis of their staid, cautious, and, ultimately, orthodox approach to current affairs. The three major post-Lloyd George prime ministers crudely demonstrated this. Ramsay MacDonald, though leading the first Labour governments, embraced aristocratic high society and governed longest at the head of Tory-dominated coalition. Stanley Baldwin, meanwhile, consciously sought to amplify a provincial, middle-class Englishness. And Neville Chamberlain was as famous for his Edwardian dress as his energetic prosecution of foreign policy.

Unlike those other movements though, the Christian roots of *The Problem* are clear to see. It was Methodism, long synonymous with Welsh Liberalism, that shaped Davies' means of interpreting and communicating his new world order. In one of the many speeches he gave on the subject, he declaimed that 'we have all sinned and fallen short of those beneficent intentions embodied in the Covenant'.<sup>24</sup> He was not referring to the covenant between God and the Israelites, but to the League of Nations Covenant of 1919. Instead of 'breaking' the Covenant by making the League effective whilst they had the chance, they had 'sinned'. Davies, the lifelong believer, was substituting God for the League, before which all

states would be equally supplicant and upon which they would rely for justice. The League Covenant stood in for the Ten Commandments and the hope encapsulated in the Gospel of Christ was to be fulfilled by this new Gospel of Eternal Peace. Any international dispute could be solved by the disinterested tribunal and punishment for breaking the law would be imposed by the omnipotent IPF. Here then, was the basic idea that would dominate Davies' approach to foreign affairs for the rest of his life. Indisputably, it was reliant on a great deal of ambitious

thinking and goodwill. Indeed, it appears to be hopelessly naïve and unrealistic. However, it would also prove to be the basis of a unique challenge to the appeasement of the dictators in the late 1930s and was an attempt to address the flaws in the system as it then existed.

### Return to Westminster

In order to understand how it was that Davies, a marginal political figure, brought this plan to the heart of a great political debate, it is necessary to first recount how he returned to Westminster. As a former MP, out of favour with his party leader, his support base was limited to his native Montgomeryshire. He could use his wealth to gain influence, but he was now detached from the centre of power, having given up a safe Liberal seat, where his reputation was strongest, and then been defied by local members over the selection Clement Davies. It was not a propitious position from which to promote a plan that, as he understood, had to be enacted before the League inevitably broke down.

This impotency prompted Davies to write to a fellow former Liberal MP, Sir John Herbert Lewis, in early 1932 to lament his inability to get a hearing for his views. Indeed, so strong was this feeling that he wrote that he was prepared to defect to the Labour Party and re-enter the House of Commons if necessary.<sup>25</sup> This was significant for two reasons. Firstly, that he was willing to return to a role he disliked, just three years after surrendering a safe seat, and abandon his old party is an indication of the importance of a reformed League to him. It was also notable that he was prepared to join Labour, a party that had recently been smashed in the 1931 general election. One result of that was for the elderly pacifist, George Lansbury, to become chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party. It is not a huge leap to suggest that Davies saw a broken party, but which had now clearly supplanted his own Liberal Party in electoral terms, as an opportunity to secure their endorsement of his proposals and, when Labour was back in power, to have them implemented. This seems even

more obvious in light of the fact that the interim Labour leader was former Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson. Though he had lost his seat, he was the most high-profile figure in the party and had been appointed as president of the Disarmament Conference, a world summit on multilateral arms reduction. In early 1932, though, it was entirely possible that a figure such as Henderson could readily take up the gauntlet and lead his party to join Davies' crusade.

