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Parliament and the Press: Forging the United Nations in Wartime Britain, 1939–45

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During the Second World War, not only the United States but also Great Britain played a leading role in planning and establishing the United Nations (UN) as a new international organisation to replace the League of Nations. While scholarship on post-war planning is extensive, relatively little exists on how the planning process was discussed and depicted publicly in Britain. The purpose of this article is to fill such lacunae by examining the two most important domains for public discussion at the time, the press and parliament. It will argue, first, that the League of Nations' experience – its inability to use collective force and its optimistically democratic structure – overwhelmingly shaped public discourse in reference to the UN. By referring to the past, the press and politicians alike in Britain were content to relinquish interwar ideas such as equal rights and equal representation for all nations. Second, apart from the lessons of history, the less democratic structure of the new world organisation was justified from the perspective of great power politics. The desire to make the grand alliance between Britain, the United States of America, and the USSR functional despite all mutual suspicions, directed the view of the UN, and typically overrode all other concerns relating to post-war planning. Finally, throughout the wartime planning of the UN, public opinion, in so far as press and parliament were concerned, held fast to the idea that the British empire was not to be touched by the UN. In public, the establishment of the UN was hardly considered as a starting point for decolonisation. Instead, the UN was designed to become the post-war embodiment of the grand alliance, a vehicle through which the victory over the Axis powers would be managed at the global level: such management did not envision the need to let empire go. Viewed this way, it also becomes clear that nationalism and internationalism were not mutually exclusive or binary visions, but coexisted and shifted in importance throughout the period examined.

Keywords: Great Britain; internationalism; League of Nations; parliament; press; Second World War; United Nations (UN)

> I make a plea that, when we are thinking of this new organisation, the factor of our own safety should be put forward.[1]

> … the lessons of the past should be used to make a better future.[2]

[1] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccx, col. 1530: 17 Apr. 1945 (David Gammans, Conservative).
[2] *Daily Herald*, 23 Aug. 1945.

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1. *Introduction*

During the Second World War, Great Britain played a leading role in planning and establishing the United Nations (UN) as a replacement for the defunct League of Nations. Traditionally the focus of the historiography was on the United States, founded on an assumption that the Americans, starting with Franklin D. Roosevelt, first conceived of the UN and others simply followed their lead.[3] This focus often restricted itself to a detailed examination of the planning process, emphasizing the role of the United States State Department at the expense of other actors and forces. From the British side, preoccupation with the planning process ranges from Winston Churchill's rather erratic contributions to more consistent and systematic work done by foreign office mandarins such as Gladwyn Jebb and the historian-diplomat, Charles Webster.[4] Recently, however, scholars have added new perspectives. Mark Mazower has connected the UN's formation to British imperial ambitions in the 19th century, arguing that the apparent globalism of the UN was no more than an imperial form of internationalism designed to safeguard Caucasian Europe. In this respect, as an instrument of empire, it was hardly anti-colonial or anti-racist.[5] In a similar vein, seeking to challenge the dominant perspective that the UN began as an instrument of peace at the conferences of Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco, Dan Pleisch has focused, instead, on the UN's origins during the war, especially on some of its earlier manifestations in agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).[6] Nuance has also been added to the intellectual history of the UN by looking more closely at the fluctuation and interplay of internationalism and national interest in the formation of both the UN and League of Nations.[7] Yet in spite of this, and the wider 'international turn', apart from the works of Patricia Clavin, Glenda Sluga, and Helen McCarthy, wider public debate during these crucial times of transformation and civil society movements surrounding the establishment of an international organisation have received

[3]Such works include: Harley Notter, *Post-War Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939–1945* (Washington, DC, 1949); Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations Charter* (Washington, DC, 1958); Frank Donovan, *Mr.Roosevelt's Four Freedoms: The Story Behind the United Nations Charter* (New York, 1966); Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the United Nations* (New Haven, CT, 2000); Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder, CO, 2003); Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2003); Paul M. Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present and the Future of the United Nations* (New York, 2006).

[4]Geoffrey L. Goodwin, *Britain and the United Nations* (New York, 1957); E.J. Hughes, 'Winston Churchill and the Formation of the United Nations Organization', *Journal of Contemporary History*, ix (1974), 177–94; *The United Kingdom – the United Nations*, ed. Erik Jensen and Thomas Fisher (Basingstoke, 1990); Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2008), esp. ch. 4; Ian Hall, 'The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian: Sir Charles Webster, 1886–1961', *International Politics*, xlii (2005), 484–6.

[5]Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (2012).

[6]Dan Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (New York, 2011). For more on the UNRRA, see Jessica Reinisch. 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA', *Past & Present*, No. 210, Supplement 6 (2011), 258–89.

[7]Antero Holmila and Pasi Ihalainen, 'Nationalism and Internationalism Reconciled? British Concepts for a New World Order during and after the First and Second World War', *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, xiii, (2018), 25–53.

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surprisingly little attention.[8] What is more, most recent work concentrates on institution building and key actor-agency themes like feminist, religious, and socialist movements, and the emergence of human rights on the global agenda, rather than the discussions raging on what today would be called a public sphere. Predominantly, scholarship has focused on the interwar period when, as Helen McCarthy has shown with reference to the League of Nations Union (LNU), it was a popular topic for public discussion.[9]

It is the intention of this article to examine how post-war planning for a new international system was portrayed and publicly discussed in wartime Britain between 1939 and 1945. What were the main themes presented to the public and to what extent did they differ from the ideas that went into constructing the League of Nations? To answer these questions, this article will use press reports and parliamentary debates which pondered the nature of a post-war international system. While the focus will be on press and parliament as foreign policy advocates, it is, nevertheless, impossible neatly to separate international from domestic policy. As Helen McCarthy has noted, especially after the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942, social and economic reforms at home 'could no longer be credibly divorced' from international reconstruction.[10]

Investigating the parliamentary debates enables us to pinpoint the themes which Westminster deemed most important in the discussions about events and conferences taking place in Moscow, Tehran, Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta, and San Francisco, concerning the UN. Often, the debates took place either immediately before, or after, such events to enable the government to account for its policies to members of parliament. The immediacy of the record offers the chance to examine responses to given situations that were almost instant.

Bringing parliament into the picture in this way is important for two main reasons. First, the government needed parliamentary support to carry out its foreign policy; so what was said there mattered, even if implicitly.[11] Interest has recently increased in parliament's role in British foreign policy, and what has emerged is that, despite its limited role, parliament, nevertheless, managed to exert pressure on the government's foreign policy by planting difficult questions and using procedural means.[12] Second, parliamentary debates offer a discursive framework for examining what MPs saw as the most important and salient features of issues which demanded legislative attention. Whereas the press was severely limited in its ability to cover issues fully owing to paper rationing, MPs had plenty of opportunity to ponder the fate of the post-war world. Although the press (and radio in the 1940s) would certainly publish the most intriguing arguments, parliament was, perhaps, the only place where a government's foreign policy could be cross-examined in depth. For that reason it makes sense to examine these sources together.

