

Arthur Henderson and the 1917 Stockholm Conference

A Reappraisal

by

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2018

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Abstract

This thesis will challenge established accounts of the events leading to Henderson's enforced resignation from the War Cabinet in August 1917. These accounts attribute Henderson's determination to pursue British attendance at an international socialist conference in Stockholm to his concerns over the vulnerability of the socialist dominated but 'moderate' post-tsarist government. They contend that Henderson believed that the Russian government would be bolstered by the presence of Allied socialists at the conference. It will be argued in this thesis that whilst Henderson himself gave this impression, there is little supporting evidence to demonstrate that this was his main concern. The thesis will provide a detailed analysis of Henderson's actions and statements during the period and will conclude that the standard account of this episode is not viable. It will argue that Henderson was not primarily motivated by events in Russia, but exploited them to bring about a change in Labour party policy, directed at engagement with the Socialist International in order to secure a peace based on socialist principles. It will be argued further that the threat of Bolshevism, not just in Russia, but more widely, has been gravely overstated as an explanation of Henderson's actions at this time.

Acknowledgements

I must begin by acknowledging my debt to Professor Nicholas Crowson who has encouraged and guided me throughout the period since I tentatively returned in later life to the challenges of academic research. This has all along for me been a rewarding relationship. I would like to thank too the many members and staff of the University of Birmingham who have at all times been willing to help me in a variety of ways.

I have appreciated too the generous assistance of numerous archivists and librarians elsewhere. These include the staff of the Labour History Archive and Study Centre in Manchester; of the National Archive at Kew; and of the British Library. Other university libraries accessed through the Sconul scheme have provided this visiting Brummie with a no less excellent service. The librarians of University of Warwick and University of Nottingham must in particular be mentioned. So too those of the Bodleian in Oxford.

I would also like to express my thanks to John and Ann Tenant, to Margaret Legg, and to the Undergraduate friends of my son Alex McCormick, all of whom have provided welcome hospitality during many research trips. Finally, since most of the time I have put into this dissertation has taken place at home, I must show the greatest appreciation to my immediate family, Christine, Alex and Mollie who have all made home a happy place and who have amusingly tolerated my thesis induced absences of mind and general distraction. Lastly I must mention my four legged friend Poppy, whose daily perambulatory requirements have encouraged that most essential of needs in work such as this: that of regularly 'clearing the head'.

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List of Abbreviations

AFL	American Federation of Labour
BSP	British Socialist Party
GFTU	General Federation of trade Unions
FO	Foreign Office
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISB	International Socialist Bureau
LHA	Labour History Arhive
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MRC	Modern Records Centre
NWAC	National War Aims Committee
PCTUC	Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
SFIO	Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
TNA	The National Archive
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
USC	United Socialist Council
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

Introduction

On the morning of 10 August 1917 Arthur Henderson, Secretary of the British Labour party, persuaded a special party conference to vote for attendance at an international socialist conference to be held in Stockholm. Later the same day, following angry exchanges with the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who made clear both his surprise and disapproval over this action, Henderson resigned from the War Cabinet. This was a ministerial resignation of considerable significance. Henderson was recognised at this time as *de facto* leader of his party, had supported labour participation in the two coalition governments, and had been included since December 1916 in Lloyd George's five man inner core of the War Cabinet. The issue over which he resigned was one of high political importance. Should British citizens be permitted, as Henderson wished, to attend an international gathering based on ideological affinity and including political groups from opposing sides in the war?

It is generally agreed that the roots of this episode lie in the period between 1 June and 16 July 1917 which Henderson had spent in revolutionary Russia, attempting on behalf of the War Cabinet to keep the wavering Russians committed to the war. His critics would contend, in the words of Lloyd George, that whilst in Russia Henderson had contracted 'more than a touch of the revolutionary malaria.'¹ His defenders rejected any such notion, arguing instead that Henderson had recognised in Russia that the fragile Provisional

¹ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol.2 (London, 1938), p.1127; see also the judgement of *The Times* correspondent in Russia, *The Times*, 31 December 1917, p.5.

Government, dominated as it was by 'moderate' socialists such as Alexander Kerensky, was under continuous threat from 'extremists', prominent amongst whom were the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin. He recognised too, claim his supporters, that the Stockholm conference, strongly supported by the moderates but opposed by the extremists, would provide a valuable boost to the Kerensky government and to its determination to remain committed to the wartime alliance with Britain and the other Allied powers. It is this version of Henderson's motivation that has for many decades predominated.

The aim of this thesis is to subject this now well established version of events, which we may describe as the standard account, to critical scrutiny. Initially on engaging on this task, this appeared essentially to be a matter of tying up loose ends. It was not considered that a full reappraisal would be required. The thesis originally envisaged was to cover a wider area of Labour foreign policy through the later stages of the war and the early years of the peace. The Stockholm affair was expected to be just one of several episodes discussed. Increasingly however research into this episode led to the conclusion that fundamental flaws in the Russo-centric core of the standard account were sufficient to justify the full reappraisal which will now be presented. This is not to say however that what follows will be confined to the events of summer 1917. No proper understanding of these events could be achieved without seeing them in wider contexts. Nevertheless, since the primary aim of the thesis is highlight the weaknesses in the standard account it will be necessary to devote considerable space at the heart of this account to a detailed re-examination of the months between May and August 1917.

Before summarising the difficulties that have undermined the historiography on Henderson and the Stockholm affair, reference must be made to the difficulties Henderson has himself imposed on historians. Few politicians have been as permanently unrevealing as to the often hidden purposes and considerations which inspire particular courses in this profession. Henderson's individual political style has been ably described by his first major biographer, Mary Agnes Hamilton.² 'At no time was it natural to him,' she writes, 'to produce his thinking processes for inspection or discussion, until they had reached a point of action in his mind.'³ He kept no personal diary nor, as Chris Wrigley wryly observed many years later, files of his personal papers, preferring 'to use the waste-paper basket.'⁴ To gain a full understanding of Henderson's motivation during the critical Stockholm period has for these reasons alone not been easy.

The first and still most expansive account of Henderson's involvement with the proposed, but never convened Stockholm conference is Hamilton's. This may be taken as the first full statement of the standard account. Hamilton has been followed by a number of other historians who have reinforced and in some cases expanded the key elements of her account. These include two later biographers, Chris Wrigley and F. M. Leventhal, with Wrigley having also provided an earlier account of the Stockholm episode.⁵ Probably the most influential addition to the corpus however is J. M. Winter's frequently cited 1972 article discussing Henderson's experience in Russia and its consequences.⁶ Taken together these works may be seen as having both consolidated and updated Hamilton's account.

² An insubstantial earlier biography by Edwin A. Jenkins, see Bibliography, has been of little value to historians.

³ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson: A Biography* (London, 1938), p.130.

⁴ Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990), p.204.

⁵ F. M. Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989); Chris Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: Peace and War* (Brighton, 1976), pp:205-217.

⁶ J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), pp: 753-773.

Since little has been added to the discussion on Henderson's involvement with Stockholm since 1990, when Wrigley's biography was published, we may see Hamilton and the historians referred to above as the joint bearers of a firmly established orthodoxy on the subject. But one twenty first century historian should perhaps be added to our list, not for having challenged any fundamental tenets of the standard account, but for having at least modified some of the judgements of his twentieth century precursors.⁷

These several studies will constitute the main reference points for the standard account and will be utilised for this purpose throughout the thesis. Given that they straddle such a long period of time, it will be no surprise to see that they differ in several respects. This is in part because the standard account, despite its core features remaining remarkably durable, is not without areas of uncertainty or curiosity, and has been developed or extrapolated in various ways. This is of course a natural development, pertaining partly to the release or discovery of new sources, the most important of which have been government papers, not opened under the fifty year rule until 1967.

We may now examine what appear to be the central features of the current orthodoxy and highlight the defects therein which this thesis will expose. These defects may be grouped under three headings: firstly, the account of Henderson's conversion to Stockholm whilst in Russia; secondly, the campaign he thereupon undertook when back in Britain to persuade the Labour party to accept the invitation to Stockholm; and thirdly, the significance of Bolshevism in one or both of the above.

⁷ Paul Bridgen, *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace, 1900-1924* (Woodbridge, 2009).

On the initial conversion to Stockholm, all the afore-mentioned historians believe that Henderson's view on the conference changed whilst in Russia from one of opposition to one of support, and that his change of mind was triggered by concerns for the survival of the Kerensky led Provisional Government. Evidence can be found for the first part of this supposed transition in the form of correspondence between Henderson and labour associates in London indicating his initial rejection of the Stockholm conference and his lack of sympathy for the Russian socialists.⁸ It has proved a good deal more difficult however to find similarly persuasive evidence for the reversal of these attitudes. Hamilton is forced to rely instead on the conjecture that during the course of his stay in Russia Henderson came gradually to understand the difficulties facing his fellow socialists and developed much warmer feelings towards them as a result. Appreciating too that the attendance of Allied socialists at Stockholm would be of great benefit to his hosts he was at some point converted to the conference.⁹ For the post-1967 historians in our group the possibility existed of finding fuller evidence of Henderson's conversion in the Foreign Office or War Cabinet papers, which included correspondence with Lloyd George and one substantial report to the War Cabinet. Winter in particular used this documentation to propose a specific time during Henderson's stay, and a proximate cause, for the conversion.¹⁰

With the exception of Bridgen, who proposes a different date for Henderson's conversion, Winter is alone in attempting to be quite so specific.¹¹ None of this however matters very greatly, since the main evidence for Henderson's conversion came from Henderson himself. In his address to the 10 August labour conference he tells delegates that before he went to

⁸ Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 132-133.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp: 130,133.

¹⁰ Winter, *Historical Journal*, pp: 766-767.

¹¹ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.96.

Russia he had been 'opposed to the holding of an ordinary International Conference' but had, whilst there, changed his mind.¹² This reliance on Henderson's own testimony however raises as many problems as it resolves. Obviously his words on this occasion must be considered in the context of what he was hoping to achieve at this moment, which was to persuade his party colleagues to take a step to which the majority of them had long been opposed. For Henderson indeed this was a crucial battle, set against the background of a party which had been bitterly divided virtually since the beginning of the war.

Two issues on which party divisions were most intractable were central to the debate over Stockholm. These were, firstly, the question of involvement with the pre-war Socialist International, and secondly the issue of Allied war aims, which would be germane to any discussions the International would undertake. For most of the preceding three years a clear party majority, generally designated as 'patriots', had wanted nothing to do with either the International or the debate on war aims. They had been opposed by an insistent minority comprising so called 'pacifists' who took the contrary view.¹³ Underlying these differences were conflicting perceptions regarding the nature of the current war. 'Pacifists' by and large clung to what was the dominant pre-war position within the International: that any war between the major European powers was likely to take the form of an imperialist struggle for territorial or economic advantage and should be resisted by the united forces of international labour. 'Patriots' on both sides of the conflict quickly identified the war as one

¹² Peter Stansky, ed., *The Left and War: the British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), pp: 222-225. Henderson's address to the Special Party Conference is reproduced in full by Stansky; it can also be found in *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1918*, pp: 47-51.

¹³ The terms 'patriot' and 'pacifist' were widely used by contemporaries, though polemically rather than literally. In this thesis they will therefore be used in inverted commas. What they represented will become clear as we proceed.

of aggression on the part of the enemy states and chose to close ranks with their rulers in what they declared a justifiable war of defence.¹⁴

Six months before the Stockholm question became a matter of controversy in the summer of 1917 the general position on an international conference had been debated at the party's annual conference in Manchester. A resolution moved by the 'pacifist' Bruce Glasier had called for the 'speedy reconstitution' of the Socialist International. In response the 'patriot' Will Thorne moved an amendment which prioritised the need to continue the war 'until victory was achieved', at which point the 'Socialist and Trade Union organisations' of the Allied Powers 'should meet simultaneously with the Peace Conference.' Thorne's amendment was carried and Glasier's resolution rejected, both by majorities of more than two to one. The party was thereby pledged to reject participation in any international socialist conference whilst the war continued and then to consider only a conference confined to Allied socialists once the peace terms were being decided.¹⁵

For Henderson to achieve his goal of attendance at Stockholm these binding decisions had to be overturned. A significant part of the majority which had supported Thorne in January had to be persuaded in August to adopt a position long associated with the much rebuked minority. In these circumstances Henderson in his 10 August address was at pains to distance himself from those arguments in favour of the Socialist International traditionally deployed by 'pacifists'. He asked his audience to dismiss from their minds the suggestion

¹⁴ Whilst 'patriots' generally predominated, the one important exception was Russia, in which the majority of socialists 'repudiated the war as an imperialist venture', Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge, 2000), p.12.

¹⁵ For the full texts of the resolutions, the debate and the voting, see *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, pp: 125-127.

that any members of the party's National Executive now advocating attendance at Stockholm, himself included, had been 'in any way influenced' by the 'unworthy or unpatriotic motives' widely attributed to the party's minority. He had 'not wavered in the slightest degree' in his attitude to the war. He asked delegates to ignore the 'unscrupulous agitation that has been carried on outside' designed to suggest otherwise. His declaration that he had initially been opposed to an 'ordinary' international conference, but that he had changed his mind in response to the extraordinary circumstances he encountered in Russia, was one of the ways he was able to reassure 'patriots' that he remained very much one of their number.

Statements made by Henderson during the course of his party campaign must clearly therefore be treated with some caution. Evidence from the period in Russia showing that he had indeed converted to Stockholm for the reasons he later gave would for historians have been very welcome. But none have managed to find this evidence, at least not in any definite form. The first clear declaration that Henderson favoured attendance at Stockholm came just *after* he had left Russia. Having chosen to stop off in the Swedish capital as he made his journey home, Henderson was able to speak with the non-Russian organisers of the conference. It was on this day, 17 July 1917, that Henderson informed a British correspondent that he now considered the conference 'desirable'.¹⁶ We do not know whether he had already reached that position before he left the Russian capital, Petrograd. Nor do we know what influence the conversations he had with the Stockholm promoters on 17 July may have had on his decision to commit to the conference.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.5.

The lack of clear evidence in support of the standard account's first major proposition must then be noted. Both when and why Henderson moved in favour of the conference are questions on which historians are essentially reliant on his own later words. Neither can a related problem be ignored. Just how did Henderson come to believe that Stockholm would be an effective means of bolstering the position of the Russian Provisional Government? Historians have failed to delve very far into this crucial question. Yet this is undoubtedly an important matter, not least because as we shall see, Stockholm was not the only way Henderson believed Petrograd could be supported by the Allies.

Assuming nevertheless that Henderson *had* become strongly convinced of the value to Russia of the Stockholm conference, historians have perceived him as driven to pursue this objective regardless of the opposition he faced from within the Cabinet, the House of Commons, the bulk of the press, and senior ranks of the Labour party. The fact that he remained undeterred by this considerable opposition and on 10 August powerfully restated his case at the special conference occasions no surprise. As we shall see however this perception of a stubborn and resolute pursuit of a widely understood and principled position does little justice to the twists and turns of what became a highly complicated campaign. Particularly in its final forty eight hours, Henderson's actions make something of a mockery of the assumptions on which the standard account was built.

The key question which arises from this final period is why Henderson persevered with a campaign that could clearly no longer achieve its stated objective, but ran the very real risk, if not the near certainty, of bringing about the outcome that he supposedly never desired: his enforced resignation from the Cabinet. We shall see that the bearers of the standard

account find no common way of answering this question. Nor are they comfortable with a related issue: the charge levelled against Henderson by Lloyd George that he [Henderson] had deceived his Cabinet colleagues regarding his intentions at the special conference. The Prime Minister insisted that Henderson had led him to believe in these final days that he would, as a member of the Cabinet, attempt to achieve on 10 August the outcome the government wanted: a rejection by the Labour party of the invitation to Stockholm. Exactly what Henderson may or may not have said to create this impression remains unknown. It does nevertheless seem the case that this impression was created, that Lloyd George and others within the Cabinet did indeed expect Henderson to use his influence in this way.¹⁷ That the Prime Minister was genuinely shocked and angered when the news arrived that Henderson had done exactly the opposite has been accepted by almost all historians.

The controversy over Henderson's alleged deceit of Cabinet colleagues has never really been settled. Henderson from the outset forcefully denied the charges.¹⁸ Hamilton unsurprisingly would give him her backing, although she is again handicapped by having no access to crucial War Cabinet minutes. She essentially argues, on the basis of Henderson's past behaviour, that he strongly supported the view that 'loyal observance of collective responsibility' was 'vital to democratic government.'¹⁹ This sense had been 'sharpened, not blunted, by war.'²⁰ Lloyd George, she observes, was unable to provide any explanation as to why on this occasion Henderson should have chosen to behave so uncharacteristically.²¹

Also, since Henderson had repeatedly made clear over the preceding fortnight that he

¹⁷ George H. Cassar, *Lloyd George at War, 1916-1918* (London, 2011), p.52; Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.213.

¹⁸ *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 5th series, (hereafter H C Debs), 13 August 1917, Vol.97, cc: 925-928.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.158.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.143.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.158.

favoured attendance at Stockholm, Hamilton infers that his views must have been 'entirely familiar' to Cabinet colleagues.²² The clear implication of Hamilton's judgement is that Lloyd George knew perfectly well what Henderson would do at the Labour conference and that the surprise and the accusation of deceit which followed were both feigned. As has been indicated, this is now a rejected view.

Hamilton is undeniably partisan. She was during the war a 'pacifist' and would have taken a dim view of Lloyd George's drift towards the 'patriotic' and Conservative right, which elevated him to the premiership in 1916.²³ She seems to have had little to do with Henderson during the war but in 1929, as a newly elected Labour MP, she was invited by him in his new role as Foreign Secretary to join the British delegation at the League of Nations. Close contact with him during her stay in Geneva evidently induced in her a great respect for Henderson which is manifest throughout her subsequent biography.²⁴ Her views on the controversy surrounding Henderson's alleged deceit of the War Cabinet were clearly influenced by her strongly held opinions of the two protagonists, as well as by wider labour opinion which had long since concluded that Henderson had been innocent of any deception.²⁵

The eventual release of the Cabinet papers undoubtedly made Henderson's professions of innocence rather harder to believe. Also, after the lapse of half a century partisanship was

²² *Ibid.*, p.157.

²³ See for example her comments on Lloyd George's self serving decision to call a general election in December 1918, an election that led to the parliamentary dismissals of all those in any way tinged with wartime 'pacifism', including Henderson, Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944), pp: 94-95.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp: 184-186.

²⁵ See the comments of Beatrice Webb, who professes Henderson's innocence and attributes his forced resignation to the 'duplicity' for which Lloyd George had 'become notorious', LSE Digital Library, Beatrice Webb's typescript diary, December 1916-October 1924 (hereafter Beatrice Webb diary), pp:52-54, entry for 12 August 1917.

perhaps less of an issue. Nevertheless, a reluctance to deviate from the well established characterisations of the starkly differing politicians at the centre of the dispute may well have played a part in the post-1967 accounts. Henderson had long epitomised the blunt but honest labour politician, the antithesis indeed of Lloyd George. Whilst nobody would wish to deny that these depictions have general validity, it will be argued below that at least on this occasion Henderson did choose to deploy political skills more characteristic of his rival. If this is so, then questions inevitably follow as to the nature of his political motives at this time. Henderson knew during the final days of his Stockholm campaign that no British delegation would actually be travelling to the conference. Why then did he choose to risk his reputation for political integrity, as well as his place in government, by securing a decision at the special conference which would astound and embarrass his Cabinet colleagues? We shall in due course see that this question cannot satisfactorily be answered without abandoning the suppositions of the standard account. Moreover, if these suppositions must be abandoned in order to explain Henderson's puzzling decision to persevere with his Stockholm campaign in the face of circumstances which had changed significantly since his return from Russia, how can the same suppositions be seen as reliable tools through which to understand his wider objectives?

We may now consider the third area of the standard account on which doubt may cast: the influence of Bolshevism on Henderson's unfolding campaign. Hamilton again leads the way on this question, crediting Henderson with an awareness that Stockholm would be 'the sole means of holding Russian democracy together against the disruptive tactics of the

Bolsheviks.....'²⁶ Winter broadly seconds this view, contending that for Henderson the matter at stake over Stockholm was 'the fate of the socialist revolution in Russia.'²⁷ Significantly however, Winter also introduces a new dimension to the Bolshevik threat as perceived by Henderson: the possibility that this destructive ideology could gain a foothold elsewhere, perhaps even in Britain. If Stockholm was seen by Henderson as a means by which the Bolsheviks in Russia could be weakened, his subsequent political activity in Britain, in particular his reorganisation of the Labour party, was in Winter's view a means to frustrate the ambitions of the country's own potential Bolsheviks.²⁸

A student today approaching this episode in World War One or Labour party history could be forgiven for concluding that this was indeed a significant factor in Henderson's actions. He or she might quickly encounter one or more of the following observations: 'Fear of Bolshevism and the extreme left throughout Europe was almost certainly a preliminary to the new constitution.....'²⁹; Henderson was determined to create a reorganised and moderate socialist party 'that was resistant to the extra-parliamentary and revolutionary left, for his trip to Russia had convinced him of the need to prevent extremists from taking control of the party.'³⁰; Henderson had concluded that 'the greatest threat to the allies' war effort' was the emergence in Petrograd of 'a more extreme left-wing government.....encouraging pacifistic and revolutionary tendencies throughout Europe [which would] imperil the British Labour party....'³¹; Henderson 'had been persuaded by his trip to Russia of the need for an effective left-wing party that could head off the danger of a

²⁶ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.133.

²⁷ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.770; for similar remarks see Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 114-116; Leventhal, *Henderson*, pp: 65-66; Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.210.

²⁸ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.771.

²⁹ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party: 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974), p.92

³⁰ Rhiannon Vickers, *The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900-1951* (Manchester, 2003), p.66.

³¹ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.96.

British revolution more successfully than the Provisional Government was meeting the Bolshevik challenge.³² All these observations cite Winter's 1972 article.

The 1917 sources however, whilst they certainly indicate Henderson's distaste for Lenin's movement, fail to sustain the argument that Bolshevism in particular was perceived by him as quite such a threat. He did recognise in Russia that Lenin's supporters, despite the fact that they remained a minority within the Soviets, were capable of generating considerable disorder and dissent, particularly in relation to the government's attempt to revive the economy and the army. He doubted however whether the Bolshevik movement could go beyond serious disruption and itself make a successful bid for state power.³³ During the course of his campaign on returning to Britain he gave no sign that he had changed his mind on this question.³⁴ It was only in the aftermath of the Bolshevik overthrowing of the Kerensky government that Henderson linked this event to his earlier campaign. Having drawn attention to the vulnerability of the Petrograd government during the summer, he suggested that the government's indifference to his warnings had 'contributed to the present awful Russian disaster?'³⁵ Others had already suggested as much.³⁶ For Henderson this was a point easily scored against his former Cabinet colleagues. Yet as *the Times* rather pertinently commented, it could also be doubted whether 'he – any more than others – had formed so definite an impression of the Russian situation' during the summer.³⁷ As for his perception of the Bolshevik threat to British labour, there is not much in the historical

³² David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988), p.162.

³³ LHA, Henderson to Roberts, 21 June 1917, Henderson papers, LP/HEN 1/31; TNA, Arthur Henderson, 'British Mission to Russia, June and July 1917', War Cabinet, 16 July 1917, CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.11.

³⁴ In his public comments in support of Stockholm, Bolshevism is not directly mentioned.

³⁵ *The Times*, 29 December 1917, p.8.

³⁶ See the editorial entitled 'Alliance Among Democracies', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 November 1917, p.6.

³⁷ *The Times*, 29 December 1917, p.7.

record to support Winter's view, and still less to justify the prominence this idea has gained in recent decades.

The cumulative weaknesses within the standard account we have highlighted in this brief survey provide the justification for a *full* reappraisal of Henderson's actions in this period. But any such reappraisal must go further than merely demonstrating the inadequacy of accepted beliefs. Whilst the task of challenging existing accounts must remain the essential starting point of this thesis, it must be supplemented by some attempt at providing a more persuasive explanation of Henderson's Stockholm campaign. We must assume that historians, like nature, abhor a vacuum. One obvious place in which to seek an alternative motivational framework capable of displacing the established view of Henderson's Stockholm campaign lies in the courses he followed once free from his Cabinet responsibilities. As has been well documented, Henderson, with time and political freedom now at his disposal, devoted much of his energy in the final fifteenth months of the war to two major projects. One of these was the constitutional reconstruction of the Labour party, which was to transform the existing, somewhat loose federal structure into 'a nation-wide political organisation' with party branches 'in every parliamentary constituency.'³⁸ This was a well judged and rational response to the greatly expanded franchise about to be provided by the 1918 Representation of the People Act. Henderson's second major initiative at this time was to pursue, in the wake of the failure to convene the Stockholm conference, a new international socialist project which represented, in Winter's words, a 'policy of which he knew the government disapproved.'³⁹ Although Winter has famously linked the programme of party reconstruction to the preceding Stockholm campaign, this second of Henderson's

³⁸ Arthur Henderson, *The Aims of Labour*, (New York, 1919), p.24.

³⁹ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p. 769.

post-resignation initiatives appears on the face of it to represent a more obvious continuity with Stockholm than the first.

This thesis will contend that such a continuity is indeed essential to understanding Henderson's actions both before and after his Cabinet resignation. We have noted that his first clear declaration in favour of Stockholm occurred in Sweden rather than Russia, on a day in which he spoke with conference organisers closely linked to the International Socialist Bureau (the executive body of the Second International). The ISB had been engaged since well before the Russian revolution in finding some way to revive the fractured International and thereby create a unified socialist perspective on the war.⁴⁰ In the minds of his interlocutors, the revival of the International pre-dated and probably predominated over any concerns they may have shared with Henderson regarding the future of the Russian revolution. It is clearly the case that Henderson, as shown by his post-Stockholm programme, ultimately shared the ambition of reviving the International.

We have seen also that once he became committed to Stockholm, Henderson's task was to overcome the opposition within majority Labour opinion to any wartime involvement with the International. We must surely therefore consider the possibility that Henderson recognised that a direct plea to his party to reverse its view on the International would be considerably less effective than a plea based on the new and exceptional factors he had observed in Russia. The failure of standard accounts to consider this possibility may again be attributable in part to the reluctance of sympathetic historians to show Henderson as misleading his party as to his real motivations: to have been, in the modern parlance,

⁴⁰ Camille Huysmans, *The Policy of the International: A Speech and an Interview with the Secretary of the International* (London, 1916).

economical with the truth. The case will be made in this thesis that any such sensitivity should now be abandoned. Once it is allowed that Henderson *may* have behaved in the manner of many other determined politicians, in pursuit of a goal to which he attached great importance, a new narrative of the Stockholm episode can begin to fall into place.

Were we to assume however that Henderson was already by 17 July (a full week before he arrived back in Britain) hoping to lead the Labour party in a new internationalist direction, a major question arises. Could he have imagined that he would be able to do this whilst remaining a member of the government? The answer is almost certainly not. The Lloyd George coalition government took power on 7 December 1916 and was immediately recognised, despite the inclusion of Henderson at the pinnacle of the War Cabinet, as considerably more right wing in its political complexion than the former coalition led by H. H. Asquith.⁴¹ It also faced a new range of problems. As the great Somme offensive petered out over the winter, having failed to achieve the much hoped for breakthrough, and having cost a great many British lives (including Henderson's eldest son), the new government addressed concerns over the rise of 'war weariness'.⁴² Although public commitment to the war remained largely unbroken, talk of peace could exert in some quarters a significant appeal. The need for determined measures against the various organisations of domestic dissent which could capitalise on this change in atmosphere was recognised by the ministry as imperative.⁴³

⁴¹ Other than Lloyd George, now seen as very close to the Conservatives on his attitudes towards the war, and Henderson, the three remaining members of the War Cabinet core were Lords Curzon and Milner, both associated with the imperialist right, and the Conservative party leader, Andrew Bonar Law.

⁴² John Grigg, *Lloyd George: War Leader, 1916-1918* (London, 2003), pp:1-2.

⁴³ See Paul Harkinson, *David Lloyd George as the "Hammer" of Dissent: The War Premiership, 1916-1918*, Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University, 1994.

The issue quickly became all the more urgent when, even before 1916 was out, peace initiatives were launched from abroad. On 12 December for the first time in the war the German government made 'direct overtures of peace to the Allies.'⁴⁴ This was followed by a suggestion by the recently re-elected United States President, Woodrow Wilson, that the belligerent powers should reveal the terms on which they would be willing to make peace, especially since, as Wilson judged from their various public statements, their objects appeared 'virtually the same'.⁴⁵ Neither of these initiatives was welcomed by Allied governments, in which determination to fight on to victory remained strong. But whilst it was relatively easy to dismiss the approach from Berlin, a response to Wilson, representing as he did the most powerful of neutral nations, required a good deal more care.⁴⁶ Following prolonged debate Allied governments decided to present a joint statement on their aims to the President. This statement, which they accepted would be made public, was delivered on 11 January 1917. Although this carefully worded document presented Allied war aims in terms of morally acceptable criteria such as future security and liberation of oppressed peoples, it did not conceal that territorial changes to the detriment of the Central Powers were envisaged.⁴⁷

As the War Cabinet would later acknowledge, the reply to Wilson had been used as 'anti-war propaganda' both at home and abroad 'to prove that our war aims were imperialistic and grasping.' It was held that henceforth such frank expressions of war aims 'might with

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 13 December 1916, p.10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 December 1916, p.8.

⁴⁶ Sterling J. Kernek, 'The British Government's Reaction to President Wilson's "Peace Note" of December 1916', *Historical Journal*, Vol.13, no.4 (1970), pp:721-766.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 12 January 1917, p.7.

advantage be allowed to fall into the background.’⁴⁸ Wilson’s own response to the Allied reply, the famous “Peace Without Victory” address of 22 January to the United States Senate, also did much to encourage pacific sentiment.⁴⁹ Wilson’s argument that a settlement concluded without either side being in a position to dictate terms would be more likely to result in a stable and lasting peace, though completely contrary to the views of Allied governments, was praised by their ‘pacifist’ critics who had themselves frequently made similar points.⁵⁰ The War Cabinet would throughout 1917 take measures to limit the influence of these newly encouraged ‘pacifist’ critics.⁵¹ These would culminate in August in the creation of a National War Aims Committee (NWAC), the primary focus of which was ‘to combat pacifism’.⁵² Contrary to what was implied in this new body’s title its object was to stifle rather than encourage conversations on *specific* war aims, relying instead on regurgitated ‘vague platitudes’ as to the infamies of Prussian militarism.⁵³

From December 1916, writes Keith Robbins, ‘pacifists’ entered ‘a time of hope’ during which the prospect of moves towards a peace settlement suddenly grew.⁵⁴ How far Henderson may have been influenced by or sympathetic to a peace campaign given wings first by Wilson and then by the Russians is essentially unknown. But as a member of a Cabinet concerned to isolate and undermine any such campaign he could hardly have expressed his

⁴⁸ TNA, War Cabinet, 20 August, 1917, CAB 23/3 (220).

⁴⁹ For the text of Wilson’s address, see *The Times*, 23 January 1917, pp: 9-10.

⁵⁰ Note for example the similarities between Wilson’s views and those expounded a year earlier in G. Lowes Dickinson, ‘The Basis of Permanent Peace’ in Charles Roden Buxton, ed., *Towards a Lasting Settlement* (London, 1915), pp:11-36.

⁵¹ M L Sanders and Philip M Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (London, 1982), p.63; TNA, John Buchan, ‘Propaganda at Home’, War Cabinet memorandum, 18 May 1917, CAB 24/13, GT 774; War Cabinet, 5 June, 1917, CAB 23/3 (154).

⁵² Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p.149; see also David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain* (Liverpool, 2012), p.44.

⁵³ See the comments of Ponsonby and Trevelyan, *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 November 1917, Vol.99, cc: 298-299, 302-306.

⁵⁴ Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The ‘Peace Movement’ in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff, 1976), pp:113-117.

personal support. The publicly available evidence consequently points in the opposite direction: that until his return from Russia he remained solidly in line with the official view. His private thoughts however were characteristically kept to himself. Given that he would later pursue, and with evident strong conviction, his own peace programme, would it not be reasonable to assume that his place in government constituted the main constraint on any involvement in the public discussions generated in Britain by Wilson and the Russians?

It is a fact that when released from this constraint after 10 August 1917, Henderson did go on to generate a process which culminated eighteen months later in an international socialist conference concerned to influence the terms of peace. But when and why did he decide to embark on this course? And how and why did he plan or hope to overcome the many serious difficulties entailed in such a controversial change of direction?

Standard accounts have recognised to varying extents that Henderson may have been affected by changing attitudes internationally on the pressing questions as to when and how the war would be concluded. Winter refers to his conviction 'by mid 1917' that 'the war had radically changed not only his but also popular ideas about politics.' A 'new democratic consciousness' which Henderson highlighted required Labour to act in accordance with its traditional standpoint and interests, which 'were international in scope.'⁵⁵ Hamilton says much the same, referring to a deep moral unrest in 1917 amongst British workers, behind which 'lay the feeling that a war which had begun as a crusade was degenerating into a dog fight, and that they, once appealed to as co-operators in a heroic enterprise, were now

⁵⁵ Winter, *Historical Journal*, pp: 770-771.

mere cannon fodder.⁵⁶ Wrigley offers his own more cautious perception that Henderson seemed 'to have regained his faith in socialist war aims.'⁵⁷ Henderson himself would observe after his resignation that in the past 'British Governments decided when the nation should make war and afterwards determined the terms that should bring about its settlement. To-day, it is the British people who are at war and the people must decide the terms of peace.'⁵⁸ These perceptions however remain of secondary significance in standard accounts of the Stockholm campaign, in which the fate of Russia continues to assume its dominant position in Henderson's motivation.

It is generally believed in these accounts that when he launched the Stockholm campaign Henderson did not expect that he would be jeopardising his government office. This is a view he might reasonably have held since the War Cabinet had itself considered British attendance at Stockholm as a possibility earlier in the year.⁵⁹ On the other hand, once it became clear in July that ministers were now taking a very different view, it is questionable whether Henderson could have retained any great confidence that his position within government remained safe. Winter suggests that he probably knew 'that a political collision was inevitable'.⁶⁰ That this collision would result in Henderson's enforced resignation was of course all the more inevitable in the light of Lloyd George's belief that Henderson had misled him over his intention to support Stockholm at the Labour conference. The question then as to whether Henderson did in some way mislead the Prime Minister, or whether indeed he realised that Lloyd George was expecting him to dissuade his party from voting in

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.165.

⁵⁷ Wrigley, *Lloyd George*, p.210.

⁵⁸ Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, p.41.

⁵⁹ TNA, War Cabinet, 21 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (141); 23 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (144).

⁶⁰ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.769.

favour of going to Stockholm, although central to any understanding of the episode, has not been adequately addressed in standard accounts.

Having been unwilling to accept Lloyd George's charges of duplicity against him, labour historians have been able to present Henderson's dismissal from the Cabinet as an unwarranted action by the Prime Minister. Acting honestly and sincerely on his conviction that his party's attendance at Stockholm would be to the benefit of the new democratic Russia, as well as to the Allies as a whole, Henderson found himself drummed out of the War Cabinet as a result of malevolence, political cynicism or poor judgement on Lloyd George's part. This, paradoxically, gave him the freedom to pursue a party programme which would challenge Allied governments on war aims, an outcome that appears inconceivable had he remained in the Cabinet. The alternative possibility - that Henderson sought to contrive his own dismissal from the Cabinet *in order to* pursue this programme - has been rejected or simply not considered by labour historians.⁶¹ Yet this alternative has at least one major attraction. It would surely place Henderson in a more flattering light, as the architect of his own future, rather than the beneficiary of Lloyd George's 'blunder'.⁶² The traditional view in which Lloyd George turns out to have been his own worst enemy of course has its attractions. But it is perhaps an unfortunate curiosity that historians who have widely approved of Henderson's post resignation initiatives on behalf of his party have been required to concede that these initiatives were only made possible by the unreasonable and self-defeating behaviour of the Prime Minister.

⁶¹ Wrigley for example asserts that he 'did not manoeuvre for a pretext for resignation.' Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.113.

⁶² For a recent example of this commonly accepted interpretation, see Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.119.

In summary then, we may surely note that the two main outcomes of Henderson's decision to address the 10 August party conference as he did were his dismissal from the War Cabinet and the nullification of the party's Manchester decision. Both these outcomes were essential to the internationalist policy which he thereafter pursued. Standard accounts see this development essentially as a case of unforeseen consequences, on both Henderson's and Lloyd George's part. This thesis will argue that for Henderson this assumption can be challenged. It will suggest, on the contrary, that a strong case may be made for the contention that Henderson actually won, as much by luck perhaps as good judgement, a significant political battle with Lloyd George, and was thus enabled to lead his party in a new and challenging direction for the remainder of the war, which had, probably by the time he returned to Britain in late July, been his true objective.

Such a reading of the Stockholm episode clearly suggests an analysis in line with the historiographical school of 'high politics'. It has been noted by proponents of this school that labour historians have largely rejected such an approach. Arguing that this form of analysis is politically Conservative (as unashamedly was its most prominent advocate, Maurice Cowling), labour historians have tended to dismiss what they perceive as an interpretation of British politics too focussed on the rivalries and ambitions of the nation's most senior politicians. They have preferred to explain their own party's political rise (and occasional fall) in terms of 'foundational ideas, electoral sociology, or some combination thereof.'⁶³ More importance is attached to ideology and 'politics from below' than to the rarefied

⁶³ Robert Crowcroft, , ' "High Politics", Political Practice and the Labour Party', in Robert Crowcroft, S.J. D. Green and Richard Whiting, eds., *The Philosophy, Politics and Religion of British Democracy: Maurice Cowling and Conservatism*, (London, 2010), p.153.

atmosphere of 'high politics'. To what extent then might these approaches also be valid to Henderson and the Stockholm affair?

Winter's comments, quoted above, suggesting that Henderson was influenced by the emergence in mid-1917 of a 'new democratic consciousness' which chimed with Labour's traditional and internationalist perspectives clearly support 'history from below' and ideology as possible drivers of his actions. But although he would go on to cite such considerations later in the year *after* he had left the Cabinet and was already deeply engaged in his new political course, there is little to indicate that this 'new democratic consciousness' in British politics, if it existed, had any influence on Henderson's behaviour prior to his visit to Russia. It is also firmly believed of course that Henderson's change of political direction occurred whilst he was in Russia.⁶⁴ In that country there was indeed during this time a veritable ferment of new radical perspectives on the war and the role that could be played by the international fraternity socialists in bringing it to a satisfactory end. But it remains unclear how far and in what sense Henderson's course of action on returning to Britain may have been driven by this *international* pressure from below. Account must obviously also be taken of the contrary pressure from below of 'patriotic' and anti-Stockholm sentiment still prevalent within his own party. Such pressures from below could be seen therefore as cancelling each other out, leaving Henderson to make his own decision as to the options available to him for reasons he may in some measure have chosen to conceal. Historians have rightly focussed on Henderson's *personal* decision to act as he did as central to the Stockholm drama. Regarding the campaign he then launched on his return

⁶⁴ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.769.

to Britain there is little dissent from the proposition that this was a case of Henderson leading rather than being led by his party or any wider domestic public opinion.

Cabinet disputes are by their nature matters of 'high politics'. The Cabinet crises of May 1915 and December 1916 can clearly be analysed in this way. Whilst both were fuelled by substantial issues concerning the conduct of the war, they clearly also revolved around personal rivalries between senior figures jockeying for position at the pinnacle of national politics.⁶⁵ The crisis of July/August 1917 does however present different features. In the first place it only affected the personnel of the Cabinet in a minor way, with Henderson alone losing office and being replaced by his Labour party colleague, George Barnes, who had deputised for him whilst he had been in Russia. Secondly, although Henderson as de facto leader of the Labour party and member of the War Cabinet can be seen as one of the 'fifty or sixty.....politicians who mattered' in the sphere of high politics both he and his party were new to this status, which they had attained only as a consequence of the war and the recognition by longer established political leaders of the importance of labour to a successful outcome of the conflict.⁶⁶ In high political terms the battle between Henderson and Lloyd George was far from a confrontation between equals.

A further sense in which Henderson fits less than convincingly into a high political narrative is his strikingly unusual indifference to personal advancement. Neither in the sphere of national government nor in that the Labour party's leadership did he ever appear to be

⁶⁵ For 1915 see Martin D. Pugh, 'Asquith, Bonar Law and the First Coalition', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 17, No.4 (1974), pp: 813-836; for 1916 see John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (London, 1992), pp: 112-151.

⁶⁶ Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971), p.3.

driven by any strong desire to secure in the longer term his elevated wartime status. As regards the party, as Hamilton observes, the war had in fact provided him with the opportunity to secure a lasting leadership at the expense of his main rival, MacDonald, but he chose rather to assist in the latter's reinstatement.⁶⁷ And as we shall demonstrate in this thesis, his sacrifice of Cabinet office, however interpreted, came about with little serious care on his part for its retention.

The focus of his dispute with Lloyd George had in reality little to do with his position in Cabinet or directly with wider government policy. It centred rather, as we have suggested, on the future policy of the Labour party. Nevertheless, given that his original stated objective was to secure a British presence in Stockholm, he would of course need to persuade his Cabinet colleagues to act counter to other Allied governments by sanctioning such a presence. Cabinet minutes show surprisingly little evidence of any such attempted persuasion. His objective regarding his ministerial colleagues appears rather to have centred on a concern that the government could block or undermine his main party objective, which was to persuade the proposed party conference to accept *in principle* that it could attend an international labour conference in Stockholm and thereby undo the resolutions of the previous January's annual conference.

Historiographical debates over the value and validity of 'high politics' and its rival methodologies have continued over the several decades since Cowling's first works appeared.⁶⁸ The protracted nature of this debate rather suggests that no one

⁶⁷ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.98.

⁶⁸ See for example, Steven Fielding, 'High Politics' in David Brown, Gordon Pentland, and Robert Crowcroft, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800-2000* (Oxford, 2018), pp:32-47; Richard

historiographical approach can be applicable in all cases. In practice historians may have to choose horses for courses. Peter Clarke has observed that since historians are 'actually and ultimately concerned with what happened once.....there is an inescapable role for contingency in their causal explanations, especially in political history.'⁶⁹ The unique episode in British political history with which this study is concerned, incorporating as it does the unusual political circumstances of the war, the influence of the especially turbulent contemporary events in Russia, the stark divisions within the wartime Labour party, as well as the untypical political style of our central protagonist, has little in common with other Cabinet ruptures in modern times. The principal challenges which this thesis imposes can arguably be reduced to the answering of two central questions: why did Henderson choose during his spell abroad to attempt to reverse his party's current position on attendance at an international socialist conference? And why, under the circumstances that prevailed on 10 August, did he choose to address that day's labour conference as he did, predictably ensuring *not* any British attendance at Stockholm but rather his own removal from the Cabinet? The manner in which these questions may best be approached are very different.

For the second question a high political approach is undoubtedly valuable. Indeed the absence of such an approach in earlier accounts arguably constitutes one of the major weaknesses in the historiography. Cowling has defined high politics 'as primarily a matter of rhetoric and manoeuvre.'⁷⁰ Henderson's actions during the sixteen days following his return from Russia can readily be understood in these terms. What may be unusual in this

S. Grayson, 'The Historiography of Inter-War Politics: Competing Conservative World Views in High Politics, 1924-1929' in William Mulligan and Brendan Simms, eds., *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660-2000: how strategic concerns shaped modern Britain* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp: 277-290.

⁶⁹ Peter Clarke, 'Political History in the 1980s', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.12, No.1, pp: 45-47.

⁷⁰ Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, p.4.

particular case is that the rhetoric and manoeuvre needed to be applied on two fronts: the Cabinet *and* the Labour party. This naturally made Henderson's task especially complex. For the first question however this approach would be far from efficacious. Cowling's conception of high politics posits a network of senior politicians acting and reacting on an ever continuing basis to positions taken by their colleagues and rivals. At the (significantly uncertain) time Henderson took his initial decision on Stockholm he was largely detached from his political networks in Britain. Both for Cabinet and Labour colleagues this decision came out of the blue, with virtually no prior soundings or assessments of the domestic political waters. His decision in short lacks almost completely the visibility that 'high political' historians would expect and rely upon.