By October 1932, however, Henderson had resigned in order to focus on his work in Geneva. He was succeeded by Lansbury, who was riding the wave of pacifism then sweeping across the Labour Party. As Davies' plan required an implicit acceptance of the use of force, it was incompatible with Lansbury's world view and the direction in which the party lurched. Fortunately for Davies, another opportunity arose in May 1932 when Ramsay MacDonald, the prime minister who had abandoned Labour in favour of a Conservative-dominated coalition, nominated him for a peerage. Davies' acceptance from a man reviled in the Labour Party is an indication of his proposed defection being calculated as the best route to achieve his ends, rather than a renunciation of his Liberalism. There is no evidence that he considered defecting again, though whether he was still officially a Liberal is unclear. His later re-engagement with the Montgomeryshire Liberals in 1938, in an attempt to influence Clement Davies to defect from the Liberal Nationals and re-join the independent Liberal Party, suggests that he had not completely severed his ties.<sup>26</sup> But now, with a guaranteed seat in the House of Lords, he had a platform to launch his wider campaign for a reformed League without the distraction of elections, feigning party loyalty, and working on issues that did not interest him.

The early 1930s was also a time in which talk of an international force persisted in political circles. Davies could point to several examples of his ideas in action, such as, in 1932, when he supported the League commission, chaired by his LNU colleague Lord Lytton, to investigate the Japanese invasion of Manchuria as being what



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he envisioned for an equity tribunal.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in 1934, he welcomed a proposal for an international force from the French delegation to the Disarmament Conference. However, the problem in this case was, as he told the Lords, that as there was not yet an armed League to provide security, he did not think the proposition would achieve anything meaningful.<sup>28</sup> And finally, when debating the forthcoming 1935 Saarland plebiscite, to determine whether it would return to German rule, he saw the multinational force sent to manage it as an example of an IPF in action.<sup>29</sup> In each case, he naturally cited them as evidence that his ideas could work and that the world was already moving in that direction. When demanding a leap of faith for all states, these examples could help to ameliorate their concerns and imply that it was an evolutionary step for the world system. Davies also snatched at the opportunity to present his ideas as having a great deal of public support. The 1934 'Peace Ballot', an unofficial referendum conducted by the LNU, found that, of the 11 million people questioned, 86.6 per cent supported the League's use of economic sanctions against aggressors, and 58.7 per cent backed military measures.<sup>30</sup> Though historians still debate what, if anything, can be discerned from the results, Davies was quick to link it to his campaign. In an LNU Welsh National Council bulletin, he stated that 'two vital principles are involved': the question of 'isolation or collective security' and whether the League was 'to become an International Authority, or merely a Debating Society?'<sup>31</sup> As with the examples of his plan in action, it suited Davies' purposes to interpret the results so as to support his case. In the first place, the rest of the world was automatically moving in the direction he desired and, secondly, the public desired it to be so. Put that way, it was a far more compelling and weightier case than the theory he had dealt with in *The Problem*, which, alone, could not realistically be a precursor to a radical upending of international affairs. With this in place, and there being more real-world examples as time went by, Davies began to follow the LNU route of tapping into public opinion and drawing in

the powerful to shape policy. That meant forming a new organisation, as the LNU's Conservative and pacifist elements would not endorse such a proposal, and so rallying support for his specific idea. The answer came in the form of the New Commonwealth Society.

### The New Commonwealth Society

In 1932, the newly ennobled Lord Davies gathered several leading politicians and public figures, including former Labour leader George Barnes, the Archbishop of York William Temple, and Lord Cecil. Together they formed the New Commonwealth Society (NCS), with Davies heavily subsidising it, to promote his ideas about a reformed League and collective security. The LNU's size proved that there was a widespread, if vague, support for the League across the political spectrum. As such, the NCS did not emerge in a vacuum. Whilst the LNU, trading on being a mass membership organisation and keen to hold onto its wide array of supporters, was cautious in advocating much more than supporting the League come what may, the NCS was much more strident in staking out its position. In early 1932, the LNU Executive Committee discussed an international air police force, but backed off in order to satisfy its Conservative element, though it only finally resolved that point shortly after the founding of Davies' new group.<sup>32</sup> The NCS, by comparison, only had 2,000 members by 1937 due to the deliberate policy of attracting support amongst the national elite, thus avoiding wasting resources on replicating the LNU.<sup>33</sup> This meant that where the LNU was far more ideologically diverse, the NCS was founded as Davies' brainchild and, at least formally, stood by his ideas.<sup>34</sup>