[8] *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History*, ed. Patricia Clavin and Glenda Sluga (Cambridge, 2016); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013); Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–45* (Manchester, 2011).

[9] McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 29.

[10] McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 249–50.

[11] Peter G. Richards, *Parliament and Foreign Affairs* (1967), 38.

[12] Pasi Ihalainen and Satu Matikainen, 'The British Parliament and Foreign Policy in the 20th Century: Towards Increasing Parliamentarisation?', *Parliamentary History*, xxxv (2016), 1–14.

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2. *Early Views of the UN – Beleaguered by the League*

The outbreak of war in September 1939 underscored the failure of the League of Nations' collective security system. Debate over the question of how the League could be made more effective had gone on since the early 1920s. Both Labour and Conservative politicians had outlined a number of propositions, starting from Conservative Jan Smuts's *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* in 1918 to the Liberal Ramsay Muir's *The Expansion of Europe*, a call for a federated Europe published in 1939. In between, the literature which grappled with the problems of internationalism in general and the European question in particular, ranged from the economic to the esoteric; from John Maynard Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) to Alfred Adler's *Social Interest: A Challenge to Mankind* (1938) which argued from metaphysics and social feelings in their communal form. The question of peace remained at the core. As Gilbert Murray, Robert Cecil, Leonard Woolf, Philip Noel-Baker, Alfred Zimmern, and others advocated throughout the interwar period, the League was hardly a perfect solution for the new open diplomacy, but it was the only collective body designed to deal with international disputes, and imperialism as well as social, scientific, and economic issues.[13] By autumn 1939, however, the League's failure was plain to see. It was no longer simply a matter of debate over questions such as national sovereignty against a federated Europe. Lessons needed to be drawn to ensure that any future organisation would have different capabilities and a different outlook. This would inform not only the planning, but also the public's view of this process.

The first wartime debates in parliament relating to the new post-war international organisation took place in November 1939. The moment could not have been more poignant. As parliament was examining the failures of the League, the Soviet invasion of Finland had begun, leading to the expulsion of the USSR from the League in December 1940. Unsurprisingly, in this new situation where jurisdiction and diplomacy had succumbed to armed intervention, the League's inability to use force formed the nexus of the first debate. Hugh Dalton, one of the main Labour critics of Chamberlain's appeasement, and one of the Labour Party's major thinkers on foreign policy, neatly encapsulated the situation:

> In planning that new Europe we must learn from the past … The League of Nations was a brave effort, but it failed because it was not brave enough, and, in particular, because successive British governments at critical moments were not brave enough. … one reason why the League of Nations failed was that it was not armed, and if in the future an international society – or even a regional society within Europe – is to succeed it must be armed overwhelmingly against aggression.[14]

[13]Even a cursory look at the interwar internationalist literature illustrates the depth of problems contemporaries sought to deal with: Jan Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (1918); John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920); Philip Noel-Baker, *The League of Nations at Work* (1927); Robert Cecil, *The Way of Peace* (1928); Norman Bentwich, *The Mandates System* (1930); John E. Harley, *International Understanding: Agencies Educating for a New World* (1931); Gilbert Murray, Leonard Woolf *et al.*, *The Intelligent Man's Way To Prevent War* (1933); Frank Noel Keen, *A Better League of Nations* (1934); George Slocomb, *Crisis in Europe* (1934); A.E. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918–1935* (1936); Alfred Adler, *Social Interest: A Challenge to Mankind* (1938); Ramsay Muir, *The Expansion of Europe* (1939).

[14]Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclv, col. 302: 30 Nov. 1939.

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For Dalton, the failure of the League was connected to his own understanding of the role of the League in interwar European relations. Germany had been the major threat and both Conservatives and the pacifist element within the Labour Party had failed to recognize this.[15] In similar tones, another LNU member and anti-appeaser, Geoffrey Mander (Liberal), added: 'I suggest that in order to make it effective, and we must make it effective – the whole point is that the League has been ineffective – it would have to be conducted on the lines of collective force.'[16] Thus, from the beginning, the failure of the League fulfilled an important function in the politics of the past. Domestically, it highlighted the futility of appeasement, giving anti-appeasers and League supporters like Dalton and Mander, not only opportunities to reflect what had gone wrong with the League, but what had been wrong with British foreign policy, both in the ranks of Labour and the Conservatives. Indeed, as Rhiannon Vickers has shown in relation to Labour foreign policy, this change started to take place during the Spanish civil war when, in 1937, Dalton ousted George Lansbury and his pacifist disarmament vision from the leadership of the Labour Party.[17]

By late 1939, hard-line appeasers and active League supporters such as Rab Butler, the Conservative under secretary of state for foreign affairs, could no longer ignore such arguments. Internationally the League's failure allowed MPs to draw attention to the League's lack of military muscle.[18] Yet, as Butler noted, the question over who would exercise this international force remained: 'It is clear that force is going to continue to exercise its function. The question is whether it is going to be national force, exercised as any State thinks fit, or international force, exercised in the general interests of humanity.'[19] Commenting on a similar theme in its editorial in early November, *The Times* noted that: 'When the League of Nations was challenged it was found to have no force behind it.'[20] Such immediate and painful lessons about the use of force, or lack of it, became a guide to both the planning process for a 'new league' and the public discourse about how such a league should function internationally after the war. On this subject, the *Observer* commented that the mistakes of those idealists 'who supposed that the League of Nations would give them perpetual peace' should definitely not be repeated.[21] Clearly, the lofty interwar idealism of 'collective security' had given way to the more practical (and realist) concerns of how 'collective force' might be deployed. Assessing the first year of war in December 1940, *The Times* also argued that:

> Military alliances in the old form are obsolete; so is the doctrine of collective security as preached for many years at Geneva. The practical lessons of the past year have

[15] John T. Grantham, 'Hugh Dalton and the International Post-War Settlement: Labour Party Foreign Policy Formulation, 1943–44', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xiv (1979), 714; Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World. Volume I: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900–51* (Manchester, 2004), 109, 116.

[16] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclv, col. 318: 30 Nov. 1939. On Mander and the League of Nations, see McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 49.

[17] Vickers, *Labour Party, vol. I*, 126–8.

[18] On Butler's appeasement, see Michael Jago, *Rab Butler: The Best Prime Minister We Never Had?* (2015); Paul Stafford, 'Political Autobiography and the Art of the Plausible: R.A. Butler at the Foreign Office, 1938–1939', *HJ*, xxviii (1985), 901–22; Peter J. Beck, 'The League of Nations and the Great Powers, 1936–1940', *World Affairs*, clvii (1995), 175–89.

[19] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclv, col. 317: 30 Nov. 1939.

[20] *The Times*, 3 Nov. 1939.