To understand this decision then a recourse to simple deduction is surely required. Such a deduction cannot be reliably based on Henderson's own subsequent explanations since these fall into the category of 'rhetoric' deployed to achieve the desired result of 10 August. Political *actions* rather than words must be utilised. Using such a process of deduction to understand an individual's unrevealed motivation must surely also demand a wider biographical approach. The characters and core beliefs of individual politicians clearly provide indications as to why they may have alighted on particular political goals. Henderson's record during a lengthy career as a Liberal and later a Labour politician, as well as his initial responses to the war, must be considered in order to provide some sort of explanation as to why in 1917 he chose this particular path. No less relevant of course is his political record post 1917. One of Henderson's abiding beliefs was, by general consent, a consistent opposition to militarism and war. It is interesting to note in this context that his entire adult life coincided with an era in which numerous progressive and religious groups

came to perceive that war between advanced nations had become an anachronism. Civilised societies, they insisted, could and should find means of resolving disputes without recourse to the barbarous practice of mutual slaughter. The pre-war international socialist movement strongly supported this view.

By 1914 no major war between the great European powers had been fought for more than four decades, yet preparations for such a war never ceased. These preparations moreover incorporated the advances of modern science and technology, allowing future wars (should they occur) to be conducted on a massively greater and more destructive scale. There was a perception before 1914 that a European war 'would have ruinous consequences for social, political and economic stability.'⁷¹ For the many-faceted peace movement in Britain it appeared essential that the moral and political progress that might ultimately remove war from the human agenda (at least in the first place for the advanced nations of the world) should keep pace with the material progress which was already rendering the prospect of armed conflict so potentially catastrophic.⁷²

As an upcoming Liberal politician and senior trade unionist, and as a man with a strong non-conformist religious faith, Henderson appears to have shared these views and to have participated in peace campaigns, even if his involvement was generally limited.⁷³ After 1903, as an MP representing the newly created Labour Representation Committee (the pre-1906 name of the Labour Party) he continued to support pacifist causes. Having condemned the

⁷¹ William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2010). p.118.

⁷² For valuable studies on the British peace movement of this era, see Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854 -1945* (Oxford, 2000); Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement 1870-1914* (Oxford, 2001)

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.147.

recently terminated conflict against the South African Boers as ‘an iniquitous war’, he remained a steady opponent of ‘militarism’, rearmament and the *Entente* with tsarist Russia. He was sympathetic to the radical wing of the Liberal party which constituted the main parliamentary opposition to the ‘balance of power’ and anti-German policies of the Foreign Office. Like many progressives, he opposed British involvement in the looming war following the Sarajevo crisis virtually until the last minute.⁷⁴

There is a consensus amongst Henderson’s biographers that whilst he did harbour a moral commitment to the radical and pacifist cause of reforming international relations, this was not yet for him a major personal priority.⁷⁵ It became so, the consensus continues, only after 1917 and Stockholm. ‘His international outlook....now....became vivid and personal, and never again left him,’ observes Hamilton.⁷⁶ It is true that others in the higher reaches of the Labour party were more prominent in pre-war anti-militarist campaigns than Henderson. It is also the case that many of these others remained resistant to the rationale for war against Germany in 1914 whilst Henderson opted to follow the bulk of the Labour party in supporting the war. However, as with many progressive internationalists who were persuaded to back the war once underway, there is no reason to believe that Henderson abandoned or modified his anti-militarist views. Again like many other British progressives, Henderson hoped and believed that the war would lead not just to the military defeat of the Central Powers but to a new and more pacific international order. But as the war persisted and the human and material costs of waging it remorselessly grew, doubts also emerged as to how committed Allied governments really were to the desired new international order.

⁷⁴ Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 70-76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.71; Leventhal, *Henderson*, pp: 41,49; Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 91-93.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.166; Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 120,128.

As suggested above, Henderson's position in government during the middle years of the war required him to keep any such doubts he may have shared to himself.

In the final months of the war and throughout the post-war period until his death in 1935 Henderson continued, as Hamilton stated, to take a keen interest in international affairs. In the minority Labour government of 1929-1931 he served as Foreign Secretary. He took this opportunity to orient British policy much closer to the League of Nations than the preceding Conservative administration had wished. He pushed through measures establishing procedures for international arbitration of disputes and pressed forward on the dilatory process to initiate general disarmament, to which the signatories to the Treaty of Versailles had committed themselves ten years earlier.⁷⁷ The Labour government having fallen the previous autumn, Henderson accepted the position as President of the International Disarmament Conference which finally convened in February 1932. Under the then inauspicious international climate the conference drifted slowly towards failure. Henderson's determination to at least keep discussions going was later rewarded by his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, months after the conference had effectively collapsed in the summer of 1934.⁷⁸

Henderson won much praise from the British public for these endeavours. 'For this was a time,' writes John Callaghan, 'when the First World War was popularly remembered - in film, poetry, fiction and autobiography - as a never-to-be-repeated disaster.'⁷⁹ These years were indeed an historical highpoint in the long running attempts to significantly reform

⁷⁷ Leventhal, *Henderson*, pp: 137-181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp: 201-216.

⁷⁹ John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A history* (London, 2007), p.102.

international relations. Labelled as 'radical' in their pre-war manifestation, reviled as 'pacifist' during the war, and criticised by 'realists' as 'idealist' or 'utopian' in the post-war period, this was a continuous movement to address the above mentioned fear of future wars conducted with ever more deadly forms of weaponry.⁸⁰ Recognising Henderson as very much in line with this wider movement in its successive formulations gives support to the argument that will be presented below.⁸¹

Faced with the deficiencies in standard accounts of the Stockholm episode this thesis will attempt a thorough re-examination of the available evidence. Almost all of the source material on which this re-examination will depend has been available for a considerable time, and was indeed open to most of the historians whose accounts we have examined. It appears however that these materials have been used less extensively or rigorously than they might have been, perhaps because there seemed no obvious reason to question earlier accounts, particularly Hamilton's, or perhaps because of a reluctance to unpick a narrative in which Henderson and Lloyd George played out roles so well suited to their respective reputations. This attempt to explore more fully the available material, alongside a more sceptical treatment of Henderson's own campaigning statements, will inform the approach taken towards these longstanding sources in this thesis.

In one particular area however, that of Russia in 1917, interpretations have been modified following the end of the Cold War and the opening to the West of Russian archives. Earlier

⁸⁰ See the comments of one wartime contemporary regarding the danger of increasingly destructive weapons outstripping the wisdom of the men who would control them, George Bernard Shaw, 'Common Sense About the War', *New Statesman*, 14 November 1914, Vol.4, no.84, Special War Supplement, p.24.

⁸¹ For classic texts on these consecutive periods, see A. J. A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914: The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment* (London, 1972); Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford, 1971); Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: an Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, 1939).

accounts of the Stockholm episode, particularly those of Hamilton and Winter, accept a dynamic at the heart of Russian politics in the summer of 1917 based on the battle within Russian socialism between Menshevism and Bolshevism.⁸² This binary view of Russian revolutionary politics has been modified in recent times to take account of the many other political groupings that struggled to meet the great variety of social, political and national aspirations released by the February revolution. The satisfaction of these aspirations in the midst of an ongoing world war inevitably created immense problems, arguably to the point of making the new Russia almost ungovernable. It would take several years of chaos, civil war and foreign intrusions before a sufficiently ruthless political regime could finally establish control over most of Russia's pre-war territory.⁸³

The ousted Kerensky's several reminiscences, set against the long background of the Soviet Union's international estrangement, encouraged a belief in the West that with more support from its wartime Allies the fledgling democratic revolution in Russia could have survived and perhaps even prospered. This is a view that obviously played well into the established narratives of Henderson's Stockholm campaign. It is interesting to note however that during the period he was in the country few believed that the small and extreme Bolshevik faction could succeed in taking and maintaining power in the Russian state. Henderson himself shared this majority view. When or if he changed his mind remains wholly unclear.

⁸² This was a view very much promoted by the defeated Kerensky, see A.F. Kerensky, *The Catastrophe: Kerensky's own story of the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1927) and *The Crucifixion of Liberty* (London, 1934).

⁸³ For the now better understood complexity of Russian politics in 1917, see Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London, 1997), pp: 307-473; Zila Galili y Garcia, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1989), *passim*; Wade, *Russian Revolution*.

One further aspect of this thesis may, finally, be considered. Since its main purpose will be an examination of Henderson's likely motives for acting as he did in the summer of 1917, the focus will necessarily be on the narrow and uncertain area of those 'thinking processes' which, as Hamilton observed, he kept very much to himself until such time as they could form a plan of action. The post-resignation outcomes of Henderson's actions are well known and significant, and will not be the subject of any revision in this study. We need therefore mention them only briefly and in passing. One such outcome, no doubt, was a weakening of the patriotic unity of the country. Although Henderson promptly sought to minimise the damage attendant on his resignation, assuring the War Cabinet that he continued to share and was ready to support in a 'non-Government capacity' the Cabinet's desire 'that the War should be carried to a successful conclusion', the defection of so senior a figure to what would clearly become an oppositional role represented a definite deterioration in the government's position.⁸⁴

Of more lasting significance were the changes effected in the Labour party. The party had for three years been conspicuously divided on its attitude towards the war. Officially it had had little to say other than to echo the government line. Under Henderson's post-Stockholm leadership the situation was transformed. By the end of the war the bulk of the party was aligned behind comprehensive, independent policies, both domestically and internationally, and had put into place new structures to facilitate electoral success. It was in short ready to reap its post-war success and emerge as the principal party of opposition to the Conservatives. It was also by the end of the war taking a leading role in the revival of the Socialist International. When the socialist movement finally convened its first full

⁸⁴ TNA, War Cabinet, 11 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (211).

conference in early 1919, attended by delegates from the Allies, Central Powers and Neutrals, credit for this achievement was rightly awarded to Henderson personally.⁸⁵

It could perhaps be argued that since these achievements are fully recognised, further speculation on Henderson's ultimately impenetrable motivations can serve no important purpose. Several rejoinders can be offered to such an argument. One such has already been mentioned. It has not been the primary purpose of this thesis to proffer a new interpretation of Henderson's objectives to be considered *alongside* that which already exists. It has been, rather, a matter of demonstrating that the long accepted interpretation lacks credibility and cannot on that account continue to stand, and that therefore something must be offered to take its place. It is surely also a historiographical norm to treat the motives of historical actors, where these can be reasonably assessed, as of scarcely less interest than their deeds. Where moreover suspicions of political obfuscation come into play, this interest is likely to be enhanced. In this particular case study, we may also note that a thorough exploration of motives can give rise not just to minor adjustments, but to radically different conclusions. Did Henderson act out of apprehension for the beleaguered Petrograd government, or did he see in the Russian situation an opportunity to affect change in the Labour party under the umbrella of a different concern? Did his perseverance in the Stockholm campaign to the point of his loss of Cabinet office represent a laudable sense of determination and commitment or was it the result of calculated political finesse?

A conclusion incorporating an untypical degree of political finesse on Henderson's part may finally also have a bearing on the episode's historiography. For if it were accepted that a

⁸⁵ In Hamilton's view, it was above all Henderson's 'drive and energy' that brought this conference to fruition despite the multiple difficulties it faced, Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.192.

significant number of historians over a period of a hundred years have misread Henderson's true motives, then some explanation of such a misreading must be required. Paradoxically perhaps, the political finesse Henderson may have deployed to such effective purpose in 1917 may have subsequently obscured rather than illuminated his remarkable success. Reason enough, it must surely be argued, for the full reappraisal of the Stockholm episode this thesis will offer.

The thesis will be set out in four chapters arranged chronologically to cover the full passage of the war. The first will deal with the period between August 1914 and May 1917; the second will focus on the period encompassing Henderson's stay in Russia, whilst the third will look particularly closely at his Stockholm campaign in July and August 1917. The final chapter will embrace the subsequent period up until the summer of 1919. Although presenting the key considerations for the purpose of the thesis in chronological order, these chapters are not designed to simply present a wartime narrative. Each chapter will pose its own distinct questions, the cumulative answers to which will provide the overall shape of the thesis. There is also of course some benefit in terms of general comprehensibility in discussing events in the order they occurred.

Chapter One will tackle the question of how far the belief at the centre of the thesis - that Henderson's commitment to an ongoing involvement in the Socialist International was largely independent of whatever worries he may have had regarding the situation in Russia - can be sustained by evidence emerging from an examination of the earlier war years. Whilst it will be seen that this is no easy task, in part because of Henderson's habitual reticence and in part because for most of this time he was a member of the government and thereby

obliged to follow the Cabinet line, the case will be made that a continuity does exist between the period *prior* to his joining the first coalition in May 1915 and his actions following his return from Russia twenty six months later.

Chapter Two will address the absence of evidence in support of the standard account's view that Henderson converted to Stockholm whilst in Russia. In examining more closely than previous studies have done the particular circumstances which Henderson faced throughout his stay, the chapter will propose that only towards the end of his visit would it have been possible or prudent to make a commitment to his hosts over Stockholm, and that there are good reasons to believe that he would have preferred to postpone any final decision until he had spoken to the conference organisers in the Swedish capital. Similarly, Chapter Three will conclude, following a more detailed and thorough consideration of the evidence than has hitherto been provided, that the standard account has failed to adequately explain Henderson's actions following his return to Britain, especially during the final and crucial forty eight hours of his campaign.

The fourth chapter will begin by proposing alternative explanations of Henderson's actions in Russia and on his return to Britain, before outlining the more or less seamless transition from a Stockholm campaign purportedly designed to bolster the Russian government to a post-Stockholm campaign for the revival of a Socialist International. It will assess what he most hoped to achieve through this subsequent campaign and conclude that his ultimate aim was to encourage a progressive and ameliorative settlement to the war. It will argue that this aim was consistent with his international views both before and after the First World War. The main conclusion then proposed by this thesis is that it is in the context of

Henderson's more or less lifelong views on international affairs that his actions in the summer of 1917 can best be understood. To continue to place these events primarily in the context of political upheaval in Russia, it will be suggested, would be misleading.

Chapter One

Henderson and the War

Why did Henderson induce the Labour party in the autumn and winter of 1917 to focus its attention on the still controversial issues of war aims and the socialist international? This is the question this chapter will seek to answer. It is generally assumed that his decision to embark on this course is related to Russia and Stockholm. And in as far as these matters precipitated his resignation from the Cabinet this is obviously true. He could not have followed this path whilst a member of the government. But this brings us to a consideration of means and ends. His resignation helped provide the means to pursue this objective, but why and when did he come to feel that this was a legitimate end? Historians have been unable to give clear answers to this question, largely because Henderson himself gives so little away. There is even uncertainty as to whether his political change of direction may have been born in Britain or Russia.¹ We can only observe that from the spring of 1915 Henderson and other Labour 'patriots' refused to publicly discuss the issue of war aims and that there was no hint of any change of position until his return from Russia.² Throughout

¹ Compare Winter's belief that 'by mid-1917' Henderson may have been changing his mind on the political situation in response to a growing 'democratic consciousness' within the British public, J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), pp:770-771 with Wrigley's observation that whilst in Russia Henderson 'does seem to have regained his faith in democratic war aims', Chris Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: Peace and War* (Brighton, 1976), p.210.

² *Daily Citizen*, 26 April 1915, p.5.

the same period there was a definite reluctance to engage with what was left of the Second International.

For the purposes of this thesis the question of whether Henderson's changed political perception began in Britain or in Russia is important. But with no clear indications from Henderson his biographers have had to form their best guesses as to his state of mind during the months before June 1917. The results have been rather divergent. Hamilton sees her subject in this period as something of a tragic figure, still mourning the death of his son, suffering the pain of isolation from too many of his Labour comrades, and an 'outsider' in the Cabinet. Though he continued doggedly in his ministerial work, she surmises, 'the question would arise, more and more insistent – Was he really doing the best by the nation and by the labour movement in sticking to his association with men whose general outlook and ideas he did not share, at the price of losing contact with and sympathy among his fellows?'³ Leventhal too sees him as haunted 'by doubts about his effectiveness' and clinging to office 'in the hope that he could uphold the interests of the labour movement whether or not he could retain its confidence.' Nor were his relations with the new Prime Minister ever 'as amicable as they had been with Asquith.'⁴ Wrigley however sees Henderson's period in the second coalition government in a more positive light, noting that despite some 'occasional personal tensions, Henderson had no major policy difference with Lloyd George until he went to Russia' and that he expounded the Prime Minister's policies 'with much vigour.'⁵

³ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson: A Biography* (London, 1938), pp:116-119.

⁴ F.M.Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), pp:62-63.

⁵ Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990), pp:114, 109.

Since it is highly unlikely that evidence will be found to demonstrate the validity of any of these differing views, this chapter will offer a different approach to the problem. It will be argued that little can be learned in relation to the questions which concern us from the many months in which Henderson held Cabinet office. He was throughout this long middle period of the war punctilious in his adherence to the doctrine of Cabinet responsibility, never deviating in public from the government's line. He appears to have wholeheartedly accepted that the creation in 1915 of a national government symbolised the 'unity and determination of our country until our efforts.....culminated in a final and lasting peace.'⁶ He adopted as his principal role in both coalitions that of mediating between ministers and the labour movement, largely to ensure the industrial harmony essential to the achievement of military victory. Strategic and foreign policy matters he readily left to those he believed better qualified than himself.⁷

More illuminating by far is the opening period of Henderson's war. Contrary to what would follow, he could not in this period simply adhere to a well established and consistent public line. Like so many others he had not only to construct his position on the war, but had to do so by reversing his original stance. Although there is much in the historical record showing him negotiate this transition, it is again the case that historians cannot agree on central questions as to when, why, and to what extent, he moved from pre-war opposition to British involvement in the conflict towards full commitment to the 'patriotic' cause. Underlying these disagreements lies a division of opinion on the fundamental question as to

⁶ Henderson to Asquith, 10 January 1916, Asquith papers, quoted in Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.99.

⁷ Henderson only rarely attended the Cabinet committees set up by Asquith to consider these matters, operating, as Wrigley puts it, in the narrower role of 'industrial relations trouble-shooter', *ibid.*, p. 105; although present in the discussions of wider aspects of the war within the Lloyd George coalition, he largely continued in the same role, David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford, 1995), p.18.

whether he converted to 'patriotism' primarily as a consequence of personal conviction, or as a result of political calculations as to the long term interests of his party.

One element of this early phase of the war on which we will focus is the resolution agreed by the Allied socialist parties of Britain, France, Belgium and Russia on 14 February 1915. This is particularly significant since it represents a formal position on the war effectively adopted by the British Labour party in the absence until then of anything agreed by the party's annual conference, which was postponed in 1915. Also, the gathering in London of Allied socialists was the one and only international conference which British labour attended during the first three years of the war. When the party prepared in 1917 for a second Allied socialist conference as a prelude to the full international conference at Stockholm, a statement produced by the National Executive began by declaring its continued acceptance of the agreement of 1915. We may see this resolution then as a bridge between Henderson's first and third periods of the war.

Henderson's middle period as a Cabinet minister (longer than the other two combined) may not reveal much as to any developing thoughts on the war he may have harboured, but it is nevertheless important in indicating issues relating to the state of his divided party which he could not in the longer term ignore. In this chapter then we will consider separately both the first and second period, the one with the principal aim of understanding how he settled on his own 'patriotic' position, and the other with assessing the impact in several policy areas of the deepening division within the party. The policy areas we shall examine in this second part of the chapter will be related to clauses contained in the Allied socialist resolution.

‘Pacifist’ or ‘Patriot’? August 1914 – May 1915

Three conclusions will be offered in relation to Henderson’s movement during this period. Firstly, it will be suggested, Henderson’s fundamental beliefs on war, peace and international relations, as demonstrated throughout his political life, lend themselves more naturally to the ‘pacifist’ phases at the start and end of the war than to the albeit lengthy ‘patriotic’ interlude between them. Secondly, it will be argued that whilst the true extent of Henderson’s personal identification with ‘patriotic’ sentiment during the war cannot by its nature be easily determined, his actions, particularly in the early months of the war, *can* be satisfactorily explained by concerns over the continued cohesion under the stress of war of the Labour party. Thirdly, and as a consequence of this perceived danger, Henderson attempted to, and partially succeeded, in establishing a position on the war that balanced key components of the rival stances of the opposing groups within the party. That position can be identified most clearly with the Allied socialist resolution of February 1915, which Henderson himself had a hand in drafting.

Before beginning our discussion of Henderson’s responses to the war we must briefly return to his pre-war politics and the beliefs he held regarding the conduct of international relations. In common with most of the senior figures in the pre-war international labour movement Henderson was an inheritor ‘of the traditions and thought of the enlightenment,

confident that men were capable of attaining perfectibility, if only shown the true way.’⁸ His belief in moral progress was as we have seen strongly reinforced by deeply held religious faith. During his early years as a rising Liberal activist in the North East, observes Ross McKibbin, he would have come into contact with an ‘intensely pacifist’ regional outlook influenced by Quakers and Radicals.⁹ These early convictions, which he evidently retained for the rest of his life, impelled him into a loosely aligned community of progressive internationalists active in Britain, as elsewhere, in the pre-war years.¹⁰ As a way of assessing the alternatives open to Henderson in August 1914, the scene may usefully be set by looking more generally at the reactions of this progressive community.

Viewing the July 1914 international crisis as a concern of the Continental powers, progressives demanded that Britain should not become embroiled in what was essentially a Balkan conflict into which neighbouring powers had been disastrously drawn. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, saw matters very differently. It was for him essential that Britain should provide military support to the French, who were in their turn committed to back Russia in the war with Germany which now seemed inevitable. Despite the opposition of a great many progressives, up to and including numerous members of the Liberal Cabinet, war was duly declared on 4 August.¹¹ Progressives responded to this setback in a variety of ways, which broadly fell into three categories. Many simply converted to unequivocal support for the war, largely in response to the apparent German initiation of the conflict. A much cited example of this tendency was Oxford University’s prominent classicist, Gilbert

⁸ David Kirby, *War, Peace and Revolution War: International Socialism at the Crossroads* (Aldershot, 1986), p.246.

⁹ R. I. McKibbin, ‘Arthur Henderson as Labour Leader’, *International Review of Social History*, 23 (1978), p.86.

¹⁰ Leventhal, *Henderson*, pp:3-4.

¹¹ For a recent account of the progressive resistance to war, see Douglas Newton, *The Darkest Days: The Truth Behind Britain’s Rush to War, 1914* (London, 2015).

Murray. Having been an active critic of Grey's Entente policy, Murray now saw the conflict as a consequence of the 'unalterably aggressive designs of Germany.'¹² Grey, he now also realised, had worked throughout the pre-war period to foster good relations with Berlin and to maintain the precarious international peace.¹³ Another celebrated convert to unequivocal support for the war was H. G. Wells, whose early statements saw the conflict in the starkest of terms. Victory for Germany would mean 'the permanent entronement of the War God over all human affairs.' A German defeat could 'open the way to disarmament and peace throughout the earth.'¹⁴

At the opposite extreme some, mostly Labour, chose to retain their forthright opposition to the conflict. In a statement of 13 August the National Council of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) sent 'sympathy and greeting' to German socialists and blamed the 'appalling crime' of the war on 'the rulers, the diplomats, the militarists' of the belligerent nations, including Britain.¹⁵ Ramsay MacDonald, who had shared with Henderson in recent years the most senior Labour party positions, presented in the ILP press a powerful critique of what he saw as Grey's fundamentally deceptive diplomacy.¹⁶ But the few who continued to criticise the government's decision to take up arms during the early days of the war quickly found themselves subject to hostile public responses, which doubtless encouraged greater discretion amongst other more cautious sceptics.¹⁷ This third intermediate group of former neutralists adopted a different type of response to the outbreak of war, characterised by an

¹² Gilbert Murray, *The Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey, 1906-1915* (Oxford, 1915), p.9

¹³ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁴ H. G. Wells, *The War that will End War* (London, 1914), p.11.

¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 14 August 1914, p.9.

¹⁶ See articles in *Labour Leader*, 13 and 27 August 1914; see also Lord Elton, *The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1919)* (London, 1939), pp: 251-262.

¹⁷ For examples of these forceful responses, see Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), pp:45-46.

unwillingness to continue expressing their earlier views without necessarily abandoning them, whilst professing their resolve to work for an Allied victory. The major Liberal papers fell into this category. The *Manchester Guardian*, which had remained strongly critical of Grey's determination to press the country into war until the final moment, articulated well this new position. 'Some time the responsibility for one of the greatest errors in our history will have to be fixed,' it declared on the first morning of the war, 'but that time is not now. Now there is nothing for Englishmen to do but to stand together [for] the attainment of our common object – an early and decisive victory over Germany.'¹⁸

A safer way to raise the issues that continued to concern progressives, it was soon more generally decided, was to focus attention on 'the terms of peace and other future matters, leaving the past to be dealt with when the country is out of danger.'¹⁹ Yet this too presented difficulties. A focus on distant matters such as the peace settlement during the early stages of a war which had clearly started badly for the Allies was understandably open to criticism. It was therefore felt that any attempt to raise the question of peace should be postponed until the military position became clearer, fear of defeat or invasion could be put aside, and public opinion, it was hoped, could become more receptive to wider perspectives on the nature, development and possible conclusion of the conflict. In the meantime, suggested C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, attention should be focussed on 'the getting together [of] the nucleus of an organisation and preparing written matter for publication when the appropriate time comes.....'²⁰

¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 August 1914, p.4.

¹⁹ Bertrand Russell to C. P. Trevelyan, 2 October 1914, cited in Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, (London, 1997), p.371.

²⁰ Scott to E. D. Morel, 18 August 1914, cited in Trevor Wilson, ed., *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott: 1911-1928* (London, 1970), p.100.

The possibility of keeping these preparations private was perhaps always remote. The bubble burst as early as 10 September after a private circular had been leaked to the *Morning Post*. This aggressively Conservative paper immediately warned the public that ‘an organisation is being secretly prepared in order to flood the country “when the proper opportunity occurs” with “books, pamphlets and leaflets” directed to the object of a peace satisfactory to Germany.’²¹ Other organs of the patriotic press were quick to echo the *Post*’s condemnation. Realising that they were going to be slandered almost whatever they said, the accused concluded that they may as well come out and state their views clearly.²² The Union of Democratic Control (UDC), which became the principal voice of radical Liberal dissent, was thus born.²³ Insisting that their new organisation was in no sense a ‘stop-the-war’ movement, the founders defiantly set out their criteria for the terms of peace.²⁴ Their disavowals of ‘pacifism’ did nothing however to lessen the ‘patriotic’ outrage, encouraging the more cautious radicals to distance themselves from the vilified new organisation, thus splitting the progressive movement still further. With the UDC and the ILP remaining a defiant minority the dichotomy between ‘pacifists’ and ‘patriots’ began to set firm, curiously resembling in its durability the military stalemate simultaneously forming on the other side of the Channel.

²¹ *Morning Post*, 10 September 1914, p.6.

²² A. J. A. Morris, C. P. Trevelyan, 1870-1958: *Portrait of a Radical* (Belfast, 1977), p.123.

²³ For the formation of the UDC see Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford, 1971), pp: 28-45; Sally Harris, *Out of Control: British Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control, 1914-1918* (Hull, 1996), pp: 40-80.

²⁴ These criteria, later confirmed as the UDC’s four cardinal points were essentially that the peace settlement should abjure the transfer of territory without the consent by plebiscite of its population; should set up machinery for democratic control of foreign policy; should not be based on considerations of ‘balance of power’; and should plan for drastic reductions in armaments, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1914, p.4.

This early and conspicuous division in their ranks was one of several handicaps under which progressive internationalists would labour throughout the war. Those who chose to remain on the 'patriotic' side of the fence hoped that they would thereby be better placed to wield some influence over the eventual peace, yet the circumstances in which they could safely raise this vital topic continued to elude them. One major problem they faced was their pre-war record in failing to heed the warnings of their political enemies as to the nature and extent of the German threat. The 'scaremongers' they had so readily dismissed in earlier years could now insist that it was they who had been proved correct.²⁵ The advocates of a progressive peace could scarcely avoid raising old, now rather suspect hopes of harmonious relations with the German nation. What they believed in was by its nature an ameliorative peace. What they rejected was the traditional diplomatic cycle whereby the punitive settlements of one war tended to create the grievances which would lead to the next. But to make the case for a 'soft' peace against Germany was to invite the charge that they had learnt nothing from their previous errors.

A further difficulty arose through their determination to avoid criticism of what emerged as the patriotic consensus on the causes of the war, for which the Central Powers were held solely responsible. To call for a peace settlement based on a 'New Diplomacy' which would abandon traditional forms of national security in favour of untried procedures of international collaboration could easily be seen as an inappropriate response to the circumstances presumed to have given rise to the current war. Had there been a perception in Britain that the war was in part at least a consequence of the brinkmanship inherent in the pre-war international system, progressive perspectives may have attracted greater

²⁵ Irene Cooper Willis, *England's Holy War: A Study of English Liberal Idealism during the Great War* (New York, 1928), p.192.

support, as indeed they did in the post-war years when great power brinkmanship was latterly indicted as a major cause of the conflict. The raising of this idea in the early years of the war was always likely to be seen as an *apologia* for Berlin and therefore ‘pro-German’.²⁶

The belief that Germany had brought about the war was challenged by few in Britain. It was indeed widely asserted that Berlin had been planning such action for several decades. These opinions were bolstered by the professional judgement of eminent historians.²⁷ They were bolstered further by the brutal manner in which Germany had chosen to fight the war. Much publicised atrocities in Belgium, the shelling of British coastal towns, the sinking of British vessels by submarine warfare and the use of poison gas in the trenches, all combined to form a composite picture of German criminality from which the deliberately planned launching of world war was par for the course.²⁸ Unlike the subsequent war against fascism or the Cold War against communism, the First World War is not commonly viewed as an ideological conflict, yet the criminality of Germany was seen at this time as the function of a prevailing pattern of thought loosely described as ‘Prussian militarism’. This differed from the sorts of militarism identified during the pre-war years with all the great powers in that it was now recognised to dominate German cultural life to a uniquely unprecedented extent.

In a chapter entitled ‘The New German Theory of the State’ the Oxford historians showed how the writings of pre-war German thinkers had fostered the ‘idealization of the state’, the

²⁶ ‘Peace cranks’ and ‘pro-Germans’ were labels widely applied in the ‘patriotic’ press to progressive dissenters, Swartz, *Union of Democratic Control*, pp: 105-115.

²⁷ See for example, Members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History, *Why We Are At War*, Second Edition, (Oxford, 1914), also the work of the Professor of Modern History at Manchester University, Ramsay Muir, *Britain’s Case Against Germany: an Examination of the Historical Background of the German Action in 1914* (Manchester, 1914).

²⁸ For the importance of German military actions in ‘defining the enemy’, see Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp: 40-69.

self preservation of which demanded the perpetual enhancement of its power relative to other states, unconstrained by concerns for the individual or civilised moral norms.²⁹ The trawling through works of German philosophers and historians appropriate to the bolstering of this image became a powerful tool of Allied intellectuals during the war, giving the conflict an unmistakable ideological dimension.³⁰ The invasion of Belgium was held to illustrate the profound difference between the German approach to international relations and that of the other major powers. Disregarding treaty obligations or the rights of small nations Berlin attacked its helpless neighbour simply because it appeared a military necessity. The Allies on the other hand had responded in order to uphold the established public law. Believing that 'History' would 'doubtless attribute' the British decision for war 'to the Belgian question,' the Oxford historians were sure that had the French rather than the Germans invaded Belgium, Britain would 'indubitably have kept neutral, if it did not throw her onto the side of Germany.'³¹

In the face of a patriotic consensus strongly supportive of these views, the moderate left found it difficult to evoke a national discussion on the desirability of a progressive peace. Late in 1914 for example, George Cadbury, Quaker pacifist and proprietor of the liberal *Daily News*, wrote to his editor, A. G. Gardiner, suggesting that sometime before 'peace was declared.....we must if possible educate men to think.'³² By which he meant of course, to think like a progressive. But how this was to be done in the prevailing political climate was

²⁹ Oxford Faculty of Modern History, *Why We Are At War*, pp: 108-117.

³⁰ The historian Heinrich von Treitschke, Prussian general and military historian Friedrich von Bernhardi and the philosopher Hegel constituted for this purpose 'the unholy trinity, with Nietzsche in reserve for those who wished to leave nothing to chance.' Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1988), p.47.

³¹ Oxford Faculty of Modern History, *Why We Are At War*, pp: 90,92.

³² George Cadbury to A. G. Gardiner, 9 December 1914, Gardiner papers, quoted in Stephen Koss, *Fleet Street Radical: A. G. Gardiner and the Daily News* (London, 1973), p.163.

left unanswered. As the determination to crush the hated Hun grew ever stronger in Britain, the possibility of providing such an 'education' ever receded. Tellingly perhaps, it was not until the powerful interventions of outsiders, President Wilson and the revolutionary Russians, that the moderate progressives finally sensed an opportunity to advance their views.³³

Having considered briefly the political atmosphere in which he had to operate, we may now turn to Henderson's own responses to the outbreak of war. We may start by examining the views provided by his three main biographers. Hamilton sets out her stall quite straightforwardly. She believes that Henderson, like the majority of his labour colleagues, converted immediately to full support for the war, which he perceived as a just and necessary response to the outrage of German aggression against Belgium. As early as the evening of 3 August, she suggests, Henderson was a committed 'patriot'.³⁴

Hamilton's views on the significance of Belgium at this moment were common during the inter-war period.³⁵ But this perception has in recent times been modified. Belgium's importance in bringing about the collapse of the campaign for neutrality is today recognised as double edged. Shock and outrage at the German attack on a small neutral state doubtless influenced many. At the same time however the invasion made it morally easier to support a war which could be justified in terms of high principle, rather than the imperatives of the balance of power or a barely concealed alliance obligation. The invasion, in short, greatly facilitated the movement of progressives to acceptance of a war that was now recognised as

³³ Laurence W. Martin, *Peace Without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (New Haven, 1958), *passim*; Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, 1959), pp: 33-36.

³⁴ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.95.

³⁵ See for example, David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol.1, (London, 1938), pp: 40-44.

unavoidable. This was particularly important within the Liberal party, from the Cabinet downwards, for whom many felt obliged to back their leaders out of political loyalty or fear of the consequences of bringing about a government collapse.³⁶

Like Hamilton, Leventhal believes that Henderson was 'stirred by the violation of Belgian neutrality' and that he consequently 'accepted Grey's rationalizations for British intervention.'³⁷ The reference to Grey is significant, for both Hamilton and Leventhal. Hamilton's singling out of the evening of 3 August as the moment Henderson's mind changed is influenced by the fact that this was the occasion of Grey's celebrated address to the House of Commons, which is thought to have won many doubters round to the necessity of war.³⁸ The Foreign Secretary's revelation that Berlin had demanded the right for German troops to cross Belgian territory, and would invade the next day if this were not granted, was inevitably a powerful inducement to support British involvement in the coming war.

A further revelation however may have had the opposite effect. The House was informed that naval arrangements between Britain and France of which MPs had not been aware had ensured that French warships were concentrated in the Mediterranean where they could protect British as well as their own interests. In return the Royal Navy would deploy in the Channel in defence of France's northern shores. This imposed on the British government an

³⁶ See the posthumously published account of Cabinet discussions by one of the two ministers (of an initially larger potential number) who carried through on their threats of resignation, John Viscount Morley, *Memorandum on Resignation* (London, 1928); also Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: essays on the determinants of British foreign policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge, 1985), pp: 135-147.

³⁷ Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.50.

³⁸ Hamilton believes that Henderson had been 'deeply.... impressed' by Grey's speech, Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.96; whether or not she was right about Henderson, there remained many amongst the neutralists far from convinced, Newton, *Darkest Days*, pp: 229-231, 242-246.

immediate obligation to prevent German vessels launching attacks on undefended French Channel ports, which Grey insisted could not honourably be evaded. In the context of his longstanding insistence that the Entente with France imposed no form of *legal* obligation on Britain to enter a war in defence of its neighbour, Grey was now able to offer an obligation of 'honour' which, as was obvious to his critics, appeared scarcely less binding in its effect. 'Secret diplomacy' was a longstanding concern to progressive dissenters, and this latest example came as a significant shock.³⁹

No firm evidence that Henderson accepted Grey's arguments in favour of intervention at this time exists, and in the light of the above the proposition may be doubted. As a matter of fact his name would appear under a circular issued by the Labour executive four days after Grey had addressed parliament, in which the Foreign Secretary was heavily criticised. The purpose of this circular was to provide details of resolutions adopted by the party over the previous two days. It is worth noting that there is no mention, either in the circular or the resolutions, of Belgium or the German assault. The conflict is still blamed on 'Foreign Ministers pursuing diplomatic policies for the purpose of maintaining a balance of power.' Grey's policy of 'understandings with France and Russia only' had been 'bound to increase the power of Russia both in Europe and Asia, and to endanger good relations with Germany.' The Foreign Secretary moreover had committed the nation to supporting France 'without the knowledge of our people.' Denying that the labour movement was in 'any way receding' from its earlier opposition to 'engaging in a European war', the party's executive, while 'watching for the earliest opportunity for taking effective action in the interests of peace.....' advised that 'all Labour and Socialist organisations should concentrate their

³⁹ For a critical analysis of Grey's address and the reactions to it, see Newton, *Darkest Days*, pp: 216-234.

energies' on measures designed 'to mitigate the destitution which will inevitably overtake our working people while the state of war lasts.'⁴⁰

The Executive resolutions were not carried without argument. They were pushed through however by a significant majority of eight to four. Clearly, given the tenor of the statements, it was the more 'patriotic' amongst the delegates who constituted the minority. This seems surprising in the light of subsequent disputes within the NEC, the personnel of which changed only marginally during the war. The 'patriots', following this first week of the war, would almost invariably muster majority support for their views, at least until Henderson returned from Russia in 1917. This untypical balance of forces in early August strongly suggests that the image projected by Hamilton of a party moving more or less instantly and *en masse* towards a committed patriotic stance on the war is questionable. Almost certainly the process by which the patriotic ascendancy asserted itself was more uneven and protracted than this image allows. Before attempting to assess what can be known regarding Henderson's personal position on the declaration of war, on Grey, and on related matters, a closer examination of the above process will again be useful.

Support for the war has generally been seen as the essence of 'patriotism'. One problem with this is that a large number of 'pacifists', including the two most notorious offenders, MacDonald and E. D. Morel, secretary and driving force of the UDC, also supported the war.⁴¹ 'Victory.....must be ours,' wrote MacDonald to the Mayor of Leicester (his parliamentary constituency) in mid-September.⁴² This had been his consistent position. His

⁴⁰ LHA, National Executive Committee minutes (hereafter NEC mins.), 5 and 6 August 1914.

⁴¹ For Morel's dominant position in the UDC, see Swartz, *Union of Democratic Control*, pp: 24-25.

⁴² David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), p.175.

earlier attempt to persuade the Labour Party to abstain on the vote for war credits was not motivated by illusory hopes that the war could by this stage be prevented, but by the 'desire to preserve a free hand in criticism' of the government.⁴³ Morel too declared in the UDC's first pamphlet that it was 'imperative that the war, once begun, should be prosecuted to a victory for our country.'⁴⁴ These statements were not unusual. The many misnamed 'pacifists' who recognised that war was at times a necessary evil did not call for an immediate peace. Acknowledging that any settlement would require the withdrawal of German troops from Belgium and France they were not so naive as to believe that this would be offered as a token of Berlin's goodwill. What singled them out from their fellow countrymen was something rather different: their refusal to endorse the hardening patriotic consensus which insisted that the war had come about *solely* as a result of German aggression and which subscribed to the fiction that Allied governments were essentially motivated not by the traditional objectives of great powers, but by the need to liberate Europe from the poisonous strain of 'Prussian militarism'.

Initially, as we have seen, support for the war as manifested by the more cautious progressives could best be described as backing for the nation in its coming trial rather than acceptance of Grey's arguments. Given his closeness to the neutralists in the final pre-war days, given also his record of opposition to militarism, it seems quite likely that Henderson might have taken such a view.⁴⁵ If Hamilton and Leventhal use language which suggests that their subject should be placed in the same category as Murray or Wells, that is as an immediate convert to the government's case for war, Wrigley adopts wording more

⁴³ G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in War Time* (London, 1915), pp:30-32.

⁴⁴ E. D. Morel, *The Morrow of the War* (London, 1914) , U. D. C. Pamphlet, no.1, cited in G. H. Hardy, *Bertrand Russell and Trinity* (Cambridge, 1970), p.11.

⁴⁵ For his pre-war political positions see Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.41; Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 71-74.

indicative of a belief that would place Henderson in the intermediate grouping we have identified with the *Manchester Guardian*. Although the situation ‘was not as he would have wished,’ Wrigley writes, Henderson accepted the necessity of coming to terms ‘with the reality of a major war in progress.’⁴⁶

Whilst uncertainty over Henderson’s personal reaction to the reality must remain, it is clear that he and MacDonald moved apart during the first week of the war. Although Henderson was in the Commons during the critical hours of 3 August, he did not follow the example of MacDonald and Hardie by speaking against Grey. Two days later however he and MacDonald met with the Radical Liberal MPs, Arthur Ponsonby and Charles Trevelyan (the latter having just resigned from Asquith’s government over the decision to declare war). The conversation appears to have centred on the idea of setting up a joint committee of representatives from the Liberal and Labour parties to coordinate policy now that the war had commenced.⁴⁷ Almost immediately however the first major break between the two Labour men emerged following MacDonald’s failed attempt to persuade the party to oppose war credits. With the great majority of Labour MPs, including Henderson, voting against him, MacDonald resigned as Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP).⁴⁸

How can the sentiments expressed by the NEC be squared with the near unanimous rejection of MacDonald’s proposal to abstain in the parliamentary vote for war credits? Undoubtedly, one important consideration is that of venue and occasion. To have voted against the government in the national spotlight of the House of Commons, to have been

⁴⁶ Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 75-76.

⁴⁷ Morris, *Trevelyan*, pp: 120-121; Raymond A. Jones, *Arthur Ponsonby: The Politics of Life* (Bromley, 1989), p.90.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 7 August 1914, p.3.

indeed the only party to have done so, would have represented a most provocative and politically dangerous challenge at such a moment.⁴⁹ The deliberations of the National Executive on the other hand were directly communicated only to affiliated bodies of the Labour party. The resolutions of 5th and 6th August appear to have been ignored by most of the national press. It is also the case that Labour MPs were on the whole more conservative than the politically mixed bag of NEC delegates.⁵⁰ Above all perhaps, opinions during these days were in a state of some flux. In discussions with Labour MPs shortly before the war credits request, MacDonald had failed to detect any major opposition to his own point of view.⁵¹

This state of flux obviously makes it difficult to pinpoint any one individual's movement of opinion. Henderson's biographers are nevertheless convinced that within a relatively short space of time he became fully aligned with the 'patriotic' sentiments of the majority of his party. This transition, they also suggest, was a matter of personal conviction, a sense indeed of national obligation, which evidently encompassed a readiness to accept official notions of the war's essential purpose.⁵² This is not however universally accepted. McKibbin's stress on the 'intensely pacifist.....quaker-radical influences' that Henderson had absorbed in earlier years makes him question how easily these could have been put aside in 1914. He suggests that it would have been 'perfectly conceivable' for Henderson to have taken the path of MacDonald, Ponsonby and others following the outbreak of war, and that it was 'perhaps surprising' that he did not. If his trade union connections had been 'strong enough to push

⁴⁹ Christopher Howard, 'MacDonald, Henderson, and the Outbreak of War' *Historical Journal*, 20.4 (1977), p.882

⁵⁰ G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), pp: 4, 19.