Davies chaired the preliminary meeting on 26 May 1932 that laid down the NCS's founding doctrines in line with his proposals.<sup>35</sup> Its immediate aims were to consolidate opinion behind these ideas and to educate those with the power to implement them. It was also agreed that British and international sections should be formed in due course, with Barnes as president of the overall organisation and Davies as treasurer and

chairman of the executive committee. Overseas branches followed in France, whose politicians had shown themselves to be amenable to a reformed League to ease their national security anxieties, and Germany, which was still a liberal democracy.

As with the examples of his ideas in practice, the timing of the NCS's founding was auspicious. In July 1933, just over a year after the inaugural meeting, the Labour Party conference issued a foreign policy statement calling for an international force to facilitate disarmament.<sup>36</sup> Understandably, the NCS leapt on this and, at a subsequent meeting, Davies agreed to write an appreciation of the statement in *The New Commonwealth*, the body's official publication, which would be sent to all Labour members and offered to the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* for reproduction. As with Davies' proposed defection, and regardless of the 1931 election outcome, they would have naturally relished being aligned with one of the two major parties. It was not a huge leap for an internationalist party to endorse a reformed League and there was only so much

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they could do when the National Government had such an overwhelming majority, but it was an undeniable early victory.

April 1934 saw the British section formed with its own executive committee. Its president was to be Lord Gladstone of Hawarden, a younger son of the Victorian prime minister, with Davies as treasurer, and representatives from each of the three main parties and the British Legion.<sup>37</sup> This group became the centre of the NCS's campaign to influence national policy. Vyvyan Adams and Geoffrey Mander, respectively the Conservative and Liberal representatives, regularly appeared in the columns of *Hansard* advocating collective security and the League. The Labour

representative, John Wilmot, would stand in for Clement Attlee. As Labour's deputy leader, Attlee's proxy membership is indicative of the fact that those earlier approaches had garnered tangible results. When added to the Liberal Party's support for collective security, Davies and his allies could be confident that the Opposition was firmly in favour of the League and amenable to his ideas. The problem remained, though, that neither party had any prospect of forming a government in the immediate future and the attitude of the Conservative leadership was amply demonstrated by their nominating an obscure backbencher to represent them.

Recognising the potential of this support though, Davies held a dinner in the Palace of Westminster for supportive MPs to form a parliamentary group on 6 November 1934.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of this group, which was soon extended to include peers, was to meet with experts on international affairs to inform their arguments in parliamentary debates.<sup>39</sup> Within a year, they had recruited eighty-two members, though this was reduced to sixty-seven by the 1935 general

election when new Labour MPs replaced several of its Liberal supporters. It was an outcome that meant that they had firm grounds to hope to rebuild quickly.<sup>40</sup> The size of the group was an indication of there being

a sizeable current of support in parliament for Davies' ideas and, though few such groups could expect to get legislation passed, this did not stop Mander from proposing a bill in December 1935 to legislate for the formation of an IPF.<sup>41</sup> Though the motion was withdrawn, this incident must be seen as drawing attention to the issue and forcing the government to respond to it. Parliamentary time was thus devoted to discussing Davies' ideas, its opponents were welcomed to challenge it, and, the NCS could hope, its advocates defeat them by force of argument.

Having laid out his ideas and begun campaigning to implement them, Davies had to contend with a rapidly changing international scene.

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A year after the NCS was formed, Hitler rose to power in Germany, began rearming, and soon after withdrew from the League. It was this challenge, combined with the growing threat from Italy and Japan, that forced Davies to adapt his proposals in order to meet it and transformed the NCS into one of the several groups that took a stand against attempts to appease them.