[21] *Observer*, 3 Dec. 1939.

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> demonstrated to every intelligent observer what was already clear to the military expert – the fact that paper commitments of mutual assistance are valueless under the conditions of modern warfare unless they involve a pooling in advance of military resources and military equipment and, above all, a common strategy, common loyalties, and a common outlook on the world.[22]

Indeed, less than a year later, the Atlantic Charter would be drawn up to express what its authors hoped represented the common outlook of the post-war world.

3. *Atlantic Charter – Foundations for the UN?*

The story of how the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 came into being is already well documented and need not be discussed at length here.[23] Only the last point of the charter, which called for 'the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security' referred, albeit implicitly, to the vision of setting up a new international organisation. The Churchill-Roosevelt meeting was widely editorialised in the press, often with eager tones, and yet David Reynolds has remarked that though it is 'now celebrated as the genesis of a great alliance [it] was regarded in London at the time as a disappointment, close to a flop'.[24] Certainly, it is true that the cabinet was not exactly pleased with the results. Not only was Churchill unable to persuade the United States to enter the war as he initially had hoped or get the term 'international organization' inserted into the final statement, but it now seemed possible that the charter would have repercussions on Britain's imperial policy – something which Roosevelt explicitly sought to secure from the charter.[25] Despite these misgivings, press opinion was generally less apprehensive about the meeting. Above all, it was contextualised from the perspective of the First World War: almost anything seemed better than the Allied or League of Nations policies of the past. The *Manchester Guardian* observed that Churchill and Roosevelt had made 'it clear that some adequate measures must be taken to secure peace and order'; and perhaps the biggest contrast to 1918 was that Roosevelt's role in the meeting gave 'the world every reason for believing that the new order [would] have behind it the moral and material power of the United States'.[26] The *Daily Telegraph*, meanwhile, called it 'a momentous meeting' showing Anglo-American 'unity in war and peace aims'. At the same time, the paper's diplomatic correspondents enthusiastically noted that the declaration marked 'an important departure from the Versailles Treaty' and the significance of point eight grew from the fact that Roosevelt seemed to have accepted

[22] *The Times*, 16 Dec. 1940.

[23] For more detailed accounts, see Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill. Volume VI: Finest Hour, 1939–1941* (1983), 1154–68; James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York, 1970), 125–31; Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 36–40; Theodore Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay* (Lawrences, KS, 1991); Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 53–5, 132–9; Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York, 1988), 144–61; David Bercuson and Holger Herwig, *One Christmas in Washington* (New York, 2005), 17–38.

[24] David Reynolds, ' "The Atlantic Flop": British Policy and the Churchill-Roosevelt Meeting of August 1941', in *The Atlantic Charter*, ed. Douglas Brinkley and David R. Facey-Crowther (New York, 1994), 146.

[25] Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 36–40.

[26] *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Aug. 1941; see also *The Times*, 15 Aug. 1941.

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that the United States would 'participate in the policing of the world after the war'.[27] The *Daily Herald* editorial, representing the official voice of Labour in the press, championed the charter as 'a brilliant advance for Democracy's war-cause'. Its 'prime significance' was 'that Britain and the United States are in absolute agreement on the broad principles which should govern the reconstruction of the world'. Like virtually all other papers, the *Herald* went on to add that had there been such 'full American collaboration' in 'the previous attempt at peace-building', the world 'would never have relapsed into Babel'.[28] Clearly, the meeting was received with much enthusiasm and the tone of the reporting was not so much based – as Reynolds has suggested – on the hope that the United States would join the war, as on the fact that Americans would, nevertheless, be committed to world affairs – especially post-war reconstruction.

Yet despite the press endorsement of the charter, clause three did, indeed, pose difficulties for Britain with regard to the status of her colonies. It stated that the signatories would 'respect the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live', which would have grave implications if Britain's colonies interpreted the statement as including them (which Roosevelt certainly hoped). The colonial secretary of state, Lord Moyne, was quick to defend the government's position. According to him, the declaration was written with 'the nations of Europe in mind'.[29] Anthony Eden also hurried to confirm this in his telegram to the governor of Burma, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith: 'it is of course absurd to assume that Burma or any other particular unit in the British Commonwealth was in mind when this declaration was framed'.[30] Interestingly, the press did not make an issue of this – not even Liberal- or Labour-leaning papers pointed out the implications for Britain's colonies. Tellingly, the *Daily Herald* focused on clauses four and five which, broadly speaking, labelled the reduction of global economic barriers and the upholding of social security as 'the essence of the Charter' and ignored the question of self-determination.[31] Roosevelt's attempt to place colonialism at the heart of the charter had failed to impress the whole spectrum of the British press.

Westminster first debated the charter after the summer recess, during which the Churchill-Roosevelt meeting had taken place. William Dobbie (Labour) immediately took Churchill up on whether point three of the charter would be applied to the question of Indian independence.[32] Churchill declined to answer at that time, but asked Dobbie to wait for his general statement on the matter, which would announce the government's official policy in no uncertain terms. This would define British post-war planning in the colonial context:

> … the Joint Declaration does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government in India, Burma or other parts of the British Empire … At the Atlantic

[27] *Daily Telegraph*, 15 Aug. 1941.

[28] *Daily Herald*, 15 Aug. 1941.

[29] TNA, CAB 67/9 (W.P. (G) (41) 89): interpretation of Point III of Atlantic Declaration in respect of the British empire. Memorandum by the secretary of state for the colonies, 2 Sept. 1941.

[30] TNA, CAB 67/9, 248: cabinet memoranda G Series 1939–41.

[31] *Daily Herald*, 15 Aug. 1941.

[32] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxiv, col. 29: 9 Sept. 1941.

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> meeting, we had in mind, primarily, the restoration of the sovereignty, self-government and national life of the States and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke, and the principles governing any alterations in the territorial boundaries which may have to be made. So that is quite a separate problem from the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in the regions and peoples which owe allegiance to the British Crown.[33]

It is clear from the above statement that the two issues were to remain quite separate. However, even if the government's colonial policy was not challenged in the debate, parliament was approaching the Atlantic Charter in much more ambivalent and cautious tones than the press. A Conservative MP, Henry Strauss, called it 'dangerous' because the terms were so general, and was annoyed that it was 'predominantly an American document', expressing 'magniloquent declarations of principles', when in fact the United States record regarding European affairs was based on 'profound mistakes' made after the end of the First World War.[34] Yet, in reality, the charter originated from the British side, the first draft being produced by Churchill himself, with the aim of deepening transatlantic ties.[35]