⁵¹ Marquand, *MacDonald*, pp:168-169; Howard, *Historical Journal*, pp:881-882.

⁵² Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.96; Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.50; Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 84-85.

him into supporting the war', suggests McKibbin, this would have been a close run thing. He accordingly detects during the first months of the war a degree of 'ambiguity' in Henderson's responses to the war.⁵³

Signs of this ambiguity can be detected in the efforts he continued to make to heal the breach with MacDonald and in his decision to join the General Council of the UDC, both indicative of a desire to retain some sort of foothold in both 'patriot' and 'pacifist' camps.⁵⁴ As late as January 1915 he was ready to temper his orthodox view on the responsibility of 'Prussian militarism' for the war with sceptical comments about those in Britain who declaimed 'against militarism in Germany but were not unwilling to support universal militarism in England.'⁵⁵ Whilst Henderson took definite steps in the direction of 'patriotism', he was often responding to rather than initiating key events. Asquith's proposal of 28 August 1914, inviting leaders of other parties to cooperate in a parliamentary recruiting campaign, provides an early example of this. Majorities in the PLP and the NEC voted in favour of joining the new campaign, whilst the ILP for the most part was strongly opposed, voicing objections to sharing platforms with longstanding political opponents and participating in occasions that could too easily succumb to jingoist excess.⁵⁶

Whilst Henderson endorsed the majority view it has been suggested by David Marquand that he, like MacDonald, had 'misgivings' about appearing on recruiting platforms.⁵⁷ A 'certain ambivalence' in his initial response to the campaign has also been detected by

⁵³ McKibbin, 'Arthur Henderson as Labour Leader', p.86.

⁵⁴ Harris, *Out of Control*, p.55.

⁵⁵ *Daily Citizen*, 11 January 1915, p.4.

⁵⁶ Marquand, *MacDonald*, pp. 174-175.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.179.

Christopher Howard, who believes that his support for the initiative was determined in part by the fear that Asquith might have called a wartime general election had the cooperation of other parties not been forthcoming.⁵⁸ The wider nature of any such ambivalence may be divined in comments relating to the recruiting campaign included in the subsequent annual conference report. The party, it was stated, had joined the campaign on the 'understanding that speakers.....would not necessarily be responsible for.....opinions regarding the original causes of the war, or the chain of circumstances which led up to it' contrary to those adopted by the labour movement.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly too Henderson would have been concerned by the further distance the campaign created between the opposing wings of the party. When MacDonald offered it some qualified support Henderson responded euphorically, stating that this would persuade the party 'that we are not as apart as some imagine.'⁶⁰

His hopes on this count were short lived. A new and more damaging initiative, emerging this time from within the party itself, greatly accentuated the division between the two leaders. On 15 October the party's daily paper published a document it described as 'admirable and valuable'.⁶¹ Although not a formal party statement, the document had been signed by a large majority of Labour MPs and leading trade unionists. Its purpose was to 'clear away once and for all' misconceptions as to the opinions of the party's majority. As the statement went on to make clear these opinions were fully in line with the patriotic consensus. The critical tone of the August executive resolution was abandoned. Concerns over secret diplomacy and the balance of power were conspicuous by their absence. All that remained

⁵⁸ Howard, *Historical Journal*, pp:877-878.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January 1916*, p.51.

⁶⁰ TNA, Henderson to MacDonald, 14 September 1914, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1232.

⁶¹ *Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1914, p.2.

of the traditional Labour critique of international relations was a brief final sentence stating that when the time came to discuss peace, the movement would stand, as before, for an international agreement among civilised nations to resolve disputes by arbitration.⁶²

Amongst the signatories to this 'patriotic' manifesto was Henderson, who explained rather apologetically to MacDonald that he had had nothing to do with its drafting, had only signed 'after a good deal of thought', and had tried to persuade the authors to consult more widely with all members of the Executive with a view to considering amendments.⁶³ Little came of this latter effort, the concessions in language offered by the 'patriots' dismissed by MacDonald as 'absurd'.⁶⁴ It was by now obvious that divisions of opinion on the war would remain deeply entrenched and that this was a reality with which party leaders would have to come to terms. Whilst Henderson did now accept that the leadership breach would regrettably remain, he nevertheless continued to press MacDonald to at least commit himself to retaking his post as PLP chairman at the end of the war; this was a commitment his disillusioned colleague was unwilling to make.⁶⁵

Historians agree that throughout the war Henderson acted in a manner designed to ensure that the Labour party would emerge from the conflict in the strongest possible position. The divisions which occurred at the outset, both within the leadership and between the affiliated sections of the movement, were in this respect a matter of immediate and great concern, raising obvious questions as to whether the party could even survive the war

⁶² Cole, *Labour in War Time*, pp:55-57.

⁶³ TNA, Henderson to MacDonald, 19 October 1914, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1232.

⁶⁴ Ibid., MacDonald to Henderson, 20 October 1914.

⁶⁵ Marquand, *MacDonald*, pp: 178-179.

intact.⁶⁶ In Hamilton's view, Henderson was determined to avoid any sort of 'heresy hunt', as the more fervent 'patriots' desired. Since the war would only be a temporary phenomenon, the bitter divisions it generated should themselves be seen as temporary. Henderson was firmly resolved not to permit 'the old line of division between the ILP and Trade Unions to reappear and develop into a schism.' He would in short tolerate the expression of controversial minority views within the party, even though, Hamilton insists, he found these views deeply distasteful.⁶⁷

We of course know that the Labour party did in the end hold together, unlike the Liberal party. This however was unforeseeable in the first months of the war. With their long roots in British politics and their position as an established party of government, the Liberals hardly seemed the most obvious candidates for division and collapse. Disagreements over entering the war had certainly been evident, but Asquith and Grey had succeeded in bringing around all but a few relatively insignificant dissenters to their decision to intervene. The Labour party was at this stage far more openly at odds with itself. Moreover it still constituted, unlike its progressive rival, a young and fragile entity.

Unwilling at its birth in 1900 even to describe itself as a party, the Labour Representation Committee was the outcome of a lengthy effort on the part of the ILP to bring the socialist societies, the co-operative movement and the trade unions into a single political federation. Notably divergent in wealth and power, as well as ideology, the constituent parts of the new federation cohabited with some difficulty. The unions in particular, many of which initially chose to shun association with the socialists, feared that their own resources might be

⁶⁶ Howard, *Historical Journal*, p.882.

⁶⁷ Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 96-99.

siphoned off by the latter into programmes for which they had little sympathy.⁶⁸ It was not until 1909, when the one remaining large union not yet in the fold - the Miners' Federation of Great Britain - finally agreed to affiliate to the party, that the ILP fully achieved its original aim.⁶⁹ And even then, as a loose alliance of independent organisations the party lacked much by way of common purpose, the main fault line remaining that between the socialist ILP and trade unionists.⁷⁰ A party which in 1900 had struggled to 'get off the ground' could still be seen by 1914 as far from secure.⁷¹

Foreign policy was one issue on which the pre-war labour movement was potentially disunited, as had been evident during the Boer war.⁷² Nevertheless, a policy combining socialist internationalism, anti-militarism and vigorous criticism of the Liberal government's anti-German alliance and rearmament programmes was adopted by the party between 1900 and 1914. It has been argued that this Labour foreign policy was principally the creation of a 'Big Four' of ILP leaders - MacDonald, Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden and Bruce Glasier - all of whom, it may be noted, gravitated to the pacifist camp in 1914.⁷³ The responses of trade unionists to the several aspects of this programme varied. Doubtless many were content to leave the foreign policy critics to their own devices, provided their campaigns did not impinge directly on union interests, as they did for example in relation to

⁶⁸ Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900* (London, 1954), p.239; Roger Moore, *The Emergence of the Labour Party 1880-1924* (London, 1978), pp:67-68, 76.

⁶⁹ H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, Vol.1, 1889-1910* (Oxford, 1964), pp: 375, 407.

⁷⁰ Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, (London, 1961), p.20.

⁷¹ Alastair J. Reid, 'Labour and the trade unions' in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane, Nick Tiratsoo, eds., *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp: 224-225; Robert Taylor, 'Out of the Bowels of the Movement: The Trade Unions and the Origins of the Labour Party 1900-1918' in Brian Brivati, Richard Heffernan, eds., *The Labour Party: A Centenary History* (Basingstoke, 2000), p.14.

⁷² Douglas J. Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, 1889-1914* (Oxford, 1985), pp: 99-108; Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp: 59-75.

⁷³ Edward McNeilly, 'Labour and the Politics of Internationalism, 1906-1914', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.20, no.4 (2009), p.433.

criticisms of naval rearmament.⁷⁴ A wider problem for the ILP programme was what Pugh has identified as 'the patriotic, monarchist and imperial sentiment that existed within the Labour Movement.' Between the Boer and the greater German war this sentiment remained relatively quiescent, only to emerge with significant force in 1914.⁷⁵

On foreign policy Henderson had occupied a pivotal position. He was the only Labour politician since 1906 to have occupied either of the two leadership positions of Chairman of the PLP or Secretary of the Party who was not also a member of the ILP. For most of this period he was not a member of any socialist society. However, on becoming party Secretary in January 1912 he simultaneously adopted, in accordance with a decision taken the previous year, the position of Secretary of the British section of the International.⁷⁶ Since this was an avowedly socialist body it was judged desirable that the senior officers of the British section should themselves be socialists. Henderson could at this point have joined most of his senior colleagues in the ILP, but chose instead to take up membership of the Fabian society, the most moderate of the available options, and the most detached from the polemical hurly-burley of the other socialist groups.⁷⁷ If this was a sign that he was not greatly enamoured of the ILP, feelings in this respect were largely mutual. His earlier assumption of the Chairmanship of the PLP had given rise to privately expressed fears on the part of Hardie that his influence would lead to the ascendancy of 'reaction and timidity' within the party.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Rearmament, of course, provided jobs, Newton, *British Labour*, pp: 182-187.

⁷⁵ Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.105.

⁷⁶ For the decision to give this International responsibility automatically to the party secretary see, LHA, NEC mins., 26 April 1911.

⁷⁷ Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.68.

⁷⁸ Hardie to Glasier, 27 December, 1908, Glasier papers, cited in, Pelling, *Short History*, p.21; for a fuller account of Henderson's cautious and conservative politics and his differences with Hardie in the pre-war period, see Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 21-69.

At the same time however Henderson was certainly more supportive of the foreign policy agenda of the ILP 'Big Four' than were many of his fellow trade unionists. Although significant numbers of trade unionist MPs consistently embarrassed the party by their failure to support its opposition to arms increases, Henderson was a prominent supporter of the party position.⁷⁹ Whilst most trade unionists showed little interest in the deliberations of foreign socialists, Henderson was again an important exception. When in 1905 a Committee was created to forge closer links between British socialists, trade unions and the Second International, the TUC decided to take no formal part. Individual unionists could nevertheless volunteer to serve on this body, as Henderson did. But he was only one of a pair of non-socialist members amongst the seven who made up the Committee.⁸⁰ This engagement in the affairs of the International would of course increase greatly when he became secretary of the British section.

It is likely that as divisions emerged in the party following the outbreak of war Henderson would have wished to use his pivotal position to keep unionist dominated 'patriots' and socialist dominated 'pacifists' in harness. Once it became obvious that these divisions were only likely to harden the pressure to choose one side or the other became correspondingly intense. There are powerful reasons to see why he would, in the interest of retaining party unity, take the 'surprising' (as McKibbin sees it) decision to commit to the majority 'patriots'. One has only to consider the probable consequences of the alternative choice. Had Henderson followed MacDonald and the bulk of the ILP, the Labour party would have found itself in an extraordinary and surely unsustainable position in which all its traditional

⁷⁹ Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 73-74.

⁸⁰ Newton, *British Labour*, pp: 46-47.

foreign policy spokesmen were at odds with the great majority of its members. Given the overwhelming numerical and financial strength of the unions within the Labour confederation, as well as the pre-war reservations of many of their members regarding the amalgamation, tensions could surely have become exacerbated to a critical extent. Attempts were indeed made during the war to create a separate trade union party.⁸¹ Henderson's forceful opposition to these moves doubtless played a significant part in their failure.⁸² There can be little doubt either that his ability to counter these secessionist impulses would have been immensely weaker had he been identified from the outset with the 'pacifist' camp.

We may then consider Henderson's movement in the early months of the war as a steady if somewhat reluctant progress into the 'patriotic' ranks, this being balanced by the ambiguity we have discussed, which ensured he retained links to both sides of the party. The ideal position to which he may still have aspired would have been some sort of party statement on the war which could be supported by both the opposing groups. An opportunity to achieve this was soon to arise through the agency of the Socialist International, the scattered parts of which were puzzling over how to proceed following the failure to generate a unified response to the crisis of the previous August. Whilst the holding of a full conference was no longer possible, discussions were taking place which would lead to the convocations of three separate conferences - neutrals in Copenhagen, the Allies in London, and the Central Powers in Vienna - during the early months of 1915.⁸³ The Allied conference, which took place on 14 February, was approached with some trepidation. It was

⁸¹ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party: 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974), p.90; Ward, *Red Flag*, pp:146-148.

⁸² *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, June, 1918*, pp: 17-18, 40.

⁸³ Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, Volume 2: 1914-1943* (London, 1967), pp: 37-39.

obviously going to reveal significant disagreements. A week before it met the patriotic majority of the French socialists (commonly referred to during the war as *majoritaires*) declared its determination 'to pursue the war to the bitter end'.⁸⁴ Belgian socialists were understandably expected to take the same line. Russian socialists by contrast were known to be largely opposed to the war.⁸⁵ Both the French and British delegations moreover were internally divided. Rather than expose these manifold differences to the wider world, the conference organisers declined to offer invitations to the press. It was also decided that the meeting should be no more than an informal exchange of views. No attempt would be made to draw up a common programme.⁸⁶

This decision was communicated to the forty six delegates by Hardie, who chaired the conference, but was then overturned on the suggestion of Emile Vandervelde, chairman of the ISB and minister in the exiled Belgian government, in the hope of procuring a resolution in line with the firmly anti-German majority view. As anticipated, consensus proved hard to achieve. After a period of rancorous debate it was therefore decided to set up a drafting committee comprising two representatives from each nation, Henderson and MacDonald representing Britain, which would hopefully agree on an acceptable text. Following still more arduous negotiation the committee voted by six to two on a draft that was put to and finally endorsed by the conference. The two committee dissenters were MacDonald, who

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁸⁵ Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: the Origin of the Third International* (Stanford, 1940), pp: 260, 275-278.

⁸⁶ *Daily News*, 13 February 1915.

opposed, and a Russian delegate, who abstained.⁸⁷ The resolution then was clearly a hard won compromise as the text very obviously reveals.

The statement begins by declaring that the Conference could not ignore 'the profound general causes of the European conflict, itself a monstrous product of the antagonisms which tear asunder capitalist society.....against which international socialism has never ceased to fight, and in which every government has its share of responsibility.' Following this opening sentence however, responsibility was placed firmly on the Germans, whose invasion of Belgium and France had threatened 'the very existence of independent nationalities' and struck a blow 'at all faith in treaties.' Whilst 'inflexibly resolved' to fight until victory the Allied socialists were at pains to declare their equal determination 'to resist any attempt to transform this defensive war into a war of conquest.....' They were 'not at war with the peoples of Germany or Austria, but only with the Governments of those countries by which they are oppressed.' Difficulty was created by the fact that at least one also of the Allied governments was seriously oppressing its own citizens. Russian socialists, supported by the Western minorities, successfully demanded against the wishes of the majority that a paragraph condemning the Russian authorities for their widespread suppression of domestic opposition be included.⁸⁸

Despite the great effort that had gone into its achievement there was little sense of satisfaction over the resolution during the months which followed. It was perhaps too easy for both sides of the political divide to regret those sections of the statement which gave

⁸⁷ The above is taken from an unofficial account of the conference published in Russia, Gankin and Fisher, *Bolsheviks*, pp: 275-278.

⁸⁸ For the full text of the resolution, see *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1916*, p.32.

legitimacy to the views of their opponents.⁸⁹ This was more of a problem for the majorities than the minorities, since their numerical dominance might have been expected to show up more prominently in the text. The ambiguities they permitted to pass in the resolution were furthermore open to attack from their wider patriotic communities. The returning French socialists in particular were harshly judged by their national press.⁹⁰ British delegates by contrast got off lightly. The exclusion of the press was in this sense very helpful. Neither the conference nor its 'ambiguous' declaration was given wide coverage. One exception was the *Morning Post*, which did include a report on the conference, accompanied by the text of the resolution, but which covered the matter in a surprisingly uncritical manner.⁹¹ However in an editorial three days later, apparently inspired by the criticisms in France, the paper adopted a scathingly condemnatory tone.⁹²

Our analysis would suggest that Henderson would have viewed the inter-Allied resolution more positively than many amongst the conference delegates. It did demonstrate after all an almost unique show of unity, however fragile, on the vital questions raised by the war. The balance it displayed moreover between vigorous support for the war effort and traditional socialist perspectives on international peace was not dissimilar to that found in an address made by Henderson just a few weeks earlier, in which he had declared himself a pacifist who had devoted his life to the cause, and in which he had implied that militarism was not the sole prerogative of Germans. He had nevertheless concluded that it had become necessary to face the 'grim realities' of the present world tragedy and to accept the

⁸⁹ John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), p.307; H. Weinroth, 'Peace by Negotiation and the British Anti-War Movement, 1914-1918', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol.10, no.3 (1975), p.379.

⁹⁰ Horne, *Labour at War*, p.305.

⁹¹ *Morning Post*, 15 February 1915, p.6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 18 February 1915, p.8.

necessity of crushing the Kaiser's 'mischievous lust for power.'⁹³ Although this balance had been rather lacking in the October trade union led statement which he had earlier been pressed into signing, historians are agreed that his commitment to the realisation of a progressive peace as elucidated in the Allied socialist statement was throughout the war genuine and strong.⁹⁴

But although the text of the February resolution did indeed give substantial weight to concerns over the peace, it did nevertheless prioritise the 'patriotic' position. The discussion on the nature of any final settlement was clearly predicated on an Allied military victory. Were 'German imperialism' to triumph, Allied socialists would have little possibility of influencing the terms of peace. Such an outcome, they believed, would amount to no less than 'the destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe.' There was no repeat in the February resolution of the references in the NEC's statement of the previous August to seeking the 'earliest opportunity for taking effective action in the interests of peace.....' It was now more clearly recognised that whilst Allied socialists could play an important part in attempting to ensure that the settlement would reflect their principles, their ability to secure an early date for that settlement would essentially depend on the contribution they could make to a speedy Allied victory.

This implied priority of the 'patriotic' over the 'pacifist' sections of the February statement reflected the position towards which Henderson had been moving over the previous six months. It may also have facilitated the significant further step he was to take three months later in becoming a minister in the first Coalition Cabinet. Responding once more to a Prime

⁹³ *Daily News*, 11 January 1915, p.3; *Daily Citizen*, 11 January 1915, p.4.

⁹⁴ See for example Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.85.

Ministerial initiative, Asquith's offer on 19 May of a place in government, Henderson was again, according to G. D. H. Cole, 'uncomfortable' about accepting.⁹⁵ The party itself was generally divided, having been before the war fiercely determined to maintain its political independence. A constitutional amendment forbidding members of the Executive 'from identifying themselves with or promoting the interests of any other Party' had been adopted at the 1913 annual conference.⁹⁶ 'Patriots' as well as 'pacifists' felt that entry into a coalition government was both unconstitutional and politically a step too far.⁹⁷

A specific objection was the constraint this might put on Labour's freedom to criticise where necessary the conduct of the war. This was largely a concern for the minority, from where the policies and concealed motives of the government were by now habitually under attack. Snowden made the case powerfully in the national press, arguing that once in government 'the fetish of Cabinet responsibility' would require Labour ministers 'to accept and defend policies and actions quite inconsistent with the ideas of the party.' The Labour movement, he contended, acknowledged its duty to the nation, but that duty could be performed perfectly adequately from outside the government.⁹⁸ This indeed was the position which would be adopted by the Irish nationalists.⁹⁹

Addressing party workers at his constituency on 29 May Henderson dismissed the idea that participation in government would constitute a sacrifice by the party of its right to hold

⁹⁵ Cole, *History of the Labour Party*, p.25.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1913*, p.119.

⁹⁷ Significantly, it was the PLP, despite its generally supportive attitude towards the war, rather than the NEC, which voted initially to reject coalition; it required a subsequent joint meeting of the two bodies to reverse this decision by 17 votes to 11, LHA, NEC mins, 19 May 1915.

⁹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1915, p.6.

⁹⁹ See the explanation given by the Nationalist leader, John Redmond, for his decision to decline the prime minister's invitation, *The Times*, 3 July 1915, p.6.

critical views. Members of the Labour movement, he maintained, would not be dictated to by ministerial colleagues from other parties. But was it even wise to focus so heavily on the right to criticise? 'We were not going to be saved by criticism,' he declared, it was 'the saving of the nation' which was of 'primary, essential importance.' Once this was achieved Labour would 'revert to our position without having compromised that position in the slightest degree.' Joining the government was not moreover an especially significant new departure, since the party was already cooperating in the war effort through its earlier commitments, notably the parliamentary recruiting committee. Having thus minimised the difficulties being raised by some of his colleagues, he also focussed on what would be an important benefit of entering government: the party would be granted an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate to the nation its 'capacity for statesmanship', something it would be unable to do in any other way. For all these reasons then, offering his own personal judgement, he felt that it would have been 'impossible' for the party to have done otherwise than accept Asquith's invitation.¹⁰⁰

What then of Cole's view that Henderson was uncomfortable over the coalition offer? It is true that in the above address Henderson did state that initially that it had been 'no easy matter' to decide what to do in response to the Prime Minister's offer and that he was content (as Cole also suggests) to allow the party to decide for him. It could therefore be argued that in his constituency address he essentially made the best possible case for the party's decision. Yet this address carries the tone of strong personal conviction. The case he made for continuity may also have had greater relevance to him personally than to other less senior party figures. As Wrigley has shown, he had become involved during the

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Citizen*, 31 May 1915, pp: 1-2.

preceding period in numerous government appointed bodies dealing with various aspects of the war.¹⁰¹ The idealised view of political cooperation in the most pressing of national causes, which he propounded to his constituency supporters, certainly became for him a regular refrain. The argument that party and personal interests should remain subordinate to the task of doing whatever was necessary to bring the nation to victory was an enduring feature of his period in office. When this later cost him the support of many Labour activists, he responded defiantly. Criticised at the 1917 party conference for his readiness to remain in a government accused of anti-labour actions he retorted angrily that he would be resigning every day to please some of his critics. If he were to please himself he might even do so, but 'he was not there either to please himself or them, he was there to see the War through.'¹⁰²

We may sense then that having helped secure the agreement of February 1915 Henderson felt freer to move less ambiguously into the 'patriotic' camp. From the perspective of maintaining party unity this could now seem relatively safe. Not only had the minority signed up to a commitment, bolstered by Allied socialists, in which vigorous pursuit of the war was very definitely sanctioned, they were also very much less likely than the trade unionist majority to contemplate defection from the party. It would in truth have been hard for the dissident socialists to go back to their pre-1900 status as small impecunious parties highly unlikely to ever attain positions of national power.

It was also steadily clearer that ambiguity was not a safe or straightforward option in the prevailing political climate. The party may have got off lightly over the inclusion of 'pacifist'

¹⁰¹ Wrigley, *Henderson*, pp: 85-89.

¹⁰² *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, p.110.

sentiments in the February resolution, but there was no guarantee that the Fleet Street guardians of the patriotic consensus would show such forbearance in the future. With the war routinely seen in Manichean terms as a life and death struggle between good and evil, political pressures were correspondingly intense.¹⁰³ These pressures were manifest throughout British party politics and played a large part in pushing Asquith into acceptance of a coalition government.¹⁰⁴ Similarly within the labour movement, pressure on those seen as insufficiently committed to the war was increasingly in evidence. W C Anderson, author of the fiery ILP manifesto early in the war as well as current Chairman of the NEC, characterised the outlook of Labour 'patriots' as one in which 'you must either be a Jingo shrieking your rage and hate and fear.....or.....you are praying for the downfall of your country and the triumph of Prussian militarism.'¹⁰⁵ The 'for or against' mentality was indeed commonplace in the contemporary statements of Anderson's 'patriotic' colleagues. John Hodge, a member of the NEC, had used the expression when challenging MacDonald over the vote for war credits at the beginning of the war; a year later at the TUC annual congress his NEC colleague G. H. Roberts repeated that one was 'either for or against the nation'.¹⁰⁶ Similar comments were made in the Labour party annual conference the following January by two other members of the NEC, J. R. Clynes and G. J. Wardle.¹⁰⁷

There was a rationale for this sort of pressure. Dissensions within Britain would be picked up abroad, negatively impacting on the war effort. In a series of vitriolic articles, letters and

¹⁰³ For many contemporary expressions of this Manichean view, see Katherine Andrews, 'The Necessity to Conform: British Jingoism in the First World War', *Dalhousie Review*, Vol.53, No.2 (1973), pp:227-245.

¹⁰⁴ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), pp: 192-199.

¹⁰⁵ W C Anderson to Ponsonby, 3 January 1915, Ponsonby papers, MS Eng Hist, c662, Bodleian Library.

¹⁰⁶ John Hodge, *Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle* (London, 1931), pp: 166-167; *Report of the Proceedings of the 47th Trade Union Congress*, September 1915, p.322.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1916*, pp: 102, 108.

editorials appearing in *The Times* in the autumn of 1914 MacDonald had been chastised for 'Helping the Enemy' when it was learned that his critical comments regarding Grey's diplomacy had been exploited in the German press.¹⁰⁸ When Henderson signed the patriotic labour declaration in October he was apparently swayed by his colleagues' argument that the party's lack of clarity on the war had created 'a very bad impression....in neutral countries', and that it was 'desirable' that some statement should be made to counteract this.¹⁰⁹ Striking a safe balance between 'patriotic' and 'pacifist' sentiments was unlikely to have become easier as the war progressed. Joining the government helped him escape this dilemma, requiring him to resign both from the UDC General Council (though not without expressing his continuing sympathy for the cardinal points of the Union's constitution), and from his position as Secretary of the British Section of the International.¹¹⁰

If Henderson became less ambiguously a 'patriot', what sort of commitment did he retain to the 'pacifist' sections of the February resolution? It seems likely that he would have seen himself in the same boat as many other progressives, eager to ensure that the war would end with a progressive peace settlement, ready to engage in political battle to that end, but obliged to hold fire until the popular climate moved at least some way from its current 'patriotic' excess. But nobody had any idea when the national mood would become more supportive. Henderson was also now a member of the government. In criticising the party's decision to join the coalition, Snowden had predicted that as the war approached its conclusion, when peace terms would need to be decided.....the party would find itself still

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 1 October 1914, p.7; for more on this episode, including MacDonald's responses, see also the editions of 17 September, p.6, 29 September, p.9, 30 September, p.9, 2 October, p.7.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, Henderson to MacDonald, 19 October 1914, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1232.

¹¹⁰ Swartz, *Democratic Control*, p.148; *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1916*, p.33.

shackled to coalition government 'with its hands tied and its mouth closed.'¹¹¹ In the end of course Henderson was free to lead the party in an unshackled and determined campaign for socialist peace terms, but had no way of anticipating the circumstances which would make that possible. In the intervening period therefore, Snowden's forebodings seemed well justified.

Developments during the middle period of the war were undoubtedly discouraging for progressives. With no end to the military stalemate in sight, peace remained far beyond the horizon, and discussion of its probable terms was still strongly discouraged. Developments during this period did impact however on the likely shape of a future settlement, widening the gulf between 'patriots' and 'pacifists'. We shall examine in the remainder of this chapter how these burgeoning events boded for the hopes expressed in the Allied socialist resolution, and consider Henderson's responses, or more accurately lack of response, to these developments.

A Party Divided

The Allied Socialists had declared in 1915 that they were 'resolved to resist any attempt to transform this defensive war into a war of conquest.' They would also reject 'the political and economic crushing' of the citizens of enemy states, since they were themselves victims of the aggressive designs of their governments. They insisted too that they 'remained true to the principles of the International' and expressed the hope that the working classes of all

¹¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1915, p.6.

countries would 'before long' find themselves reunited 'in their struggle against militarism and capitalist imperialism.'¹¹² In all three of these resolutions the prospects of achieving their goals seemed subsequently to diminish. As a Cabinet minister and effective leader of the Labour party Henderson was able to observe and was to varying degrees involved in the diminution of these prospects, but appeared unable or unwilling to react to this clear weakening of hope for a socialist peace. Whilst some evidence suggests that he may have 'gone native' and increasingly come to share the views of his Cabinet colleagues regarding desirable peace terms, it is equally possible that he was simply constrained, not only by the conventions of Cabinet responsibility but also by the continuing strength of 'patriotic' sentiment in his party. This section will consider these alternative possibilities.

Regarding the stipulation that the war should not become a 'war of conquest', doubts continued to grow over whether Allied war aims, as agreed in treaties concluded during the spring of 1915 and beyond, were consistent with the notion of a defensive war. Strong and well founded suspicions that the Russians had secured their Allies' consent to post war control of the Ottoman Empire's capital, Constantinople, were more or less confirmed during the course of 1916.¹¹³ And in what amounted to a significant failure of 'secret' diplomacy many details of the expansionist terms by which the Italian government was persuaded in the spring of 1915 to join the war on the Allied side were widely known almost as soon as the treaty was signed.¹¹⁴ Closer to home it was clear also that powerful lobbies in Paris were anxious not only to secure the return of Alsace-Lorraine (an ambition largely acceptable to British opinion since these territories had been annexed from France in 1871)

¹¹² *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1916*, p.32.

¹¹³ See *The Times*, 4 December 1916, p.7; *Labour Leader*, 12 October and 7 December, 1916.

¹¹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1915, pp: 6-8.

but aimed also to take control of ‘the entire left bank of the Rhine’, despite the area being populated by eight million Germans.¹¹⁵

Similarly in Britain vigorous lobbying in favour of the retention of the majority of Germany’s scattered colonies which had been seized or were in the process of being seized by British and Imperial forces was a feature of the political scene.¹¹⁶ It seemed likely too that with a final collapse of the Ottoman Empire widely expected, not only Russia would gain control over current areas of Turkish rule. French ambitions in the Levant were freely discussed in Paris. British forces were engaged by spring 1915 in both Mesopotamia and Gallipoli. Although the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement on post-war spheres of influence in the Middle East would not be signed until 1916, serious thought to the future shape of the region was being given much earlier.¹¹⁷ British labour could not agree on how to respond to these indications of expansionist intent. For ‘pacifists’ these were matters over which the government should be forcefully challenged. ‘Patriots’ on the other hand were sensitive to official claims that public discussion of such issues could weaken Allied solidarity and encourage the enemy. Ministers could insist moreover that the contents of Allied treaties, the secrecy of which had as was traditional to be maintained, would be acted upon only in accordance with prevailing conditions once the war was concluded.¹¹⁸ The ‘patriotic’ option therefore was to steer clear of the topic.

¹¹⁵ See ‘The Coming Peace and Its Problems’ by Jean Longuet, *Daily Citizen*, 26 April 1915, p.4.

¹¹⁶ Wm. Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany’s Lost Colonies, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1967), pp: 70-76.

¹¹⁷ For details, see James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East* (London, 2012), pp: 7-36.

¹¹⁸ Henderson himself would have known from his regular attendance at the War Cabinet that ministers generally worked on the principle that ‘definite decisions’ on territorial adjustments would only be made *en bloc* at the peace conference, see for example, TNA, War Cabinet, 8 February 1917, CAB 23/1 (57).

There was another equally powerful reason to take this stance. The issue of peace terms could be raised for more than one reason. The February resolution certainly legitimised debate on the subject in order to ensure that imperialist instincts would not prevail over the socialists' concern that victory should be followed by an ameliorative peace. For 'pacifists' however the question of peace terms was increasingly seen to have more immediate value. As it became ever clearer that the soldiers were failing to bring an end to the war at anything other than an unacceptable cost, it was argued that the diplomats should be given the chance to negotiate a settlement. Since it was agreed that the most vital British and French war aim was the removal of German forces from the occupied areas of Belgium and France, could this be bought by the sacrifice of some of the lesser and more questionably legitimate Allied aims? If so, many lives might surely be saved.¹¹⁹

This line of reasoning was already emerging as the Allied socialists met in early 1915 and it was met in the national press with a hostile response. Reacting to an article in the February 1915 *Contemporary Review* by the 'Radical publicist' Harold Spender, in which the possibility of a negotiated settlement was mooted, the *Daily Express* journalist Sydney Dark reacted forcefully to this dangerous idea. Using arguments that would be regularly deployed throughout the war, Spender's suggestion was dismissed, to use the sub-headings of Dark's response, as 'wicked and foolish', a 'puerile proposal' and 'the enemy's game'. To talk of peace was to weaken the determination of the Allies 'to fight on until Germany is hopelessly beaten.....' Anything less would render the sacrifices already made as in vain; brave men

¹¹⁹ For an account of the growing campaign for a negotiated peace, see Philip Snowden, *An Autobiography*, Vol.1, 1864-1919 (London, 1934), pp: 429-445.

would have died for no purpose; and future generations would have to prepare 'to fight Prussianism all over again.'¹²⁰ Labour 'patriots' were quick to adopt similar views.¹²¹

There was an important and obvious distinction between the idea that peace terms would be a matter of justifiable interest in relation to the settlement that would follow a German defeat, and the alternative notion that terms could be negotiated in order to reach a peace without clear victory for either side. But 'patriots' found it easy to conflate these purposes. Later in the war when the Labour party was willing to challenge the government to openly state British war aims, Winston Churchill provided a fine example of this technique. He was afraid, he told a Bedford audience, that there were people who go about saying 'restate your war aims' when what they really mean is 'make friends with the victorious Huns.' They ask 'What are we fighting for?' when they really mean 'Let us leave off fighting.'¹²² To avoid becoming a victim of this sort of obfuscation the safe option was to remain within the confines of accepted phraseology and to talk only of the nation's commitment to a just and lasting peace, as Henderson frequently did during his ministerial phase. Such words could be invested with meanings that did not challenge national ambitions. For surely it would be 'just' to liberate the oppressed national groups suffering under German, Austrian or Turkish misrule. And plainly too a peace settlement that left the Empire's global position strategically enhanced relative to that of the aggressors would be an effective way to ensure the peace would be 'lasting'.

¹²⁰ *Daily Express*, 5 February 1915, p.4.

¹²¹ See for example Roberts' attack on those attempting 'to bring about an inconclusive peace', *Report of the Proceedings of the 47th Trade Union Congress*, September 1915, p.323.

¹²² Cited in Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2000), p.238;

The resolve of the Allied socialists to reject 'the political and economic crushing' of enemy citizens on the grounds that they were themselves oppressed by the common enemy appeared not to find general favour. The notion that the peoples, as opposed to the governments, could retain mutual sympathy during the war was to prove delusive. In Britain the government would in the early days insist that it had no quarrel with the German people, and ministers would periodically repeat this. But this was a sentiment more usually expressed by Liberals than Conservatives.¹²³ Two years into the war the Liberal peer, Lord Bryce, could continue to insist that Britons, excluding a 'certain chauvinistic element' to be found in all countries, harboured no hatred for the German people.¹²⁴ But did Bryce perhaps understate the hostility evinced throughout the nation towards the hated Hun?

From the early months of the war in fact the argument was made that enemy citizens should *not* be considered as innocent of their country's designs. Within weeks of the outbreak the *Daily Mail* gave space in its columns to the Belgian playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck, who proclaimed the guilt of all Germans and urged his British readers not to succumb at the war's end to the inevitable efforts there would then be to enlist sympathy for those supposedly unfortunate Germans who were 'merely victims of their monarch and their feudal caste.'¹²⁵ The British writer, Arnold Bennett, would later argue that since the German people would undoubtedly be happy to reap the benefits of a criminal war in the event of their armies proving victorious, so too should they share in the national punishment and humiliation of defeat.¹²⁶ Few historians today would disagree with the

¹²³ For the differences of opinion within the political elite, see Lorna S. Jaffe, *The Decision to Disarm Germany: British Policy Towards Postwar German Disarmament, 1914-1919* (Boston, 1985), pp: 7-16.

¹²⁴ James (Viscount) Bryce, *The Attitude of Great Britain in the Present War* (London, 1916), p.23.

¹²⁵ *Daily Mail*, 14 September 1914, p.4.

¹²⁶ *Daily News*, 13 May 1915, p.4

judgement of Arthur Marwick that 'an intense hatred of the German Kaiser and people' was an 'obvious feature' of the British wartime mood: a mood which manifested itself in spy hunts, calls for internment, and periodic destructive riots against those of German origin settled in Britain.¹²⁷ Labour 'patriots' were not immune from these hatreds. In a warmly applauded address at the 1915 Trades Union Congress, E. H. Jarvis of the Carpenters and Joiners Union, was persuaded that German workers had 'entered the trenches eagerly and.....taken delight in shooting our lads down.'¹²⁸

One way in which German civilians might suffer as a consequence of defeat in the war was through discriminatory trade measures levied upon them by the victorious Allies. This was a major concern of British progressives. Many Conservatives had perceived the pre-war German threat as economic as well as military, and a movement for tariff reform had been largely directed at their powerful economic rival. The war provided an irresistible opportunity to renew this campaign. A Commons motion of 10 January 1916 calling on the still predominantly Liberal coalition to initiate discussions with Dominion and Allied governments designed to direct their combined economic strength against the enemy won considerable support in the House. There was wide consensus over the proposition that since Germany had been waging economic war against its rivals for many years prior to its military assault, it would almost certainly do so again once this assault had been seen to fail. The Liberal President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman, largely went with the tide in

¹²⁷ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965), p.49; David French, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, No.2 (1978), pp: 355-370.

¹²⁸ *Report of the Proceedings of the 47th Trade Union Congress*, September 1915, p.328.

agreeing that 'we must see to it that, having ended this War victoriously, we do not give Germany a chance of reconstructing her commercial position.'¹²⁹

Later in the year at an economic conference in Paris ways of putting these ideas into effect were agreed.¹³⁰ The proposals that emerged horrified 'pacifists'.¹³¹ They were declared to be in clear contradiction to official statements that the purpose of the war was not to punish enemy civilians.¹³² As with expansionist war aims however justifications for these measures were not difficult to find. Only minorities in Britain and France would have wished to dissent from the statement released by their governments following the conference, which asserted that Germany and her allies were already preparing for 'a contest on the economic plane, which will not only survive the re-establishment of peace, but will at that moment attain its full scope and intensity.' In the face of 'so grave a peril', the statement continued, it was the duty of Allied governments, 'on grounds of necessary and legitimate defence' to prepare their own counter-measures.¹³³ Labour had traditionally opposed protectionism, but during the war this opposition was challenged. At the 1916 TUC conference a motion designed to challenge the decisions in Paris was neutralised by an amendment aimed at blunting this purpose.¹³⁴

Evidence that a part at least of 'patriotic' labour was entirely out of sympathy with the stance taken by Allied socialists on enemy civilians was provided by the emergence of a new

¹²⁹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 10 January 1916, Vol.77, c.1367.

¹³⁰ John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918* (London, 1992), pp:86-90; Douglas Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918-1919* (Oxford, 1997), p.74.

¹³¹ The UDC promptly added a fifth cardinal point to its original four, insisting that a viable peace required the 'preservation and extension' of free trade, Swartz, *Democratic Control*, p.78.

¹³² *War After The War*, ILP position leaflet, no.4 (1916).

¹³³ *The Times*, 21 June 1916, p.9.

¹³⁴ *Report of the Proceedings of the 48th Trade Union Congress*, September 1916, pp: 261-266; *The Times*, 'A New Working-Class Party', 8 September 1916, p.10.

militantly nationalist party, the Socialist National Defence Committee. This body had features in common with the more notorious 'national socialist' movements which flourished between the wars: a strong sense of racial identification; a profound loathing for the pacifist and internationalist left; and a penchant for political violence directed against its political enemies.¹³⁵ The new party was the initiative of a former member of the British Socialist Party (BSP), Victor Fisher, who had attended the Allied Socialist conference as a delegate of this group, which at the time had been dominated by 'patriots'.¹³⁶ Changing its name successively to the British Workers' National League, the British Workers' League and the National Democratic Party the group became associated with the Cabinet minister, Lord Milner, who provided Fisher's new party with political and financial support.¹³⁷

Henderson may have assumed in early 1915 that whilst the differences within labour on the war were unbridgeable, divisions would be far less pronounced when it came to considerations of the eventual peace. The patriotic manifesto he had reluctantly signed the previous October had arguably suggested this much. The BWL however set about negating any such presumption. It held the German people and German socialists, no less than the Kaiser's regime, responsible for the war and fiercely objected to any sort of ameliorative peace.¹³⁸ It opposed a post-war return to free trade, supported the recommendations of the Paris Economic Conference, and campaigned for a closed economic system within the

¹³⁵ For a brief history of the party, see Roy Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, no.3 (1972), pp: 533-552.

¹³⁶ For a sample of Fisher's views, including his call for every Briton to 'become a soldier in the service of the Empire and of the race' see his pamphlet, *Before and After* (London, 1916), quotation, p.16.

¹³⁷ J. O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918', *English Historical Review*, LXXXVII, 345 (1972), pp:717-754. To avoid confusion, Fisher's party will henceforth be referred to as the British Workers' League (BWL), the name by which it is most commonly remembered..

¹³⁸ See the words of League Vice President, South Wales miner and Labour MP, C.B.Stanton ,who declared that 'We do not propose, after the war, to slobber over Germans and Austrians who are now doing their best to destroy us', *The Times*, 18 March 1916, p.5.

Empire.¹³⁹ Yet the League had considerable support at all levels within the labour movement, including several members of the NEC and, by 1917, 'no fewer than eleven' out of thirty eight of Labour MPs.¹⁴⁰ It established over seventy branches around the country and staged up to a hundred patriotic mass meetings a week.¹⁴¹ Its weekly paper claimed a circulation of approximately 30,000.¹⁴²

A third expectation raised in the Allied socialist resolution over which action proved inordinately difficult concerned the International. It had been assumed following the February 1915 conference that discussion with the ISB would continue. Henderson and MacDonald were expected in due course to travel to The Hague for this purpose. Following Henderson's move into government and the consequent resignation from his role with the British Section, MacDonald would have to be accompanied by whoever else would assume Henderson's place as Secretary – someone necessarily in prevailing circumstances being a 'patriot'. But the two most eligible candidates, Hodge and Clynes, declined to take up the position. It had been intended that in such an event the Executive would appoint another individual. Hodge however successfully proposed a different solution: that it was 'desirable that no delegation from the British Section should attend international meetings at The Hague under existing circumstances.'¹⁴³ But if British labour would not go to The Hague, The Hague decided it would come to Britain. In March 1916 Camille Huysmans, the ISB

¹³⁹ Victory in the war was to be followed, according to the list of party objectives listed in the first edition of its weekly paper, by 'Expropriation of Enemy Economic and Industrial Interests Within the Empire', *British Citizen and Empire Worker*, 25 August 1916, cited in Stubbs, *English Historical Review*, pp: 731-732

¹⁴⁰ As well as Hodge, Roberts and Wardle were NEC members during the war who joined the League in at least one of its manifestations; see Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, for 'no fewer than eleven' MPs, p.116.

¹⁴¹ Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars* (London, 2012), p.178.

¹⁴² Douglas, *Historical Journal*, p.536.

¹⁴³ LHA, NEC mins, 28 June 1915.

secretary, and its president, Vandervelde, arrived in London 'to get first hand information as to the feeling in Britain' regarding the war and eventual conditions of peace.