### Force

Before going into detail about how Davies' campaigns changed tack in response to the challenge posed by the dictators, it is necessary to look at his second important book in this period. Published in 1934, *Force* was intended to give a philosophical underpinning to Davies' proposals and to adapt them to the changing world situation. It is evident that events were transpiring as Davies had expected them to, unless his ideas were implemented, when he wrote that 'sovereign nations, dominated by imperialistic and nationalistic motives, have succeeded in undermining the moral authority of the League'.<sup>42</sup> By that stage, the League had lost two important members, Germany and Japan, and Hitler was embarking upon a major rearmament programme, but the situation had not yet deteriorated to such an extent that it was impossible for his plans to save it. Clearly, Davies also thought it necessary to lay his thinking out in order to give weight to the technical programme he had devised in 1930. The fundamentals were the same, the world had to have a reformed League in order to save the peace, but it was now framed as even more pressing in light of changes, primarily, in Germany.

Aside from realising Davies' fears and vindicating his predictions, namely that the League would inevitably fail unless it had the power to enforce its will, the rise of Hitler added greater urgency to his efforts. It was obvious, with rearmament proceeding apace, that the Nazi state might be inclined to use force to secure a revision of the Treaty of Versailles. To head that off, Davies wrote that it was still possible for Britain to push reform of the League in order to address

Germany's demands for treaty revision and French anxiety about national security.<sup>43</sup> Though the enormity of his scheme made him sound detached from reality, *Force* made clear that there was a simple logic behind it. Of course, it was impracticable and there was little prospect of it being enacted, but there can be no doubting that Davies had put a great deal of thought into how to make his blueprint work in practice. To that end, in light of all that had transpired, Davies argued that it was necessary to immediately rally the remaining League members behind reform.<sup>44</sup> In the end, the case was the same, it was a matter of explaining how the thinking behind it weathered the tests of the international situation and how peace could be preserved.

*Force* is significant for two other reasons. The first is that it was an opportunity for Davies to define himself from the pacifists who dominated the Labour Party and, he argued, had led to the LNU clinging to disarmament as the solution to all ills. In terms of pacifism generally, he wrote of the experiences of the past showing that force could not 'be dispensed with: the problem is not how to abolish it, but how to use it'.<sup>45</sup> *Force*, used by the police and 'held in the leash of the law', would provide 'the security indispensable to the progress of mankind'.<sup>46</sup> Going further, Davies issued an outright challenge to the pacifist position by pointing out that history showed 'that justice cannot become effective without the assistance of force'.<sup>47</sup> He also took aim at the LNU for playing 'the part of fairy godmother to the governments of the day' by endorsing their lip service support for the League.<sup>48</sup> Where the LNU was taking concerted action was in continuing to chase 'the ever-receding shadow of disarmament', at a point when the Disarmament Conference had broken down after Hitler withdrew Germany from it.<sup>49</sup> This sentiment reflected the fact that the LNU had not directly endorsement an IPF in the May 1932 debate. Though he never explicitly stated it, it is likely that this setback, which was essentially accepted weeks before, had inspired him to form his new group. With an organisation firmly dedicated to promoting a reformed League, *Force* served not



only to buttress Davies' case with a philosophical foundation and very simple logic, but also to mark him out from his fellow internationalists. It would be unfair to present his LNU colleagues like Cecil and Gilbert Murray as blind to the changing situation, but they were much more circumscribed, where Davies had no reason to be. The result was that Davies and the NCS were in place to push for a firmer response to the threat from Germany and, realistically assessing the situation, calling for a faster pace of rearmament to face it.