Strauss was not alone in these concerns. Based on the lessons of 1914–18, other MPs were deeply concerned that these 'magniloquent declarations' would not translate into action: the United States would isolate itself from international affairs and keep out of the war for as long as possible. Major Petherick (Conservative) argued that the charter simply reiterated the main points which Wilson had made in 1918, which had hardly been 'productive of satisfactory results'.[36] It is fair to say that there were other issues regarding the charter that were considered more important in the British political context than deliberating over a nascent UN. As we have already seen, the *Daily Herald* highlighted points four and five, while Cadogan thought the sixth article the most important (the restoration of peace after Nazi tyranny allowing 'all the men in all the lands' to live 'in freedom from fear and want').[37] In August 1942, the *Daily Telegraph*'s editorial celebrated the charter's first anniversary with no mention of point eight. Instead it referred to 'the defeat of the Axis' as the 'supreme objective' of the charter.[38]

4. *From League of Nations to United Nations*

The United Nations was officially adopted as a title on 1 January 1942, when 26 nations met in Washington to sign the 'Declaration by United Nations'. At this point it was more of a pledge to stand united in defeating the Axis powers, than to build an international peacetime organisation. However, in general terms, the political ideas it described (defending life, liberty, religious freedom, human rights, and justice) would, indeed, become the legal foundation of today's UN, and the charter of 1945 would stipulate that it was the signatories

[33] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxiv, cols 68–9: 9 Sept. 1941.

[34] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxiv, cols 95–6: 9 Sept. 1941.

[35] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume 3: The Grand Alliance* (1950), 262–80; Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 36–40.

[36] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxiv, col. 108: 9 Sept. 1941.

[37] *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938–45*, ed. David Dilks (1971), 401.

[38] *Daily Telegraph*, 15 Aug. 1942.

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in 1942 who were the founders of the organisation.[39] However, the context in which the press described it at the time was a military one – a pooling of resources and a pledge not to make any kind of separate armistice with the enemy. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, the declaration was 'the formal constitution of the Grand Alliance, the preliminary to unity and in strategy and supply'.[40] However, the declaration was greeted by far less press commentary than the Atlantic Charter. In the Commons it was also quickly dispatched in the first debate regarding the war situation on 8 January 1942. Attlee, in Churchill's absence, referred to it only once without elaboration. Nor was there any mention of a post-war international organisation in the public discourse surrounding the declaration.[41] Clearly, the declaration was interpreted as business-as-usual.

Nevertheless, both the charter and the Declaration by the United Nations did endorse the idea of an international organisation in the broadest and most general terms; and on both sides of the Atlantic, planning for its realization picked up speed during 1942. In June the British foreign office established the economic and reconstruction department which began drafting blueprints for the future organisation. It was headed by Gladwyn Jebb, who was assisted in his task by Charles Webster – professor of history at the London School of Economics and a LNU activist.[42] Like the Americans, the British placed national interest as a priority. In Jebb's words: 'hard-headed British self-interest was paramount … The international organisation … might halt Britain's further decline.'[43] The first memorandum which detailed Britain's broad concerns was Anthony Eden's 'United Nations Plan' drafted in January 1942. The document opened with a distinct axiom regarding the nature of British interests:

> The aim of British foreign policy must be first that we should continue to exercise the function and to bear responsibilities of a World Power; and secondly, that we should seek not only to prevent Europe from being dominated by any one Power, but to preserve the freedom of Europe as essential to our own … We cannot realise these objectives through our own unaided efforts. We can only hope to play our part either as European Power or as a World Power if we ourselves form part of a wider organisation.[44]

It was clear from the outset that Britain was planning a post-war role whereby it would work from within what would become the UN, as one of the 'Big Three' (and in co-operation

[39] Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN*, 34–5.

[40] *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Jan. 1942; *The Times*, 3 Jan. 1942.

[41] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxiv, col. 83: 8 Jan. 1942.

[42] Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 150–1; Gladwyn Jebb, 'Founding the UN: Principles and Objects', in *United Kingdom*, ed. Jensen and Fisher, 24; McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 117–18.

[43] Jebb, 'Founding the UN', 25; see also Neil Briscoe, *Britain and UN Peacekeeping 1948–67* (Basingstoke, 2003), 16–17.

[44] TNA, CAB 66/33/31: Anthony Eden, 'The United Nations Plan', 16 Jan. 1943. Eden noted that for a long time, China would only be a great power on paper but should be included due to United States demands. On point 9 of the memo, he also asked that France should be added, 'if only because without the assistance of a rejuvenated France the problem of preventing a renewed German effort to dominate the Continent will be much more difficult'. Point 24 was about creating the framework for a 'Council of Europe'. Point 26 advocated regional councils such as a Pan-American Union and a (British) Imperial conference. But these regional councils would ultimately defer questions of security to the 'Council of the World', i.e., the United States, USSR, Britain, and China. 'Backward Areas' with the status of colonial dependencies would fall under the regional councils. See also TNA, CAB 66/33/31: Leo Amery's own plan and commentary, 25 Jan. 1943.

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with China) so that not only world peace could be maintained, but also Britain's role as a great power. Yet, although planning of the UN went on in the foreign office, there was little public mention of post-war aims in 1942 after the Atlantic Charter and Declaration. Ministers were growing restless with this seeming lack of progress. Arthur Greenwood (Labour) who in 1914 had written *The War and Democracy*, together with LNU supporters, R.W. Seton-Watson, J. Dover Wilson, and Alfred E. Zimmern, argued in the Commons that the government should clarify its peacetime aims.[45] Eventually there was a debate about post-war reconstruction for two days in early December 1942. The debate began with Labour moving an amendment which called for the government and UN (which meant 'the Allies') to take the necessary legislative and administrative measures to translate the principles of the Atlantic Charter into practice by the end of the war. The debate reflected the growing public anxiety over the form the new organisation would take. As *The Times* put it, the debate 'carried with it an implied criticism of official apathy in the past'.[46] At the end of the debate, Eden offered the House eagerly awaited government views of its plans for a post-war international organisation. Churchill, who was critical of the work done at the economic and reconstruction department, had not been asked for his approval of Eden's speech.[47] What emerged was a view (based on Gladwyn Jebb's plan) that the UN should be dominated by the great powers to avoid it becoming as powerless as the League of Nations had been – 'for any international organisation if it is to have a chance to achieve its purpose … it must be fully representative of the Powers that mean to keep the peace. The old League was not.'[48] By the end of 1942, it was becoming clear that the post-war international organisation would not be quite like 'the old League'. As Eden continued, the lessons learnt from the interwar years (lessons which were intimately personal to himself) would affect the current post-war policy under consideration. 'Let us take heed a little from the lessons of the past', he argued, 'let us try to learn them. I believe that out of this organisation of the United Nations, based in the first instance on understanding between ourselves, the United States and Russia, a great opportunity opens to us.'[49] Earlier, Mander had also considered how in the post-war organisation, 'the actual physical power may have to be delegated to those who really possess it, the big four – Britain, the United States of America, the Soviet Union and China'.[50] Interwar League of Nations' supporters like Mander (and to some extent Eden), who had been pained by the League's military ineffectiveness, sought to advocate a far stronger role for the new organisations.