The purpose of the ISB visitors was to initiate conversations related primarily to the eventual peace not only with the Labour party, but also the other groups affiliated to the British section: the ILP, the Fabians and the BSP. Each of these organisations later submitted reports to the ISB; the Labour party did not. After twice deferring its decision on how to respond, the Labour executive finally informed Vandervelde and Huysmans 'that any consideration of possible terms of peace by the British movement was absolutely impossible at the present time,' that 'such action would create misunderstandings in neutral and Allied countries and also in the mind of the enemy as to the attitude of the British working class towards the war,' and that 'the only thing with which the Labour Party could concern itself was the prosecution of the War to a victorious termination'.¹⁴⁴ The following January the executive was confronted with a further initiative, this time on the part of Dutch socialists, who invited the French and British parties to meet with themselves and a delegation from Sweden. Once again the response was negative.¹⁴⁵ This latest rejection came on the eve of the 1917 annual conference in Manchester, at which the majority secured its resolution against any international conference before the end of the war.

It was during this conference however that the fraternal French delegate, Pierre Renaudel, informed his British hosts that his own party would soon be extending invitations to a

¹⁴⁴ LHA, NEC mins, 30 March and 29 June 1916; *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, p.44.

¹⁴⁵ LHA, NEC mins, 20 January 1917.

second Allied Socialist conference in Paris.¹⁴⁶ The executive found it particularly difficult to reject the invitation of so important an ally, despite this running counter to the latest conference decision. Initially the decision was taken, albeit reluctantly, to accept the French invitation. Four weeks later the executive changed its mind and announced that it would not attend, upon which the SFIO called off the conference altogether.¹⁴⁷

It was noted in these early months of 1917 that the British labour party appeared to be lagging behind other European parties, who were increasingly questioning their loyalties to their respective governments. In a hard-hitting UDC pamphlet Morel accused the Labour leadership of standing alone amongst 'the world's democratic organisations' in continuing to 'support the Imperialist ambitions which prolong the war.'¹⁴⁸ The pamphlet was written sometime between Wilson's 'Peace Without Victory' address on 22 January and the Russian revolution in mid-March. Morel reproduced statements from German, French and Italian parliamentary socialists, all of which expressed strong support for Wilson's address and condemned the 'exalted brigandage' of their own nations' imperialists.¹⁴⁹ Although Morel doubtless overplayed the significance of these movements in continental socialist opinion, there was certainly something in what he said. British labour seemed stubbornly impervious to the pressures on patriotic opinion within other socialist parties during the winter of 1916-17.¹⁵⁰ These pressures were to increase greatly following the overthrow of the tsarist

¹⁴⁶ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, p.131.

¹⁴⁷ LHA, NEC mins, 7 February, 6 March and 18 April 1917.

¹⁴⁸ E. D. Morel, *Why? A Question and an Appeal to British Labour* (London, 1917), p.2.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3; the expression 'exalted brigandage' from the Italian party.

¹⁵⁰ See for example the contrasts between British and German experiences in F. L. Carsten, *War Against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (London, 1982).

government as radical Russian socialists came to international prominence with unequivocal condemnations of what they saw as an imperialist war.¹⁵¹

The party of greatest importance to British labour was undoubtedly the French. Being of similar size and political significance within the international movement, and being closely aligned on their views on the war, the two parties attached great value to their sustained solidarity. The balance of power within the SFIO however was moving very much in the direction of the *minoritaires* during 1916.¹⁵² The decision to call a second Allied socialist conference was a consequence of gains for the French minorities in local party branches, which allowed Longuet and his supporters to press reluctant *majoritaires* into support for this initiative.¹⁵³ The proposed agenda later agreed for this conference would undoubtedly have struck British labour 'patriots' as 'pacifist' in its tone and language and may have played a part in inducing the NEC to reverse its decision to attend.¹⁵⁴

Majoritaires in the French parliament had already been pushed the previous November into demanding of their government that it 'must convince everybody that it has no bad designs' and that soldiers must not be asked 'to spend their efforts in pursuit of territorial conquests.' Having attended the SFIO annual conference in late December and witnessed the growing strength and confidence of the *minoritaires*, Henderson would report to the War Cabinet on 'the considerable development of pacifist feeling' within the French party. He expressed concern regarding Longuet's faction which had 'been leading a movement for

¹⁵¹ Robert D. Warth, *The Allies and the Russian Revolution: From the Fall of the Monarchy to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk* (New York, 1954), pp:45-65.

¹⁵² Quoted in Mayer, *New Diplomacy*, p.154.

¹⁵³ TNA, Longuet to MacDonald, 5 June and 14 July 1916, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1160.

¹⁵⁴ Allied governments were to be pressed to abandon any 'thought of conquest and annexation' and to reject economic agreements which could contain 'germs of future conflicts' or 'be made the instruments of prolonged war.', LHA, NEC mins, 6 March 1917.

peace' and had 'weakened on [the French demand for the return of] Alsace-Lorraine.' Had the Longuet group swung behind a more radical group of *minoritaires*, he observed, the majority may well have lost their ascendancy. Moreover, if the recent peace initiatives on the part of the Germans and Americans 'had held out any hope for the restoration of Belgium, the Longuet group would have been very dangerous.'¹⁵⁵

Henderson was clearly speaking the language of his Cabinet colleagues in this discussion. But did this now represent his true opinion? His comments or silences over the previous two years on the matters we have been considering above give no hint that he was anything other than a committed 'patriot'. The fact that once free of Cabinet responsibility he went on to pursue 'pacifist' objectives in relation to war aims, the International, and post-war economic discrimination against enemy states is the only reason one might have to doubt this. But whether in the context of the War Cabinet or of his party he continued during the first five months of 1917 to follow an unmistakably 'patriotic' line. According to MacDonald, for example, it was Henderson who pressed the NEC to overturn the initial decision to accept the French invitation to a second Allied conference, on the grounds that there was a 'danger that the British majority might be outvoted.'¹⁵⁶

Considering then Henderson's responses to the political developments we have described above, all of which were antithetical to the prospects of a progressive peace, we are left with two explanatory options. One of these is that his views on the war had indeed become

¹⁵⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 2 Jan 1917, CAB 23/1(25).

¹⁵⁶ TNA, MacDonald diary, 6 March 1917, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1753; whilst the executive minutes never reveal who was doing the bulk of the persuading, they do in this instance show Henderson stating that 'he himself did not propose to attend' the Paris conference, LHA, NEC mins, 6 March 1917.

firmly aligned with those of his Cabinet colleagues. This would undoubtedly represent a familiar trajectory, undergone many times by radical politicians. What would be unusual in this case however was the sudden return to original perspectives which was shortly to take place. Current interpretations explain this in terms of his experiences in Russia and the miscalculations of Lloyd George. A second explanation could suggest that he was in reality dissatisfied with his current position, but that the political constraints under which he laboured were responsible for the lack of any evident discontent. Henderson has left no clues as to which of these explanations carries the greater conviction. The most we can do, it would seem, is to approach the issue tangentially, by examining the nature and extent of the political constraints by which he may well have felt bound. As Snowden had of course predicted, participation in government was almost certainly a very powerful constraint at this time. So too, we may assume, was the vigilance of the 'patriotic' press, always quick to sniff out 'pacifist' backsliding.¹⁵⁷ And as we have seen, there were many in his party who shared powerfully 'patriotic' views.¹⁵⁸ Henderson may indeed have been triply constrained, seeing little possibility of striking out in a new direction, even if this was something he might have desired.

Two other considerations may be mentioned. If it were not possible for Henderson at this time to change course, it would seem very much in character that he should continue along the current path with his customary vigour. And again, apprehensions over the continued cohesion of his party may certainly have played a part. Wilson and the events in Russia

¹⁵⁷ As an indication of how sections of the press would have responded to any attempt to act on the 'pacifist' clauses of the February resolution, note the statement of one popular daily that 'to talk of peace now is treason, to question the justice of our cause is treason, to demand soft terms for Germany is treason.....', *Daily Sketch*, 1 December 1915.

¹⁵⁸ Hodge roundly informed TUC delegates that 'men who talk about peace today are traitors to their country.....', *Report of the Proceedings of the 47th Trade Union Congress*, September 1915, p.328.

naturally encouraged the minority, but as the confidence of 'pacifists' grew, so too did the responses of the 'patriots'. The party had long been polarised and in this period was becoming ever more so.¹⁵⁹ For the reasons we have already considered, Henderson, regardless of any personal views he may have held, was not prepared to step over into the minority camp for fear of allowing the more extreme 'patriots' to question the merits of remaining within a party whose most senior figures were dallying with 'pacifism'.

Growing polarisation within the Labour party was reflected in a growing polarisation within the nation, of which the Lloyd George government, dominated as it was by the political right, was a symptom. The decision of the Labour leadership to join this coalition had itself exacerbated the differences within the party. The readiness of the NEC and PLP to join the new coalition in December 1916 was acrimoniously debated at the party conference the following month.¹⁶⁰ Henderson himself stoutly supported this decision, despite its being, in important respects, a harder change to justify than that of 1915. Few in the party (and certainly not Henderson) had welcomed the campaign which had removed Asquith from office. Few were impressed by the political intrigues through which Lloyd George had secured the premiership.¹⁶¹ And the role of the press in this unseemly political *coup* was condemned by 'patriots' and 'pacifists' alike.¹⁶² Asquith's refusal, supported by the majority

¹⁵⁹ The most significant manifestation of this polarisation was the 2 June Leeds conference convened by the ILP and BSP, which notoriously called for Soviets in Britain, see Stephen White, 'Soviets in Britain: The Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, vol.19, no.2 (1974), pp: 165-193; Millman, *Domestic Dissent*, pp: 206-211; for a furious 'patriotic' response see Ben Tillet, 'Report on Leeds Conference', *Dockers' Record*, reproduced in W. Hamish Fraser, ed., *British Trade Unions, 1707-1918, Vol.8: 1912-1918* (London, 2008), pp: 313-314.

¹⁶⁰ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, pp: 86-98.

¹⁶¹ Carl F. Brand, 'British Labor and the War-Time Coalitions', *American Historical Review*, Vol.35, no.3 (1930), pp: 530-531.

¹⁶² *The Times*, 11 December 1916, pp: 9-10.

of Liberal MPs, to serve under Lloyd George made it impossible to claim moreover that the new coalition represented the nation as a whole.¹⁶³

Henderson made light of these matters, stressing rather the more fundamental continuities in Labour policy, particularly the need to demonstrate to the world the maximum degree of national unity in support of the war. He did nevertheless place some emphasis on the benefits the movement was likely to achieve as a result of having joined the new coalition. In the negotiations preceding Labour's accession Lloyd George had offered Labour twice the number of ministerial posts they had obtained under Asquith. These were posts moreover which would be important in protecting the interests of workers. The Prime Minister had also pledged to adopt principles of state control over major industries, something which Labour had long sought. These commitments, if honoured, would certainly chime with the party's domestic concerns. There was apparently however a further commitment, which Henderson did not mention. This was a promise that Labour would be represented at the peace conference. It was only revealed, perhaps by agreement, at the end of the war, when the party executive demanded that it should be redeemed.¹⁶⁴ Whilst Henderson may have been obliged to remain silent on this particular pledge, it should certainly be noted that throughout his lengthy justification of the party's decision to embrace Lloyd George's right wing regime, he made no mention at all of any controversies surrounding the question of peace.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ As pointed out by a deeply dispirited MacDonald, see Marquand, *MacDonald*, p.201.

¹⁶⁴ *The Times*, 14 November 1918, p.8.

¹⁶⁵ For Henderson's address, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, pp:86-88.

It was left to others amongst the coalition supporters, notably Clynes, to raise this issue on his behalf. Having castigated Snowden and his associates for apparently believing that they could distance themselves from support for the war and then claim that ‘they above all others’ had the right to determine the terms of peace, Clynes polemically asked: ‘Was it of no value to Labour to have a man of great Trade Union experience like Mr. Henderson having a voice and taking part in the terms of the settlement as he had in the general prosecution of the War?’¹⁶⁶ Given Henderson’s elevated position in the new Cabinet, this on the face of it appeared a reasonable assumption. But whilst present on an almost daily basis at meetings in which the most sensitive matters of the war and international politics were discussed, he generally failed to take a prominent part in these discussions or to challenge the assumptions shared by his Cabinet colleagues. Unacquainted as he was ‘with even the basic elements of strategy’, Henderson was given and accepted other areas within government, usually involving labour or manpower problems, in which to work.¹⁶⁷

One exception to this norm was the series of Imperial War Cabinet meetings in the spring of 1917 attended by high level representatives of the Dominions and India. In one of these meetings Henderson did register dissent. The purpose of this particular meeting was to consider the report of a Committee on Territorial *Desiderata* chaired by Lord Curzon and more generally to discuss Imperial war aims. The Committee had been unanimous, reported Curzon, on the need to secure ‘the future safety of the British Empire by removing the menace, which the German colonial system and the German ambition for expansion towards the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf, created to the sea communications of the Empire and to its peaceful development.’ The spokesmen of the Dominions and India had

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp: 95-96.

¹⁶⁷ George H. Cassar, *Lloyd George at War, 1916-1918* (London, 2011), pp: 14-15; Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.110.

held 'the very strongest views' on this matter. Removing the threat to the Empire, the Committee believed, required the retention of at minimum, German East Africa, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

Other less important areas, though their retention would be desirable, could conceivably be relinquished if it proved necessary to trade territories in the peace conference. It was recognised during the course of the discussion that consideration would need to be given to the views of the Allies and to the military positions of the combatants at the end of the war before such aims could be finally settled upon. The Cabinet therefore decided to accept Curzon's report as 'an indication of the objects to be sought' at a peace conference rather than as 'definite instructions' to be given to the Empire's negotiators. Henderson however 'regretted that he felt compelled to dissent from this Conclusion.' Since it was clear that 'certain annexations' were being considered, and speaking 'not as representing himself, but the Party which had sent him to the Imperial War Cabinet, he was bound to vote against any annexation of territory.'¹⁶⁸

This clearly fell short of any strong personal affirmation of what Clynes may have imagined to be his intention to fight in Cabinet for a Labour peace. The statement that he was bound by his party to dissent obviously left open the possibility that his personal views on this matter may have differed from the positions of his party. Even if he did feel personally committed to a labour peace, it could be argued, he clearly recognised his inability to persuade Cabinet colleagues to abandon their traditional perspectives on what would best serve the Empire's interests. Any Labour campaign against an annexationist peace would

¹⁶⁸ TNA, Imperial War Cabinet, 1 May 1917, CAB 23/40.

clearly be fought at some later period, and mainly in some other political forum. Snowden could well have seen this as a clear case of a compromised Labour man with his hands tied and mouth closed. But in fairness to Henderson, it was up to his party to take up the baton on this issue, and his party was too deeply divided to do any such thing.

An episode which occurred in February 1916 is worth contemplating in this respect. Realising the need to plan for the eventual end of the war, Henderson submitted proposals to the party executive that sub-committees should be set up jointly with the PLP to consider the questions of (a) peace terms, (b) Labour after the war and (c) electoral reform. The second and third of these committees were duly established and reports from them would appear regularly at future NEC meetings. The arrangements made for the peace terms committee were however somewhat bizarre. Its membership, comprising a balance of two 'patriots', two 'pacifists' and Henderson was appointed on 15 February; the previous day however it had been agreed that this committee should merely 'hold itself in readiness to take action respecting Peace Terms when occasion arises.'¹⁶⁹ In the event, the occasion never did arise, the committee's formation ultimately being overtaken by the dramatic turn in the political situation following Henderson's return from Russia sixteen months later. It is surely remarkable that the Labour executive remained so resistant to broaching the issue of peace terms, despite its broad position having been formally stated in the previous year's Allied socialist resolution, that it could not discuss this important topic even in private.

It was perhaps just too depressingly obvious that any attempted discussion on peace terms would inevitably degenerate into futile confrontation. The challenge for the party in the

¹⁶⁹ LHA, NEC mins., 14 and 15 February 1916.

long run was to find a way of considering these questions in a manner that could transcend the rigidly opposed views of 'patriots' and 'pacifists'. In the face of the now hardened attitudes in both groups, this was unlikely to be accomplished other than by some sea-changing political development which would allow the terms of the debate to be reformulated. Perhaps then an area of common ground could be established, around which the more moderate elements of the opposing camps could unite. This indeed is what happened the following year, but this could not have been foreseeable in 1916. The one sea-changing event that could on the other hand be safely predicted was that at some point the military stalemate would be broken and that the peace settlement, by virtue of its imminence, would necessarily become a legitimate matter of public debate. Given that this was necessarily dependent on military success, Henderson's support for the Lloyd George coalition and its promise to prosecute the war more effectively can be seen to make sense. Little could be gained moreover by Henderson's prematurely attacking the presumptions on peace terms of Cabinet colleagues before these became matters of much wider public discussion.

Leaving the creation of a detailed party position on the peace settlement until the war was almost over was obviously however fraught with danger. Especially in the light of the divergent party perspectives, some more extensive period of political preparation would ideally have been required. This, as we have seen, had been argued by progressives in the early weeks of the war. The belief that there were 'military and conservative interests in England' who would be preparing for a peace unacceptable to labour did not at that time

seem particularly perverse.¹⁷⁰ And the Allied socialists clearly acknowledged such a danger in February 1915. We may surmise that for Henderson in 1916 this danger would have remained perfectly perceptible, but that he accepted it because he saw no way it could be overcome.

Until he went to Russia in 1917 then, we may account for Henderson's actions in terms of the key decisions he had taken earlier in the war: to remain close to the party's trade unionist majority; to fully support the government in its pursuit of military victory; and to hold fire over agitation regarding war aims until the political climate became significantly less hostile to this venture. As always with Henderson, uncertainty regarding his innermost thoughts, plans or expectations, is unavoidable, and what is offered here is at best an informed guess. But for the reasons indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, the inadequacy of the standard account necessitates a search for some new understanding. A key question at the heart of any such understanding is the extent and manner to which he felt committed to the fight for a progressive peace *before* he set sail for Petrograd. No convincing answer can be provided to this question through a direct examination of the pre-Russia period. Evidence that he had remained strongly committed to a progressive peace comes essentially from the period after Russia.

For the most part this evidence will be gleaned from later chapters, but one relevant indication may be provided here. A major theme of this chapter has been Henderson's relationship to the February 1915 Allied socialist resolution. It may be fitting therefore to conclude with a brief look at the fate of this statement in the months after it was drafted.

¹⁷⁰ See MacDonald's open letter to a correspondent, *Daily Citizen*, 17 October 1914.

For the two and a half years following its creation it had been used for the most part as a means by which 'patriots' could condemn their 'pacifist' opponents for failing to honour the commitment therein to remain 'inflexibly resolved' to fight until victory was achieved. Henderson used it in this manner in his justification at the 1917 annual party conference of the decision to join the Lloyd George coalition.¹⁷¹ Six months later it was used to very different effect.

Following decisions made by the NEC on 25 July, the day after Henderson's return from Russia, a 'Memorandum on the Issues of the War' was prepared for presentation to a hurriedly convened second Allied socialist conference in London, initially scheduled for the 8th and 9th August. (This conference was to prepare for the full international conference in Stockholm, then scheduled for 22 August).¹⁷² The Memorandum opened by ratifying, reaffirming and reproducing the bulk of the 1915 resolution. What followed was a detailed statement of what were considered to be legitimate Allied war aims. In its penultimate clause the document called for the reconstitution of the Socialist International. Its final clause demanded of the 'warring Governments' a 'common repudiation and abandonment of imperialism and aggression.' Socialist and Labour movements were enjoined to press their governments towards a frank exchange of each other's 'claims and desires' in the 'confident belief' that this could lead to the passing 'of the present terrible calamity.....'¹⁷³

In calling for the restitution of the International, in openly commenting on war aims, and in its advocacy of peace through negotiation, this Memorandum was already a far cry from

¹⁷¹ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1917*, p.88.

¹⁷² LHA, NEC mins, 25 July 1917.

¹⁷³ LHA, *Memorandum on the Issues of the War*, Labour party, 1917.

earlier official utterances of the party. Subsequent statements from future Allied socialist conferences would again be headed by the resolution of 1915.¹⁷⁴ Having spent more than two years functioning as a political football then, the 1915 resolution suddenly assumed a new and more positive role: as a launch pad for a new Labour policy, a policy designed to ensure that an imperialist war would not be followed by an imperialist peace. No one has doubted that Henderson provided the momentum for this transformation.

Historians are agreed that the major concerns mentioned above - party unity, an Allied victory and a progressive peace - influenced Henderson's behaviour during the war. The relative strength of these concerns doubtless altered at different stages of the war. But all three constituted parameters within which his actions would be confined. In the long middle period of the war he was clearly as a member of the government doing his bit to help win the war. In continuing to accept that his party was divided and that opposing groups would remain free to voice their respective views, he certainly helped hold the party together, but at a cost in terms of pursuing an active official policy that went beyond unquestioning support for the nation. Regarding progressive peace terms, a Labour campaign at this stage of the war would be controversial and divisive, all too likely to create disunity between the country's supporters of such a peace and those powerfully placed groups who continued to believe that future safety was best secured by enhancing the nation's power at the expense of current or possible future enemies. It would also exacerbate divisions within Labour itself, again threatening the party's cohesion. At this point in our argument then, we can see that

¹⁷⁴ See the statement issued by the third Allied socialist conference in Paris, February 1918, which declared that the conference saw 'no reason to depart' from the 1915 resolution, the bulk of which was again reiterated in the new statement, Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, Appendix 1, p.99.

Henderson was indeed considerably constrained in any attempt he may have thought desirable to elevate Labour concerns for the coming peace further up the political agenda.

Chapter Two

The Mission to Russia

In August 1917 Henderson explained to his party that he had been opposed to British attendance at the Stockholm conference when he went to Russia, but that the circumstances he encountered whilst there persuaded him to change his mind. In December, following the recent Bolshevik coup, he pointedly asked party colleagues if it could be doubted that the government's ignoring of his advice during the summer had 'contributed to the present awful Russian disaster?'¹ These and other scattered remarks form the foundation of the labour historians' standard account. For these sympathetic researchers the challenge has been to find in the historical record of Henderson's six week stay in Russia evidence that corroborates, or better still, fills out an otherwise scanty account. Hamilton had few available sources on which to provide any such confident answers, but for the later historians we have been considering, access to government papers after 1967 provided the opportunity to make such an attempt.

This chapter will show that these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Curiously enough, clear evidence that Henderson changed his mind on Stockholm whilst in Russia has not been found. Attempts to derive this conclusion from tangential remarks in Henderson's

¹ *The Times*, 29 December 1917, p.8.

correspondence with Lloyd George have not been convincing. It has not been possible to glean from the contemporary sources convincing answers to the most fundamental questions regarding Henderson's change of mind: precisely when, why, and in response to what particular events, had Henderson become committed to Stockholm? The reliance of standard accounts on Henderson's own explanations of what happened in Russia remains largely unbroken. The attempts that have been made to fill out the record will be discussed below and their conclusions will be challenged. A rather fuller exploration than any so far provided of the events in Russia during Henderson's stay will lead to a new conclusion: that if he did convert to Stockholm before he left Petrograd it is unlikely that this could have occurred until almost the end of his stay, and that it is arguable that the conversion was only completed *after* he had left Russia. Existing accounts of Henderson's time in Russia, it will also be noted, have failed to take sufficient account of broader factors which would have impinged on Henderson's consideration of the Stockholm option. They have also failed to take into account all the available evidence.

Winter, author of the first and most influential post-1967 account of Henderson's role in the Stockholm affair, has gone further than his successors in trying to fill the historical gaps. He has suggested the critical moment of his subject's conversion whilst in Russia as well its proximate cause.² Indicative perhaps of a tacit acceptance of Winter's judgement, neither Wrigley nor Leventhal would attempt any further precision in this respect. Not until many years later did Bridgen follow Winter's example and propose a date for Henderson's conversion (which differed from that of his predecessor by two weeks). Bridgen however

² J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), pp: 753-773.

offers little clarity as to why he chooses the date he does.³ Neither of these accounts will be shown to be reliable. The one thing of which he can be certain is that the first clear statement by Henderson of support for Stockholm does not actually appear until he reaches the city of Stockholm itself as he begins his journey home to Britain.⁴

This may have a great deal more significance than has hitherto been recognised, particularly since during his brief stop in the Swedish capital he engaged in talks with the original proposers of the international conference, whose aims, as we shall see, were somewhat different to those of the Russian advocates. It will be argued in this chapter that the tendency in the standard account to perceive matters in simple terms of Henderson's moving from opposition to support for Stockholm whilst in Russia can be challenged on two counts: firstly because the available evidence is not sufficient to sustain this, and secondly because it fails to give sufficient consideration to the fact that there were several different reasons the various political actors involved may have chosen, at one time or another, to support, oppose or defer judgement on the holding of or attendance at the conference. The discussion will rely principally on the evidence emerging from the period Henderson was actually in Russia and will specifically discount subsequent statements he would make when in Britain that may be seen as having political value in his attempt to persuade his party to follow his controversial new position.

We may begin then with the first key component of the standard account: that when Henderson arrived in the Russian capital, Petrograd, on 1 June he was firmly opposed to his party's attendance at the conference. Winter is particularly strong on this argument,

³ Paul Bridgen, *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace, 1900-1924* (Woodbridge, 2009), p.96.

⁴ *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.5.

affirming that Henderson's mind was 'set against the Stockholm Conference' and contending that the contrary view of Arno Mayer is simply 'wrong'.⁵ But can Mayer's judgement that Henderson was at this stage 'uncommitted' on the question be so easily dismissed? Formally speaking, Henderson would as Secretary of the Labour party have felt obliged to support the resolution of the 1917 annual conference rejecting British attendance at a full International Socialist conference, and the NEC had already rejected an invitation to Stockholm on 9 May. At that time however the party was following the French, whose socialists had earlier spurned the invitation. Agreement on policy between the two major Allied parties was naturally something both valued. By the end of May however a senior figure in the SFIO, Albert Thomas, whose position in the French government was similar to Henderson's in the British, and who had already been despatched to Russia to perform the same role as his British counterpart, had become an advocate of the conference.⁶ More dramatically, in Paris the SFIO in a mood of unprecedented militancy had unanimously reversed its decision to reject Stockholm.⁷ Although Henderson remained bound by his own party's decisions, he would certainly have seen these French developments as of potential future significance.

Henderson was also of course a member of the War Cabinet, which had been modifying its own antithetical views towards a socialist conference during the fortnight prior to his departure. The background to these discussions was Russia's deteriorating situation, as Allied governments saw it, following the revolution. A first Provisional Government in

⁵ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.759; for the earlier contrary view, Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, 1959), p.215.

⁶ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson: A Biography* (London, 1938), p.132.

⁷ Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1914-1924* (Stanford, 1966), pp: 90-91; *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1917, p.5.

Petrograd dominated by the liberal opposition to the tsar, mainly the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets), saw no reason to change the former regime's policies on the war or on the secret commitments into which the Allies had entered. This government however was from the outset challenged by the Petrograd soviet, which rejected any policy of continuing the war in an attempt to achieve tsarist war aims and called instead for a peace based on the principles of 'no annexations or indemnities'.⁸ Such profound disagreements ultimately led to the fall of the government and its replacement by a coalition, in which Soviet members were included, committed to a non-annexationist policy.⁹ These developments gave rise to concerns in London over the danger that Russia might conclude a separate peace.¹⁰

This deeply worrying possibility had immediate relevance to the Stockholm question, given the enthusiasm of the Petrograd soviet for the conference and the still more alarming news that 'leading German Socialists' were likely to be present at the conference. The War Cabinet now feared that in the absence of Allied representation the Germans 'would impress on the Russians that the British Empire and France were alone standing in the way of peace.' The sending of labour delegates to the conference could in the light of these fears be justified. The difficulty arose however over who such delegates should be. Those who were known to be willing to attend were mainly 'pacifists' who 'might do considerable harm.' It would be better, the Cabinet felt, to send 'a strong delegation from the Labour Party, who could represent our national aims.....in their true light.' It was also considered

⁸ Soviets were spontaneously generated councils of workers, peasants and soldiers emerging with the revolution; the Petrograd soviet, containing many leading Russian socialists, acted as a powerfully constraining influence on the Provisional Government.

⁹ Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge, 2000), pp: 80-86.

¹⁰ On 21 March Curzon had been commissioned to prepare a report on the implications of 'possible secessions' of Allies; some weeks later he was encouraged to complete and present his report with particular reference to Russia, TNA, War Cabinet, 21 March 1917, CAB 23/2 (100), 8 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (134).

that whilst Henderson would be an obvious candidate to lead such a delegation, he would be debarred on account of his position within the Cabinet. Unable to reach any immediate conclusion, and aware that the Labour executive was meeting later the same day, the Cabinet commissioned Henderson to ascertain the views of the NEC's pacifist minority as to the peace formula being propagated by the Russian socialists, and to consider who in the party might form an appropriate delegation for Stockholm, should the need arise.¹¹

Henderson's first response to this startling *volte face* was to persuade his party to adopt the much safer option of a second Allied socialist conference in London at as early a date as possible. It quickly transpired however that the Russians had no interest in this and remained committed to a full gathering of the Socialist International. A further difficulty arose when the Petrograd soviet objected to the practice of the European Allies in ensuring that only majority socialists were permitted to travel to Russia. Members of the ILP and BSP, as well as equivalent groups elsewhere, had by now been invited to meet with the Soviet and a request to 'grant facilities for the journey to Russia' for such persons was formerly lodged by the foreign ministry in Petrograd. The War Cabinet proposed to the French and Italian governments that whilst it would be inadvisable simply to refuse this request, ways could be found to stall on its implementation.¹² Shortly thereafter applications for passports to Russia were received at the Foreign Office from MacDonald and Fred Jowett (ILP members of the NEC) and Albert Inkpin of the (by now militantly 'pacifist') BSP.

These various matters were debated at length in the War Cabinet on 21 May and again two days later, when some inter-related conclusions were finally reached. Having delayed for a

¹¹ *The Times*, 8 May, 1917, p.5; TNA, War Cabinet, 9 May 1917, CAB 23/13 (135a).

¹² TNA, War Cabinet, 15 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (138), appendices 1 and 2.

week any decision regarding passports for the three 'pacifists', it was agreed that these could be issued, although not immediately. This decision was dependent on the latter being accompanied by 'a strong delegation of the British Labour Party.' The possibility that such a delegation might include Henderson, whose leadership would undoubtedly enhance its strength, was again debated. It was finally agreed that the earlier French decision in sending Thomas to replace the current ambassador to Russia, Maurice Paléologue, whose closeness to the attitudes of the previous regime was now judged an impediment, could also be applied by the British government. Considering that their own ambassador in Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan, might also have become less than ideal in this role, the War Cabinet decided that Henderson could be more effective in influencing 'the democratic elements which now predominate in Russia' and invited him to 'make a personal sacrifice and go to Petrograd on a similar footing to.....Thomas.' Since it was important that the right rather than the wrong socialists should be first to arrive in the Russian capital, it was also proposed that Henderson should 'leave at the earliest possible date.'¹³ Henderson set off on his mission the following evening.

Clearly one major part of this mission was that he should judge on the basis of firsthand experience of the situation in Petrograd whether to recommend to his colleagues in London attendance or otherwise at the Stockholm conference for British labour. How seriously should we expect Henderson to have taken such a responsibility? Given his behaviour over the previous two years in office we may assume he would not have treated the matter lightly. We may also assume that he would have recognised the strength of the Cabinet's argument: that a situation in which Russian and German socialists might confer in a forum

¹³ TNA, War Cabinet, 21 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (141); 23 May 1917, CAB 23/2 (144).

from which Allied voices were absent was potentially very dangerous. He would probably not on the other hand have relished the task of persuading labour's own 'patriots' to reverse a policy they had only recently imposed on the party, let alone getting many of them to welcome sitting in conference with loathed German socialists. Admittedly the reversal of the French socialist position would have made his job a little easier, but it would still surely leave him with a hard case to sell.

The disagreement between Winter and Mayer as to whether Henderson was 'set against' or 'uncommitted' to Stockholm is clearly not as black or white as Winter imagines, unless of course Winter is deemed to be speaking only of Henderson's *personal* view on the merits of an international socialist conference at this stage of the war. But as we must repeatedly observe such personal views are always in Henderson's case hard to determine. Moreover the most significant evidence in support of Winter's opinion lies in Henderson's own subsequent statements which we have reason to consider less than fully reliable.

As a footnote to the disagreement between Winter and Mayer it is worth quoting how the latter continues after his observation that Henderson was 'uncommitted' on Stockholm. Henderson, Mayer writes, 'seems to have felt that provided the.....Conference were limited to a restatement of nonannexationist war aims it might exert a healthy influence on the excessively rigid war cabinets.'¹⁴ This is arguably a more challengeable statement than the one with which Winter takes issue, on the grounds that it appears premature. This is a position with which we may confidently identify Henderson later in the year, but less so at this particular time. It is though interesting to note that discussions surrounding non-

¹⁴ Mayer, *New Diplomacy*, p.215.

annexationist war aims were already taking place between members of the Dutch/Scandinavian Committee such as leading Swedish socialist, Hjalmar Branting, and Camille Huysmans, and that visiting socialist delegations were providing their views on such pertinent matters preparatory to the Stockholm conference. Branting and Huysmans were the men with whom Henderson would speak whilst *en route* back to Britain in mid July, and indeed many times thereafter.

We may also note at this point that we have already uncovered no less than three reasons to 'support' Stockholm, all of which can plausibly at one time or another be attributed to Henderson: the first being that of the standard account, as a means to bolster the struggling Russian government; the second being that raised in the War Cabinet, to prevent German socialists driving wedges between their Russian counterparts and the Allies; and the third being that indicated by Mayer, the exertion of pressure in favour of non-annexationist war aims on 'excessively rigid' belligerent governments.

We may now move on to the second and most important component of the standard account and consider if it is possible to elucidate just when and why during his stay in Russia Henderson became convinced of the need, on behalf of his hosts, to promote British attendance at Stockholm. As we have suggested, Winter is the only historian who has so far offered a comprehensive answer to this question and it is with his explanation we must start. Winter argues that Henderson's change of direction can be pinpointed to the beginning of July and directly related to the trauma of the Russian army's 1 July military offensive and its resulting rout at the hands of the Germans. He quotes from a telegram to Lloyd George of this date, in which Henderson warns the Prime Minister that 'we must be

on our guard' against any 'appearance of coldness or neglect in our dealing with Provisional Government. Anything which injures their credit here can only operate to strengthen forces of disorder and to postpone the Restoration of Russia.' His message goes on to distinguish between Bolshevik and Menshevik ways to achieve peace, the former relying on 'direct action on Western proletariat to provoke uprising against capitalism and war together.....'; the latter for Constitutional action to convert labour movements which could then exercise pressure on their own governments. These differences, he suggested, corresponded to a general distinction between the 'agitator and idealist in all countries.'¹⁵

Henderson's 'firm support for the "idealist" provisional government,' concludes Winter, 'eventually brought him to favour the Stockholm project.' The military offensive and the subsequent disintegration of the Russian army persuaded him 'that support for Stockholm was probably the only way to keep Russia in the war and to keep a moderate government in power.' In support of this last point Winter adds in a footnote that 'Buchanan's opinion was similar' and he cites as evidence a telegram from the ambassador of 5 July stating: 'Nothing would I think help Kerenski so much at the present moment as announcement that Allied Government had accepted Russian proposal for Conference in early September.'¹⁶

There are several observations that can be made in relation to the above. In the first place there was nothing new in Henderson's view of 1 July about the dangers of injuring the credit of the Provisional Government. Buchanan as well as Thomas had been making the same points since the formation of the Kerensky led coalition. Henderson himself had said much

¹⁵ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 1 July 1917, FO 371/2997, f.55.

¹⁶ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.766. Buchanan was referring to Alexander Kerensky, by then generally recognised as the most important figure in the provisional government and effective leader of the Menshevik tendency in Russia.

the same in an earlier letter to Lloyd George, stressing the need 'to go steadily forward losing no opportunity to strengthen the hands of the Government and being most careful to avoid any act or word which might give the Extremists a handle against them.'¹⁷ Nor is it clear that the launching of the military offensive at the beginning of July deepened Henderson's concerns regarding the vulnerability of the Provisional Government.

As he reports in the 1 July letter referenced by Winter, the offensive actually met with 'initial success'.¹⁸ The first two days of fighting saw remarkable advances against Austrian forces accompanied by mass surrenders of enemy troops. When news of these successes reached Petrograd the popularity of the government understandably soared. Even the determinedly defeatist Bolsheviks carefully avoided puncturing the euphoric mood.¹⁹ It is true that Henderson had doubts as to whether the offensive could be successfully maintained, but his doubts were based on the 'profound.....industrial disorganisation' behind the front lines.²⁰ He had already reported to Lloyd George two weeks earlier a common feeling that the 'disorganisation' of the country was so great as to render 'a successful offensive' impossible.²¹ Finally the 'rout' of Russian forces which Winter sees as decisive in Henderson's commitment to Stockholm did not really begin until German troops launched a counter-offensive on 19 July, by which time Henderson had left Russia.²²

These points surely weaken Winter's argument, but the footnote on Buchanan creates a further misleading impression: that the ambassador too had become an advocate of

¹⁷ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 15 June 1917, FO 371/3011, f.6.

¹⁸ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 1 July 1917, FO 371/2997, f.54.

¹⁹ Raphael R. Abramovitch, *The Soviet Revolution: 1917-1939* (London, 1962), p.56.

²⁰ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 1 July 1917, FO 371/2997, f.54.

²¹ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 15 June 1917, FO 371/3011, f.5.

²² Wade, *Russian Revolution*, p.180.

Stockholm. In fact the conference to which Buchanan was referring on 5 July was not Stockholm but a different one proposed by the Russian foreign minister, M. I. Tereshchenko, inviting Allied governments to discuss possible modifications to their war aims. The fact that there was an alternative conference to Stockholm which could equally be of assistance to the Russian leadership is something to which the exponents of the standard account have paid virtually no attention. This is unfortunate, since as we shall see, it was the governmental rather than the socialist conference that Henderson, like Buchanan, consistently advocated throughout his stay in Russia.²³

It has been noted by an early historian of the Stockholm episode that the multiplicity of conferences being proposed or discussed at this time created 'considerable confusion in the public mind' – a confusion which affected even 'journalists, politicians and diplomats.'²⁴ Three separate conferences which could have involved Russian and British participants were under protracted and often fruitless discussion during the summer of 1917. It will at this point be of considerable value to examine more fully these proposed encounters, to consider the objects which their various advocates hoped to achieve by them, and to better understand the context in which Henderson was required to make decisions as to which conferences he should 'support' or 'oppose'.

Let us consider first the Allied Socialist conference in London which Henderson himself proposed on 9 May. As we have noted, this was first and foremost a safer and more

²³ After consulting with members of the Provisional Government Henderson requested that Buchanan should remain in place as ambassador; the two men evidently worked well together and 'held the same views on many questions', George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, Vol. 2 (London, 1923), pp:144-147.

²⁴ Hildamarie Meynell, 'The Stockholm Conference of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, 5 (1960) pp: 208-209.

acceptable way of parleying with Russians than by meeting in Stockholm. Such a gathering would clearly be dominated by Allied 'patriots'. Once it was clear that Russian socialists remained wedded to Stockholm, Henderson continue to proselytise for the London conference as a necessary preliminary, enabling Allied socialists, including Russians, to hammer out common positions to take to the full International. But this too was unacceptable to the Russians. For although still fighting against German and Austrian forces (in order to liberate occupied areas of Russian territory, rather than in support of the wider goals agreed between Allied governments earlier in the war) Russian socialists by now saw themselves less as belligerents than as 'a conciliating force between the two enemy blocs.'²⁵ To identify themselves with either bloc for the purposes of preparatory discussions was to defeat their principal objective, which was to persuade fellow workers on both sides to put pressure on their respective governments to conclude an early peace.²⁶

The Allied governmental conference proposed by Tereshchenko was on the other hand acceptable to the majority of socialists in the Petrograd soviet. It was designed after all to bring Allied governments into line with the non-annexationist peace formula which had emerged in the first place from the Soviet. Allied governments were clearly reluctant to enter any such dialogue, but were pressed by their representatives in Russia to at least give the appearance of compliance with Tereshchenko's request, for fear of undermining the government's fragile stability.

²⁵ Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace: February – October 1917* (Stanford, Calif., 1969), p.63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp: 51-73.

As the Russian socialists mostly supported their government's efforts to achieve a war aims conference, so too did Tereshchenko and many of his colleagues welcome the prospect of the Stockholm conference. The pressure that might thereby be placed on Allied governments could be helpful in bringing about a readiness to renegotiate Allied war aims, which could in turn pave the way to wider international negotiations leading to the possibility of an early peace. Whilst tensions inevitably existed between Russian ministers and the powerful Petrograd soviet there was a general consensus on the need for Russia to extricate itself from the war.²⁷ The extensive social, economic and political demands emanating from the newly liberated Russian masses, as well as the widespread popular longing for peace, placed immense pressure on the Provisional Government. Unwilling however to take the option later adopted by the Bolsheviks of a separate peace with the Central Powers, the leadership, supported by the Soviet, were therefore dependent on Allied governments, without whom they would be unable to move towards an overall settlement. Any assistance that could be provided by a revived socialist internationalism would therefore be welcome both to the government and the more moderate of the Russian socialists.²⁸

Allied governments were no less reliant on the Russians, whose armies were needed to keep large numbers of German troops away from the Western front. It was above all this realisation that encouraged the conciliatory response towards the Provisional Government on their part. This mutual dependence was ultimately however of limited value to the Petrograd leadership, who could not ignore the brutal realities of wartime diplomacy.

²⁷ It was widely believed from the early days of the revolution that the new order could not survive without peace, see N. N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* (London, 1955), p.264.

²⁸ Wade, *Russian Revolution*, pp: 171-174.

Whatever leverage they might otherwise exert on the Western capitals, they could achieve little without keeping their armies effectively engaged, a supremely difficult task in the face of immense anti-war sentiment. This of course was a major reason for the launching of the July offensive, as well as for its almost inevitable lack of success. Its eventual failure, once confirmed, led to increasing indifference to Russian concerns in Allied corridors of power.²⁹

Russian ministers may initially have hoped for the success of Stockholm. They did not however formally sponsor the conference, which they treated as a purely socialist affair. The conference was in fact independently sponsored by both the Petrograd soviet and the Dutch/Scandinavian committee. All three of these groups - the government and the Soviet in Petrograd and the northern neutrals - shared the hope that the conference would reveal some measure of common ground within international socialism on the need for and nature of a potential peace settlement. There were however significant differences between them. The Petrograd government could do little more than give verbal encouragement to their own socialists, whilst avoiding as far as possible any rupture with Allied governments. The northern neutrals were primarily engaged in an attempt to revitalise the fractured International, the prospects for which had been considerably enhanced by Russian events. Yet the premises and aims of the Petrograd soviet, observes David Kirby, 'had more in common with the anti-war proclamations of the Zimmerwald movement than with the cautious and pragmatic endeavours of the "neutral" socialists.'³⁰

²⁹ Robert D. Warth, *The Allies and the Russian Revolution: from the Fall of the Monarchy to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk* (New York, 1977), p.117.

³⁰ David Kirby, 'International Socialism and the Question of Peace: The Stockholm Conference of 1917', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, no.3 (1982), p. 710; The Zimmerwald movement, so named after the village in Switzerland that it first gathered in 1915, represented the more radical wing of international socialism. With the notable exception of Russia it had relatively few supporters in the belligerent states.

Like the Executive of the ISB, with which it was closely linked, the Dutch/Scandinavian committee considered it futile to try to ignore the strength of feelings within the patriotic majorities of the belligerent socialists. Their search for sufficient common ground between these majorities to make an international conference moderately fruitful was obviously a delicate task. It was for this reason that a lengthy period of individual preparatory consultations continued throughout the summer of 1917. At the same time however, majority socialists on both sides were harbouring hopes that the Stockholm process could be turned to their national advantage. The British War Cabinet's worry that enemy socialists would use the absence of their Allied counterparts to damaging effect was not therefore without foundation.³¹ The very fact that both German socialists and their government appeared to favour Stockholm led not surprisingly to the branding of the project in Allied nations as a conspiracy hatched in Berlin.³² Meanwhile in Russia, visiting Allied socialists were doing their best to persuade their Soviet hosts to adopt procedures for the eventual conference which, by way of conditions for attendance or shaping of the agenda, would promise embarrassment or humiliation to enemy socialists, ideally sufficient to persuade them to stay away.³³

Prior to Henderson's arrival in Russia these and related matters were issues of contention between the Petrograd soviet, led by its most prominent figure, Irakli Tsereteli, the principal link between the Soviet and the Provisional Government (of which he was also a member) and French and Belgian socialist delegations, led respectively by Thomas and Vandervelde (the latter acting in his capacity as a socialist minister in the Belgian government rather than

³¹ Mayer, *New Diplomacy*, pp: 197-198.