### **Fighting appeasement**

The 1935 Abyssinian crisis marked the final blow to the League as a serious force in world politics. It prompted Italy to end its membership, leaving only Britain, France, and the Soviet Union inside, and exposed its inability to prevent

### **Meeting of the League of Nations Council, 1936**

aggression without the use of armed force. The National Government had recently secured a second term in office by promising to 'support the "appeasement of Europe" within the framework of the League of Nations'.<sup>50</sup> That was, before the foreign secretary was revealed to have secretly offered to partition Abyssinia in favour of Italy, without reference to Geneva. At the same time, the NCS's British section was going through a transformation that would end with it firmly opposed to the appeasing attitude that had led to this scandal. The death of Lord Gladstone in April 1935 left a vacancy for the presidency, a post which was filled, in May 1936, by the most prominent backbench critic of the government: Winston Churchill. Having first approached Liberal grandee Lord Crewe, who preferred a more subordinate position, their selection of Churchill

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was a clear sign of the side that the NCS was taking in the developing debate about defence. At this stage, Churchill was firmly estranged from the Conservative leadership over his opposition to their granting dominion status to India and, importantly in this case, the speed of their rearmament programme. The myth of his 'Wilderness Years' has it that he alone recognised the danger of appeasing the dictators. The reality was that he was inconsistent on that score and not always opposed to his party leaders, especially when ministerial office was in contention. More significantly, his NCS role, supported by a cross-section of the political and national elite, is only one example of his never really being a lonely exile on foreign policy. They were, in theory, in agreement about reforming the League and many, including Attlee and Liberal leader Sir Archibald Sinclair, were in the process of becoming part of the wider network of opposition to Britain's foreign and defence policies.

As insightful as this was of the NCS's direction of travel, it also reveals that its new president was more complex than the Tory imperialist caricature would suggest. Churchill, who first achieved ministerial office as a Liberal, used his inaugural presidential address to dispel any doubts about his endorsement of the NCS programme.<sup>51</sup> And it was Churchill who, a fortnight later, was tasked with meeting the foreign

**Until his death in 1944, Davies continued to develop his ideas. In 1940, he published 'Federated Europe' to make the case for a United States of Europe, a federation of European countries to rival the United States of America.**

secretary, Anthony Eden, to convey to him an NCS resolution to propose League reform.<sup>52</sup> It may have been that he was cynically using this new platform to attack the government, with a skin-deep support for a reformed League as a useful cover, but it required a public alignment with a positive approach to foreign affairs. If he had merely wanted to exploit the League, he could have joined the much less demanding LNU, but he never did. Instead, he became the

face of the NCS and aligned it with his other efforts to force a change in foreign and defence policy. The most notable example of this was the NCS joining the 'Defence of Freedom and Peace' Albert Hall rally, which had been partly orchestrated by Churchill, in November 1936.<sup>53</sup> It placed the NCS alongside other leading opponents of government policy and suggests that speeding-up rearmament, which the rally was intended to promote, was an important part of its programme. After all, an IPF would require an initial commitment of weaponry, the bulk of which would have to come from the only major League powers left: Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the same countries that were the basis of Churchill's much desired 'Grand Alliance' against German expansionism.

The NCS's following Churchill was not a matter of Davies losing control over the group he had done so much to create. Rather, as he wrote, they were 'prepared to work loyally under your [Churchill's] leadership'.<sup>54</sup> He demonstrated this amply when, though keeping his plan at the heart of their campaigning, Davies realistically gave a lesser role to the essentially defunct League. Where a reformed League was a long-term aim, the situation necessitated a focus on short-term measures and issues that were the mainstay of anti-appeaser campaigning. For

instance, in March 1938, he wrote an article in the *Western Mail* in response to Anthony Eden's resignation as foreign secretary.<sup>55</sup> In it, he wrote of Eden, 'the first martyr of

the League', being sacrificed by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to appease the 'Sawdust Caesar', Mussolini. Weeks later, the Anschluss between Germany and Austria led to another article in which he described Hitler as 'the Bandit Dictator'.<sup>56</sup> Through the following year, he spoke in the Lords in support of an alliance with the Soviet Union, a compromise with reality that contradicted his commitment to the League over the old alliances, and calling for a