Writing about this debate, the conservative *Daily Telegraph* staunchly defended Eden's position in the face of criticism that the government had acted slowly and with 'an alleged lack of precision' on the matter of post-war reconstruction. The paper pointed out that: 'as Mr. Eden said yesterday, many of [the government's] plans must necessarily be expressed in the form of chapter headings, because it is impossible to do more than define the principles

[45] On procrastination in 1942, see Hughes, 'Churchill and United Nations', 181; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxx, cols 73–4.

[46] *The Times*, 3 Dec. 1942.

[47] Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 158.

[48] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxxv, col. 1259: 2 Dec. 1942.

[49] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxxv, col. 1259: 2 Dec. 1942.

[50] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccclxxxv, col. 1195: 2 Dec. 1942.

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on which our actions will be based'.[51] What the *Telegraph* left unsaid about these principles was the matter which Eden had inadvertently emphasized – that not only was it important that the 'big three' co-operate within the new organisation, but also dominate it. *The Times*, in contrast, pointed this out: 'Mr. Eden made it plain that on the four Great Powers … must rest the main responsibility for building up the system of common security.'[52] A more critical view was voiced by the *Daily Herald*, which asked in its editorial: 'Would it not be wise to consult at once the other governments of the Alliance – including, of course the Dominions – so that there can be a general pooling of ideas?'[53] When we put together these press comments and debates in parliament, it becomes clear that by late 1942, with the tide of war turning, most public discourse on the new international organisation favoured – or at least broadly accepted – an approach which would be structured more according to the interests of the great powers rather than the equality of all nations. In this sense, the enthusiasm for world public opinion and global democracy, which the establishment of the League had introduced after the First World War were but forgotten tenets of collective security during the Second.[54] Yet it seems that it was usually League supporters who themselves changed this course.

Towards the end of 1943, the impetus for the new organisation moved a further step forward. At the Moscow conference in October 1943, just before Roosevelt met Stalin and Churchill in Tehran, Cordell Hull persuaded Vyacheslav Molotov and Anthony Eden to sign an agreement for a general world organisation instead of one based on regional blocs, which is what Churchill would have favoured. Paragraph four of the Moscow declaration recognized 'the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organization … for the maintenance of international peace and security'.[55] However, in its reports, the British press emphasized the role of the European Commission, showing the proclivity in British thinking to view the post-war world from a 'Europe First' perspective (the Dominions were not part of discussion).[56] While silent on the issue of any global international organisation, the *Daily Telegraph* argued that: 'the European Advisory Commission will exist to help them [nations occupied by Germany] work out their future and not to dictate it'.[57] In the Commons' debate immediately following the Moscow conference, Eden did not stress the importance of the new international organisation so much in terms of collective security, or 'world outlook', but as the glue that would keep the victorious powers together. No doubt he had the First World War in mind when he argued that:

> when the immediate common effort needed for victory is over it is hard to hold the same unity in the years that follow. That is a lesson of which we are only too well aware,

[51] *Daily Telegraph*, 3 Dec. 1942.

[52] *The Times*, 3 Dec. 1942.

[53] *Daily Herald*, 3 Dec 1942.

[54] For the initial enthusiasm for the League and public diplomacy, see Holmila and Ihalainen, 'Nationalism and Internationalism Reconciled', 36–9.

[55] Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 91.

[56] *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1943, p. 5.

[57] *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 Nov. 1943.

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> and the importance of this declaration is in the emphasis it lays on the decision of our governments to continue our co-operation and our collaboration after the war.[58]

The priority placed on co-operation between the United States, USSR, and Britain, reinforced the idea that the organisation was being formed on an increasingly undemocratic and unequal basis – in so far as agreement between the 'big three' was now seen as more important than unanimity among all nations. For the post-war planners in both the British foreign office and the United States Department of State, it was by now clear that the UN would be the pinnacle of great power politics – effectively guaranteeing their interests.[59] Most newspaper reports on the conference praised the new positive relationship between the 'big three' that it heralded. Quoting Arthur Greenwood, *The Times* noted that:

> the clouds of suspicion between us and the United States and between us and the USSR had been dispelled. Nothing of any greater significance had taken place in the war up to now than the conference which had brought about a new spirit of cooperation.[60]

Meanwhile, the *Daily Telegraph* argued that despite different political, economic, and social systems, the great powers had shown that they could work together if they wanted to. 'The Moscow conference showed that they do want to; and it is the mutual sincerity of this desire which promises that its success will be not temporary but permanent.'[61] A *Daily Herald* headline for an article describing Eden's appearance in Westminster emphasized this aspect too – 'We Three: Partnership of Nations'.[62] In this article, Eden denied that that this was a 'three-power dictatorship' because the powers also wanted 'association with others', based on 'the principle of full discussion'. Yet it was clear that virtue was being made of necessity from the line: 'But the special responsibility does rest on our three powers.' In other words, power politics was acceptable if it meant harmonious working relations among the 'big three' – and this was also accepted by the left.[63]

5. *The Culmination: Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco*

When the Dumbarton Oaks conference began, on 21 August 1944, much had happened since 1943. Above all, it was now clear that the fortunes of war had turned decisively in favour of the allies: a second front had been achieved in the west and the Red Army was advancing at a staggering rate in the east. It was now a much more pressing concern to determine the precise structure of the organisation that was to be, if it was going to be up and running by the end of the war. According to Frank Donovan, the State Department draft was the 'only detailed and fully developed agenda paper'.[64] Mark Mazower has argued

[58] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., cccxciii, cols 1325–6: 11 Nov 1943.

[59] For the great power politics and the national interest in the United States context, see, e.g., Smith, *American Empire*, 413–15; Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 152–4.

[60] *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1943.

[61] *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Nov. 1943.

[62] *Daily Herald*, 12 Nov. 1943.

[63] *Daily Herald*, 12 Nov. 1943.

[64] Donovan, *Roosevelt's Four Freedoms*, 106.