³² See for example, 'The Kaiser's New Pawns', *Daily Mail*, 10 May 1917, p.6.

³³ Wade, *Search for Peace*, pp: 62-63.

in his ISB role). Disagreements between the Russian and Allied socialists were an inevitable consequence of their fundamentally contrasting perceptions of the war, which for the Russians was a classical conflict between imperialist powers and for the Allies a legitimate war of defence against naked aggression. At the same time, neither side could afford to walk away from the discussion: the Allied socialists because they needed to persuade the Russians to stay militarily committed; and the Russians because they needed to persuade the Allied socialists to push their governments towards a negotiated peace. These conflicting needs determined the nature of the debate over Stockholm, which had less to do with support or opposition to the conference than with the terms under which it would be convened and the conditions which might be demanded of participants. A major confrontation on such matters happened to coincide with Henderson's arrival in Petrograd.

The confrontation was a consequence of the unexpected decision of the Petrograd soviet to issue its own invitation to an international conference, and to declare that the purpose of such a conference would be to encourage socialists 'to liquidate the policy of "national unity" with the imperialistic governments and classes which make a struggle for peace impossible.'³⁴ Henderson's first encounter with the 'moderate socialists', including Kerensky and Tsereteli, in support of whom he would later campaign for British attendance at Stockholm, was a 'stormy discussion' on the evening of 3 June in which he joined with Thomas and Vandervelde in castigating the Russians for their unwarranted action.³⁵ The following day the Allied Socialists drafted an open letter to the Petrograd soviet in which they declared their 'complete agreement' with the idea that socialists should rupture their

³⁴ Robert P. Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky, eds., *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*, vol.2, p.1171.

³⁵ David Kirby, *War, Peace and Revolution: International Socialism at the Crossroads, 1914-1918* (Aldershot, 1986), pp: 125-126.

agreements with 'governments or classes whose war aims are tainted with imperialism', but that a 'national union against aggressive imperialism' was 'a duty incumbent on all classes.'³⁶ As Thomas and Vandervelde had been contending for some time, this was an argument for excluding from any international conference only those socialists who refused to renounce their support for the 'aggressive imperialists' of the Central Powers.

The fundamentally divergent perspectives on the war between the Allied and Russian socialists could manifest themselves in many ways, one of the most difficult of which for the Allies was the question of war aims. Though they stuck rigidly to the position that their nations were fighting a legitimate war of defence against unprovoked aggression, they found it hard to counter the Russian contention that it was not only the Central Powers whose war aims were 'tainted with imperialism', not least because their hosts had evidence to this effect in the form of the 'secret treaties' agreed between the Allies during the course of the war.³⁷ In attempting to argue that their own governments' war aims were consistent with the 'no annexations, no indemnities' formula of the new Russian government the Western socialists were very much forced onto the defensive. Whilst this was principally a problem for the French and British, even the Belgians had some post-war territorial adjustments in mind, including a claim for the 'reclamation' of Luxembourg as well as some bits and pieces of both Germany and neutral Holland.³⁸

³⁶ Browder and Kerensky, *Documents*, vol.2, p.1174.

³⁷ In Petrograd at least the outlines of these treaties were far from secret, Wade, *Search for Peace*, p.83; following their publication by the Bolsheviks in late 1917 their contents would also be known (though not widely publicised) in the West, see F. Seymour Cocks, *The Secret Treaties and Understandings* (London, 1918).

³⁸ Emile Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1918), pp: 263-266; Belgian ministers were not alone in their desire to offer a new national home to Luxembourgers: French politicians were also considering their absorption, David Stevenson, *French War Aims Against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1982), pp: 50-51.

Under considerably greater pressure than their Belgian comrades, the French socialists in Russia addressed the defence of their national war aims with neither conviction nor consistency, giving way with little resistance on the sensitive matter of Alsace-Lorraine.³⁹ French policy on these provinces demanded their restoration to France as a matter of right.⁴⁰ The more progressive view, to which the French socialists acceded under pressure from the Soviet, suggested that the province's own populations had a right to decide under whose jurisdiction they should be placed, and that a post-war plebiscite would be the means by which this could be determined. Thomas would later substantially qualify this concession, claiming that Berlin had long flooded the territory 'with German peasants and officials' and that 'many natives' had fled to France on the outbreak of war to avoid service in the German army and to enlist instead in the French forces.⁴¹

For the French socialists the greatest difficulty came however with the revelation of the most recent episode of Franco-Russian diplomacy which had occurred only days before the revolution. The two governments, conferring in the absence of Britain and Italy, provisionally agreed that they would support each other's claims on German territory. In the east, Russia would be licensed to annex areas of Prussia with Polish populations; in return Paris would be given Petrograd's blessing not just for the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine within its pre-1870 borders, but within the more extensive boundaries established during France's Napoleonic ascendancy. These borders were to 'be drawn in such a way as to

³⁹ Maurice Paléologue, *An Ambassador's Memoirs, 1914-1917* (London, 1973), pp: 885-887.

⁴⁰ This position was supported by the SFIO *majoritaires*, see the comments of Pierre Renaudel at the 1916 Labour party conference, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1916*, p.114.

⁴¹ A. J. Sack, *The Birth of Russian Democracy* (New York, 1918), p.366; fears that a plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine would not necessarily yield the desired result were common in French governing circles for reasons broader than those offered by Thomas. Both in Berlin and Paris concerns as to the national loyalties of the native populations led during and immediately after the war to heavy handed treatment of suspect citizens, see Laird Boswell, 'From Liberation to Purge Trials in the "Mythic Provinces": Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920' *French Historical Studies*, Vol.23, no.1 (2000), pp: 129-162.

provide for strategic necessities' and would include the coal rich Saarland. Other territories on the left bank of the Rhine were to be completely severed from German rule, or any other form of political or economic dependence on Berlin. Such territories not incorporated in France would form 'an autonomous and neutralized State' and be subject to French military occupation until such time as all terms and guarantees ultimately stipulated by a future peace treaty had been fully carried out by the enemy States.⁴² For the French socialists this was incendiary stuff. It may well have contributed to the turning of two former *majoritaires* into adherents of the growing *minoritaire* camp.⁴³ Certainly Marcel Cachin and Marius Moutet returned to Paris committed to the Stockholm conference and were influential in bringing about the reversal of SFIO policy in late May.⁴⁴

Though perhaps less flagrant than those of the French, British war aims were also a source of some embarrassment. Britain was now revealed in the secret treaties to have claimed its 'sphere of influence' within the Ottoman Empire and within neighbouring Persia. It was also widely believed by Russians that the British Empire intended to retain the German colonies it had already captured. Since plebiscites in 'backward' areas of the Middle East or Africa were not seen as practical in this era, the British claim that in freeing populations from their German or Turkish oppressors they would be acting in conformity with the inhabitants' desires could not be tested, allowing the British to affect veiled annexations.⁴⁵ Russian suspicions on these counts were creating difficulties for Buchanan during the period in which Henderson arrived in Petrograd. Tereshchenko's request of Allied governments to

⁴² Paléologue, *Memoirs*, p.788.

⁴³ See the diatribe delivered to the departing French ambassador against the '*bourgeois*, capitalist and imperialist classes' which had 'plunged the world' into its 'frightful crisis', *ibid.*, pp: 927-929.

⁴⁴ David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988), pp:159-160.

⁴⁵ See editorial in the Soviet mouthpiece, *Izvestiia*, 18 March, 1917, quoted in Browder and Kerensky, *Documents*, pp: 1079-1080.

provide parallel responses to Russia's own revised position on war aims became a matter into which Henderson was soon drawn.⁴⁶

Buchanan's role in these diplomatic exchanges involved taking successive Foreign Office drafts of the requested British statement to Tereshchenko in order to ensure that the text contained nothing likely to arouse public anger. It eventually became clear that, however carefully worded, British justifications for territorial changes following the war would be interpreted as annexationist by the Petrograd soviet. Buchanan would eventually report to London that an apologetic Tereshchenko had 'come to the conclusion that passages about Arabs and German Colonies would give rise to dangerous discussions' and that it would 'be better to express sentiments conveyed in Note in more general terms without citing special cases.' Agreeing with Tereshchenko that any such discussions could be used as propaganda within the army to the effect that Russian soldiers were being asked to fight 'for British Imperialistic aims' and believing too that 'our only hope of saving internal situation from anarchy and chaos rests on successful offensive', he went on to discuss the matter with Henderson and Thomas, who also agreed that 'passages to which [Tereshchenko] takes exception' should be omitted.⁴⁷ The note, as finally submitted, made no reference at all to specific territorial aims under consideration by the British government. It merely alluded in a general way to the object of 'liberating populations oppressed by alien tyranny' as one of several justifiable war aims.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Wade, *Search for Peace*, pp: 77-79.

⁴⁷ TNA, Buchanan to Cecil, 30 May 1917 and 4 June 1917, FO 371/3010, ff: 310-312; 330-331.

⁴⁸ For text of revised note, see Browder and Kerensky, *Documents*, p.1107.

Henderson then had clearly been introduced to the sensitivities within Russia surrounding his country's territorial goals and the manner in which they were habitually justified. Yet on 9 June when he addressed the Petrograd soviet in order to explain the views of the 'British proletariat' he appeared to throw caution to the wind. Having started with safe statements to the effect that British workers were 'fighting only to defend their country and to force the respect of international agreements', he moved on via wider considerations concerning the futures of Poland and Belgium to state that 'in the interests of maintaining peace in the future, the population of Mesopotamia and Africa must be liberated, even if it has to be done through special international commissions, from the yoke of Turkish and German rule. Little indeed was to be left of Ottoman sovereignty, as 'Armenians and Arabs' would also *have to be protected, the Dardanelles 'internationalized' and Constantinople made 'a free port'*.⁴⁹

One Russian witness to this speech later characterised it as displaying a 'unique kind of *naïveté*.' Henderson, in his undiplomatic readiness to call a spade a spade, had 'expounded the war programme of British finance.'⁵⁰ This appears to have been a common view amongst Petrograd's socialists. The reaction was also strong further afield. Robert Bruce Lockhart, British representative in Moscow, reported severe criticism of Henderson's speech amongst the city's moderate and extremist groups alike, who saw his words 'as purest doctrine of annexation.'⁵¹ How is this curious lapse to be explained? Could he have believed perhaps that in broaching these issues as a representative of the labour movement rather than as a government minister the message would have been somehow more palatable?

⁴⁹ Sack, *Russian Democracy*, p.372

⁵⁰ Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p.365.

⁵¹ TNA, Lockhart to Buchanan, 14 June 1917, FO 371/2997, f.20

Did he possibly imagine that the reference to ‘special international commissions’ would suffice as a non-annexationist gloss? Clearly no such commissions yet existed. Nor had plans to create them been officially formulated. Nor could anyone have had any idea as to exactly what role they would play in the envisaged transfer of sovereignty.⁵² The most probable explanation may be that it was simply a matter of carelessness or disorientation (Henderson had been in Russia for little more than a week). The language he used would obviously have been uncontroversial in Britain.

It can well be imagined then that after a week in Russia Henderson would not have been greatly enamoured of native socialists.⁵³ He would surely have recognised that the politics of even the most moderate amongst them had far more in common with the British ‘pacifists’ he had been opposing for over two years than with the positions of his own party majority.⁵⁴ There is no reason to doubt that in this early phase of Henderson’s mission he may have felt little personal sympathy for Russian socialists and would clearly have had reservations about attending an international conference the purpose of which was to persuade Allied (as well as enemy) delegates to go home and oppose their government’s war policies. This part of the conventional narrative can be readily accepted. What is more difficult is to locate the change in perspective historians have perceived. Winter, as we have seen, regards the 1 July letter to Lloyd George, in which Henderson elaborates on the

⁵² It is worth noting that the precise wording he used in relation to this suggestion is uncertain, possibly because his speech may have been translated into Russian prior to being re-translated back into English. Compare the sentence as presented in Sack, *Russian Democracy* (used in this text) with the version in Browder and Kerensky, *Documents*, p.1116. Sack uses the expression ‘even if it has to be done through.....’; Browder and Kerensky use the formulation ‘at least with the assistance of....’.

⁵³ Lockhart, who spent some time with him during these weeks would later write that the ‘comrades in the Soviets bewildered him. He did not understand their language. He did not like their manners.’, R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London, 1932), p.187.

⁵⁴ See his comment on the ‘suspicion and misunderstanding amongst not only the extreme but the moderate Socialists’ regarding Allied war aims, ‘The Mind of Russia: Mr Arthur Henderson’s Impressions’, *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1917, p.5.

distinction between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, as indicative of the forthcoming change; but these remarks appear in a context which Winter ignores. Henderson is clearly describing the approaches of the two Russian factions as divergent *means* to a shared *end*, which they 'called general peace, but in truth would be general surrender.'⁵⁵

Both the widespread Russian scepticism regarding Allied war aims and the strong popular hunger for peace provided Henderson with powerful disincentives towards Stockholm, which would at the very least have weighed heavily against the incentives imagined by Winter and others. Exactly how these conflicting impulses operated during the latter part of his stay are not easy to assess. What is certain however is that he did in his communications with Britain positively promote the proposed governmental conference on war aims, whilst avoiding any similar advocacy of Stockholm.⁵⁶ In noting this however we should consider one important distinction between the two conferences of which Henderson would have been fully aware. The governmental conference was already under discussion between the respective ministries. Henderson was involved only in so far, as a member of the War Cabinet who happened to be in Russia, he would obviously be expected to offer informed advice. In the case of Stockholm, on the other hand, discussions between the respective Allied and Russians socialist parties had effectively stalled.

Following the angry rejection by the Allied socialists of the Soviet's 2 June invitation to an international conference, the formal process of finding agreement effectively foundered. Though never formally withdrawn, nothing was done to actually convene the conference

⁵⁵ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 1 July 1917, FO 371/2997, f.55.

⁵⁶ See *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1917, p.5; TNA, Arthur Henderson, 'British Mission to Russia, June and July 1917', War Cabinet, 16 July 1917, CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.12.

which the Soviet had scheduled for 8 July. This was in part a consequence of Soviet leaders becoming distracted by a different matter: the question of their own democratic legitimacy. For although it posed as the authentic voice of the Russian revolution, the Petrograd soviet formally represented only the workers and soldiers of the Russian capital. Moves were now afoot to create an 'All Russian' Soviet in Petrograd which could claim to be the democratic voice of the whole nation.⁵⁷

Requiring as it did the election of worker, peasant and soldiers' delegates across the entire country, this was inevitably a slow process. Nevertheless, in the interests of acquiring greater legitimacy, the leaders of the Petrograd soviet decided to wait until the new 'All Russian Congress of Soviets' was assembled before proceeding in this body's name with their Stockholm initiative.⁵⁸ The Congress was convened on 16 June when over a thousand delegates gathered for an event that did not conclude until three weeks later.⁵⁹ At its close the dominant 'moderate' groups in the Petrograd soviet could claim a mandate from an estimated eight million soldiers, five million workers, and four million peasants. A new All-Russian Central Executive Committee was created, in which the factions close to Tsereteli were bolstered by the provincial delegates who at least temporarily shifted the balance of power away from the Zimmerwaldist tendencies which had been growing within the Petrograd soviet.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p.255.

⁵⁸ Rex A. Wade, 'Argonauts of Peace: The Soviet Delegation to Western Europe in the Summer of 1917', *Slavic Review*, 26/3 (1967), p.455.

⁵⁹ Zila Galili y Garcia, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1989), p.304; Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, pp: 384-385.

⁶⁰ Galili, *Menshevik Leaders*, pp: 304-314.

The new executive recognised the need for a more inclusive approach to the Stockholm question, instructing a Stockholm bound delegation to converse with representatives of both the Dutch/Scandinavian committee and the Zimmerwaldist International Socialist Committee (ISC), an organisation trying at this time to agree its own position on the conference.⁶¹ Arriving in the Swedish capital on 2 July the Russian delegation did after some difficulty reach an accord with the Dutch/Scandinavians though not the ISC. This partial success was reported in *Izvestiia* on the 14th, two days before Henderson left Petrograd.⁶² How much detail Henderson could have gleaned from these first reports may be in question. He did of course have the opportunity of finding out more by speaking personally to Branting and Huysmans as he passed through Stockholm on his way home. It may be concluded therefore that as he left Petrograd he still possessed only limited knowledge of what was being proposed in the Swedish capital.

A further unanticipated aspect of Henderson's stay in Russia also enabled him to remain safely uncommitted on the conference. It had been expected that he would be joined soon after his arrival by a Labour party delegation from Britain. Had this delegation arrived one of its foremost tasks would have been to discuss Stockholm with the Russian socialists. Henderson could not have envisaged conducting such talks on his own. Initially the delay in the delegation's departure was attributable to the NEC. In what seems like a re-run of the 1915 situation when the executive had struggled to find a willing 'patriot' to take over from Henderson as secretary of the British Section of the International, there again appeared little enthusiasm amongst committee members for engagement with foreign socialists.

⁶¹ Wade, *Slavic Review*, p.456.

⁶² Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: the Origin of the Third International* (Stanford, 1940), pp: 637-640.

Henderson had indicated to party colleagues before he left London that he wished the executive delegation to follow him 'at the earliest opportunity.' Over the next two weeks no less than five proposed members of the 'patriotic' part of the delegation had advanced reasons as to why they should not be included.⁶³ It would eventually require intervention from the War Cabinet to prompt Roberts, a junior minister who had used his position in the government as his reason to withdraw from the proposed delegation, to reconsider.⁶⁴ Following Roberts' enforced change of heart, others finally followed. The grounds for withdrawing that had been offered by reluctant delegates had been varied. Frank Purdy, the current NEC Chairman, was the only one whose stated objections were overtly political. In an interview following his refusal to travel he declared himself 'entirely opposed' to action that might bring into question the previous January's resolution against British attendance at an international socialist conference. He declared also 'the strongest possible objection' to the inclusion of 'pacifist' members of the executive in the delegation.⁶⁵ It seems likely that, to one extent or another, these considerations played some part in the decisions of the others.

In the event Purdy would have had no need to worry about the minority delegates. When the delegation was eventually about to embark on the journey to Russia members of the militantly patriotic National Sailors and Fireman's Union refused to set sail with the ILP 'pacifists'.⁶⁶ Rather than depart without the latter the 'patriots' themselves decided not to

⁶³ LHA, NEC mins, 1 June and 7 June 1917.

⁶⁴ TNA, War Cabinet, 7 June, 1917, CAB 23/3 (158)

⁶⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1917, p.8.

⁶⁶ See David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), pp: 214-215 for one of many accounts of this episode.

travel. From Petrograd Henderson urged the seamen's leader, Havelock Wilson, to lift the embargo, warning of difficulties that would otherwise be created for the Russian government, and even suggesting that MacDonald might be willing to promise to act whilst in Russia 'consistently with decisions of Manchester Conference.....'⁶⁷ Wilson however remained immovable. Henderson finally advised his executive on 5 July that it would be inadvisable to send only a majority delegation since this would 'only strengthen rumour here that MacDonald has been prevented by Government agents.'⁶⁸ By this stage Thomas and Vandervelde had left Russia, leaving Henderson as the sole significant representative of Allied labour. Meaningful negotiation over the terms of Stockholm was on this count also no longer possible.

Of course, the absence of negotiation cannot preclude informal discussion. Henderson's hosts must have been keen to elicit his views on Stockholm even if commitment was something he remained unable to offer. It seems likely nevertheless that he would have responded to this sort of probing with caution. What may well have been a typical response can be seen during his brief visit to Moscow, where he told the Chairman of the local Soviet that whilst British labour did not at all share the latter's views, he and his party would 'give serious consideration to the propositions advanced here.'⁶⁹ One final consideration we cannot of course ignore is that even if he was not yet ready to make any commitment to Stockholm, the reasons he would eventually do so, as advanced in the standard account, were already forming or had formed in his mind.

⁶⁷ TNA, Henderson to Wilson, FO 371/3006, f.263.

⁶⁸ LHA, NEC mins, 10 July 1917.

⁶⁹ Sack, *Russian Democracy*, p.376.

We cannot rule out the possibility that he may, as Hamilton in particular suggests, have come to sympathise with the hard pressed 'moderate' socialist leaders, all of whom were undoubtedly keen that British and Allied socialists should be present at Stockholm.⁷⁰ The vulnerability of the Provisional Government was a common theme in the discussions on Russia within the British government. The advice of both Henderson and Buchanan was that this vulnerability could be eased by the agreement of Allied governments to attend Tereshchenko's proposed war aims conference. A key question we must ask then, is why Henderson might have persuaded himself that attendance at Stockholm would also have been required. The standard account falls down badly here because the historians concerned, with one exception, appear either to have disregarded or been unaware of the proposed governmental conference.⁷¹ This is a serious omission, not least because what many in Petrograd hoped for from Stockholm was that it could change the political climate in the Allied countries, in such a way as to oblige reluctant Allied governments not only to attend Tereshchenko's conference but also to consider significant modifications in their aims.

Henderson was certainly aware of this hope. As a Cabinet minister he was clearly in a position to act, if he so wished, *directly* in support of this primary ambition, without the difficult and possibly dangerous expedient of Stockholm. As we have seen, Henderson does indeed advocate a positive response to Tereshchenko's invitation. He does not however go further and advocate actual concessions on war aims as a way of easing the Russian plight.

⁷⁰ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.130.

⁷¹ Hamilton is not alone in seeing Stockholm as the 'sole means' of preserving the Provisional Government, *ibid.*, p.133.

Like Buchanan he leaves it to ministers in London to decide whether the most that Russia might now contribute to the war 'is worth purchasing, and if so, at what price.'⁷²

The one main contributor to the standard account who shows awareness of the governmental conference is Bridgen. His treatment of the matter is however rather sparse. He acknowledges that for a time Henderson did consider that it would be sufficient to deal with the threat to the Provisional Government through 'an inter-governmental conference.....to review war aims.' By 'the middle of July' however he was 'convinced that the pressure on the Provisional Government had become so great that outright rejection of the Stockholm conference was no longer appropriate.'⁷³ Bridgen does not say however what exactly happened in mid-July that increased the threat to the Petrograd government. More importantly, he does not explain why Henderson changed his mind on the efficacy of the inter-governmental conference as a means of staving off this growing threat, and why he could have believed that Stockholm could better serve this important purpose? To suggest that mid-July was the moment when Henderson became convinced that 'outright rejection' of Stockholm was inappropriate ignores the reality that we have already described: that for the Allied socialists outright rejection had for weeks been something they wished to avoid. The 'middle of July' also happens to be the time that Henderson left Russia, but whether this has any relevance to Henderson's change of view on the relative importance of the two conferences is not mentioned. Clearly Bridgen is no more effective than Winter in discovering either the moment or the reason Henderson became committed to Stockholm.

⁷² Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.12; C/f Buchanan's view that if 'we find that Russian Army is incapable of giving us any effective support we shall have to reconsider our whole attitude....' TNA, Buchanan to Cecil, 4 June 1917, FO 371/3010, ff: 330-331.

⁷³ Bridgen, *Labour Party*, p.96.

For Bridgen, as for Hamilton and Winter, the fear of an extreme left wing (or Bolshevik) government taking power in Russia is seen as a major concern for Henderson. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter Henderson's response to the Bolshevik coup when it took place in November included the suggestion that had he been listened to by the War Cabinet three months earlier this unfortunate event may have been avoided. It is not at all clear however in Henderson's despatches from Russia that he possessed any such awareness regarding the potential of the Bolsheviks to seize power. The impression he gives, rather, is that Bolshevism was one of many problems faced by the Provisional Government, most of which appeared decidedly intractable. It was the fact that the Leninist takeover occurred when it did that allowed him and his sympathisers to argue that he had foreseen this event and that his campaign for Stockholm had been largely designed to forestall it.

Henderson had raised the issue of a Bolshevik takeover in a letter to Roberts of 21 June. Referring to a conversation with 'an active but moderate socialist' whose view that the backers of Kerensky and of Lenin would soon be in a battle as to which would prevail was, in Henderson's opinion, 'not far wide of the mark'. He went on to predict however that if the extremists triumphed 'we shall have a few months of anarchy' followed by counter-revolution.⁷⁴ Henderson was aware that some Russian conservatives seemed to welcome such an outcome, precisely to achieve this end result.⁷⁵ He later adopted a more positive stance on the survivability of the Provisional Government. In the substantial and comprehensive report he drafted for the War Cabinet at the end of his stay, he now judged that 'a Bolshevik rising' did not 'appear to be likely'.⁷⁶ He did nevertheless recognise that an

⁷⁴ LHA, Henderson to Roberts, 21 June 1917, Henderson papers, LP/HEN/ 1/31.

⁷⁵ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 15 June 1917, FO 371/3011, ff: 4-6.

⁷⁶ TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.11.

unholy alliance of Bolsheviks, anarchists and other leftist groups represented a seriously disruptive force within the country, preventing the Provisional Government from achieving that degree of political and economic stability which could secure its long term future and, most importantly, revive its military commitment to the war.

Significantly though, he took the view that the chronic disorder he witnessed in Russia could not be attributed solely to the pernicious activities of extremist groups. The revolution had been hampered by decades of poor government under the Tsars, without whose symbolic leadership 'the Russian State fabric' had simply disintegrated, he believed. Had there been 'a tradition of diligent and honest administration the Central Authority [of the revolution] would have at once a solid basis and an effective machine through which to work.'⁷⁷ In recommending a course of action to the War Cabinet, Henderson conceded that it would not be easy to 'help Russia because her chief trial to-day is anarchy, which no amount of foreign sympathy advice will mitigate or restrain.'⁷⁸ But if he believed that Allied governments could do little to influence events in Russia, what made him believe that Allied socialists, through the Stockholm conference, could do anything more? Governments could after all provide sustained material as well as moral resources on a scale that mere political parties could not. Meeting briefly outside Russia's borders, those socialists willing or able to attend the conference could in theory endorse this or that political view current in Petrograd. In practice, the divisions between them would almost certainly prevent any clear message emerging.⁷⁹ Even the language in which disputes would be aired by the Stockholm

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6. Henderson's perceptions in this regard have been endorsed by historians, see for example, Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London, 1997), pp: 359-360.

⁷⁸ TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.10.

⁷⁹ Kirby, *Historical Journal*, pp: 709-716.

delegates, Henderson seems to have believed, would be alien to the distant Russian masses.⁸⁰

Henderson never satisfactorily answered the all-important question as to how exactly Stockholm could preserve the Provisional Government from the various threats of Bolshevism, anarchy or counter-revolution, nor did he ever pose this question in such specific terms. Once back in Britain he repeatedly referred in a general way to the problems in Russia, but the one issue he highlighted above all others was the propaganda deployed by 'extremists' against the supposedly self serving nature of Allied war aims. He had clearly been shocked on his arrival in Russia by the 'slandorous statements....freely published against Great Britain....'⁸¹ As we shall see, one of the principal arguments he would later use in favour of Stockholm was that the conference would provide an opportunity for British labour to refute these slanders. After the fall of the Provisional Government he would suggest that 'the suspicion, fostered by the extremists who have usurped power, that we are fighting for imperialistic ends.....is responsible for the downfall of Kerensky and for the rise of the Bolsheviks.' He went on to argue, as he had done earlier, that had 'the Russian people' realised that the Allies were 'not seeking to prolong the war for ends inconsistent with the principles of the Revolution.....' they would have resumed 'the struggle with us for victory of the ideals of democracy.'⁸²

⁸⁰ 'It must always be borne in mind that political discussion in Russia is conducted in a western terminology which has only a token value to the ordinary Russian.', TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.7.

⁸¹ LHA, Henderson to Ralph Raine, 19 June 1917, Henderson papers, LP/ HEN/1/29.

⁸² *The Herald*, 8 December 1917, p.5; for similar statements on the willingness of Russians to fight for war aims they recognised as just, see *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1917, p.5 and *The Times*, 25 July 1917, p.6.

One point that Henderson was clearly making in December, however, was that if the War Cabinet had listened to these arguments in August, and not effectively prevented the Stockholm conference, this catastrophe may not have occurred. This is clearly a less than credible judgement. The idea that 'the Russian people' would have been greatly affected by what were bound to be at Stockholm rather abstract opinions on the nature of the war is unconvincing. It takes no account either of all the other issues on which Russian 'moderates' and 'extremists' disagreed. It must also be noted that in December, unlike in August, Henderson was freely voicing his own suspicions as to the true nature of Allied war aims. All this has led to a confusion we see clearly stated in Hamilton's account of the Stockholm episode: that between the wider political and ideological struggle within the revolution and the narrower question of Russia's participation in the war.⁸³ Henderson had been sent to Petrograd principally to keep Russia in the war. The survival or otherwise of Russian democracy was for Allied governments a matter of secondary concern. When persuading his party in favour of Stockholm Henderson could appeal to both concerns. Inducing Russia into renewed commitment to the war had obvious appeal to 'patriots', whilst the survival of the new post-tsarist Russian democracy appealed to 'patriots' and 'pacifist' alike.

Following his return to Britain, none of the ideas Henderson articulated on the relationship between Allied war aims and the survivability of the democratic revolution bore much resemblance to those he had provided to the War Cabinet before his departure from Russia. It is clear however from these earlier comments that he knew what the 'moderate' socialists he championed wanted from Stockholm. At the centre of *their* conception was the hope that the conference would generate a powerful, co-ordinated and irresistible campaign by

⁸³ Note her comment that Henderson came to believe that Stockholm 'would be the sole means of holding Russian democracy together' *and* 'the sole chance of keeping Russia in the war.', Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.133.

the world's oppressed classes which would force the warring imperialists into concluding a negotiated peace. Henderson would doubtless have realised that this hope was chimerical and that his own party would anyway refuse to align itself with any such campaign. As we have suggested, this remained amongst the most powerful impediments to committing himself to the conference.

Confirmation that this impediment remained strong can be found in his concluding mission statement to the War Cabinet, in which he refers to an interview with Tsereteli towards the end of his stay. 'When I pressed the idea of an Allied Socialist Conference in London,' Henderson writes, 'he showed little interest in the proposal.' His real interest was 'to have the Stockholm Conference before the meeting of the Allied Governments.' This was the policy, continues Henderson, of the Menshevik group, 'which is to bring pressure from within to bear upon all Governments the direction of a general renunciation of Imperialist aims.'⁸⁴ This encounter was clearly an echo of the initial confrontation of the two men several weeks earlier in which Henderson had unsuccessfully tried to promote the Allied conference to an unreceptive Tsereteli, whilst Tsereteli had promoted Stockholm to an unresponsive Henderson. Evidently, very little had changed.

We have shown in this chapter that there is practically nothing in the historical record to support the proposition that Henderson changed his mind over Stockholm whilst in Russia, or that he did so as a consequence of his growing awareness that the revolutionary regime was under serious threat, in particular from its Bolshevik opponents. His readiness to score polemical points against Lloyd George in the aftermath of the Leninist coup, whilst it has

⁸⁴ TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152), p.12.

been taken by sympathetic historians as evidence of this awareness, must surely be discounted. His statement at the 10 August conference that his change of mind on Stockholm had occurred in Russia can also be seen, as we have indicated, as a means of achieving an important political goal. Have historians then been too reluctant to challenge Henderson's own subsequent account of events in this instance, despite their inability to find convincing corroboration of this account from the available sources? Or have they failed to examine and interpret these sources in a sufficiently diligent manner?

The answer would seem to be a bit of both. Two rather remarkable historiographical failures are certainly worth highlighting. The first of these - the failure to note the existence of the governmental conference and Henderson's obvious preference for this over Stockholm as a means to bolster the position of the Provisional Government - we have already mentioned. The second is equally surprising. Of all the documentary evidence available from Henderson's time in Russia the most valuable single item must surely be the lengthy final report Henderson writes for the War Cabinet. It is valuable indeed for a variety of reasons: its length, its scope and its timing. Running to something in the region of 10,000 words it covers in some depth the military, industrial and political circumstances in Russia as Henderson perceives them at the end of his stay.⁸⁵ This document has been cited on several occasions during the course of this chapter, yet not a single reference to it is to be found in any of the studies we have been examining in this thesis.

To conclude this chapter we must move from Russia to Sweden, where we find the first clear demonstration of the support for the Stockholm conference which Henderson would

⁸⁵ Ibid., *passim*.

carry back with him to Britain. He knew as he travelled to Stockholm that an agreement had been reached between the Dutch/Scandinavian committee and the visiting Soviet delegation regarding the holding of the international conference. He was probably aware that an outline agenda had been agreed and that the conference was scheduled to take place on 15 August. He may also have known that an account of the negotiations published in *Izvestiia* on 14 July suggested that the Dutch/Scandinavians had fought to exclude conditions which 'would create difficulties for France and England.'⁸⁶ The involvement in particular of Branting on this agreement would also have been encouraging, since this veteran Swedish socialist was widely known to favour the Allies.⁸⁷

Branting and Huysmans had every incentive when they met with Henderson to present their achievement in reaching agreement with the Russians in the most positive light. Prior to this success the prospects for the conference had not looked good. The governments of France, Italy and the United States had made clear that they would not permit their citizens to attend. The discussions with the visiting socialist delegations had shown little sign of common ground on which to build, leaving some to suggest that the project was doomed.⁸⁸ Britain was the one Allied state which had not yet closed the door on the conference. If Henderson could be persuaded to give his personal backing to Stockholm, and if he could then induce his party to follow suit, this, coming in the wake of the all important agreement with the Russian delegation, would totally transform the situation.

⁸⁶ Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks*, p.638.

⁸⁷ Branting's staunchly pro-Allied views had long been recognised in Britain, as had his efforts in trying to discourage the Russian socialists from any thoughts they may have had of a separate peace, see TNA, Cabinet Papers, Western and General Reports, no.12, 18 April 1917, p.17, CAB 24/146; he was not however uncritical of Allied war aims, see Esmé Howard's report of an article in the Swedish socialist press dated 31 May 1917, TNA, FO 371/3006, fo.47.

⁸⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 'The Stockholm Epilogue', 30 June 1917, p.4.

We do not know what was said at the crucial meeting with Branting and Huysmans. We do know that on the day of the meeting Henderson gave an interview to *The Times* Stockholm correspondent in which he declared himself 'fully convinced of the desirability' of the international conference.⁸⁹ Henderson gives no indication at this point as to *why* he felt the Stockholm conference was desirable. Whether he still shared the War Cabinet view of May and considered the conference as a defensive necessity to prevent the Russian socialists being wooed by the Germans into a desire for a separate peace, or whether he was driven by concerns over the rising threat of Bolshevik extremism, was not revealed. A third alternative motivation - that he had been persuaded by Branting and Huysmans that the time had at last come for a revival of the Socialist International - was, given the context, certainly possible. The beliefs that Mayer attributed to him, probably prematurely, on his arrival in Petrograd could well have been lodged when he left Stockholm six weeks later. It is only on his return to Britain that he begins to explain his surprising conversion to a wartime international conference. Whether his explanations provide full and credible answers to the nature of his conversion we must now go on to investigate.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.5. It is suggested in this report that Henderson had already stated this view in Petrograd, but no reference to such an earlier statement can be found in the British press. Clearly such a significant pronouncement would have been reported by *The Times* correspondent in Petrograd if it had been made public. It is of course possible that the news of the agreement with the Soviet delegates might have encouraged him to make some more positive comments on the conference than hitherto.

Chapter Three

Campaign and Resignation

The eighteen days between his return to Britain on 24 July and his resignation from the War Cabinet on 11 August constitute a critical episode in Henderson's (and by extension, the Labour party's) war. The currently accepted interpretation of this short but highly significant period is uncomplicated. Henderson returned from Russia firmly convinced of the need for British labour's attendance at Stockholm and devoted himself throughout these eighteen days to securing this outcome. Henderson's conviction on this matter has been seen as sufficiently powerful to ensure that he would not be deflected by the wide ranging opposition to his plans from the Cabinet, parts of his party, and most of the press. His character was such that once convinced that a course of action was justified and correct he would stubbornly pursue it until the bitter end. This facet of Henderson's nature had been commented upon approvingly by Clynes at the 1917 annual party conference and is cited by both Hamilton and Wrigley in their biographies.¹ Hamilton in particular perceives Henderson as pursuing his campaign not only stubbornly, but consistently and transparently as well.²

¹ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson: A Biography* (London, 1938), p.144; Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990), p.113.

² Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 134-162, this was a view shared at the time by some of Henderson's contemporary supporters, LSE Digital Library, Beatrice Webb Diary, pp: 51-52, entry for 13 August 1917,

Hamilton's articulation of the standard account again leads the way, portraying this period in essentially linear terms, during which neither Henderson's objective nor the means by which he pursued it were in any significant way modified. It will be argued in this chapter however that this perceived linearity is not easy to sustain. During the course of his Stockholm campaign Henderson actually faced obstacles and opportunities that he evaded or exploited in a manner that involved not only tactical changes in the pursuance of his objectives, but ultimately also in significant tailoring of these goals. Henderson may well have shown a stubborn determination to pursue some kind of end result; questions can be raised however as to precisely what this was.

This chapter will argue that Henderson's essential objective was not as presented in standard accounts. Careful examination of these eighteen days will suggest that the conviction he is believed to have held that British attendance at Stockholm was vital to the beleaguered Russian revolution is far from the explanatory key to his actions it is supposed. Going to Stockholm, for whatever reason, may initially have seemed to him desirable, but ultimately what mattered to him most was securing the vote at the 10 August special conference. What finally gives these eighteen days their coherence is Henderson's determination to open up the possibility of an ongoing involvement for the Labour party with the ambitions of Branting and Huysmans for a revived Socialist International. As for the supposed transparency with which he conducted his campaign, this notion can only be sustained in as far as the charges of deception levelled by Lloyd George can be dismissed. Contrary to the prevailing judgements of the standard account, it will be argued here that these charges are in fact difficult to refute.

Henderson made clear in his 17 July interview his conviction that the Stockholm conference was 'desirable'. He had plenty of time during the slow journey home to consider how best he could achieve British involvement in the venture.³ Clearly there would be difficulties. He would have to campaign on three separate fronts: firstly, he needed to persuade his party to attend; secondly to ensure that the War Cabinet would sanction British attendance; and thirdly, to prevent the conference organisers imposing conditions that his party, or he personally, could not accept. Not only would he have to campaign in these distinct areas, he would also need to achieve success in all three. Failure in any one would be sufficient to scupper the project. There were dangers too that difficulties and doubts in any one of these areas would impact on the possibilities of progress in the others. Continuing uncertainties as to the conditions of attendance could for example provide fuel to those in the Labour party reluctant to go to Stockholm on any terms, as would signs of opposition within government.

In his Stockholm interview Henderson made specific reference to some of these potential problems. He singled out three particular difficulties which would need to be overcome. The first of these concerned representation at the conference. The basis on which national sections had appointed delegates to pre-war conferences of the International, he argued, were no longer appropriate, partly because these would fail to afford adequate representation to two of the most important delegations, the Russians and the Americans, and partly because in the British case, the old rules would ensure that the minority would 'be gravely over-represented'. This latter point had emerged as a matter of concern to British 'patriots' during earlier discussions on the proposed Allied socialist conference in Paris, and would do so again at the 10 August conference in London.

³ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.134.

A second concern was 'the binding or semi-binding character' that the Russian delegates sought to attach to conference resolutions. Although this would eventually persuade him that British attendance could not be considered, Henderson was confident at this point that the Russians would 'modify their attitude' when they realized that not to do so would exclude from the conference 'the majority of.....influential leaders of working-class opinion throughout the world.'

His third issue stemmed from the belief, shared by Branting, that the conference should be attended by the most prominent leaders of the Entente socialists. Since many of these had become members of their respective government, some arrangement 'involving perhaps temporary relinquishment of their offices' could be required to enable them to attend. What is curious about this observation however is that it makes no reference to the widely known fact that the governments of France, Italy and the United States had already declared that they would permit none of their citizens, let alone Cabinet ministers, to attend the conference.⁴ This omission could perhaps be explained by Henderson's continuing belief (or hope) that the War Cabinet might still see advantages in allowing British labour to go to Stockholm, and could conceivably induce Allied governments to follow suit.⁵

The selection of issues Henderson chose to highlight at this stage clearly anticipates the problems he would later face. However the manner in which these difficulties would present themselves and the means by which he would be able (or unable) to overcome

⁴ The American government had announced its intention to refuse passports on 22 May, the French and Italians followed suit in early June, Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace* (Stanford, 1969), p.62.

⁵ For Henderson's 17 July interview, see *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.5.

them obviously remained very uncertain. In grappling with these uncertainties he was increasingly required to improvise solutions, which took his campaign in unanticipated directions. It is the striking improvisatory nature of his actions that will be highlighted in the pages below. In drawing attention to these complex tergiversations we will hopefully provide a fuller and more compelling account of these extraordinary days than has been offered in earlier studies.

Once back in London, Henderson's first moves in the accomplishment of his goals were directed at his party. Meeting senior figures on 24 July he discussed with them matters to be raised within the NEC the following day, and no doubt elaborated on the content of his Stockholm interview which had appeared in the press that morning. He gave a further interview the same day, outlining his views on the deteriorating situation in Russia. In this interview he repeated many of the observations he had made earlier in Petrograd, pointing out that even the moderate socialists in Russia were suspicious of Allied war aims, and critical too of the majority Allied socialists who continued to back their imperialist governments. Their full commitment to the war would be dependent on modifications of these imperialist aims, which they urged the Allied socialists to promote.⁶ The moderate socialists were however vital to Russian stability, forming as they did the democratic majority within the All-Russian soviet which had supported and would continue to support the Provisional Government. Noting their anxiety to see *both* the Stockholm and Allied government conferences convened, Henderson doubted that they would 'give of their best for the successful prosecution of the war' should these conferences be denied them.⁷

⁶ Compare the interviews published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 5 July 1917, p.5 and 25 July 1917, p.5; the later interview, differently edited, also appears in *The Times*, 25 July 1917, p.6.

⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 July 1917, p.5.

When the NEC met the following morning Henderson briefed members on his consultations with Russian soviet leaders, his talks with Branting, and his further conversations with four Russian delegates from Petrograd, who had accompanied him on the journey to London and who were intending to meet with European Allied socialists in the hope of securing their presence in Stockholm. He made clear his own view that the Labour party should itself be present and he proposed that a special conference should be convened to consider this. Despite objections from the more determined 'patriots' he won the assent of the committee. Winter attributes his success in this forum to Henderson's unparalleled prestige within the party, a judgment which need not be contested.⁸ Another important factor however was his direct experience of Russian events, not shared by other committee members, which allowed him to present the situation in Petrograd in a manner that could not easily be challenged by his opponents. The presence of the four soviet delegates who joined the meeting for part of the discussion may also have been of some assistance.⁹

Much of the ensuing conversation centred on the scheduling of the three conferences now envisaged. The Stockholm organisers had proposed 15 August for the opening of their conference and the Russians were reluctant to change this. For Henderson however it was essential that both the special party conference to sanction attendance at Stockholm and the long proposed Allied socialist conference should first take place. His idea was that the Allied socialists should meet first, that the decisions reached at this gathering would be reviewed by the special conference, which would then be enabled to take an informed

⁸ J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), p.767.

⁹ LHA, NEC mins, 25 July 1917; Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.136.

decision on whether or not to go on to Stockholm. Unable to persuade the Russians to allow more time for all this conferring, the NEC decided it had no option but to call the Allied conference for 8th and 9th August, immediately prior to the special conference on the 10th.