Ministry of Supply to ramp up the rearmament programme.<sup>57</sup> Each of these were issues on which the wider group of anti-appeasers were vocal. Churchill was a vocal proponent of a Ministry of Supply, possibly hoping to be appointed to run it, whilst Conservative Imperialist backbencher Leo Amery wrote in his diary that the Anschluss had tipped him into full opposition to the National Government's foreign policy.<sup>58</sup> With the League now dead, and unlikely to be revived in the near future, Davies downgraded the centrality of his proposed reforms in favour of more conventional anti-appeasers causes. In doing so, he was aligned with others in opposition to the National Government's foreign and defence policies, but he always maintained that ultimate aim of a reformed League in the hope of one day achieving a permanent peace.

### **Deluded idealist or neglected prophet?**

Until his death in 1944, Davies continued to develop his ideas. In 1940, he published 'Federated Europe' to make the case for a United States of Europe, a federation of European countries to rival the United States of America.<sup>59</sup> Two further books followed, both setting out the principles by which peace could be rebuilt and made permanent when the Second World War came to an end.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, there was no real prospect of Davies' vision being implemented. Aspects of it were incorporated into the United Nations and, in hindsight, he was remarkably prophetic. And the impulse that drove him, a desire to avoid a repeat of the carnage of the First World War, though not unique, was admirable. However, despite his best efforts, he was not courted by those in power seeking a solution to the international crises of the 1930s. Free of the constraints of the Commons and living on inherited wealth (which he generously distributed), it would be easy to conclude that he was a privileged ideologue unable to make a practical assessment of the international situation and the role his ideas could realistically play. For instance, his books, which stand as an important contribution in the history of internationalist thought, made little

direct impact on British political discourse when he needed them to.

However, his analysis was fundamentally sound. The Abyssinian crisis demonstrated that the League was inherently flawed by relying on its members to voluntarily honour their commitments. Each subsequent crisis merely confirmed this until the League itself was defunct. Davies' answer to how this would be overcome in his own system was, essentially, coercion. The IPF would be so overwhelmingly powerful that states would feel compelled to join, if not to bask in the security it offered, then by being unable to challenge it and so permanently at a disadvantage. Unlike pacifists, Davies understood that force could not be abolished, but should be repurposed to police the world and enforce peace. This would be achieved by evolving an existing system that most countries had already joined voluntarily.

In time, this idea developed into an alternative proposition to the appeasing attitude to foreign affairs. Davies, as the driving force behind the NCS, drew in several leading figures in order to exert influence in the corridors of power. Though it failed to alter British policy on this front, the NCS became a platform for Winston Churchill and his fellow anti-appeasers to wage war on Britain's foreign and defence policies. That Churchill and several other prominent figures, including Sir Archibald Sinclair and Clement Attlee, pinned their colours to the NCS mast is indicative of the fact that his ideas, as radical as they may seem in our time, were palatable enough to be deemed acceptable for ambitious politicians to adopt. In so doing, Davies and the NCS stand as proof against the mythology of Churchill's 'Wilderness Years' that continue to pervade the popular memory of the 1930s. By his energetic advocacy of a reformed League, Davies provides a different perspective on the inter-war debates around foreign policy, without which the history of that period cannot be fully understood.

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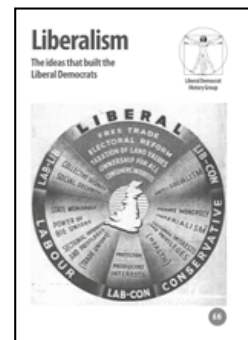
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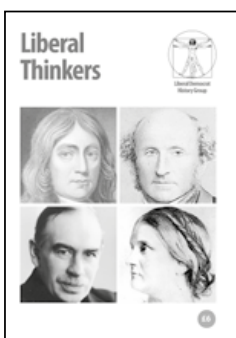
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