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that at Dumbarton Oaks the British discovered that the Americans were much further ahead in their post-war planning, so had simply to go along with everything the Americans suggested.[65] Both these assessments seem to downplay the British contribution and role in forging the UN.[66] As far as the press was concerned, especially at the opening of the conference, efforts were made to highlight the good working relations between the British, Americans, and Russians, but at the same time serious differences between the USSR and western powers became apparent over events in Poland.[67]

The four key issues at the conference were the voting procedures in the Security Council, the questions of International Air Force, membership, and finally, the scope of the UN in general. While the voting procedure was not settled at Dumbarton Oaks, it, nevertheless, formed the nexus for the whole future organisation. Similarly, this was where public attitudes towards post-war security were made most visible – making the conference all the more important for the present article. Press opinion was divided over the role of the Security Council, especially after the war. On the right, the council was seen as a good thing; those on the left were more cautious. The *Daily Telegraph* cited General Smuts (another staunch League supporter) in asserting that 'the neglect to provide adequate force' had caused the Second World War. By contrast, under the auspices of the UN, the Security Council would 'command an overwhelming potential of military and economic strength against any aggressor'.[68] In seeking to downplay the 'great power' aspect, the paper was arguing, in March 1945, that the 'strongest nations ... are not constituted dictators. An appeal against any of them may be made ... it is true that an organisation, however fair and skilfully devised, cannot alone generate effective measure.'[69] *The Times*, too, concentrated on the question of power while remaining cautiously positive. It argued that any plan – with or without a security council – would be 'impotent in the face of a serious conflict between Great Powers – a truth abundantly demonstrated in the brief history of the League of Nations'.[70] In the paper's opinion, power and enforcement went hand in hand. In March 1945, as the San Francisco conference was drawing nearer, the paper argued that possession of 'effective power' translated into 'less danger ... of a recurrence of the old divorce between decision and enforcement'.[71] As far as smaller nations were concerned, a benevolent attitude was discernible. Citing Eden's views expressed in parliament, *The Times* argued that the whole purpose of the Security Council was to prevent war and conflict, and since 'the greatest threat to the political independence and territorial integrity of the smaller states comes from war', small states would be secure under the umbrella of the UN and the great powers within it.[72]

In contrast, the *Manchester Guardian* exhibited a far more critical attitude, examining the issue from the perspective of small nations – an issue which also had divided views among

[65] Mazower, *Governing the World*, 198–9; see also Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, 44; Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 136–7.

[66] Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 175.

[67] *The Times*, 22 Aug. 1944; Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of United Nations*, 140.

[68] *Daily Telegraph*, 10 Oct., 18 Dec. 1944.

[69] *Daily Telegraph*, 6 Mar. 1945.

[70] *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1944.

[71] *The Times*, 28 Mar. 1945.

[72] *The Times*, 22 Nov. 1944.

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the major foreign office planners, Gladwyn Jebb and Charles Webster.[73] The new system, the paper argued, would 'be no more than a Three-Power Alliance to preserve the status quo. Moreover, the small Powers could hardly be expected to join in collective action if they had no voice in reaching the decision.' The biggest flaw, the paper pointed out, was that 'if Britain, Russia, and the United States fall out that will be an end to the League'.[74] Clearly, underneath the rhetoric of continued alliance, the real danger of the new UN system was also becoming visible. Nevertheless, optimism generally prevailed, with the *Daily Herald* editorial approving the new plan as it enabled the organisation to act, as a clear divergence from the League, 'swiftly and decisively'. The overall argument was based once more on 'the failure of the League', which 'was not a failure of machinery. It was a failure of will on the part of the spokesmen of the great nations.'[75] Returning to the matter in December, the *Herald* argued, rather optimistically, that 'each country must be sincerely willing to give to the preservation of world peace priority over the pursuit of nationalistic advantage'.[76]

In parliament, the Commons debated the Dumbarton Oaks provisions in November 1944, and also in February 1945 – after the Yalta conference. Representing the majority view, Daniel Chater (Labour and Co-operative) argued that setting up the Security Council would remedy the main problem to have plagued the League of Nations. Concentrating power like this was 'a logical necessity … to have effective means of preventing world aggression'.[77] Voicing a more critical stance, and reminiscent of Webster and the *Guardian* was Percy Harris, the Liberal Party whip. Harris was well connected to the liberal international circles of the interwar years, not least through Eric Drummond, the League's General Secretary (1920–33). Voicing the fears of the direction in which the UN was heading, Harris argued that the Security Council was just 'another Concert of Europe', and 'the new machinery' would 'suffer the same discredit as the League of Nations'.[78]

Besides these questions surrounding the 'big three' was that of Britain's leading role in European affairs – clearly illustrated by the debate on the Address (29 and 30 November). Sir James Duncan (Conservative) offered the most straightforward formula: 'I believe, broadly speaking, British interests abroad, at any rate as far as Europe is concerned, are the interests of Europe itself.'[79] On the other side of the chamber, Labour's Ivor Thomas argued that it was Britain's role:

> to give a … lead in bringing to an end the Balkanisation of Western Europe; for in this world of super-States we can no longer regard such countries as Belgium, Portugal, Holland, or even ourselves in this Island, as having the potentialities and capacities of a great Power.[80]

[73] Gladwyn Jebb was less concerned with small powers and their role than his colleague, Charles Webster, who thought that small powers would be disinclined to join such an exclusive club: see Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 181; Hall, 'Webster', 485.

[74] *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Sept., 13 Oct. 1944.

[75] *Daily Herald*, 10 Oct. 1944.

[76] *Daily Herald*, 13 Dec. 1944.

[77] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., cccci, col. 142: 30 Nov. 1944.

[78] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., cccci, col. 22: 9 Nov. 1944.

[79] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., cccci, col. 159: 30 Nov. 1944.

[80] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., cccciii, col. 538: 28 Sept. 1944.

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The press, too, started to recast the European dimension of any post-war organisation. On 10 October 1944, immediately after the Dumbarton Oaks conference, *The Times* editorial, under the title 'Preparation for Peace', took the work done at the European Advisory Commission as its starting point, pointing out how this had 'laid firm foundations' for peace in Europe. Only after then did it turn to the topic of a 'General International Organisation'.[81] The *Daily Telegraph* observed in December that a post-war 'system is indeed more likely to be built up from regional schemes than created outright as a single organisation'.[82] In February 1945, when discussing the proposals made at Dumbarton Oaks in preparation for the forthcoming conference in San Francisco, many British MPs used language reminiscent of 1939–40. These debates show that the British were placing an increasing importance on Europe as its liberation drew closer. As Kenneth Lindsay (National Labour) argued, a 'Western European community' seemed to be more of a priority than an Atlantic one:

> The people of France and Belgium – and I am sure the people of Holland and Scandinavia before long – are looking to this country. Short of coming into the British Commonwealth, they desire the closest possible liaison with this country, and in our own interests – in our trade interests, to put it at its lowest – it is up to us to take some cognisance of that amazing fact. They are looking to us not only in the field of economics, but in a very much wider field. Mr. Walter Lippman talks about an Atlantic community; I am much more modest and talk about a Western European community.[83]

At the same time, as MPs became increasingly interested in Europe's reconstruction, there appeared to be a growing sense of disappointment with the new organisation's guiding ideology. Although the deadlock over vetoing had been resolved at Yalta, the voting formula was not immediately revealed to parliament, and it was not until April 1945, just before the San Francisco conference, that it had a chance to debate the veto question. The most realistic and critical strand of opinion against the government was represented by the Liberal William Beveridge, a LNU member and supporter of European federalism, who argued that the veto arrangement spelled doom for the new organisation if it was to really have any power in the post-war world:

> The Lord President of the Council [Clement Attlee] spoke of the Security Council having great power at its disposal. It has no such thing. The only power it has is the power which each of these five Powers individually will allow to be used. This voting procedure involves, by us a definite pledge, not to act against aggression unless we can have the support of each one of these four Powers, or unless–this is the other alternative – we go outside the world organisation; *so that real provision for security falls outside this world organisation for peace*.[84]

[81] *The Times*, 10 Oct. 1944.