Further discussion took place over whether at the special conference the executive should itself recommend attendance at Stockholm. A proposal that any decision on this should be deferred was rejected in favour of a motion in support of a positive recommendation. Two further significant decisions were also taken at this meeting. Firstly in response to an invitation from the SFIO, the executive appointed a delegation comprising Henderson, MacDonald and Wardle to travel to Paris to join scheduled meetings between French and Russian socialists to settle remaining questions relating to the Stockholm process. The three British delegates to Paris were instructed to form on their return a wider sub-committee, to which would be added Jowett, Roberts and Sidney Webb, charged with drafting a report for presentation to the 10 August special conference.¹⁰

Henderson had achieved a great deal in the mere forty eight hours he had been back in Britain. The Stockholm ball was well and truly rolling and he must have been pleased with this initial success. From this point however difficulties and complications were quick to arise. Between 27 July and 10 August he faced a succession of hurdles, and much ingenuity, as well as the customary determination, was required to keep his effort on track. Broadly speaking this period falls into three separate phases, the first of which involves the Labour delegation's trip to Paris and the negative consequences this generated back in London. This was followed by a sort of interregnum in which Henderson was required to wait for the

¹⁰ LHA, NEC mins, 25 July 1917.

inevitable formal decision on the part of the War Cabinet to debar a Labour delegation from travelling to Stockholm. The third phase constitutes Henderson's peculiar perseverance in a campaign which to all appearances was already lost.

Paris and its Consequences

The visit of the three labour delegates to Paris during the weekend following this meeting provides a perfect demonstration of the negative impacts that setbacks in one (or in this case two) areas could have on success in another. If Henderson could be pleased with his progress on 25 July, on his return to London a week later he faced major problems in relation both to the Russian socialists and the War Cabinet. The Stockholm venture now appeared highly controversial in British politics, giving encouragement to his labour opponents.

The meetings in Paris proved for the most part disappointing for Henderson. He could take some comfort at least over the agreement of the French, and more reluctantly the Russians, to attend the Allied socialist conference in London to which he attached great importance.¹¹ With the help of the French he was able to persuade the Russians to loosen the excessively tight timetable for the successive conferences. Stockholm was now postponed until 9 September and the Allied socialist conference rescheduled for 28th and 29th August. On two of the troublesome questions he had highlighted in his 17 July interview however, he suffered disappointment. On the issues of representation and of the binding or non-binding

¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1917, p.5.

nature of conference resolutions, the British position was opposed by both the French and the Russians.

Opposition from the latter could certainly have been anticipated, but the position of the former may well have come as an unpleasant surprise. For whilst the French had already conceded the point that the Americans and Russians were special cases to whom the pre-war procedures of the ISB could not be applied, and had also allowed that the Italian socialist party, having earlier chosen to detach itself from the Second International, should not thereby be excluded from the conference, they insisted nevertheless that in the case of established members of the International including themselves, the British and the Germans, historic procedures should be retained. Their purpose in this may have been to ensure the exclusion of the various leftist groups within the Zimmerwaldist ISC.¹² The virtual parity in strength between the *majoritaires* and *minoritaires* in Paris also rendered the party unsympathetic to British attempts to disenfranchise their own minorities. In a lengthy submission to the Stockholm organisers (the French government had prevented the party's delegates from travelling in person) the SFIO had insisted on a formula which would ensure that where parties affiliated to the pre-war International had since become divided the separate 'fractions' should retain their rights of representation.¹³ The Russians, whilst unsympathetic to French attempts to exclude the Zimmerwaldists, were perfectly happy with their hosts' proposals regarding the Western minorities. Henderson was obliged to concede on this point.¹⁴

¹² *The Times*, 26 July 1917, p.5.

¹³ LHA, French Socialist Party, Response to Preliminary Enquiries of Stockholm Organising Committee, English translation, p.60.

¹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1917, p.5.

On the question of whether the conference should be 'mandatory' or 'consultative' the French and Russians were again aligned against him. The confidence he had expressed on 17 July that the Russians would eventually defer on this matter seems to have been based on the assumption that the most powerful parties would not agree to be bound by resolutions passed by combinations of their wartime enemies, neutrals and leftist Russians. Again, he may not have anticipated that the French socialists might actually support the Russian position. An alliance of convenience nevertheless emerged to frustrate the British. Whilst the Russians hoped that binding resolutions would force the belligerent socialists into greater efforts for peace, the French sensed an opportunity to confront the Germans. Believing that they rather than their enemies could secure majority support for contentious resolutions on the war, such as its cause, or the justice of returning Alsace-Lorraine to its pre-1870 status, the former *majoritaires* in particular saw the possibility of inflicting serious embarrassment on the SDP, who could face the prospect of being 'bound' by the conference to adopt positions they simply could not accept.¹⁵

On this issue Henderson refused to succumb to the majority. His party, he insisted, could only accept a consultative conference. Disagreement on this point, according to one account, 'almost brought the Paris talks to an abrupt end' as 'Henderson rose from his seat and began gathering up his papers, ready to leave.'¹⁶ A compromise of sorts was finally accepted, though hardly one that would have appealed to Henderson. The communiqué issued by the three parties spoke of 'the future and the action of the International being dependent on the loyalty with which the resolutions passed by the Conference will be

¹⁵ Rex A. Wade, 'Argonauts of Peace: The Soviet Delegation to Western Europe in the Summer of 1917', *Slavic Review*, 26/3 (1967), p.462.

¹⁶ Raphael R. Abramovitch, *The Soviet Revolution: 1917-1939* (London, 1962), p.49.

adhered to' and demanded an undertaking of the national sections that they 'declare definitely at the meeting of the International what effect they intend to give to [conference] decisions.'¹⁷ This hard won formula was ultimately ineffective. It allowed the Russians to maintain that the resolutions at Stockholm would indeed be binding, a view for which they would find further encouragement on the succeeding leg of their European tour in Rome. The Italian socialists, like the French, were in favour of the Soviet position. They and their Russian guests issued a joint statement on 7 August declaring that both parties would accept the decisions of the Stockholm conference as binding.¹⁸

These results of the Paris meetings were clearly for Henderson discouraging. To make matters worse, another significant difficulty had emerged domestically as a consequence of the arrangements he had made for the British delegation's travel to Paris. Following the NEC decision to appoint himself, MacDonald and Wardle as the British delegates, Henderson had arranged transport to France on a naval vessel for the 27th, without having discussed this with the Cabinet. He had in fact missed three successive daily Cabinet meetings, being otherwise engaged on each of these mornings. We have seen that on the 24th and 25th he had been busy with party matters. On the 26th he was invited for an audience with the King in Aldershot.¹⁹ Having been in London since the morning of the 24th, Henderson's only contact with the War Cabinet by the afternoon of the 26th amounted to a telegraphic exchange with Lloyd George, who was himself in Paris attending an inter-Allied conference.

¹⁷ For the full communiqué, see *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1918*, pp:45-46.

¹⁸ Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: the Origin of the Third International* (Stanford, 1940), p.601.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 27 July 1917, p.9.

Henderson's telegram to Lloyd George quickly became a matter of controversy and confusion. Whilst still in France the Prime Minister would acknowledge to the Cabinet in London that he had received a telegram from Henderson regarding his proposal for an Allied socialist conference, but that no mention had been made of the intended visit to Paris.²⁰ Lloyd George had replied approving of the Allied socialist conference and the 'subsequent labour conference to receive report' therefrom, but suspending judgement 'as to later steps' until he could meet with Henderson and discuss 'Russian situation in light of conclusions' of the governmental conference he was currently attending.²¹ This was not however a reply to the telegram Henderson would later claim he had sent. Lloyd George's telegram was despatched on the morning of 25 July only an hour or so after the NEC meeting of that day had begun. Henderson's claim was that he had sent the Prime Minister a telegram informing him of the key decisions of the executive, presumably those including the delegation to Paris, once they had been made.²² But this would have been despatched to Paris after Lloyd George had responded, presumably therefore to an earlier message. The Prime Minister did later recall the telegram Henderson claimed he had sent on the 25th. He admitted also that it had included details of the Labour delegation to Paris, but insisted that it contained nothing about the purposes of the meetings in France.²³

Disputes over telegrams, although indicative of the later mistrust between Henderson and Lloyd George, were not the most important matter Henderson's actions raised at this point. More significant was his tardiness in informing the Cabinet in London of his plans. Hamilton

²⁰ See morning and afternoon sessions of the Cabinet solely devoted to the issues raised by Henderson's actions prior to his departure for Paris, TNA, War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (198a and 199a).

²¹ TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (196a), Appendix.

²² *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, Vol.97, col.911.

²³ *Idem*.

has remarked, correctly up until this point, on Henderson's strong belief in the notion of Cabinet responsibility, particularly in a wartime context.²⁴ If this had remained so in July 1917, how might we have expected him to have acted? Recognising that Stockholm was a matter of great political sensitivity, would he not have seen fit to inform Cabinet members in London through the acting chairman, Bonar Law, of the matters he had telegraphed to Lloyd George? He could easily have explained on the afternoon of the 25th why he had been unable to attend that morning's Cabinet, and why he would be unable to attend the following morning. He could have summarised the Labour resolutions and volunteered to discuss their implications with the Cabinet at a time of mutual convenience. He could also have stressed the imminence of the Paris meetings and the urgency therefore of arranging transport to France. In failing to do any of this he permitted a situation to arise whereby the Cabinet learned only from the Foreign Office on the morning of the 26th that he had already made arrangements for the Labour delegates to travel the next day.²⁵

Clearly perplexed by Henderson's untypical behavior, the Cabinet decided during its morning meeting on the 26th to invite him to provide explanations at a further *ad hoc* meeting that evening. In what clearly involved a number of angry exchanges, ministers at this evening meeting expressed concern over the 'very grave embarrassment' in which the government would be placed once it became known that a member of the War Cabinet had travelled to Paris with the 'pacifist' MacDonald in order to discuss 'questions regarding a Socialist Peace Conference at Stockholm.' They also made plain their more general objections to 'the Stockholm project.' Henderson explained that he was going to Paris in his capacity as Secretary of the Labour party and as a consequence of the decisions taken by

²⁴ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.143.

²⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/3 (196).

the party executive. If his colleagues were dissatisfied with his behaviour they should demand his resignation from the War Cabinet. Ultimately tempers cooled sufficiently for Bonar Law to recognise that with the Prime Minister away, Henderson could neither be asked to resign, nor prevented from travelling to Paris as arranged. On his part, Henderson conceded that even though his experiences in Russia had persuaded him personally of the merits of the Stockholm conference, the government itself was not in any way committed, and the Labour party would itself not decide until 10 August. All agreed that the matter should be fully discussed when Lloyd George and Henderson had returned from Paris.

Despite pulling back slightly at the end of the meeting, Henderson undoubtedly gave the impression of a weakening commitment to his ministerial obligations. As far as can be gleaned from the minutes and his own subsequent statements, he informed the Cabinet that he had become persuaded that it was his 'duty to his country' to go personally to Stockholm, that he had himself encouraged his executive to commit to the conference, and that he now felt politically bound to honour this party decision. He finally warned that if he did not go to Stockholm, he could not see how he could retain his position as Secretary of his party.²⁶ Alongside his challenge to colleagues to demand his resignation, this may have suggested that Henderson was now placing obligations to his party above those to the Cabinet. Whilst such impressions could be attributable to the bad tempered atmosphere in which these remarks were engendered, they could also indicate a change in his attitude towards Cabinet membership already in place *before* he had returned to Britain.

²⁶ TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (196a).

Lloyd George would describe Henderson's behaviour towards Cabinet colleagues at this time as a 'profound blunder'.²⁷ Given that he would have to rely on government acquiescence to succeed in his ambition to go to Stockholm, Henderson's actions could legitimately be seen in this way.²⁸ Why then did he make such an unfortunate error? The most likely explanation centres around the choice the executive made to include MacDonald in the labour delegation to Paris, a choice that Henderson would have known would be particularly controversial.

In May the War Cabinet had judged, with some trepidation, that MacDonald could be considered one of the more responsible members of the Labour minority, and that this made him a suitable and potentially persuasive addition to the largely 'patriotic' delegation to be sent to Russia. By early June however this confidence was eroded, largely as a result of MacDonald's leading role in the infamous Leeds conference of 3 June, at which minority supporters outraged both 'patriotic' labour and the wider nation by praising the Russian revolutionaries' peace programme and by proposing the creation of 'soviets' in Britain itself.²⁹ As a consequence the War Cabinet's original decision came under review on 7 June. Pointing to the unease of Allied governments in allowing minority socialists to travel to Russia or attend the Stockholm conference, Cecil cited fears that 'pacifists' could force Allied governments 'into a premature and unsatisfactory peace.' It was being suggested, he continued, 'that we were paying too high a price and risking too much to support a Government in Russia whose prospects were at best very uncertain, and who were probably unlikely to exercise any further influence on the war.....' The Cabinet decided that they

²⁷ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol.2 (London, 1938), p.1127.

²⁸ In one of his works Wrigley concurs with this judgement, Chris Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: Peace and War* (Hassocks, 1976), p.211.

²⁹ *The Times*, 5 June 1917, p.7.

should 'solicit the views of Henderson in Russia' before reversing, as Cecil recommended, the original decision.³⁰ When Henderson and Buchanan jointly replied that it would be 'a great mistake' to prevent MacDonald travelling, the War Cabinet gave its approval, subject to MacDonald accepting undertakings to stop no longer in Stockholm 'than was absolutely necessary to change trains' and to communicate with nobody there 'except Mr Branting'. Lloyd George would personally secure this undertaking. It was also reaffirmed that minority delegates should be comfortably outnumbered by 'patriots'.³¹

The fallout from Leeds may have dissipated somewhat by the time Henderson returned to Britain. However the epithet 'pro-German' widely attached to MacDonald since the beginning of the war was at this moment about to gain new currency. Unhappy over the fact that the progressively worded resolution on peace terms passed on 19 July by the Berlin Reichstag had been largely ignored or dismissed by the British press, MacDonald had agreed to initiate a Commons debate on this striking initiative. On 26 July therefore MacDonald was to read out to MPs the full Reichstag resolution and to propose that the House of Commons respond in kind.³² This was the day before he was due to travel to Paris with Henderson, who would surely have realised how difficult the Cabinet would find it to permit MacDonald's departure on this mission immediately after he had offended the great majority of MPs on the Conservative, Liberal *and* Labour benches.³³ It is quite possible that this realisation played its part in Henderson's decision to make the delegation's travel arrangements prior to any discussion with the Cabinet.

³⁰ TNA, War Cabinet, 5 June 1917, CAB/23/3 (154).

³¹ TNA, War Cabinet, 7 June 1917, CAB 23/3 (158).

³² David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), p.217.

³³ For the full debate see *Hansard*, H C Debs, 26 July 1917, vol.96, cols: 1479-1590; Bonar Law was amongst those who contributed to the debate; having waited his turn to excoriate MacDonald he arrived late to the War Cabinet meeting he was to chair and to which Henderson had been summoned to explain his position!

We may therefore recognise Henderson's decision less as a blunder than an enforced improvisation, made possible (and necessary) by the twin circumstances of MacDonald's initiative and Lloyd George's absence. Whilst on the one hand the MacDonald situation made it hard to imagine that he could gain the assent of the Cabinet to the latter's inclusion in the Paris delegation, on the other, the absence of the Prime Minister made it possible to adopt a semblance of keeping ministers informed without incurring the risk of a full and difficult conversation with ministers. We cannot now know what Henderson would have done on the 27th had the Cabinet not summoned him the previous day. Perhaps he would have attended Cabinet to inform ministers that he was sailing to Paris that afternoon, trusting that it would by then be too late for the Cabinet to prevent the trip - perhaps not.³⁴ In the event ministers were unable to persuade Henderson into any change of plans even on the 26th, largely it seems because they believed that the Prime Minister had already authorised the arrangements. When it became evident that this was not so, Lloyd George and other senior Cabinet members discussed in a succession of meetings how they should respond to the several serious ramifications of this episode.³⁵ Henderson had succeeded in retaining MacDonald as part of the Paris delegation, but this was at the expense of gravely weakening his standing within the government.

Henderson could of course have avoided this particular problem. It would surely have been within his power to persuade the NEC that the risk of including MacDonald in the Paris

³⁴ Henderson did in fact attend this meeting, although obviously since the issues regarding Paris had been thrashed out the previous evening, there was nothing for him to lose in making what amounted to a routine appearance, TNA, War Cabinet, 27 July 1917, CAB 23/3 (197).

³⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (198a); 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (199a); 1 August, CAB/23/13 (201a).

delegation was under the circumstances too great. Whilst it was expected by both the Russians and French that a 'minority' delegate should be included, there were options in the executive other than MacDonald, for example Jowett. On the other hand MacDonald, by virtue of his seniority in the party and his international reputation, would certainly have been considered by the Russians and the French *minoritaires* as the obvious candidate. One other consideration was the earlier prevention of MacDonald's expected appearance in Petrograd. Given the preconceptions of most Russian socialists regarding the character of imperialist governments, it had been hard to convince them that the block on MacDonald's visit had been solely attributable to a rogue trade union. A further failure to permit him to engage with international socialists would certainly have created a negative effect. Might Henderson have felt that MacDonald's exclusion would have weakened the British position in the vital arguments over the mandatory or consultative nature of the conference and the hoped for adjustments to the system of representation?

Henderson has never provided an answer to this question. At the time he concentrated on denying his own responsibility for MacDonald's inclusion in the delegation. Whilst ready to admit his own major role in the central Stockholm decision, he gave the impression that the selection of MacDonald for Paris had not been made by him personally. He suggested to the Cabinet on 26 July that MacDonald had been imposed on him by the executive, who had decided that the delegation should comprise 'the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary of the Labour Party'. The implication here is that MacDonald was chosen *because* he was party treasurer rather than for any more obvious political reason. Henderson provided no explanation as to why the Executive should have chosen this unusual manner of selecting a delegation to an international meeting. He himself would apparently have been included for

no better reason than that he was party secretary. Earlier in the meeting however he had stated that his own inclusion in the delegation was 'essential' in order 'to ensure that the conditions governing attendance at the Stockholm Conference were satisfactory.'³⁶

Six days later in the House of Commons Henderson began a discussion of the 25 July NEC meeting by stating that 'when our executive met a week ago we had to consider' the invitations to Stockholm and Paris. (emphasis added). In the following sentences, during which the decisions regarding delegates to Paris are discussed, Henderson's 'we' becomes a 'they'. When the invitation to join the delegation was extended to him, he tells MPs, 'I determined to accept it.' One reason he reveals for this acceptance was that his own inclusion would allow him, given the executive's decision to also appoint MacDonald, 'to do what I could if I found him going astray.'³⁷

All of this is wholly unconvincing and must surely be seen as an attempt to shift responsibility for a controversial decision. In reality Henderson was very much in control of the Stockholm process at this time. His decision to sanction if not promote his 'pacifist' colleague's inclusion in the Paris party should surely be seen then as a strategic choice – a judgement, in effect, that it was more important to secure his goals in relation to the French and Russian socialists than to gamble on his ability to persuade the War Cabinet of the continuing case for a British presence at Stockholm. Whilst it was obvious that an unconvinced Cabinet could prevent British attendance, it was no less true that the hopes of persuading his party to accept Stockholm would themselves be dependent on his ability to convert Russian socialists to his views on the conference arrangements.

³⁶ TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (196a).

³⁷ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 1 August 1917, Vol.96, cc: 2191, 2193.

The handling of this episode in standard accounts has been generally inadequate. Neither Winter nor Bridgen directly consider the issue. In the three biographies the 26 July Cabinet confrontation is mentioned, but treated in terms of a strong disagreement between Conservative ministers and Henderson on the merits of Stockholm rather than as a perceived dereliction of duty on the latter's part in failing to keep his colleagues properly informed.³⁸ The biographers have generally accepted Henderson's subsequent defence on this count, delivered to the House of Commons following his resignation. Yet this defence is clearly evasive. Henderson accuses ministers of having intimated 'that the whole of the arrangements for my going to Paris were done without their knowledge.' This, he declares, was factually incorrect. His telegram to Lloyd George on the 25th and the 'special meeting of the Cabinet' the following day informed ministers of his plans. No reference is made to the fact that the 'special meeting' had been called precisely because ministers had by then learned that Henderson had already booked the delegation's passage to Paris very much 'without their knowledge'.³⁹ Fortunately perhaps, Bonar law chose not to make this point.

Before moving on to the events following his return from Paris, we must consider a little further a point made above. If we are to conclude that Henderson *was* adopting in the pre-Paris period an approach towards his Cabinet responsibilities very different to that he had maintained over the previous two years, this has unavoidable implications regarding our interpretation of the more significant dispute with the Cabinet a fortnight later. The relative neglect by historians of this first dispute with the Cabinet, alongside a tendency to take

³⁸ See especially Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 136-137; also F. M. Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), p.66 and Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.117. Wrigley does not repeat his endorsement of Lloyd George's 'profound blunder' comment in the biography.

³⁹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.911.

Henderson's explanations too uncritically, may have permitted the taking of a similarly defensive view to in relation to the graver circumstances leading to his resignation.

The events of 1 August, the day of Henderson's return from Paris, have been amply covered by historians. At a private meeting between Lloyd George and Henderson in the morning the Prime Minister 'could not disguise the unpleasant character of the situation' his colleague had created, whilst Henderson responded with a 'full' and 'faithful' statement of his 'personal position'.⁴⁰ Disagreeing on substantive matters they resolved to continue the conversation at a meeting of the Cabinet that afternoon. This led to the memorable 'doormat' incident, when Henderson arrived at the scheduled time only to be asked to wait outside the Cabinet room whilst other ministers discussed the issues his actions had raised. Although Lloyd George maintained that Henderson's hour long wait in the antechamber had been intended 'to spare him personal unpleasantness', it is easy to imagine that the Prime Minister and his senior colleagues had another purpose in mind.⁴¹ This is evident from the minutes of the recent Cabinet meetings at which the situation had been repeatedly discussed.

These discussions had taken place against a background of serious criticism in parliament and the press as to how it was that the government had permitted Henderson and MacDonald to travel to France in 'a Government transport' to discuss a conference of which the bulk of the nation disapproved.⁴² The embarrassment this caused was not however the sole or most serious problem. The fact that Henderson had 'acquiesced in, if not advocated'

⁴⁰ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p.1128; *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.913.

⁴¹ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, pp:1128-1129.

⁴² War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (198a).

the decision of the Labour executive to attend Stockholm was itself a major concern. The government's position in regard to the conference was 'gravely compromised' by a member of the War Cabinet taking this position, even if he was acting in his capacity of Labour secretary. Senior trade unionists may have believed that Henderson's advocacy of Stockholm 'implied consent on the part of the Government.'⁴³ It was further suggested that the processes initiated by the NEC could provide opportunities for 'Pacifist organisations' to influence events unfavourably, perhaps leading to an Allied socialist agreement to attend Stockholm, from which the British party would find it difficult to demur. The presence of Allied socialists at a Stockholm conference could ultimately create a situation in which 'the making of peace might be taken, to a great extent, out of the control of governments.' Ministers recognised that they could prevent this outcome by refusing to grant passports to appointed delegates, but were reluctant to be forced into a position which could damage hitherto good relations with the Labour movement.⁴⁴

It was also agreed that if Henderson were to persevere in his promotion of Stockholm it was 'difficult to see' how he could remain in the government. At the same time however the Cabinet feared that a resignation over the issue on his part would have negative consequences in relation both to Russia and the domestic labour situation. It was clear too that Henderson's contribution to the war effort over a long period in government had been very valuable. It was also thought possible that his recent lapse in judgement could be partially explained by a lack of awareness that the War Cabinet now viewed the Russian situation as significantly changed since May, when they had reluctantly contemplated British attendance at Stockholm. For these reasons it was considered important to take no action in

⁴³ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/13 (201a).

⁴⁴ TNA, War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (199a).

relation to Henderson until he had been given the chance to discuss the situation with Lloyd George.⁴⁵

The 'doormat' incident and the apparent reconciliation within Cabinet which immediately followed can be readily understood in terms of the conflicting concerns highlighted above. The humiliation inflicted by the former was one way of demonstrating to Henderson how seriously colleagues had viewed his earlier behaviour; once he had been admitted and allowed to register his protest at being excluded from the Cabinet room, an atmosphere of restored harmony was encouraged, demonstrating the readiness of ministers to put the matter behind them in the hope that Henderson would revert to type and ultimately support whatever position the government would take on the Stockholm issue.

To cement this restored harmony Henderson was asked to make a statement to the House of Commons, where MPs were still demanding explanations of recent events. Ministers agreed that he could dispose of some of the expected criticism by stressing that the difficulties had arisen as a consequence of his dual role as Labour party secretary and government minister. He could admit that whilst on this occasion misunderstandings had been entailed, on balance this arrangement possessed great advantages. This, it could be added, was clearly the opinion of other Allied governments, who adopted similar practices regarding the inclusion of labour leaders in their administrations. As for MacDonald, as party treasurer he could not simply be excluded from party business. The two men had been obliged to work together throughout the war without illusions as to their conflicting views. 'By taking some such line as this, and by combining it with a strong war speech,' the Cabinet

⁴⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/13 (201a).

concluded, Henderson 'should succeed in satisfying the House of Commons.'⁴⁶ Henderson then addressed the House that evening very much along these lines, after which Lloyd George also asserted that his colleague's dual role as Cabinet minister and leader of the Labour party had been of great benefit to the government. As for the Stockholm conference, the government was by no means committed to British attendance but would continue to discuss the matter before stating its final position.⁴⁷

Waiting for Lloyd George

By the morning of 2 August then the initial crisis was to some extent defused. This, as it happens, was the precise mid-point in the period between Henderson's return to London and his departure from the Cabinet. It will be useful therefore to consider how matters stood in relation to his campaign at this juncture. The position in the Cabinet now assumed a superficial normality. At the same time however a formal decision on Stockholm had still to be taken. Henderson clearly expected this to be reached sooner rather than later.⁴⁸ Nor could he have had much doubt as to the nature of this final decision. In the meetings of both 26 July and 1 August it had been plain that ministers were opposed to British attendance. Significantly, Allied governments had by now been informed of that fact.⁴⁹ On 2 August Bonar Law told the Commons that although the government had not yet formally

⁴⁶ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202).

⁴⁷ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 1 August 1917, vol.96, cc:2182-2286.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, col. 914.

⁴⁹ TNA, War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (199a).

decided on Stockholm, permission to attend would not be given without 'the most careful consideration' and 'probably not at all'.⁵⁰

But if Henderson could be all but certain regarding the views on Stockholm of his colleagues, they in their turn remained in some doubt as to his position. In his address to parliament on 1 August Henderson had explained why he had come to believe *whilst in Russia* that it would be to the Allies advantage to allow socialists to attend the conference. Though as requested he had sounded a firm 'patriotic' note during his statement, he fell short of any clear declaration that his opinions had since changed. He did not suggest either that his views remained the same. He neither confirmed nor denied that it remained his intention to urge his party to vote in favour of Stockholm. He did however make remarks concerning his party's traditional 'ideals' and the need for a peace settlement which would meet with 'the approval of the common people' which showed continuing sympathy to the internationalist cause.⁵¹ The remaining uncertainty clearly concerned some ministers, who wished to see matters brought speedily to a head through a swift and unequivocal statement of the Cabinet's view. Lloyd George, on the other hand, evidently preferred to delay a potential confrontation which he presumably feared could needlessly damage the government's sensitive relations with Labour.⁵²

In relation to the Cabinet then, Henderson was obliged to play a waiting game. In relation to Allied socialists there was nothing he could do to reverse the agreements reached in Paris. But what now were his prospects as regards his own party? These it seemed were decidedly

⁵⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 August 1917, p.5.

⁵¹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 1 August 1917, vol.96, col. 2196.

⁵² George H. Cassar, *Lloyd George at War, 1916-1918* (London, 2011), pp: 51-52.

mixed. There were certainly signs that the controversy surrounding the Paris expedition had encouraged Labour opponents of Stockholm to raise their voices. On the morning of his return from France Henderson would have seen in *The Times* a demand from the leader of the BWL that the government should insist on his resignation. In Fisher's view Henderson was guilty of a 'gross impropriety' in failing to consult either with the War Cabinet or with his Labour colleagues in the government before setting off to Paris to discuss the Stockholm conference. Reminding readers that Henderson had formerly been a member of the UDC, and doubting how completely he had since severed himself from these earlier 'pacifist' connections, Fisher went on to state that in endeavouring to lead his party into 'treasonable negotiations for peace with enemy delegates' Henderson had brought about the gravest political crisis to confront the nation since the outbreak of war. He urged labour 'patriots' to stand firm against their 'erratic colleague'.⁵³

There was evidence that Labour 'patriots' were already doing just this. Alongside Fisher's diatribe in *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* reported the same morning on a meeting of Labour members of the government. Observing that 'great opposition' to Henderson's Stockholm proposal had been evident at the gathering, the *Mail* noted the determination of 'the strongest of the Labour Ministers not to follow this line.' It was also stated that the ministers had not been consulted and 'did not know of the Paris visit with.....MacDonald until the arrangements were complete.'⁵⁴ The several ministers who were members of the NEC and who had attended the 25 July meeting could not of course legitimately have made this final claim. It was nevertheless suggested several days later that Henderson had only succeeded in securing his resolution in the NEC by a narrow margin, which he achieved

⁵³ *The Times*, 1 August 1917, p.7.

⁵⁴ *Daily Mail*, 1 August 1917, p.3.

when two of his opponents, Roberts and Clynes, had been drawn away by business in the House of Commons.⁵⁵

However little his opponents liked it however, a Stockholm momentum was now gathering within the party. Affiliated bodies were beginning to state their views.⁵⁶ The matter would of course be settled by the block votes of the unions, and in the following days many of these were ready to declare their intentions. It soon became clear that the numbers on either side remained close. We might imagine in the light of this that Henderson would have been keen to influence this nationwide debate. In fact, he chose to remain silent, making no further public statement on the matter until the moment he addressed the 10 August conference. No doubt his earlier difficulties with the Cabinet played a major part in this decision to withhold his council. Any statement designed to persuade the nation's trade unionists in favour of Stockholm would inevitably have reignited the carefully doused Cabinet crisis. Anyway, the outlines of his pro-Stockholm position, as articulated in the period before Paris and in the parliamentary address on his return, were already well understood. It was also the case however that the political difficulties surrounding the question left room for uncertainty as to his present or future intentions. In retaining his silence he simply allowed this uncertainty to grow.

A further reason for Henderson's silence may be added. The failure of the Paris meetings to provide satisfactory solutions to the problems of the mandatory or consultative nature of the Stockholm conference and the issue of representation was not something to which he

⁵⁵ The charge was made by one of Henderson's most forthright opponents, J. A. Seddon, Chairman of the TUC between 1913 and 1915 and formerly a Labour MP, *Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1917, p.4.

⁵⁶ Note the concern of the War Cabinet over the narrow decision of the union of textile workers to support Henderson's proposals, TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202).

would have wished to draw attention. Personal engagement in the ongoing Stockholm debate could all too easily have obliged him to address these matters and all too easily as a consequence provided weapons to his labour opponents. We may also note one very curious aspect of this policy of silence: it extended beyond personal statements by Henderson himself to matters of practical communications between the party and its affiliates. This was to generate a quite remarkable state of confusion.

One of the decisions taken in Paris was to postpone the Allied socialist conference scheduled for 8 and 9 August to later in the month. But this information appears not to have been formally passed on. Discussions surrounding Stockholm continued to assume that the inter-Allied conference was taking place on the originally scheduled dates. The political and the labour correspondents of the *Manchester Guardian* reported on consecutive days prior to the 8th that the Allied conference was taking place as planned.⁵⁷ An editorial in *The Times* of 7 August still spoke of 'Labour and Socialist organizations of Allied countries' meeting prior to the British conference on the 10th.⁵⁸ If journalists of the national press remained unaware of this significant change in the party timetable, the political and trade union leaders with whom they were daily conversing must presumably have shared their ignorance.

The silence of the party leadership on this deferment, though undoubtedly odd, also had political significance. The original process established on 25 July had envisaged the inter-

⁵⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1917, p.4 and 7 August 1917, p.5.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 7 August, 1917, p.7; some of this must be put down to sloppy reporting: the paper's own parliamentary correspondent had reported three days earlier that the date of the Allied socialist conference had been changed, *The Times*, 4 August, p.6; similarly the *Manchester Guardian* had included a *Reuters* report of the agreements reached at the Paris meetings, which included the revised dates for the inter-Allied conference, on 1 August, p.4.

Allied conference taking place immediately prior to the 10 August special conference and its outcomes being germane to the decision on Stockholm which would be taken by the British party.⁵⁹ It came then as a considerable surprise when, at some point on 7 August, it was generally realised that there was to be no Allied conference the next day. The significance of this change was immediately recognised. The *Daily Mail* portrayed the postponement of the Allied gathering as representing a 'sudden and dramatic change.....in the arrangements for taking a Labour vote on the.....Stockholm proposal.'⁶⁰ The *Manchester Guardian* similarly declared that the situation had been 'materially changed'. It was now 'by no means impossible or unlikely that the Labour Party Conference will adjourn consideration of the whole thing until the Allied Socialists' Conference has met.'⁶¹ The *Times* agreed that the Labour party might well now choose to postpone its decision on Stockholm, pointing out that there would be 'ample time' between the end of the Allied socialist conference on 29 August and the commencement of the full international conference 9 September for the party to meet and decide 'in the light of the proceedings' of the first of these conferences whether it would go to the second.⁶²

Unsurprisingly, rumours regarding Henderson's position on this new found opportunity for delay began to circulate. Although he himself continued to maintain silence, information received 'from a quarter in close touch with Mr Henderson' suggested that he may have been 'modifying very greatly his attitude towards the Stockholm conference.'⁶³ This widespread press speculation as to Henderson's intentions clearly casts doubt on the claim

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 26 July, 1917, p.6.

⁶⁰ *Daily Mail*, 8 August 1917, p.3.

⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 August 1917, p.5.

⁶² *The Times*, 9 August 1917, p.7.

⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1917, p.5.

forcefully made by Hamilton that by the time of the critical 8 August Cabinet meeting 'Henderson's attitude was known; by now even familiar.'⁶⁴ This was a judgement of pivotal importance in the claims and counter-claims which would surround the proceedings of that meeting.

Meanwhile, there was little sign during the early days of August that the wider difficulties facing the Stockholm venture were easing. The Soviet delegates, continuing their European tour, still insisted that participants at the conference would be expected 'to give an undertaking to carry into effect, without any hesitation and without any deviation, the decisions arrived at.'⁶⁵ In an increasingly desperate attempt to bridge the gap between the British and Russians on this question, the Dutch/Scandinavian committee revealed a complicated procedure by which parties in dispute would have their separate cases scrutinised by a committee comprising delegates from all participating parties with a view to constructing a generally acceptable position, which would *then* be binding on all. Should an acceptable compromise not be achievable the question at issue would be referred back to the various nationalities for further discussion 'with a view to possible future conferences until unanimity is attained.'⁶⁶ This proposal was not even raised by Henderson on 10 August; nor was the formula devised in Paris almost a week earlier. He told delegates instead that as things now stood the condition for British attendance at Stockholm had not been met, and that neither he nor the party executive would contemplate going to the conference under unacceptable terms.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.144.

⁶⁵ *Daily Mail*, 3 August 1917, p.3.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 7 August 1917, p.7.

⁶⁷ Peter Stansky, ed., *The Left and War: The British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), pp: 226-227.

Further problems arose over another matter to which Henderson had attached great importance. In the interview he gave in Stockholm on 17 July he stated that 'the Labour and Socialist parties of all Entente countries, including America' should be 'fully represented'. There was already serious doubt at this time as to whether Belgian socialists would agree to attend the conference, and the American position was also unclear. Ensuring sufficient time for the American Federation of Labour to dispatch a delegation to Stockholm was a major reason behind Henderson's desire to have the conference postponed.⁶⁸ News from the United States however dashed his hopes. In language that was far from helpful to his cause, the President of the AFL, Samuel Gompers, brusquely rejected the invitation. Arguing that since the working people of the United States, Great Britain and France were 'doing all in their power to aid in the war against autocracy' whilst German workers were helping 'the Kaiser to win the war', Gompers declared on 4 August that in his opinion an international labour conference was 'impractical and positively injurious.'⁶⁹ He reaffirmed a few days later that no representative of the AFL would 'go officially to Stockholm.....even if Britain and France send delegates.'⁷⁰

Also, as Henderson discovered whilst in Paris, the French party too was again bitterly divided on its approach to Stockholm. Former *majoritaires*, whilst accepting the party's earlier decision to attend the conference, were now contriving to scupper it at the earliest opportunity. As Thomas would explain to his parliamentary constituents, he would go to Stockholm with the sole purpose of delivering a *démarche* to the enemy socialists. The case

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.138.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 6 August 1917, p.7.

⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 August 1917, p.5.

for German responsibility for the outbreak of war would be put at the opening of the conference, after which the French delegates would at once return home 'if the German majority were not immediately disavowed.....by the Internationale.'⁷¹

Added to these international disappointments were continuing indications of dissent on the part of senior Labour figures in Britain. For the more traditional trade union leaders of 'patriotic' labour, Fisher's insinuation that Henderson had all along been a closet 'pacifist' was generally a step too far. Nevertheless personal criticism of a more or less veiled nature was directed towards the embattled party Secretary during the following days. Charles Bowerman, Secretary to the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC and Labour MP, whilst objecting to the calling of a conference at a time when Labour efforts would be better employed in encouraging the military campaign, pointedly added that he 'did not wish to pass any reflection upon any member of his own party, but he did resent certain things that had been said and done at a time when the nation was in death grips with a powerful opponent.'⁷²

Henderson had won round the NEC on 25 July, but he failed to gain the backing of the party's other main bodies. The smaller of the two main union groupings, the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), declared its opposition to the NEC resolution on 2 August.⁷³ The Parliamentary Committee of the larger TUC did at least, after protracted debate, decline to follow the GFTU, postponing its final decision on Stockholm to the

⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1917, p.5.

⁷² *The Times*, 6 August 1917, p.7.

⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 August 1917, p.5.

forthcoming annual congress in September.⁷⁴ Labour MPs constituted another focus of firm opposition, with a significant majority hostile to Henderson's plans. The PLP formally raised its objection to the actions of the NEC, giving rise to a tense discussion within the executive as to what should be the proper relationship between the two bodies regarding the formulation of the party's international policy.⁷⁵

Little joy was offered to the parliamentarians in this debate and resentment on the part of the PLP over these proceedings remained strong. Speaking at a second labour conference on the Stockholm question on 21 August, Will Thorne, MP, complained that as far as he could remember Henderson 'had never said a single word to the Parliamentary Party as to his views and what he proposed to do' following his return from Russia. This was a clear break, he observed, with 'the usual practice' of consulting the PLP on important questions. Thorne's notion of what had been usual practice appears correct, certainly during the first three years of the war. On the decisions to join both Asquith's and Lloyd George's coalitions and on the formulation of party policy regarding conscription, joint meetings of the NEC and PLP had been instrumental. Why then did Henderson choose to deny Labour MPs their customary say on the Stockholm question? Given the views of the bulk of the parliamentary party, Thorne's answer to this question was fairly obvious. If there had been a joint conference, he claimed, 'it was very questionable' as to whether the Stockholm resolution 'would have been put forward.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *The Times*, 8 August 1917, p.7.

⁷⁵ LHA, NEC mins., 9 August 1917.

⁷⁶ LHA, Report of Adjourned Conference, 21 August 1917, p.12.

Henderson's supporters could of course insist that far from being a crude attempt to overcome the opposition to his Stockholm policy, the calling of a full labour conference represented a more democratic solution to the party's differences than the alternative of leaving decisions to narrow leadership groups. This however was widely contested. Labour's prominent patriots were largely and probably correctly convinced that the majority of rank and file trade unionists – the democratic bedrock of the party - remained opposed to any form of discussion with enemy socialists whilst the war continued. But the timescale under which the NEC was operating, seeking a decision on the Stockholm question in a mere handful of days, precluded the possibility of any meaningful canvas of grassroots opinion. This invalidated, in the view of many, the decision in Henderson's favour at the 10 August conference. As Roberts would charge the following day: 'the party had no right to agree to go into the Conference with the enemy until the rank and file had been consulted in a constitutional fashion.'⁷⁷ Henderson had succeeded not only in bypassing the views of elected MPs, but also the opinions of the multitude of ordinary workers, it was believed.

This denial of constitutional propriety legitimised in the minds of the more militant 'patriots' a resort to unconstitutional means. The Seamen's union had already shown that it could thwart 'pacifist' plans merely by refusing to carry its opponents overseas. Despite pressures to reverse its decision to refuse passage to Russia for MacDonald and Jowett, the union had been able to garner sufficient support to uphold its decision.⁷⁸ Claiming vengeance for the souls of 'the men who have gone down in our ships' and rejecting all attempts at 'a patched-up peace', 'Captain' Tupper, one of the most militant of its representatives, had promised

⁷⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 August 1917, p.6.

⁷⁸ *The Times*, 28 June 1917, p.3.

on 26 July to again 'keep pacifists from being conveyed to Russia or any other country.'⁷⁹

The union's president, Havelock Wilson, affirmed on 8 August that his members 'would not carry peace delegates to Stockholm, no matter what consequences followed.'⁸⁰ At a BWL gathering on the eve of the 10 August conference, a meeting attended or publicly supported by Labour members of the government and by Labour MPs, Wilson reiterated to 'Loud and prolonged cheers' that whatever was to be decided the following day 'seafaring men will absolutely decline to carry any peace delegates.'⁸¹

As the 10 August approached it must have been obvious to Henderson that however the conference would vote the possibility of a British delegation actually travelling to Stockholm would be prevented, either by the denial of passports or the intransigence of seamen. Even had these obstacles not existed, Henderson himself would have vetoed attendance should the Russians have continued to insist on a binding conference. He appeared to doubt moreover that he would even succeed in securing the conference vote.⁸² In the final days before the conference it was indeed generally recognised that the decision would be close. Calculations based on the votes that would be mustered by those unions which had already revealed their intentions suggested that the outcome would be dependent on the large miners' union, whose decision had yet to be made. It was known that the representatives of the different coalfields were divided on the Stockholm question. The Yorkshire miners had already declared their opposition; those of South Wales on the other hand were clearly in favour. There had been a possibility that on this unusual and contentious issue the separate

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1917, p.3.

⁸⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1917, p.5.

⁸¹ *The Times*, 10 August 1917, p.7.

⁸² This at least was what he told Sidney Webb on 8 August, LSE Digital Library, Beatrice Webb Diary, p.52, entry for 13 August 1917,

regions would be permitted to vote independently of each other and the miners' vote apportioned accordingly.⁸³

By the time the MFGB delegates assembled to make their decision on 9 August, this option had been abandoned in favour of the established procedure by which an overall majority on the executive, however narrow, would determine which way the union's 600,000 votes would be cast.⁸⁴ The conference was opened by Robert Smillie, President of the Federation, who began by lamenting the lack of information the Labour executive had so far provided on the many issues involved in this major decision. It was possible, he believed, that the next day's conference would be adjourned, and that no vote on Stockholm would then be taken. If however it became clear that the conference was to proceed to a vote, he proposed that the miners themselves should call for an adjournment during the meeting, once the executive had more fully explained its position, in order that they might then be enabled to reach an informed decision. This procedure was accepted by the delegates. Clearly much was going to depend on what Henderson said, which was as yet shrouded in uncertainty.⁸⁵

Against this difficult background on the Labour front, Henderson finally on 7 August faced the confrontation with the War Cabinet he had been expecting for the better part of a week. The decisions Henderson would take over the following three days are at the core of this thesis. They represent the most serious challenges to the standard account, both in terms of the political morality apportioned between Lloyd George and Henderson, and to

⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1917, p.5 and 8 August 1917, p.5.

⁸⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1917, p.5.

⁸⁵ Miners Federation of Great Britain, minutes of Special Conference, Central Hall, Westminster, August 9 and 10, MRC, MSS.429/MFGB/4/14, pp: 2-3.

the presumed motivational drive of the latter. But if they cannot convincingly be rendered consistent with the tenets of the standard account, it will be shown that they *can* be explained by the adoption of different assumptions regarding Henderson's essential objectives.

Dénouement

Henderson had been expecting that a *political* decision on Stockholm was about to be taken by the Cabinet. What he discovered on 7 August was that prior to this political decision a *legal* ruling on the question had been obtained from the Attorney General. The initiative for this move had been taken by Edward Carson, one of the ministers most opposed to Lloyd George's policy of delay on reaching a Stockholm decision. Carson had a strong legal background and had served as Attorney General in Asquith's coalition. He would have been aware of the principle of common law 'that in time of war, intercourse between subjects of this country and enemy subjects is forbidden' and that the meaning of the term 'intercourse' had been broadened during 1915 to include 'not merely commercial intercourse, but all intercourse with an alien enemy.'⁸⁶ He was clearly confident that the current Attorney General, whose judgement he sought, would reach the conclusion he desired and expected: that to 'take part in a Peace Conference with enemy subjects would.....clearly constitute "intercourse".'⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Quotations from Attorney General's ruling on Stockholm, TNA, War Cabinet, 6 August 1917, CAB 24/22, GT 1624.

⁸⁷ *Idem*.

Following the circulation to Cabinet members of this ruling, Henderson and Lloyd George spoke privately on the evening of the 7th, but their recollections of what was said differ significantly. Henderson would maintain that he put two alternative suggestions to Lloyd George: firstly, that if the government was going to act on the Attorney General's opinion, this should be immediately announced so that he could go to the Labour executive and point out 'that this legal position would compel me to consider my personal position'. He would then be forced to choose between giving up either his Cabinet or his party post. His second suggestion was that the government should allow the party conference 'to decide....apart altogether from the legal aspect of the case' whether or not they wished to go to Stockholm. If they did decide to attend, then the government, he proposed, should let them go. In order that the Cabinet 'might officially disassociate itself from the conference,' he helpfully suggested, 'no member of the Government should form part of the delegation, even including myself.'⁸⁸ Lloyd George appeared to have a less detailed recollection, but would insist that the main message he had received was that Henderson, in part because of the Attorney General's intervention and in part because of his recognition that the position in Russia had changed, had indicated 'that he would use the whole of his influence to turn down the Stockholm Conference' at the upcoming labour meeting.⁸⁹

A further conversation the same evening, this time between Henderson and the other Labour ministers, led to Henderson's deciding definitely against the first suggestion he had made to Lloyd George: that the legal judgement be immediately announced. Exactly how this conversation proceeded is unknown. What is clear is that Henderson and the other ministers, although their hopes for the outcome of the 10 August conference were

⁸⁸ *Hansard*, HC Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cc: 914-915.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, col.925.

divergent, did nevertheless agree that 'the conference should be left absolutely free from Government influence to come to a decision.' Henderson then informed Lloyd George of the unanimous view of the Labour ministers, and maintained that view at the critical Cabinet meeting the following day.⁹⁰ Lloyd George concurs with this part of Henderson's account.⁹¹ He would inform Carson on the 9th that he would delay any announcement on the legal or Cabinet position 'on the advice of the anti-Stockholm Labour men', who were confident that they could win the battle on the 10th 'provided the Government does not put up the backs of the trade unionists by telling them in advance that we take no heed of their opinions.'⁹²

In the absence of any definite knowledge of the conversations Henderson had on the 7th it is not possible to form a full picture of the events of that evening. It does nevertheless appear certain that both Henderson and Lloyd George entered the Cabinet room the following lunchtime united on the course that had been agreed: that it would be desirable to make no announcements prior to the 10 August conference. Although it was reiterated that ministers no longer believed, as they had done in May, that the political situation in Russia warranted a British attendance at Stockholm, they felt 'that it would be much more convenient to the Russian Government, and more conducive to the maintenance of good relations between the British Government and the Labour Party, that the working men themselves should refuse to attend rather than that the Government should announce their decision and thereby appear to dictate to the Labour Party.' It was acknowledged that this procedure involved some risk. The possibility that the conference *would* vote for Stockholm could not be ruled out. This, in the characteristically understated language of Cabinet minutes, would

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, col.915.

⁹¹ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p.1132.

⁹² Lloyd George to Carson, 9 August 1917, Lloyd George papers, F/6/2/45, quoted in Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.215.

place the government 'in a difficult position.' What nobody raised, presumably because they thought it irrelevant (or in Henderson's case for some other reason), was how much more 'difficult' would be the government's position should one of their own members, present at this discussion and uniquely able to exercise influence on the Labour decision, strive to obtain the result the Cabinet feared.⁹³

No dissent to any of these propositions was recorded in the minutes. Neither in the course of this meeting then, nor at any time in the following forty eight hours, did Henderson let the Cabinet know that he planned to persuade his party to vote contrary to their clearly expressed hopes. How then did he seek to justify this neglect? Tellingly he offered several explanations, a sign perhaps that none of them actually addressed the issue at all convincingly. His main response to the charge that he had misled the War Cabinet was simply to deny that he had done any such thing. He had 'never hinted' to any of his colleagues, either collectively or individually, that he was 'going to do otherwise than continue the course' to which he was known to have committed himself.⁹⁴ As we have seen however, there were many, inside and outside the Cabinet, who doubted that Henderson would 'continue the course' he had earlier followed, and he himself had contributed to that doubt by remaining silent on the question. Although we cannot know what, if anything, he did say at his final Cabinet meeting which, according to Lloyd George, had convinced all those present that he would speak *against* Stockholm, we can be certain that he did not say anything to suggest that he would speak *for* the conference.⁹⁵ Had he done so ministers

⁹³ TNA, War Cabinet, 8 August, 1917, CAB 23/3 (207).

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.916.

⁹⁵ Lloyd George later insisted that he had consulted everybody who had been present at the meeting and that they had all shared his opinion on Henderson's position, *ibid.*, col.925.

would surely have done their utmost to persuade him otherwise, or failing that would have taken steps to avert what would be a major embarrassment.

The weakness of this defence is self-evident. It is possible that Henderson had never said anything to the effect that he would oppose Stockholm at the conference. We must assume however that he knew perfectly well that his Cabinet colleagues were *presuming* that he had abandoned his former commitment, and that he nevertheless chose to remain silent until after he had delivered his pro-Stockholm address. Henderson could defend himself against the charge of a sin of commission, but hardly deny a sin of omission. This could be perceived perhaps as a lesser transgression, but a breach nevertheless against the conventions of Cabinet responsibility.

Other explanations he provided sought to imply that he may not in fact have been committed to his subsequent action on the day of the Cabinet meeting. He told parliament the following week that the decision was effectively forced upon him on the 9th when the NEC met to confirm arrangements for the following day's conference. Recommendations adopted on 25 July were, he admitted, challenged at this meeting, but a fresh vote revealed a majority in favour of the earlier position. The executive then invited me, he informed the House, 'to state their case at the conference the following day.' Anyone who knew the history of the Labour movement, he continued, would realise that it 'would have been impossible' to then go to the conference and put the government view. 'If I had done so, I should have had to resign the secretaryship. There is not a shadow of doubt about that.'⁹⁶ This explanation is disingenuous. He had earlier sought to distance himself from

⁹⁶ *Hansard*, H C Debs, vol. 97, 13 August 1917, cc: 918-919.

controversial decisions by posing as a mere servant of the party executive, and this defence should be seen as in similar vein.⁹⁷ More importantly, he had had plenty of time to inform the Cabinet of this new development before addressing the conference on the 10th.

Henderson's initial explanation of his unexpected address may also be considered. In a note sent from the conference venue he had informed Lloyd George 'that after the most careful consideration, I came to the conclusion that I could take no other course than to stand by the advice I had given the day after my return from Russia.'⁹⁸ Since this 'careful consideration' had not been mentioned previously, the implication was that Henderson's decision had been reached very recently, perhaps too recently to have let the Prime Minister know until after he had spoken. This again appears wholly unconvincing. It must obviously be assumed that 'careful consideration' of the position he would adopt at the conference would have taken place over some longer period of time. Particularly damaging to this line of defence was the revelation that he had almost certainly made up his mind the previous evening. Evidently anxious that the morning papers were about to publish reports suggesting that he was intending to speak against Stockholm, he had contacted editors to tell them that this was not so. Lloyd George was understandably unimpressed by the fact that his colleague had felt it more important to clarify his position to the press than to the Cabinet.⁹⁹

If Henderson had contrived to give three distinct explanations of his questionable proceeding in this matter, the historians we have been considering go one better. Wrigley,

⁹⁷ See in particular the comments to parliament on MacDonald's inclusion in the Paris delegation we have noted above, *Hansard*, H C Debs, 1 August 1917, vol.96, c.2195.

⁹⁸ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p.1135.

⁹⁹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cc: 927-928.

Leventhal, Winter and Bridgen each deal with the questions raised in differing ways.¹⁰⁰ Wrigley has characterised the disagreement over what was said or implied on 8 August as a 'misunderstanding'. Although the Cabinet majority genuinely came away from the meeting believing that Henderson would now oppose Stockholm, Henderson himself 'came away believing he was free to follow his own course'.¹⁰¹ As we have seen however, whilst it is very likely that ministers failed to understand Henderson's true position, it seems implausible that the reverse could have been the case. Leventhal, whilst allowing that 'considerable confusion' surrounded these events, nevertheless concludes that Lloyd George 'later professed' to believe that Henderson had changed his mind on Stockholm despite 'clear evidence to the contrary'. What this evidence may have been is not disclosed. Despite this Leventhal believes that the Prime Minister may in this case have been 'propagating a deliberate misconception'.¹⁰²

In Winter's account the accusations of deception against Henderson are simply ignored. The War Cabinet on the other hand is charged with having made a 'pointed and condescending suggestion' in proposing that the Labour conference should be allowed to choose of its own volition to reject Stockholm, thereby sparing ministers the political embarrassment of appearing to dictate to the party. According to Winter, Henderson took offense at this idea and was now 'no longer prepared to carry out Lloyd George's orders'. At a more general level, suggests Winter, this alienation from his Cabinet colleagues was a consequence of the fundamental disagreement with them over Russia, which had by now persuaded him 'that a

¹⁰⁰ We exclude Hamilton's approval of Henderson's defence against the 'trickery and duplicity' of Lloyd George since she was unaware of the contents of the 8 August Cabinet minutes.

¹⁰¹ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, pp: 213-215; in the later biography Wrigley chooses not to repeat this argument, opting instead to avoid direct comment on what Henderson may have thought following the 8 August War Cabinet.

¹⁰² Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.67.

political collision was inevitable.¹⁰³ For Winter this realisation on Henderson's part is evidently more important than the detailed circumstances surrounding the 'inevitable' break with the Cabinet.

Bridgen apparently adopts a similar position but also provides a significant new twist. He implies that Henderson understood, but chose to ignore ministerial expectations, in the belief 'that ultimately Lloyd George would back him rather than risk his resignation.'¹⁰⁴ It is certainly true that Lloyd George was reluctant to break with Henderson, with all the consequences this may have had for relations with the Labour party. We have seen how significant a consideration this had been during the Cabinet discussions over the Paris episode. But we have seen also how finely balanced these discussions had been. There was no acceptance on the part of Lloyd George, still less other ministers, that Henderson could continue to adopt a semi-detached approach to his Cabinet responsibility, in which conflicting commitments to party and government would be resolved according to his own personal judgement. Even those who supported his position on Stockholm could distinguish between the substance of the debate and the question of Cabinet obligation. Commenting on the earlier row over the Paris affair the *Manchester Guardian* had concluded that everything 'depends on whether Mr Henderson took the Government into his confidence. If he did, he is amply justified; if he did not, he is to blame.'¹⁰⁵ Could Henderson seriously have imagined that the Cabinet would have sat back helpless once they learned what he had done on 10 August? The evidence would suggest not.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.769.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Bridgen, *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace, 1910-1924* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp: 98-99.

¹⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 August 1917, p.4.

Lloyd George's blend of reprimand and rehabilitation by which Henderson was greeted on 1 August may have appeared to the Prime Minister to have been successful in demonstrating the Cabinet's view that whilst the errant behaviour of the previous days could be put behind them, no repetition would be tolerated. He appears nevertheless to have felt it wise to ram home the message a few days later. Speaking on 4 August at the launch of the NWAC Lloyd George concluded with appropriate comments about the need for national patience in the pursuit of victory and about the dangers of listening to those who were 'more concerned about ending the war than about winning it.' His final words are for our purposes of particular interest. To cheers from his audience he proclaimed it essential 'to keep our eye steadily' on winning the war before continuing in the following intriguing manner:

May I say let us keep both eyes? Some have a cast in their eye, and while one eye is fixed truly on victory, the other is wandering around to other issues or staring stonily at some pet or partisan project of their own. Beware of becoming cross-eyed. (*Laughter and cheers*).....If anyone promotes national distrust or disunion at this hour he is helping the enemy and hurting his native land. And it makes no difference whether he is for or against the war. As a matter of fact, the hurt is deeper if he is for the war, because whatever the pure pacifist says is discounted and, as far as the war is concerned, discredited.¹⁰⁶

With Henderson having been so much the focus of political attention during the previous week few could have doubted to whom Lloyd George may have been referring. This was surely a message Henderson himself could have understood. Had he for whatever reason been unwilling or unable to read the runes, help from his fellow Labour ministers was at

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, 6 August 1917, p.4.

hand. Barnes would later claim that he had spoken to 'his friend Henderson.....with all the earnestness and persuasiveness of which he was capable' of the dangers he foresaw in the continuation of his leader's course.¹⁰⁷ But we must surely doubt whether Henderson actually needed outside advice to appreciate the almost certain outcome of the challenge he was about to issue to the War Cabinet. Both in the patriotic press and on the government back benches Lloyd George was already under attack for his dilatory response to the Stockholm affair.¹⁰⁸ For all his concern to avoid damaging relations with the Labour party, the Prime Minister's critics on the right represented a greater threat to his administration and could not safely in such circumstances have been ignored.

The attempts by labour historians to explain the events of 8-10 August do little to dispel the impression that Henderson knowingly concealed from the War Cabinet his intentions prior to the Labour conference. Such a conclusion is of course difficult to accept for those who wish to uphold Henderson's sense of political propriety. For the proponents of the standard account however a still greater problem arises when the question is posed as to *why* Henderson chose to adopt this course. The supposed firmness and consistency of his core belief that British labour's attendance at Stockholm would aid the survival of the moderate, pro-Allied sections of Russian socialism obviously loses its potency once it is recognised that Henderson knew during these forty eight hours that British attendance was no longer a serious possibility. The most he could achieve for Petrograd was the modicum of moral support that would follow an ineffectual pro-Stockholm resolution, but even this would be undermined by the fact that, largely due to Henderson's own objection to the Russian insistence on a mandatory procedure, the party was actually itself rejecting the conference

¹⁰⁷ LHA, Report of Adjourned Conference, 21 August 1917, p.20.

¹⁰⁸ See for example a particularly blunt editorial in the *Morning Post*, 7 August 1917, p.4.

invitation.¹⁰⁹ Had he however failed to persuade the party to support the resolution, a possibility he certainly could not rule out, his position would have been dire. Gratified no doubt that labour 'patriots' had won the day, the War Cabinet would still have been painfully aware that this was despite not because of the efforts of their own most senior Labour member. He could simultaneously have faced defeat at the hands of his party *and* ejection from the government. This was an extraordinary risk to take for what would amount to a very limited gesture towards Russia.

It could be argued that Henderson may have balked at reversing his position on Stockholm so flagrantly at the behest of the War Cabinet.¹¹⁰ We should therefore explore whether there were options available to him other than those of simply supporting or rejecting the Cabinet position. Almost certainly, such options did exist. The widespread speculation that Henderson might postpone a final decision provided an obvious opportunity. This speculation was after all based on the significant rescheduling of the Allied socialist conference which had originally been presented as an essential preliminary to the 10 August conference. Had he wished to extricate himself from the dilemma created by the War Cabinet decision he could credibly have run with this argument.

It was also the case that not all details of the Stockholm process were likely to be settled in a single day. A Memorandum on Issues of the War, which had been intended for submission to the Inter-Allied conference and would indicate the party's view on matters inevitably

¹⁰⁹ See the comments of one of the soviet delegates who had accompanied Henderson to Europe, *Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1917, p.5

¹¹⁰ It was speculated by one political correspondent that Henderson would not like to have been seen to have reversed his position as a consequence of pressure from Conservatives, whether in the Cabinet or outside it, *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1917, p.5.

arising both at this and the Stockholm conference, had not yet been circulated to members. No full discussion on the question of representation at Stockholm had yet taken place. When the executive met on 9 August it was agreed that a second conference, scheduled for 21 August, would be required to deal with these and other outstanding questions.¹¹¹ A case could surely have been made to defer a decision on whether or not to attend Stockholm to this second conference, at which a fuller understanding of all the implications could be achieved.

The 9 August meeting of the NEC provided Henderson with another way he could have avoided the head on crash with the Cabinet. His claim in the House of Commons that the NEC had obliged him to speak in favour of Stockholm fails to tell the full story of this meeting. The executive did, as he stated, finally decide by 9 votes to 5 that the executive should recommend conditional acceptance of the invitation to Stockholm, but immediately prior to this an amendment proposing that the executive should avoid any such recommendation was defeated by the much narrower vote of 8 to 7. This amendment was submitted by Clynes on the grounds, as the vote on it would demonstrate, that the executive was itself divided on the Stockholm question.¹¹² Given the closeness of the vote on the amendment it would seem likely that if Henderson had chosen to give it his personal support this would have ensured its success, thereby freeing him from any obligation to speak at the conference in the manner which would cost him his place in government. According to the *Manchester Guardian* however, Henderson had stuck to his opinion that

¹¹¹ LHA, NEC mins, 9 August 1917.

¹¹² *Idem.*

the executive *should* recommend attendance despite the 'very heated' nature of the debate.¹¹³

Whether by means of lending support to the proposed amendment, or by other proposals which he himself could have brought to the meeting, Henderson could surely have used his influence within the NEC, as well as his centrality since returning from Russia to the Stockholm debate, to either secure a postponement on the vital vote or to ensure that he personally would not be seen as primarily responsible should the conference vote in favour of attendance. For the Cabinet, postponement would have undoubtedly been a less satisfactory outcome than a clear rejection, but presumably not a matter for removing Henderson from his post, particularly had he made the case that a neutral position had been forced on him by the party. His position in the Cabinet may still in such an instance have become very difficult, but the challenge to ministerial colleagues would obviously have been far less egregious.

One further dimension of Henderson's decision making at this time should be highlighted. It is generally supposed that he acted as he did in the belief that British attendance at Stockholm would bolster the fortunes of the Provisional Government in Petrograd and its supporters. We have seen however that for most of the time he was in Russia he had apparently believed that the proposed governmental conference on war aims would be more effective and less dangerous than Stockholm. Leaving aside the fact that no satisfactory explanation has been offered as to why he might have reversed this judgement, it would surely have been natural under the circumstances he faced after 8 August to

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 August 1917, p.4.

reconsider his position on the relative merits of the two conferences. The prospects for the government conference may not have been good, but for Stockholm by this time they were undoubtedly much worse.¹¹⁴

It is in fact surprising that Henderson failed to promote both conferences throughout his campaign. In his final message to the War Cabinet from Petrograd he had expressed pleasure that the Russian foreign ministry's proposal had, as he believed, been accepted.¹¹⁵ On his first day back in London he had drawn public attention to the desire of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets to see *both* conferences convened.¹¹⁶ Thereafter the governmental conference was effectively dropped from his campaign. The only reference to it found in the minutes during his remaining tenure in the War Cabinet was the desultory suggestion that the Labour party's attitude towards Stockholm, which was 'to postpone it as long as possible' was 'precisely the same' as that of the Government on the proposed war aims conference.¹¹⁷ There was no particular reason however why he should not have continued to make the case for the latter as well as the former, a course of action which would have cost him little. Since he was already facing opposition in the Cabinet over Stockholm, he would scarcely have added to his difficulties by simultaneously promoting the more respectable conference of Allied governments. He could not easily have been accused on that count of taking 'matters of peace out of the hands of Governments.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Allied governments clearly had no enthusiasm for a war aims discussion with the Russians; diplomatic exchanges on the matter nevertheless continued right up until the Bolshevik takeover. See the extensive summary of these exchanges in TNA, FO 371/3011, ff: 380-393.

¹¹⁵ TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152) p.12.

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 25 July 1917, p.6.

¹¹⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202).

¹¹⁸ This was the charge levelled against him on 26 July, TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (196a).

Could his failure to pursue the war aims conference within Cabinet be accounted for by the realisation that his colleagues were no longer interested in discussing war aims with Russian socialists, as indeed was the case? In the light of his comments on 1 August he had presumably consulted War Cabinet minutes for the period of his absence in Russia. He would have seen that on 16 July the War Cabinet had discussed the matter and had agreed that in 'the present state of the War it was desirable to postpone the discussion of War Aims as long as possible, as, once it was known that we were discussing these questions, the effective prosecution of the war might be rendered more difficult.' Discouraging as these observations may have been, Henderson could have drawn some comfort from the fact that no final decisions on the proposed conference had been taken, this being 'deferred' until his own return from Russia.¹¹⁹ The Cabinet never did engage seriously with Henderson on the merits or otherwise of this conference, possibly in part as a result of the rumpus over Paris and the commencement of his own campaign for Stockholm.

It must be recognised also that the war aims conference was not the only area in which the interests of the Russian government would be at stake. Dealings of all sorts continued between London and Petrograd, and following the smoothing over of the Paris affair on 1 August Henderson could, by remaining in the Cabinet, have brought some influence to bear on these various matters. A case in point actually emerged over the following days in relation to a conference of Allied leaders in London scheduled for 7 and 8 August. One item on the agenda for this conference was to be the response of western governments to the failure of the Russian military offensive. It had long been pointed out by Allied military missions in Petrograd that the revolution had had a dire effect on discipline within the

¹¹⁹ TNA, War Cabinet, 16 July 1917, CAB/23/3 (187).

Russian armies.¹²⁰ In the light of these many gloomy warnings the collapse of the offensive could have come as little surprise. During his time in Russia Henderson had joined with Buchanan in advising caution in dealings with the Provisional Government. Pushing too hard over the need to re-establish effective military discipline could, they had at this point argued, fuel the extremist propaganda that the Allies were intent on driving Russian soldiers into battle to further their imperialist ambitions.¹²¹ By early August messages from Buchanan were adopting an altogether more forceful tone towards the Provisional Government.¹²² Similar views were gaining ground in London.

The 'exceedingly bad' news that had reached Britain from the eastern front, including much evidence that Russian troops 'had lost all discipline' and were 'yielding, like a rabble, before the German armies', inevitably encouraged Cabinet ministers to take a firmer line with Petrograd.¹²³ On 2 August the War Cabinet resolved to discuss at the upcoming Allied conference the question of 'putting pressure on Russia to restore discipline and resume the offensive, as a condition of further supplies of guns and officers.'¹²⁴ On the eve of the conference it was affirmed that 'while we were ready to make any sacrifice to help a Russia which had a strong Government' the advisability of such a course could be questioned should the Russians delay taking 'the necessary steps to restore discipline.'¹²⁵ There is no indication in the Cabinet minutes during these days that Henderson objected to this change of attitude towards the hard pressed Russian government. He may indeed have taken a

¹²⁰ See the recollections of the British military attaché, Alfred W. F. Knox, *With the Russian Army: 1914-1917* (New York, 1971, pp: 553-652, first published in two volumes (London, 1921).

¹²¹ See Buchanan's views of 12 July, George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, Vol. 2 (London, 1923), p.151.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp: 159-161.

¹²³ Bodleian Library, Milner papers, Milner diary, 23 July 1917, dep.88.

¹²⁴ TNA, War Cabinet, 2 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (203).

¹²⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 7 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (205)

similar position in discussions with the Soviet representatives with whom he travelled back to Britain.¹²⁶

When the Allied conference opened on 7 August Lloyd George proposed to the French and Italian delegations that a joint protest should be made to the Russian government, but that this should be combined with an assurance that support would be provided 'to help Russia to become an effective Ally.' Although a Russian delegation had attended the previous Allied conference in Paris, no delegation from Petrograd had been invited to London. Following protests from the Russian *chargé d'affaires*, Konstantin Nabokov, however, Nabokov himself was granted a last minute invitation to represent his country at the conference. His response to Lloyd George's proposal was predictable: any reproach to the Provisional Government would strengthen those in Russia who claimed their people were 'fighting only for the cause of others.' Disapproval of the British proposal came also however from the French and Italians, and in particular from Henderson's erstwhile socialist comrade in Petrograd, Albert Thomas.

Thomas made much of his experience in Russia, during which time 'he had pressed in private conversations.....for the re-establishment of discipline'. He was convinced that Kerensky was doing as much as he could in this regard and that a formal protest from Allied governments would be counter-productive and dangerous, both to Kerensky's own position and to the Allied cause. Thomas's intervention led finally to the suggestion that he himself should draft an Allied note from which all suggestion of 'protest' would be diplomatically

¹²⁶ Wade, *Slavic Review*, p.459.

removed.¹²⁷ Having won this early tussle on behalf of Petrograd Thomas returned to the topic of Russia during the final session of the conference the following afternoon, expressing his concern that too little attention was being paid to the Russian situation, which could yet be rescued were the Allies prepared to provide greater technical and material support to their still potentially important ally. Lloyd George however doubted that Russia could provide 'any powerful aid' in 1918.¹²⁸ Nevertheless Thomas's concerns were finally reflected in the conference's conclusions, which included a commitment to assist in the reorganisation of Russia by providing 'material and personnel for that object.'¹²⁹

There was inevitably some room for doubt on 8 August as to how much the Allies would be willing to contribute to the reorganisation of Russia as circumstances in that country continued to deteriorate, but Thomas could certainly feel that he had achieved something for Petrograd through his interventions at the conference. We may well believe also that he achieved rather more in this respect than did Henderson in securing his party's vote for Stockholm two days later. Henderson had attended the first three sessions of the inter-Allied conference, but was absent, presumably by choice, from the final afternoon session on 8 August. There is no indication in the minutes that he gave any backing to Thomas, or contributed at all to the conference discussion on Russia. If Henderson was engaged, as is commonly believed, in a battle to save democratic Russia, he appears to have chosen to fight on only one front, this moreover being the one least likely to yield positive results.

¹²⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, Inter-Ally Conference, 7 and 8 August, 1917, First Session, CAB/28/2 (IC-25).

¹²⁸ Ibid., Final Session, CAB/28/2 (IC-25e).

¹²⁹ Ibid., Resolutions, CAB/28/2 (IC-25d).

Proponents of the standard account are agreed that what Henderson believed was at stake in the Stockholm dispute was 'the fate of the socialist revolution in Russia'.¹³⁰ But nowhere do they address the strangely selective means by which he sought to sustain the Petrograd regime. A still greater challenge to the tenets of the standard account lies in the domestic implications of Henderson's decisions in the days between 8 and 10 August. We have seen how unconvincing are the attempts of historians to avoid the conclusion that Henderson's failure to inform the Cabinet of his intentions regarding the Labour conference was deliberately chosen in full knowledge of the likely consequences. We have also seen that opportunities to avoid the break with the government were not only spurned, but actively opposed. Bearing in mind also the Attorney General's ruling and the clear position against permitting attendance at Stockholm of the War Cabinet, not to mention the impediments to attendance still insisted upon by the conference organisers, as well as those loudly asserted by the seamen's union, the obvious question arises: why did Henderson choose to sacrifice his position within government for what on the face of it appears to have been a lost cause?

This question is neither posed in any clear way nor answered in any detail in standard accounts. The answer nevertheless appears obvious. Henderson clearly attached more importance to winning his party's support for a resolution on Stockholm, which in superseding the Manchester resolution would permit future involvement in any wartime revival of the Socialist International, than he did to retaining his place in the War Cabinet. Must we not accept this is an indication of his true priorities? May we not therefore recognise his otherwise barely explicable response to the 8 August Cabinet decisions as just the latest and ultimately most effective improvisation of his campaign? The decision of

¹³⁰ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.770.

ministers to delay revealing either their own views or the Attorney General's ruling provided Henderson with a window of opportunity, which he evidently decided to take. The labour audience he would address on 10 August would be wholly unaware of the political and legal implications of a vote for Stockholm. Henderson would still be speaking as a member of the Cabinet, and could be presumed therefore to be advocating a course acceptable to the government.¹³¹ Ministers, in their turn, would remain unaware of his intentions.¹³² As the conference opened on the morning of the 10th Henderson had succeeded in putting himself in the remarkable position of being the sole participant in this political drama who fully understood the context in which he was acting.

Having successfully exploited what would prove to have been a tactical error on the part of the Cabinet, Henderson created conditions relatively favourable to the achievement of his principal goal. The format for the conference, which he had successfully shaped on 9 August, was also advantageous to his purpose. The meeting would be dominated by the debate on the main resolution: 'That the invitation to the International Conference at Stockholm be accepted on the condition that the Conference be consultative and not mandatory.'¹³³ A second resolution, proposing the make up of the Labour party delegation (as distinct from the delegations of the affiliated socialist societies which had been traditionally treated by the International as separate entities) was to be discussed following the vote on the first. For Henderson to achieve his main objective, all he needed to do on

¹³¹ Lloyd George would make this point after the event, see the public correspondence between the Prime Minister and Henderson following the latter's resignation, *Manchester Guardian*, 13 August 1917, p.5.

¹³² Henderson may have sought to ensure this remained the case by keeping his distance from Cabinet colleagues during these days, Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p.1136.

¹³³ LHA, NEC mins, 9 August 1917.

the morning of the 10th was to deliver an address that would persuade the party to support the resolution quoted above.

Commenting on Henderson's conference address, Hamilton writes: 'In effect, though probably not in design, this was a speech of great artistry.'¹³⁴ We can certainly agree with the second part of this statement. Considering however what we have argued in the pages above, we must dissent from the proposition that Henderson's stunningly effective address was 'probably not' a consequence of careful 'design'. The lengths to which he had gone to put himself in the position he now occupied, and the price he seemed ready to pay in the future, both strongly suggest that he would have used every available means to construct a speech that would have the desired effect on his audience. We may now consider both the artistry and design of this memorable address.

As expected the argument centred on Russia. Henderson explained, as he had done in parliament nine days earlier, why he had decided to propose conditional acceptance of the invitation to Stockholm. The first part of this explanation had a somewhat negative feel. Since the Russian socialists, with the backing of the Provisional Government, had been determined to hold the conference, he had been faced with the difficult choice of either accepting or rejecting their invitation. After much reflection he had come to believe that neither of these courses would have been acceptable, the first because public opinion in Russia would have rendered such a position 'about the most fatal.....I could have taken up', the second because it would be counter to the decisions reached by the party in Manchester. His solution to this dilemma was to propose a third alternative, to the effect

¹³⁴ Hamilton, *Henderson*, p.151.

that if Stockholm could be changed 'from an obligatory Conference to a consultation for the purpose of exchanging views' he could then recommend to his party 'so far to reverse its [Manchester] decision as to make such a consultation possible.'¹³⁵

He then went on to cite a more positive reason for going to Stockholm. He had been struck by the fact that 'the most confused ideas.....as to the aims for which our country continues the struggle' were current in Russia. He had even found 'confused' and 'prejudiced' ideas regarding the willingness of British labour to support the war. Our objects, he declared, had been perverted, and 'enemy agents' were utilising these perversions 'to the full.' Attendance at Stockholm would provide an opportunity to challenge these dangerous misunderstandings. Conversely, he had decided, British absence from the conference would raise the potential dangers of 'Russian representatives' meeting 'representatives from enemy and neutral countries alone.'¹³⁶ This of course was the argument earlier used in the War Cabinet, an argument still upheld in Petrograd by Buchanan.¹³⁷ Henderson's case rested finally on 'the condition of affairs in Russia' which had been, and may still have been, 'positively appalling'. There was little by way of elaboration on this comment nor, more pertinently, a clear explanation as to just how British attendance at Stockholm would help resolve the country's manifold problems.¹³⁸

This then was how Henderson presented the conclusions he had reached in Russia. He now addressed the question as to how far current circumstances still justified these conclusions.

¹³⁵ Stansky, *Left and War*, pp: 222-224.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp: 224-225.

¹³⁷ The ambassador made this point in his 'personal opinion' on Stockholm of 2 August, also suggesting that since the government could not be bound by the conference's decisions, national interests could not be damaged by 'the attendance of British Socialists', Buchanan, *Mission*, p.161. Henderson would have liked to have cited this message in his 13 August resignation statement, but was forbidden to cite government documents.

¹³⁸ Stansky, *Left and War*, p.224.

A particular difficulty he had to overcome here was the widespread speculation in the West over whether the leadership of the Provisional Government, as opposed to the Soviet, still actively supported the Stockholm conference. Some indications in recent days suggested otherwise. This was not a matter he could safely ignore, since it would surely be raised by his opponents. He had therefore decided, as he told the conference at the beginning of his address, that he would present 'a fair yet a frank statement of the position', fully acknowledging that 'the political situation in Russia is, and has been, constantly changing.'¹³⁹ In this spirit he provided pieces of evidence that suggested there may have been 'some modification' in the government's attitude towards Stockholm, although he described the weight of this evidence as 'very slight'. Having at least admitted that there was some room for doubt on this crucial question, he turned to other matters pertaining to the 'purely British point of view.'¹⁴⁰ Towards the end of his address, when he returned to the topic of Russia, the earlier hint of doubt regarding the current position in Petrograd was forgotten, replaced by the following much quoted plea:

Let us remember poor struggling Russia, whose great miracle we all welcomed with such delight a few weeks ago, and of whom it was universally admitted that it had done the finest thing that had ever been done during the whole War. Let us remember poor Russia, and if we cannot give the newest Democracy, the infant of Democracies, all she asks, I beseech you not to give her an entire point blank refusal.¹⁴¹

This transition from a dispassionate weighing of the available evidence concerning Russia to a passionate and personal concluding appeal may be seen as a fine example of oratorical

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.222.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.225.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.229.

'artistry'. Other politically effective techniques may also be observed. For example, Henderson deployed his own status and image within the party to good effect. It was his personal vision of an international conference, not the 'Russian programme' for Stockholm, that his speech promoted. His 'full and frank' explanation of the reasons why, in Russia, he had changed his mind on the matter gave the impression of careful consideration and sincerity. The painful abuse and vilification to which he had been subject since returning to England for advocating what he genuinely believed was a patriotic cause (to which he made reference on three separate occasions during his speech) further encouraged a sympathetic response on the part of delegates. It is reasonable to perceive the party vote on 10 August as in large measure a vote of confidence in Henderson himself.¹⁴²

We may consider also the approach he adopted to those two awkward outcomes of the Paris discussions with French and Russian socialists: the representation of minorities and the obligatory nature of conference resolutions. These were matters on which he had hitherto not wished to be drawn. On the minority issue this remained the case. He did nevertheless avoid the disparaging tone he had adopted on 1 August when referring to the minority. The effort on that occasion to sharply distinguish his own views from those of MacDonald, and the suggestion that not only Russian extremists and enemy agents, but British pacifists too, had been responsible for promoting false ideas as to the self-serving nature of British war aims, were conspicuously absent from the 10 August address.¹⁴³ He was by this time more concerned to play down political differences, both in Britain and in Russia. The case for

¹⁴² Parallels can perhaps be drawn between Henderson's success in persuading his party to reverse strongly held opinions with Grey's similarly successful address to the House of Commons three years earlier, which had conveyed a similar sense of deep reflection, personal conviction and sincerity in the face of a difficult and unwelcome dilemma, see Douglas Newton, *The Darkest Days: the Truth behind Britain's Rush to War, 1914* (London, 1915), pp: 213-225; for a less critical account, Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: a Biography of Lord Grey of Falloden* (London, 1971), pp: 296-297.

¹⁴³ *Hansard*, H C Debs., 1 August 1917, vol.96, cc: 2193, 2196.

Stockholm he was now keen to make rested on a strained and unconvincing perception that 'the great British Labour and Socialist Movement', a clearly disunited entity at this time, could, by stating its own convictions on the war, help a no less divided entity - 'Russia' - achieve a renewed sense of purpose and unity in support of Allied war aims.

Henderson could keep political divisions out of his own address, but they quickly surfaced when others took the floor. 'Patriots' and 'pacifists' strongly disagreed over whether Russian ministers and the Soviet were now divided over Stockholm, and over the still uncertain question of minority representation at the conference. An amendment successfully proposed by the miners' confined a prospective British delegation to those selected *only* by the Labour party itself.¹⁴⁴ After a series of vexatious exchanges Henderson, unable to persuade delegates to reject the amendment, agreed to defer the question to the proposed adjourned conference on 21 August. Henderson again tried to reverse the embargo on minority groups at this second conference, but again failed. He suffered also the further embarrassment of a loss of support on the main resolution, largely as a consequence of the miners reversing their earlier decision. What had been on 10 August a convincing majority in favour of Stockholm of over a million votes was now reduced to a paltry 3,000 votes out of a total of nearly two and a half million cast.¹⁴⁵

More remarkable than Henderson's treatment of the minority problem was his handling on 10 August of the Russian insistence on a mandatory conference. There were obvious reasons why he had not wished to be drawn on this question in previous days. If it had become widely understood that the terms of the invitation to Stockholm were unacceptable

¹⁴⁴ *The Times*, 11 August 1917, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ LHA, Report of Adjourned Conference, 21 August 1917, p.23.

to the Labour executive, it would have been easy to conclude that the 10 August conference would no longer serve any purpose. Once the conference was actually under way, this difficulty disappeared. Henderson now spoke at length on the mandatory versus consultative issue. He repeatedly drew attention to the unacceptability of the Russian position and to the unlikelihood of its being changed.¹⁴⁶ He made it quite clear that as a consequence there could be no British acceptance of the invitation to Stockholm. Although the resolution on which the party was to vote remained unchanged, supporting it no longer involved any immediate meeting with foreign (including enemy) socialists. It was now simply a case of avoiding a snub to poor struggling Russians who, as Henderson reminded the conference, had bravely fought the common enemy for the previous three years, and whose overthrow of tsarist tyranny had been widely applauded by British labour.¹⁴⁷

Following Henderson's address Barnes seemed puzzled as to why he should have attached so much importance to the mandatory versus consultative issue.¹⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, Barnes had a point. No International Labour conference had ever possessed the power to prevent individual national parties making their own decisions. Moral pressure to conform was the only real sanction. The insistence of the Soviet on a mandatory conference was not in practice going to change this fundamental reality. Henderson argued that the attempt to make resolutions binding 'would destroy the effectiveness of the Conference, lead to angry recriminations, and make the Socialist and Labour Parties the laughing-stock of the world.'¹⁴⁹ Given the diversity of goals of the several participants, and the massively high

¹⁴⁶ The reality of the Russian position, he declared, 'has to be accepted now without hesitation or equivocation', Stansky, *Left and War*, p.226.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.224.

¹⁴⁸ *The Times*, 11 August 1917, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ Stansky, *Left and War*, p.227.

stakes involved, he must surely have realised that ‘angry recriminations’ would have been inevitable even had the Conference declared itself consultative.¹⁵⁰

It had of course made sense in the early stages of the Stockholm campaign to push for a consultative conference. However notional the binding character of any resolutions would have been, the mere fact that an attempt could be made to bind British ‘patriots’ to positions they may have wholeheartedly rejected would have heightened resistance to the conference. But once it was clear in the later stages of the campaign that there was no real prospect of British attendance it was eminently sensible, from Henderson’s point of view, to take the position he did. One of the strongest cards Henderson’s opponents were able to play against him was the genuine abhorrence many felt to the idea of conferring with German socialists, widely seen as willing accomplices of the German government.¹⁵¹ Henderson’s ability to remove this prospect from the agenda must surely have made it easier to win the conference vote.

One final dimension of Henderson’s speech must also be considered. Although firmly rejecting the conference actually being convened by the Russians and Dutch/Scandinavians, he devoted part of his address to making the case for the alternative international conference he *would* have supported. Having already referred to the possibility of countering negative perceptions amongst the Russian people regarding Allied war aims, he now broadened this argument to cover other nations. The British case had ‘never been

¹⁵⁰ See Vandervelde’s belief that Stockholm would have been a forum in which ‘the most contradictory views would meet in a confused melée’, Emile Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1918), pp: 227-228; see also Beatrice Webb’s comments on the embarrassingly disputatious ‘non-binding’ Allied socialist conference later in August which led her to wonder ‘what Stockholm would have been like!’, LSE Digital Library, Beatrice Webb Diary, pp: 56-60, entry for 1 September 1917.

¹⁵¹ Note the reiteration of this sentiment at the BWL public meeting on 9 August, also the comments of Roberts at the conference itself, *The Times*, 10 August 1917, p.7 and *Ibid.*, 11 August 1917, p.4.

properly stated either to the German Socialists or to those of the Neutral Countries.’ The opportunity to present these arguments at an appropriately structured international conference could have been as effective in persuading these socialists as those of Russia. In relation to Germany especially, the results could have been dramatic and perhaps even shortened the war. The Allied case, Henderson confidently asserted, was ‘so strong.....that if it were presented by responsible working-class representatives it would materially assist in convincing the German people that it was the crime of their rulers that caused the War, and it is the crime of their rulers that now prevents its just settlement.’ This was followed by a denial that he was in any way wavering in his determination to reach ‘a final and complete settlement’, but in a war that had already taken a terrible toll, ‘it appears to me not only wise but imperative that every country should use its political weapon to supplement.....its military organisation, if by so doing it can defeat the enemy.’¹⁵²

This was a clearly a call for an active and wide ranging labour diplomacy which stood independently of the plea to aid Russia. At the very end of his address, following his beseeching of delegates not to give Russia ‘an entire point blank refusal’, Henderson went on to repeat this wider point. If the conference were ‘to determine for the whole period of the War, not to use the political weapon to supplement our military activities, not only shall I regret it, but I will venture to predict that you as a Movement will regret it hereafter.’¹⁵³

Historians have acknowledged that Henderson’s Stockholm campaign did have twin objectives. Whilst the fate of Russia is always treated as the principal concern, there is agreement that the revival of the International was also an objective. Winter believes that

¹⁵² Stansky, *Left and War*, pp: 227-228.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.229.

following the discussions with Branting and Huysmans on 17 July Henderson became dedicated to the task of reconstructing the Socialist International.¹⁵⁴ Wrigley too suggests that Henderson did 'seem to regain his faith in socialist war aims' during his time in Russia.¹⁵⁵ Hamilton quotes approvingly from his 1 August parliamentary statement in which he asserts Labour ideals regarding the rights of common people to have some sort of say in the settlement.¹⁵⁶ These ideals were doubtless to be found in pre-war socialist internationalism, and in the strictures for a progressive peace agreed by the Allied socialists in February 1915.

The belief that Henderson's concerns over Russia were more central to the Stockholm campaign than his hopes for a revived International accurately reflects the emphases both in the 10 August address and in his preceding public statements. What has not been sufficiently considered however is the extent to which Henderson might have perceived that an emphasis on Russia would have been more effective in winning over Labour 'patriots' than a direct avowal of internationalist sentiment. Decisions taken as to the best means of achieving particular ends do not necessarily reveal the true or full nature of those ends. Too great a reliance on Henderson's words appears to have led historians into misperceptions regarding the balance between his stated objectives. Henderson's words were anyway often belied by his actions. Take for example his determination throughout the Stockholm campaign to deny that he had in any way softened in his 'patriotic' convictions.

¹⁵⁴ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.770.

¹⁵⁵ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.210.

¹⁵⁶ *Hansard*, HC Debs, col.2196; reproduced in Hamilton, p.141.