[82] *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Dec. 1944.

[83] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccx, cols 138–9: 17 Apr. 1945.

[84] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccx, col. 106: 17 Apr. 1945 (emphasis added). In retrospect it is easy to say that this is what happened. As Andrew Baker has pointed out, the 'trouble with the UN was not the work it did, which was generally good. It was the work it did not or could not do. The peace was being made

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Others shared similar sentiments. Harold Nicolson (National Labour) private secretary to Sir Eric Drummond in the 1920s and another LNU member, argued that when the time comes to use collective force, 'it does not operate at all'.[85] Meanwhile, Sir Cyril Entwistle (Conservative) regretted the whole veto issue and thought it 'disastrous' that the United States and USSR thought Britain was satisfied with the provision.[86]

6. *Ratifying the United Nations Charter*

On 26 June 1945, less than two weeks before the general elections, 50 nations signed the United Nations Charter. The charter was to then take effect once it was ratified by the United States, USSR, China, and Britain. In July 1945, the United States Senate ratified the charter, and in Britain a debate was held about it on 22 and 23 August in both Houses. The question of ratification was, nevertheless, a foregone conclusion and as the government wished, the charter was ratified unanimously by parliament. While this unanimous vote reflected the general will to channel international co-operation via the UN system, it did not mean that MPs were wholly satisfied with the charter's provisions. Ben Levy (Labour) highlighted this in his maiden speech: 'although I shall vote for the Motion, I shall do so with qualified enthusiasm. I shall do so because there is offered to us, at this moment, only this one alternative, only this instalment of collective security.'[87] In the Lords, Viscount Cranborne, Robert Cecil's nephew and a member of the LNU executive, who had also been one of the members of the British delegation in San Francisco, argued that, like many others, he disliked the veto clause, but without such provision 'you would have had no Charter at all'.[88] In the first instance, the failure of the League of Nations was, once again, used as a tool to vindicate the power-politics of the 'big three'. As Anthony Eden pointed out, the League had failed because:

> the conception of democracy in international affairs led people to think – falsely, as I believe – that the League was constituted so that every nation must be regarded as exactly equal and there was no relation between power and responsibility.[89]

What Eden meant was that that the UN would not suffer from the same excess of democracy that had handicapped the League. Taken in isolation, such a frank acknowledgement that the UN was based on a principle of inequality would seem astonishing, but it was a

84 (*continued*) without reference to the Security Council; bases were being acquired without troubling the Trusteeship Council; reconstruction was proceeding without the Economic and Social Council': Andrew Baker, *Constructing Post-War Order: The Rise of US Hegemony and the Origins of the Cold War* (2011), 229. On Beveridge, see McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 249–51.

85 Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccx, col. 120: 17 Apr. 1945.

86 Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccx, col. 130: 17 Apr. 1945.

87 Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 730: 22 Aug. 1945; Goodwin, *Britain and United Nations*, 45.

88 Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cxxxvii, col. 120: 22 Aug. 1945. In San Francisco, Tom Connally even suggested to the foreign ministers of Australia (Evatt) and New Zealand (Fraser), who wanted to change the veto clause, 'that they can go home and they can say that they have defeated the veto. But they'd have to also say that they tore up the charter': Tom Connally, *My Name is Tom Connally* (New York, 1954), 283; Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and Creation of the United Nations*, 202.

89 Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 674: 22 Aug. 1945.

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logical continuation of the discourse which had stressed the importance of the 'big three' co-operation above all other issues since 1941–2.

However, in the few weeks between the charter's adoption in the United States and in Britain, the whole question of world security and international relations was thrown into a new and lurid light by the first use of the atomic bomb in Japan. In many ways this made ratification of the charter even more urgent, while at the same time rendering the whole question of ratification somewhat obsolete, as the UN now already seemed outdated.[90] The *Economist* acknowledged this when it noted that 'the debate … on the ratification … was overshadowed by the problem of the atomic bomb'.[91] There was now much more at stake in MPs' minds with the very real threat of nuclear war.

Many MPs across the political spectrum argued in favour of relinquishing a portion of national security to meet demands of the new atomic era. The Labour minister of education, Ellen Wilkinson, herself one of the 'powerful speakers on foreign affairs' in the 1930s, called for 'maximum infringement of sovereignty within which we will try to make ourselves as comfortable as we can', and newly elected William Warbey (Labour) also argued that 'absolute national sovereignty is now an outdated factor in international affairs'.[92] The question of sovereignty was also linked to the question of a future European community, which, once again, had become the key issue since VE Day (8 May 1945):

> I believe there is a great opportunity in the future for nation States to get more mixed together, especially in their economic functions. We have a particularly excellent opportunity in the case of those nations in the north and west of Europe, and I include our own, which, I am glad to say, have now very largely a common political outlook, and which are intending to pursue similar policies of planning for full employment and for raising standards of living.[93]

According to Robert Boothby (Conservative), the future of mankind hinged on the question of whether people could adapt to a new notion of supranational sovereignty. 'Will human beings be able to make the terrific sustained mental and moral effort required to modify … the concept of national sovereignty? Upon the answer to this question, the fate of our species, I think, very probably depends.'[94] Regarding Europe, Boothby, who in the late 1940s was a delegate to the Council of Europe's Consultative Assembly, argued that without pursuing a common economic policy:

> the relatively small nations of Europe, including ourselves, can scarcely hope to survive … I think it is a tragedy that neither the late government at San Francisco, nor the present government, have taken the lead in forming a Western European bloc.[95]

[90]For the atomic question, see Matti Roitto, *Dissenting Visions: The Executive, Parliament and the Problematic Anglo-American Atomic Collaboration in the Changes of British Atomic Foreign Policy 1945–6* (Jyväskylä, Finland, 2015), 66–90.

[91]*Economist*, 25 Aug. 1945.

[92]Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 898: 23 Aug. 1945. On Wilkinson, see McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 192.

[93]Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 898: 23 Aug. 1945.

[94]Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 903: 23 Aug. 1945.

[95]Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 904: 23 Aug. 1945.

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Konni Zilliacus (Labour), a former member of the League secretariat and what Helen McCarthy has labelled as a member of 'LNU old guard', also supported the idea of surrendering a portion of sovereignty in favour of security and called for comprehensive European groups:

> we should work towards converting the Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet Alliances into a comprehensive all-in agreement embracing on one side Great Britain, France and our Western European neighbours grouped in some form of economic and political union, and on the other the Soviet Union and the Eastern European group of States associated with the Soviet Union.[96]

In the press, *The Times* was more cautious. Although it largely agreed with MPs, it also reminded readers that west European nations should, 'in light of their common heritage', examine post-war problems they all shared but, rather than giving up any sovereignty, 'agree on the general form of treatment which their common troubles require'.[97] And yet, while parliament and the press raised questions about sovereignty they also expressed the limits of sovereignty, which were seen in two issues.

First, the debate showed that co-operation between the 'big three'was more important than losing a degree of sovereignty. The *Daily Herald* explained the British approach, indicating that the left – now holding the reins of British policy – could only accept this situation too:

> The retention of the veto power means that there has been no final resignation of sovereignty by the great states … This was probably inevitable. The British people are more ready than most to contemplate fresh improvements in the machinery of international collaboration. At the same time they realise that there is an inestimable advantage in starting the new era with the full co-operation of the Soviet Union and the United States.[98]

Second, the ratification debate demonstrated the prevailing strength of the idea of Britain's empire and British sovereign rights. The ratification of the charter, for instance, did not lead to the dissolution of the British empire – an issue which the MPs were quick to note. In the Commons' debate the colonial question was one among many, but it was symbolically significant, as it showed that Roosevelt and Stalin could not simply trample over British interests. From the start it was clear that the charter would not threaten the continuing existence of the empire, as Lord Cranborne had pointed out previously in the Lords. What had already been established in 1941 was now confirmed in 1945: the question of empire was a 'domestic concern' and thus off-limits to the UN.[99] To check that the colonial status quo would remain, Oliver Stanley (the former colonial secretary) asked his Labour successor, George Hall, to confirm 'that His Majesty's government have no inten-

[96] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 884: 23 Aug. 1945; McCarthy, *British People and League of Nations*, 249.

[97] *The Times*, 24 Aug. 1945.

[98] *Daily Herald*, 23 Aug. 1945.

[99] Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cxxxvii, cols 121–2: 22 Aug. 1945.

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tion of relinquishing their mandates for those territories which they now hold'.[100] Such a demand was really directed at the whole of Attlee's new Labour government. As Rhiannon Vickers has argued, the Labour Party's wartime attitude on colonial affairs was 'underdeveloped and inconsistent', making Conservatives suspicious.[101] The Labour government's answer (given by the foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, in Hall's absence) was in line with the position adopted in 1941 under Churchill's coalition:

> As far as the administration of our existing mandates is concerned, there has been no change in the policy to which we were all a party in the Coalition government. It was thoroughly thrashed out at that time. There was no party difference about it at all, and we arrived at a decision on this question which I can assure my right hon. and gallant Friend has not even been reconsidered, because we regarded it as really settled.[102]

In addition, Prime Minister Attlee had dealt with this question in his opening statement for the debate. The British had made sure in San Francisco that the UN Trusteeship Council had no powers to 'take any decision as to the future of such territories', as it could not itself decide which areas it arbitrated. Most importantly, the PM noted – sounding like American isolationists – that by ratifying the charter, the House was not 'entering into any commitment', which meant that all MPs could rest assured that it did not amount to dismantling the empire.[103]

7. *Conclusion*

Wartime efforts by the Allied governments to establish a new international organisation were closely watched by parliament and in the British press. Overall, the ideas, themes, and visions relating to such an organisation were not steady but in a constant flux. This was largely dependent on the prosecution of the war and the relationship between the 'big three'. The only stable element throughout, was the aim to learn from the past failures of the League of Nations. While this framed the whole public discourse surrounding the nature of any post-war collective security organisation, it was hardly surprising since the politicians who most actively engaged with this matter were either members of the LNU or had direct experience about the interwar functions of the League.

From the outbreak of the war until the fall of France, public discourse was centred on European problems, stressing the need for creating a new system which would be able to deploy force quickly and effectively. This meant that states would have to relinquish some of their sovereignty. As continental Europe succumbed further to the Nazi offensive, and the alliance between Britain, the United States, and the USSR emerged, the dominant discourse changed from European issues to questions of a global reach as a necessary consequence of focusing on collaboration between the 'big three', even if the British still approached the question of an international organisation from a Europe-first perspective. While the

[100] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 933: 23 Aug. 1945.

[101] Vickers, *The Labour Party, vol. I*, 148.

[102] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 940: 23 Aug. 1945.

[103] Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., ccccxiii, col. 669: 22 Aug. 1945.

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Atlantic Charter (1941) and the Declaration by the United Nations (1942) referred to much of the post-war world order that eventually transpired, and present-day scholarship views them as foundational documents, the public at the time viewed them differently. In broad terms, they were instrumental in bringing into the public discourse the overriding importance of co-operation between the 'big three' – something which had been ignored when the League was founded. Subsequently, the view that nations would have to give up parts of their sovereignty disappeared from the discourse, as it was clear that neither the United States or USSR were willing to sacrifice any portion of their national sovereignty in favour of a post-war system of collective security.

As an Allied victory became more certain, it also became increasingly clear that the UN would ensure what the League had plainly failed to ensure – post-war co-operation between the 'big three'. The lessons of history were put to use by the LNU politicians, and the power politics practised by all three nations was justified and accepted in the name of their co-operation. In the press and in parliament, such an approach was vindicated by experiences of the League. Publicly, the legitimacy of the new organisation, not least its undemocratic Security Council, was justified in terms of the League's failure. For example, the veto clause was not liked but accepted as a necessary tool that would clearly differentiate it from the failed League, even if many (like Beveridge) understood that, in many ways, it rendered the collective security function stillborn from the start. The hope, nevertheless, remained that the 'big powers' would use this function well.

The first use of the atomic bomb heralded another shift in the discourse, coinciding as it did with the Allied governments' ratification of the UN charter. Once again, MPs mooted the idea of giving up some degree of national sovereignty. However, such a view was more a reflection of the deep anxieties and worries caused by the bomb than a real policy suggestion planned to succeed. By the autumn of 1945, the limits of sovereignty were well established. The UN charter did not question the supremacy of the United States constitution – otherwise the senate would never have ratified it; nor did it challenge the hegemony of the USSR in eastern Europe. In Britain's case, the UN presented no threat to her empire. Throughout the war, the questions of empire and the UN were largely treated as separate and with the help of parliament, the government ensured that this be so. While parliament occasionally debated the two issues – in 1941 with regard to the Atlantic Charter and in 1945 with regard to ratifying the UN charter – the press did not generally present the UN and the colonial questions together under same rubric. Overall, in spite of the many contentious issues that arose during the planning phase, the discourse was mostly framed in terms of the failure of the League of Nations. Thus, in spite of the many seemingly insoluble problems that remained, the UN symbolised the hope for a more secure, co-operative, and just world. Even if the general direction may have remained somewhat unclear, at least the powers which were wholly absent in the first organisation were now present. This way it was hoped that the League's mistakes would not be repeated.

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