As we have seen, war time 'patriotism', as espoused not least by Henderson himself, placed great importance on a strong national display of unity and determination in the fight against Prussian militarism. Yet in the final period of the Stockholm campaign Henderson pushed ahead determinedly with a project that appeared to offer no significant gain either to Russia, its supposed beneficiary, or to political unity in Britain. The principal and predictable consequence of this action was a governmental crisis resulting in an enforced Cabinet resignation, and in the longer run an open division between the Labour party and the other main parties on their respective attitudes towards vital questions concerning the objects and potential settlement of the war.

It is useful to consider in this respect the first views of the War Cabinet regarding the political situation created by Henderson's unexpected action. Meeting on the morning of the 11th ministers 'agreed that the action of the Labour Party was likely to damage this country in the eyes of Foreign Powers, who would say that British democracy had by its vote shown itself tired of the war, and that it would also be a serious blow to the Government.' Whilst they hoped that once the government's position on the matter was known the situation might 'be retrieved' by the TUC, scheduled to meet on 3 September, they nevertheless contemplated taking the issue more immediately to the electorate, either partially by means of Labour ministers going to their constituencies to stand in effect for a vote of confidence in the government, or by calling a full General Election.

There were significant objections however to both these options. The former was deemed unsatisfactory as it could 'be looked upon as a farce' and 'as a partial appeal to the Labour Party and not to the country at large.' The problem with the latter was that the existing

electoral register was shortly to be replaced under the planned extension of the franchise and that many potential voters (particularly women) would be discontented at their exclusion from any such snap election. A further difficulty arose as a consequence of a recent peace initiative taken by the Pope. Proposals for peace 'of a plausible nature but tending towards an unsatisfactory peace,' were, ministers believed, 'in the air' and it would be 'inopportune' to hold an election whilst this was the case. It was believed that this could also 'cause difficulties with our Allies.' Further consideration of these electoral options, it was decided, should wait on events. Henderson had already by this stage somewhat alleviated ministers' concerns by informing them that he continued to share and was ready to support in a 'non-Government capacity' the Cabinet's desire that the war 'should be carried to a successful conclusion'.¹⁵⁷ With his resignation statement two days later springing no further embarrassing surprises, the political fallout doubtless appeared to ministers more easily manageable, and the notion of appealing to the electorate was quietly dropped.

But even though Henderson was quick to reassure the Cabinet of his continuing commitment to the war, the question remains: why did the 'patriotic' Henderson put his ministerial colleagues in this predicament in the first place? It seems wholly incomprehensible that he did so simply to avoid offering 'a point blank refusal' to the Russians, especially since refusing their invitation to Stockholm was precisely what he *was* doing. The more plausible explanation, by a considerable margin, is that he was opening the way to a new policy for his party: a policy which would reconnect with the position agreed

¹⁵⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 11 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (212).

in the Allied socialist conference of February 1915, and a policy moreover which he could not pursue as a minister in Lloyd George's government.

In conclusion, an overview of the eighteen days of Henderson's campaign would suggest that it could be divided into two parts. It seems likely that he did initially hold out some hope that he might succeed in leading his party to Stockholm.¹⁵⁸ Following his return from Paris on the other hand the likelihood is that this hope was largely abandoned. Nevertheless, the apparently more limited aim of overturning the Manchester resolution remained achievable. But might not this latter aim have been ultimately the more important, in that it opened the way to a longer term goal of engaging the Labour party in a revived Socialist International? The argument presented in this chapter is that Henderson's actions during this extraordinary eighteen day period cannot be easily explained on the assumptions contained within the standard account, but can be more successfully understood on the assumption that this second aim was all along his primary objective.

¹⁵⁸ His comments regarding the possible difficulty and proposed solution of the fact that so many Allied socialist leaders were also members of their respective governments gives weight to this belief, see the 17 July interview in *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.5.

Chapter Four

Henderson and the Peace

The conclusion reached in the last chapter, if accepted, clearly necessitate substantial revisions in the existing accounts of Henderson's political journey through the summer of 1917. Whilst a comprehensive new narrative cannot here be provided, a start can be made on this task by consideration of some features such a narrative would need to contain. The previous two chapters have obviously gone some way in this direction. In shifting the focus away from Henderson's supposed priority of saving Russia and towards the concern he would demonstrate throughout the remainder of the war for the securing of a peace settlement in accordance with Labour ideals, the story has already undergone significant change. Further implications of this change may now also be highlighted.

This chapter then will construct a sketchy narrative of Henderson's final period during the war beginning on the day of his return to Britain in July 1917 and ending with his reaction to the Treaty of Versailles almost two years later. The narrative will be based on the premise that he was animated throughout this period by the desire that the Labour party should actively contribute to a national and international campaign, the minimum and essential goal of which would be a peace settlement in line with Labour ideals and sentiment. For most of this period, that is after 10 August 1917, this premise is not particularly

controversial. The issues raised in the latter part of the chapter will centre less on the premise's validity, than on judgements made in earlier accounts as to its relative importance for Henderson as compared with other concerns – most notably the wider threat he is thought to have identified of Russian Bolshevism. It will be concluded that this latter concern was in reality of a minor nature, certainly when contrasted with the major effort devoted to the securing of an acceptable peace settlement.

The early part of the chapter will engage with a very different problem. If we are to assume that the eighteen days of Henderson's Stockholm campaign were less concerned with bolstering the position of the revolutionary government of Russia, and more with the effort to change the direction of Labour party policy on the war, what implications may this have on the existing narratives of this period? We shall see that these implications are indeed significant, particularly in the following three areas: the impact on Henderson of his Russian sojourn, leading to the formulation of his plan to convert British labour to a renewed internationalist position; the reconsideration of his status in government that this plan would inevitably entail; and the presentational problems in carrying off both these significant changes in a manner that would not jeopardise the essential ongoing support of the party's 'patriotic' majority.

The Impact of Russia

At the heart of the standard account is the belief that Henderson became persuaded whilst in Russia that the Stockholm conference was the best means by which the troubled Petrograd regime could be supported. It will be argued here by contrast that what happened to Henderson in Russia should be seen in terms of a realisation that the circumstances he encountered in that country provided him with an unexpected opportunity to influence events in his own. It was on this basis that he constructed his campaign for Stockholm once home. Significantly however circumstances in Russia did in fact change following his departure, rendering his carefully fashioned campaign in Britain increasingly vulnerable.

This argument shares with standard accounts the great difficulty of pinning down just how and when he came to appreciate this important opportunity. The 'thinking processes' by which he realised this possibility remain as always wholly obscure. One particular handicap for the historian in this instance is that these processes may more than usually have been undertaken alone. These were not matters he was likely to have discussed with Russians, with Buchanan, nor even with other visiting Allied socialists, nor for that matter the Fabian, Julius West, the only member of the frustrated Labour delegation to travel to Russia. We are forced to speculate then as to how the circumstances he encountered in Russia may conceivably have led him to the course of action he later pursued.

On arrival in Petrograd Henderson's central purpose was to keep Russia in the war. It was generally understood that if this was to be achieved concessions would have to be made regarding the language at least in which Allied war aims would be expressed. Conferences advocated by the Russians to discuss these matters, whether governmental or socialist,

could not be easily rejected. Henderson was more amenable, whilst in Petrograd, to the former than the latter, but he would have recognised that arguments for both could be pitched in similar ways. Once persuaded in favour of Stockholm, he was thereby enabled to slip easily from the advocacy of one conference to the other.

In supporting Tereshchenko's conference, Henderson was doing no more than reinforce the opinions of Buchanan. There was nothing controversial in broaching the issue of war aims in this context. Indeed, having spent some time in Petrograd and spoken with Russian ministers he could confidently inform Lloyd George that 'frank discussion' at this conference might help 'idealists' such as Kerensky and Tsereteli to grasp 'that aggression of German militarism is alone responsible for all sufferings in war and that it is only by drawing Germany's teeth we can hope to secure permanent peace.'¹ This line of reasoning clearly foreshadows the case he would later make in relation to Stockholm.

Tereshchenko's conference could equally of course create problems for the European Allies. It could expose differences between the progressive war aims of the Russians and Americans and the expansionist aims articulated in the secret Allied treaties of previous years. It could even lead to a situation in which, under pressure from the Petrograd and Washington governments, the European Allies might be induced into making tangible concessions. But would this have been unwelcome to Henderson? If such a conference increased the chances of a final settlement more easily reconciled with the principles enunciated by Allied socialists in February 1915 why indeed should he object? Although he supported the idea of the Allies agreeing to the Russian conference, he never himself

¹ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 10 July 1917, FO/371/3011, f.78.

proposed that the War Cabinet *should* make such concessions. He must however have recognised that a policy designed to keep Russia in the war could conceivably come at the price of developments he could welcome for quite different reasons.

We may say then that the discussions surrounding the Tereshchenko conference provided a template upon which Henderson could build, if and when he so decided, to make a case for Stockholm. This returns us to the question posed in Chapter Two as to when and why he did make that decision. We argued there that the alignment of the Russian soviet with the Dutch-Scandinavian committee was the critical factor, primarily because it forced the Russians into a more moderate and acceptable position regarding the terms on which conference invitations would be issued. We may add here that it also gave Henderson key arguments to incorporate in his eventual campaign. It allowed him on the one hand to subordinate the ISB's ambition to generate conversations on peace between socialists to the pressing needs of the still fighting Russians. And in as far as the internationalist programme had to be admitted, the cautious and pro-Allied position in particular of Branting helped soften this blow.²

But if the commitment to Stockholm as such remained beyond the political horizon for most of Henderson's time in Russia, the wider questions of socialist internationalism and labour diplomacy were very much in the air. Discussions embracing a diversity of Russian opinion and including the several visiting socialists in Petrograd ranged widely over questions of war and peace, whilst not far away in Stockholm the more formal process by which the Dutch/Scandinavian committee elicited statements from parties preparatory to the plenary

² Both these 'patriotic' elements of his later campaign can be found in his 1 August parliamentary address, *Hansard*, H C Debs, 1 August 1917, vol.96, cols: 2190-2191.

International conference was ongoing. By July separate delegations from the majority and minority German socialists had presented their views in Stockholm, as had the several national groups of socialists within Austria-Hungary. The French party had resolved at the end of May to send a delegation representing both *majoritaires* and *minoritaires* to the committee, and although the French government refused passports, the party did nevertheless draft a lengthy statement for submission to Stockholm. The Belgian socialists too, although refusing throughout to contemplate any face to face meeting with German representatives, were happy to submit a full statement of their views to the Dutch/Scandinavians. Other European parties of various size or significance also presented their opinions.³ The British Labour party however played no part in these proceedings. Prior to Henderson's conversation with Branting and Huysmans on 17 July, West was the only Briton to whom the Dutch/Scandinavians spoke, and he insisted that he represented no one but himself.⁴

Although the actions of the seamen were largely responsible for the failure of British labour to become involved in the exchanges of views within international socialism, the wider distaste of British 'patriots' for the efforts of foreign socialists to draw them into unwelcome conversations was a further inhibiting factor. Having spent weeks in the *milieu* of revolutionary Petrograd in which the notion of labour diplomacy, to whatever ends it might be put, was thriving, Henderson was well placed to observe that Britain had become ever more detached from the socialist mainstream. It seems unlikely that he could have been content with this state of affairs. Restricted in his communications with party colleagues to a

³ For a summary of this stage of the Dutch/Scandinavian committee's programme, see Merle Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War* (New York, 1966), pp: 136-138.

⁴ See *The Times*, 9 August 1917, p.8.

handful of letters and telegrams, he could do little more than impress on them his strong desire to see an Allied socialist conference convened in London to which the American Federation of Labour, along with the rather reluctant Russian socialists would be invited. Whilst reporting also on the exchanges with the Russian soviet regarding Stockholm, attendance at this latter conference was not yet advocated.⁵

One additional means of communication with his party was through the press. Although he was not in the habit of giving lengthy interviews to British newspapers, one notable exception was made on 3 July, when Henderson spoke on 'The mind of Russia' to the *Manchester Guardian*. Beginning in the expected manner of a government minister Henderson put a positive gloss on the attitude of the nation to the recently commenced military offensive. The Russian people, he suggested, having become convinced that 'the aims and objects of Russia's allies in the war had become clearly consistent with Russia's declared formula of "no annexations and no indemnities".....would be devoted to the continuation until final victory of a strong offensive....' But almost immediately this optimism was heavily qualified by the observation that amongst socialists, whether 'extreme' or 'moderate', there was 'much suspicion and misunderstanding' regarding Allied intentions. After elaborating in some detail as to the apparently expansionist policies which fired these suspicions, he referred to the dissatisfaction in these quarters over London's 'recent Note to the Russian Government' which the socialists considered 'too vague and general.' Even the included 'promise to examine and, if necessary, to revise all agreements made during the war, failed to convince them that their aims and ours are substantially the same.'

⁵ LHA, Henderson to Roberts, 21 June 1917, Henderson papers, LP/HEN/1/31; NEC mins., 20 June, 2 July, 10 July 1917.

Henderson concluded that he was now 'convinced' that the proposed governmental conference on war aims would be crucial to eliminating these suspicions. Such a conference, he declared, 'must be in the fullest sympathy with the democratic ideals and aspirations' of the Russian people 'for it is certain that no ordinary meeting of diplomats would satisfy their claims.' The 'findings of any conference' he added, 'must make it unmistakably clear that the war is only continued because of the danger to freedom of an uncontrolled military despotism.'⁶ Russian socialists were not only critical however of the British government. 'Many throw on British trade unionists the responsibility of prolonging the war,' Henderson stated, 'owing to their support for an Imperialistic Government.' He also referred to their lack of interest in an Allied socialist conference, even as a preliminary to the conference they did want. (Although the word Stockholm does not actually appear in this interview, Henderson's comment that they hoped for 'an International conference of Socialists who are prepared to forget the past and come together as Socialists.....to effect an actual settlement of the war' obviously refers to the Stockholm conference.)

It is clear that on 3 July Henderson was not advocating British attendance at Stockholm, but he may be seen as preparing party colleagues for the necessity of engaging with Russian socialists, whose views were considerably closer to domestic 'pacifists' than 'patriots'. His expectation at this moment may have been that such engagement would take place preferably at the planned Allied socialist conference. But in articulating the views of the Russian socialists uncritically, and in their own anti-imperialist language, he was surely suggesting that Labour 'patriots' at home had to appreciate that these views could not be

⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1917, p.5.

dismissed with the contempt that they generally were when emerging from the mouths of British 'pacifists'. In his readiness to engage with those elements within international socialism that were adopting positions unpalatable to the British labour majority, Henderson was obviously taking a significant step towards Stockholm.

If we are to see this interview as in part at least a message to the party at home, its timing would itself be significant. Had the executive delegation been able to depart for Petrograd it would have arrived in Russia by mid-June. Debate could have taken place with Russian and other Allied socialists, as well as within the British contingent itself. By 3 July Henderson knew that his request to Havelock Wilson to reconsider his union's decision to prevent the full party travelling had been fruitless, and the following day he telegraphed Labour offices to confirm that a delegation denuded of those the seamen declared 'pacifists' would be 'inadvisable'.⁷ Recognising that party colleagues in London would be unable to communicate directly with Russian socialists, at least until such time as the latter might agree to attend the proposed Allied socialist conference, it may well have seemed sensible to provide a summary of their views. Within a fortnight of his *Manchester Guardian* interview the coming together of the Russian soviet with the Dutch/Scandinavian committee had occurred and the meeting with Branting and Huysmans had taken place. What may up to this point have been an awareness that a case for Stockholm could under certain circumstances be constructed, was now transformed. These developments allowed Henderson to take the decisive further step.

⁷ LHA, NEC mins., 10 July 1917.

We have considered so far the way in which Henderson's encounter with the ferment of international socialist endeavour in the Russian capital probably encouraged in him the desire to participate, if only initially in the context of Allied socialism. This clearly suggests a different process towards the acceptance of Stockholm than that presented in standard accounts, in which the key issue is the vulnerability of the Provisional Government. As noted in Chapter Two, Henderson fully recognised the difficulties the government faced in the form of extensive nationwide anarchy. He could nevertheless point to some encouraging factors in the political situation. The alliance between the Provisional Government and the dominant 'moderate' majority within the Soviet, which he believed had been hardening during his time in the country, had 'saved Petrograd from at least overt anarchy.....' Political stability, he suggested, mainly depended on the continuance of this alliance, about which he felt a degree of confidence. He did not judge that either the forces of the right (the Cadets) or the left (the Bolsheviks) were likely to succeed in overthrowing this centrist alliance.⁸ Almost as soon as he left Russia however, this optimism began to appear unfounded.

Henderson had been aware during the latter part of his stay in Petrograd of demonstrations and disturbances launched by Bolsheviks and anarchists in opposition to the war and to the presence of Cadet ministers in the Provisional Government. Following his departure a new and considerably more menacing wave of armed demonstrations erupted. This violent and alarming episode, later known as the 'July Days', would be mistakenly seen as an attempted takeover of power by the Bolshevik leadership.⁹ It was on the contrary the *lack* of political

⁸ TNA, Arthur Henderson, 'British Mission to Russia, June and July 1917', War Cabinet, 16 July 1917, CAB/24/4 (G 152) pp: 8-11.

⁹ For the rebuttal of earlier arguments that this had been a premature attempt on the part of the Bolshevik leadership to take power, see Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the*

leadership provided by Bolsheviks or anyone else that led to the speedy degeneration of the revolt into a chaotic bout of riot and looting which provided little resistance to the arriving pro-government forces.¹⁰

Order was restored within three days, some time before Henderson arrived back in Britain. Nevertheless he did allude to the disturbances in his interview of 24 July, emphasising the 'extent to which the extremists dominated the [Russian] capital' and demoralised the army and navy. Russia was 'passing through a crisis so grave and menacing as to expose to real danger many of the glorious possibilities of the revolution.' Despite this, Henderson continued to believe that the alliance between the moderate socialists and the Provisional Government held the key to the overcoming of the nation's problems. Reiterating several of the points he had made in the 3 July interview regarding the views of the dominant group within the All-Russian soviet, he highlighted the importance to these socialists of both the governmental war aims conference and Stockholm. Although he referred to the pleas of Tsereteli, the effective leader of this group, for British attendance at Stockholm, he still did not at this point clearly advocate a positive response (the executive's decision to propose this was only taken the following day).¹¹ But Henderson had of course been personally committed to Stockholm for at least a week, having given his view that the conference was desirable on the 17th. The much publicised disorder in Petrograd since then could add a powerful new element to the argument he would shortly be putting in favour of bowing to Tsereteli's request.

July 1917 Uprising (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1968); for a briefer and more recent account of the July Days, see Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London, 1997), pp: 421-438.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp: 426-431.

¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 July 1917, p.5.

In reality however the matter was not quite so straightforward. Although the Bolshevik leaders, recognising that they had little support in the rest of the country, had been opposed to the Petrograd uprising, it was they who paid a heavy price in its aftermath. Accused by the government of having links to the Germans, they in particular were suddenly vulnerable. Senior figures were either arrested or, as in the case of Lenin, took asylum outside Russia.¹² Their immediate political prospects looked decidedly bleak. With the far left in disarray, Kerensky emerged as the saviour of the revolution.¹³ Bolstered by his victory over the Bolsheviks, he succeeded in forming a new socialist dominated government, committed to maintaining the security of the country and the revolution. By a vote of 252 to 47, the Soviet granted 'unlimited power' to the new administration 'to re-establish the organization and discipline of the army and to wage war to the knife against revolution and anarchy.....'¹⁴ The temporarily diminished threat from extremists naturally reduced its efficacy in Henderson's campaign. It is notable that in both his subsequent addresses - 1 August to the House of Commons and at the 10 August conference - his references to the vulnerability of the Provisional government are expressed in much vaguer terms than on 24 July.

A further difficulty for Henderson occasioned by these developments lay in the perception outside Russia that the balance of power between the new government and the Soviet had changed. Former constraints on the executive, it was believed, had been largely removed. This notion would prove important in the revived debate over Stockholm within the War Cabinet. Obligated to reconsider their position by Henderson's unanticipated campaign,

¹² Lenin travelled in disguise to Finland, failing to return for several months.

¹³ *The Times*, 21 July 1917, p.6; *The Observer*, 22 July 1917, p.2; *The Times*, 23 July 1917, pp: 6,7 and 8.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 24 July 1917, p.7.

ministers argued that circumstances in Russia were now very different to the situation prevailing in May, when they had adopted the view that British attendance at Stockholm might be advisable.¹⁵ As it became clearer 'that the influence of the Soviet....was steadily declining,' their main object of sustaining the Russian government no longer required the dangerous expedient of an international socialist conference.¹⁶ Henderson himself, though obviously unwilling to reach the same conclusions as his colleagues, did nevertheless agree that circumstances *had* changed since the spring. In a message to Lloyd George on 28 July he suggested enquiring of Tereshchenko 'what view the Russian Government now take of Stockholm Conference having regard to domestic developments and in particular altered relations between Government and Sovyet.'¹⁷ In the War Cabinet four days later he admitted that circumstances had 'changed considerably' since May.¹⁸ On 10 August, as we have seen, he continued to acknowledge that the situation in Russia had changed, whilst simultaneously playing down the significance of this fact.

We should be aware at this point that the crisis in Russia was deeper and more protracted than the brief chaos of the Petrograd revolt. On the eve of, but unconnected with, the mass demonstrations, four senior Cadet ministers had resigned from the government over their dissatisfaction with many of the socialist inspired policies of the administration.¹⁹ Now outside government the Cadet defectors, along with the bulk of their party, rushed to blame the remaining ministers not only for their readiness to accommodate Ukrainian and Finnish separatists (the immediate cause of the resignations) but also for their tolerance of left wing

¹⁵ TNA, War Cabinet, 30 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (199a)

¹⁶ TNA, War Cabinet, 8 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (207).

¹⁷ TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 28 July 1917, FO/371/3007, f.213.

¹⁸ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202)..

¹⁹ William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: the Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921* (Princeton, 1974), pp: 171-175.

extremists, whom in the eyes of many Cadets included those defined by Henderson as 'moderate' socialists. A general curbing of the power of the soviets now seemed to them essential.²⁰ In the face of a faltering military offensive and continuing nationwide disorder, there was little on which socialists and Cadets could agree. So deep indeed were these disagreements that efforts to recreate a new coalition government staggered on unsuccessfully for several weeks. By 6 August when a new coalition government was finally formed, the parties remained fundamentally divided. Expectations of 'effective national leadership' emerging from the new Cabinet were very low.²¹

The increasingly polarised politics of the revolution formed an unfortunate backdrop to Henderson's campaign, which was largely predicated on a degree of harmony between government and soviet as to the value of British attendance at Stockholm. Opinion within the War Cabinet, and more generally on the British political right, was increasingly inclined to see the disaffected Cadets, whose criticisms of the Kerensky government closely echoed their own, as the best hope for Russia's active return to the Allied war effort.²² This too created an atmosphere in which Stockholm, as a means to accommodate the sensibilities of the Russian left, was firmly rejected. Henderson's greatest difficulty at this time however was the uncertainty regarding the views on the conference of senior ministers still in the Provisional Government. It was clearly fundamental to his campaign's 'patriotic' credentials that Russian support for Stockholm was not confined to the Soviet, but backed also by responsible ministers in Petrograd.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.184.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.191.

²² See the Allied support for the attempted counter-revolutionary Kornilov *coup*, Robert D. Warth, *The Allies and the Russian Revolution: From the Fall of the Monarchy to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk* (New York, 1954), pp: 116-132.

During this lengthy political crisis in Russia few in Britain fully understood its implications. Even Buchanan, who could observe from close quarters, struggled to gain any sense of where the country was heading. 'The situation is so obscure that I personally see no daylight,' he wrote on 2 August after a new round of ministerial resignations again muddled the political waters. On the same day however he reported that some ministers 'would much prefer that the Stockholm conference should not take place for fear that peace talk might have a bad influence on the army.'²³ A week later Nabokov relayed to the British government a note from Tereshchenko stating that 'although the Russian government does not deem it possible to prevent Russian delegates from taking part in the Stockholm Conference, they regard this Conference as a party concern and its decisions in no wise binding upon the liberty of actions of the Government.'²⁴ The receipt of this note shortly before the 10 August conference was not revealed to the Labour delegates, despite a last minute request from Lloyd George to Henderson that he inform the conference of its contents. This became a matter of great controversy, with the Prime Minister asserting that Henderson had essentially deceived his own party by remaining silent on this critical revelation, and Henderson maintaining that he had adequately covered the substance of the note in his general comments regarding the Provisional Government's changed perspectives.²⁵

Although Henderson held his own in this particular controversy, striking indeed a significant victory when Kerensky and Tereshchenko later denied that they had changed their views on

²³ George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, Vol. 2 (London, 1923), p160.

²⁴ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson: A Biography* (London, 1938), p.147.

²⁵ For the opposing views, see *ibid.*, pp:145-148; 158-161 and David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol.2 (London, 1938), pp: 1133-1140.

Stockholm, the evidence suggests that indifference rather than opposition to the conference may more accurately have described their positions. In Kerensky's case this was revealed in a further message which reached the War Cabinet on 10 August, too late to have had any bearing on the Labour conference. This new message came from Thomas in Paris and stated that a telegram had been received from Russia 'to the effect that the Provisional Government had disinterested itself in the Stockholm Conference, and that M. Kerensky desired that it should not meet.'²⁶ Thomas's representation of Kerensky's position is thought to have been based on an unguarded remark the Russian leader had earlier made to a French socialist that 'he had completely lost sight of the question of the conference for several weeks and had not thought about whether it should meet.'²⁷ This was probably an accurate summary of his position. He had been at this point very much involved in military matters and frequently absent from Petrograd. Coming to terms with the failure of the offensive had been especially difficult. His biographer writes of the emergence at this time of a 'new, chastened Kerensky, his mood somber, his tone authoritarian, his vocabulary increasingly traditional.'²⁸

By the evening of 8 August, when Henderson had first sight of the Nabokov note, he had not been in Russia for three full weeks. Whilst the situation he left had been moulded by him into a narrative that would support his Stockholm campaign, developments since then increasingly threatened to undermine this campaign. This was surely one major reason for his determination to push ahead and secure the Labour party's assent before the door firmly closed on the Stockholm project. The predictable outcome of this determination was

²⁶ TNA, War Cabinet, 10 August 1917, CAB/23/3/(211).

²⁷ Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution* (London, 1987), p.229.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.231.

his ejection from the War Cabinet, which leads us to the second part of the standard account most in need of substantial revision: Henderson's attitude towards his place in government.

The Resignation Dilemma

The possibility that leaving the War Cabinet was integral to Henderson's campaign to change Labour policy on politically sensitive matters such as war aims and participation in the Socialist International has not been considered in standard accounts. This is unsurprising, since these accounts largely see the above campaign as only fully emerging *after* Henderson had been forced from the Cabinet. Consideration has however been given to the idea that a conflict with the War Cabinet was a possibility (perhaps even a probability) inherent in the divided loyalties that Henderson's position necessarily entailed. Wrigley for example has argued in the context of the Stockholm episode that 'the likelihood was that Henderson would resign sooner or later, as his positions as a leading Labour official and as a Cabinet Minister were incompatible (industrial unrest repeatedly made this clear).....'²⁹

This judgement however seems questionable. Why could Henderson not have continued as before in helping to resolve labour disputes, as Barnes and Roberts did after his departure? It has been maintained by Trevor Wilson that industrial unrest was in fact no more

²⁹ Chris Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement: Peace and War* (Hassocks, 1976), p.217.

threatening after August 1917 than before, and was positively transformed in the spring of 1918 by the national response to dramatic German advances on the Western Front.³⁰ The fact that labour disputes were invariably sectional in nature and infrequently blessed by strong support on the part of other workers is also significant. Given the approach Henderson had hitherto adopted to his ministerial responsibilities, resignation would surely have been something he would consider only on a matter of deep principle or of wider national relevance.

The issue of conscription had fallen into this category and had briefly compelled his resignation in 1916; though in standing firm against a party majority, and in gaining minor concessions from the government, he was soon back in ministerial harness. The strong convictions within his party against military compulsion, he had argued, were trumped by the over-riding necessity of prevailing in the war.³¹ In the face of the growing manpower crisis of 1917 the extension of military compulsion at that time could conceivably have drawn a different response from Henderson. On the other hand however, the government were clearly reluctant to push trade unionists too far at this moment, even if this meant denying the generals the manpower they demanded.³² Had he still been in the Cabinet at this juncture, would not Henderson have sought out some compromise as he had done before?

³⁰ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), pp: 653-659.

³¹ Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990), pp: 95-99.

³² Wrigley, David Lloyd George, pp: 218-231; David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark, 1983), pp: 174-175, 233-236.

The issue over which Henderson did leave the Cabinet was of course one of deep principle, or as he presented it, of Labour ideals. But it had not been his party which had pushed him to act on these ideals. The initiative for Stockholm had come solely from himself. It is true that during the course of his campaign and thereafter he repeatedly highlighted the difficulties inherent in his dual role as government minister and Labour leader. References to this problem were made in the War Cabinet, both on 26 July and 1 August, in his letter of resignation to Lloyd George of 11 August, in the House of Commons on 13 August, and in conversation and correspondence over the following days.³³ It was nevertheless clear to all that had Henderson himself not inspired this confrontation, the likelihood of the Labour party and the government falling out over the issue was very remote. It is hardly contentious to characterise Henderson's break with the War Cabinet as a consequence of what was for him a personal quest – a quest inspired by having regained 'his faith in socialist war aims.'³⁴

On the assumption adopted in this chapter - that by 17 July Henderson already envisaged a longer term commitment to a revised International – his future in the War Cabinet was obviously in doubt. How and when he would leave government could not yet however be determined. His reference in the 17 July interview to the problem of permitting those labour leaders who were also in government to attend Stockholm, and a suggestion as to how this might be done, indicate that he had not ruled out the possibility that the War Cabinet might still be prepared to consider approving a British delegation to the conference. If this were so, the first stage of his campaign would be greatly facilitated, and departure from the

³³ TNA, War Cabinet, 26 July 1917, CAB/23/13 (196a), 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202); *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.915; Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.216; F.M.Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), pp: 69-70.

³⁴ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.210.

Cabinet could be postponed until such time as it became clear that the objects he was pursuing transcended merely keeping Russia in the war. The alternative possibility, that the War Cabinet would follow the course chosen by other Allied governments and rule out attendance, had of course also to be considered.

How might Henderson have anticipated responding to this less favourable situation? On the evidence we have seen of his actual behaviour, the assumption must be that he would have continued in his campaign to win over his party regardless of the consequences in terms of his Cabinet position. But again, precisely how this would play out was wholly uncertain. Whether Henderson himself or ministerial colleagues would take the initiative in his severance from the War Cabinet would depend on specific circumstances. One matter that would obviously be of great importance was the likely reaction of 'patriotic' labour to any such Cabinet departure. If Lloyd George were able to present the break as some sort of desertion on Henderson's part to the 'pacifist' camp, this could seriously damage his prospect of success on 10 August.

Labour historians have generally seen Henderson's removal from office as a straightforward case of dismissal. Winter allows that he may well have seen the rupture coming, but he did not himself offer his resignation to the Prime Minister until the latter had unmistakably demanded it.³⁵ Similarly Wrigley, recognising that Henderson and Lloyd George were on a collision course over Stockholm, asserts that 'Henderson did not manoeuvre for a pretext

³⁵ J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), p.769. Henderson did in fact offer his resignation during the War Cabinet meeting of 26 July, although in the absence of the Prime Minister there was no authority to accept it.

for resignation.³⁶ Subsequently however Henderson regretted that he had not resigned earlier than he did. In a letter to Runciman of 17 August, he wrote that if he were able to go through the Stockholm experience again 'the only thing I would do would be to tender my resignation a little earlier. I wanted to leave before going to Paris and ought to have done so. Everything I did from that moment left me subject to misunderstanding and suspicion.'³⁷ He was undoubtedly correct in this observation, particularly in relation to his conduct after 8 August. What he does not explain however is *why* during this fortnight he had chosen not to resign.

One rather obvious occasion for a resignation came in the wake of the humiliation of the 'doormat' incident, a procedure which Henderson subsequently suggested was without precedent.³⁸ Although undoubtedly angered at the time, his response differed from that of 26 July, at least in the recollection of Lloyd George: 'There was no longer any question of his offering to resign, as he had done at the Cabinet meeting before he left for Paris. On the contrary, he challenged us to demand his resignation.'³⁹ We may imagine at this point that Henderson would have preferred his departure from the War Cabinet to be forced upon him, ideally as a consequence of his acting on instructions from his party executive. This would help ensure the continuing loyalty of trade union 'patriots'. He could well have judged also that to have resigned over what amounted to a personal slight would not have been wise. The Cabinet had not yet formally resolved to oppose Stockholm, which would have given him a clear policy disagreement to add to his understandable indignation.

³⁶ Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.113.

³⁷ Henderson to Runciman, 17 August 1917, Runciman papers, quoted in F.M.Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), pp: 69-70.

³⁸ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.914.

³⁹ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p.1129.

Already in the eye of a political storm he had himself generated, a piqued resignation would probably not have enhanced his reputation. The impact it may have had on his ongoing campaign could have seemed very uncertain.

The more cautious option he chose at this moment was to steady the ship and simply await the inevitable breach once the Cabinet did formally declare its opposition to Stockholm. When that day came, he presumably calculated, the impossibility of continuing his dual role would be starkly revealed. As Secretary of the Labour party he was committed to support the executive's 25 July resolution in support of attendance at Stockholm; as a member of the War Cabinet he would have been obliged to support any decision to deny Labour delegates the means to fulfil this resolution. One or other of his offices would have to be discarded, and we can surely assume that it would have been the Cabinet seat which he would sacrifice. He would then be free to make the case for Stockholm along lines similar to those he eventually employed. The same recognition that nobody would actually be going to Stockholm (though obviously for additional reasons which he could in this instance freely declare) and the same appeal not to give the Russians a point blank refusal, could perhaps have led to the same outcome.

Had matters developed in this way Henderson could have presented his rift with Cabinet colleagues as a legitimate disagreement between 'patriots' over their differing approaches to the problems created by the revolution in Russia. The involvement of the Attorney General however introduced a significant complication. Whilst it was constitutionally acceptable to leave government in order to pursue a political objective not shared by

Cabinet colleagues, it was obviously a different matter if this political objective was contrary to the law.

Henderson's actions on the evening of the 7th show him struggling with this unanticipated conundrum. Reading his account of that evening's discussions with Lloyd George we can detect some confusion in his responses. The initial idea that the legal position should be made public was quickly abandoned. The further idea that ministers could disassociate themselves from the matter by debarring members of the government from forming any part of the delegation could scarcely carry conviction. The government could hardly 'disassociate itself' from a decision to provide passports to Labour delegates openly intending to act in defiance of the law as determined by the government's own legal authority. Henderson's readiness to sacrifice his own place on a British delegation may have had the appearance of an important concession, but in reality it was meaningless. The government was obviously unlikely to consent to a delegation proceeding to Stockholm from which Labour's most senior and reliable 'patriots' were excluded. And Henderson had already equivocated on 1 August over the question of whether he would attend the conference, presumably realising by then that there was little likelihood of any British delegation making the journey.⁴⁰

Wrong footed by the Attorney General's intervention it is easy to see why Henderson responded so uncertainly. It is easy to see also why he would have rejected his first impulsive response in favour of the release of the legal ruling and his own consequent resignation. This would have allowed him the freedom to present his own arguments to the

⁴⁰ TNA, War Cabinet, 1 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (202); and see Chapter 3 above.

Labour conference, but could he really have recommended a course of action which his audience would know had been declared unlawful? The alternative course inadvertently provided by the Labour ministers, and confirmed by the War Cabinet the next day, was the course which on reflection he decided to take. Whilst this would certainly open him up to charges of deception, it nevertheless provided him the best remaining opportunity to achieve the goal of reversing the Manchester resolution.

There was then no occasion on which it would have been easy for Henderson to resign from the War Cabinet without risk to this primary objective. We should repeat however that this objective was no more than a necessary first step towards the wider goal of persuading the party into an ongoing participation in the politics of the International. His dismissal from Cabinet amidst accusations of deceit was in this sense a matter of great importance. To refute these accusations in a manner sufficient to keep the bulk of 'patriotic' Labour firmly on his side was a task that he could certainly not ignore. How he went about this represents a third significant area in the historical narrative which requires revision.

Protesting Too Much?

Standard accounts see Henderson as the injured party in this episode, with Lloyd George conventionally cast in the role of chief villain. Many labour historians have written on Henderson's deep sense of indignation at the treatment he allegedly suffered at the hands of his fellow ministers. Some have suggested that 'the humiliation' and 'the injuries' inflicted upon him, particularly by the Prime Minister, provided a stimulus to his subsequent

reforming zeal: a 'determination to avenge his peremptory dismissal' may have played a part in his determination to create a post-war Labour party 'with a new image, a new structure, and a new organizational apparatus.'⁴¹ Direct challenges to these views have been hard to find in recent decades. One exception, perhaps unsurprisingly, is Lloyd George's biographer, who believed that Henderson showed signs of 'protesting too much' over his ill treatment.⁴² There is some merit in this judgement. Recognising as he must have done his vulnerability in relation to the charge of deception, Henderson undoubtedly did his best to defuse his opponent's arguments by assiduously presenting himself as the injured party.⁴³

Henderson made little in this respect of his actual departure from the Cabinet. He had been given the choice of either relinquishing his post as Secretary of the Labour party or resigning from the government. Having made much of the difficulties regarding his dual role, Henderson later expressed relief that this problematic duality was now ended.⁴⁴ He did however dwell on the charge of press manipulation which he levelled against Lloyd George in the aftermath of his resignation. He declared himself the victim of 'an unprecedented and dangerous Press campaign....organised with....perfection' by the Prime Minister, who controlled the most effective 'Press Bureau' in the country. Prior to his resignation he had suffered an 'overdose' of attacks from this source on his integrity; thereafter, he declared 'I have had a super-dose'.⁴⁵ This fed in easily to commonly held views regarding Lloyd George's political style: '.....you know from experience,' Henderson said in his letter to

⁴¹ Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.78.

⁴² John Grigg, *Lloyd George: War Leader, 1916-1918* (London, 2003), p.210.

⁴³ Though by no means dissenting from the labour consensus, Wrigley does acknowledge that Henderson 'was adroit in capitalizing on his martyrdom over Stockholm.', Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.120.

⁴⁴ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, p.216.

⁴⁵ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cc: 909, 910, 921.

Runciman, 'the kind of politician into whose hands I unfortunately permitted myself to fall.'⁴⁶

Was Lloyd George's use of the press anything other however than Henderson should have expected? His action on 10 August was not only for the Prime Minister personally embarrassing, but also for the Cabinet potentially threatening to the conduct of the war.⁴⁷ If the Cabinet briefly felt it appropriate to take the matter to the nation in a general election, one would surely expect any Prime Minister to do everything possible to influence public opinion. With the exception of the few Liberal papers sympathetic to Henderson's campaign (identified by the *Morning Post* as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily News* and the *Westminster Gazette*, organs which the *Post* characterised as still hankering after their pre-1914 warm relations with Germany), practically all the national press were critical of his initiative.⁴⁸ Of this, and the misrepresentation of his position he felt it entailed, Henderson had complained at the 10 August conference; but for a politician of the left there was nothing unusual about press hostility. Lloyd George had no need to personally orchestrate this extensive critical response.

The Prime Minister's press manipulation cannot bear the weight Henderson tried to give it as a factor in the injury and humiliation he supposedly suffered. What else then in Lloyd George's behaviour might have justified Henderson's widely accepted deep sense of grievance? There is perhaps only one episode in the run up to 10 August which may have

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, Henderson to Runciman, 17 August 1917, Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.69.

⁴⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 11 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (212)

⁴⁸ *Morning Post*, 7 August 1917, p.4.

carried this load: the tangible, comprehensible grievance of the 'doormat' incident.⁴⁹ This event would indeed come to play an early and major part in labour folklore surrounding the break between Lloyd George and Henderson. Reference was made to it at 'thousands' of meetings, where it was represented, recalled Barnes, 'as an affront to Labour.'⁵⁰ To many within the party it seemed plain, in the words of Trevor Wilson, 'that no upper-class member of the Cabinet, whatever his misdemeanours, would ever be treated like that.'⁵¹

We need not doubt that Henderson would have felt great irritation as he waited a full hour outside the Cabinet chamber, but was his resentment as great or lasting as it later appeared? Barnes, who was finally commissioned to invite his leader to join the discussion, acknowledges that Henderson was indeed initially angry, but 'after a few mutual exchanges of explanation and good-will left, as all thought, without any rancour remaining.' Everyone present 'thought that the incident had closed.' No reference was made to it in the House of Commons that evening during which Lloyd George spoke 'as arranged' in support of Henderson, and the debate proceeded successfully as the Cabinet had planned.⁵² Barnes may however be considered an unreliable witness. His readiness to take Henderson's place as senior Labour representative in the War Cabinet angered many in the party. His action was offensively described as that of a political 'blackleg'.⁵³ Characteristically, Henderson distanced himself from this insulting response.⁵⁴ He also declared his 'most strenuous opposition' to the proposal that Barnes and other Labour ministers should be pressed into

⁴⁹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cc: 913-914.

⁵⁰ George N. Barnes, *From Workshop to War Cabinet* (London, 1924), p.160.

⁵¹ Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p.525.

⁵² Barnes, *Workshop*, p.159.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to compare Henderson's refusal to condemn Barnes with the attitude of MacDonald, who, despite his generally liberal predilections, commented in his diary on Barnes' acceptance of Henderson's post: 'If this is not blacklegging nothing is.', TNA, MacDonald Diary, 14 August 1917, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1753.

resigning from the government. This would be prejudicial to the national war effort that the party had consistently supported and it would 'retard, if not destroy,' labour's prospects.⁵⁵

Barnes then had no strong personal grievance against Henderson despite their difference of opinion on Stockholm. It seems likely too that his recollection of the meeting of 1 August having ended on an apparently harmonious note was shared by ministers. Had they felt otherwise it seems unlikely that they would have allowed Henderson the latitude they subsequently did. But Barnes' perception of Henderson's state of mind following the Cabinet meeting would later be challenged by a very different recollection on the part of another senior party figure, Fred Jowett. Meeting briefly with MacDonald and Henderson in a committee room at the Commons shortly after the Cabinet meeting, Jowett recalls that whilst he and MacDonald discussed the party business to hand, 'Henderson, however, was "whacked"'. His arm lay along the table, his head hung dispiritedly, he seemed broken by the blow.⁵⁶ The credibility of this recollection, reported second hand, may be questioned. MacDonald never himself commented on his distressing scene. As for Henderson, he evidently recovered sufficiently quickly to give a coherent and measured address to MPs within two or three hours of the conclusion of the Cabinet meeting.

First revealed in Henderson's 13 August resignation statement to the House of Commons, the 'doormat' incident provided a weapon capable of deflecting, at least in the minds of his party supporters, the charges levelled against him by Lloyd George. We should now consider more fully how Henderson attempted to meet these charges in this parliamentary

⁵⁵ LHA, *Report of Adjourned Conference*, 21 August 1917, p.4.

⁵⁶ Fenner Brockway, *Socialism Over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford (1864-1944)*, (London, 1946), p.158.

statement and debate. As elsewhere, Hamilton has set the tone for her successors in analysing this event. Despite feeling that he had been 'unjustly traduced', she observes, Henderson, in what he believed to be the national interest, spoke with reserve and reticence, thereby letting Lloyd George off the hook. The latter was far less scrupulous, delivering 'an exceedingly clever speech, in which, while enduing all the panoply of the responsible statesman.....deprived himself of no weapon of innuendo and suggestion.' Henderson, she concludes, 'was too simple to fight Lloyd George.'⁵⁷ Both Leventhal and Wrigley, in his two separate accounts of the Stockholm controversy, echo these themes.⁵⁸ The accepted view then, from which no labour historian has dissented, is that Henderson, despite the inherent strength of his case, was too conscientious and too guileless to land effective blows upon his unscrupulous opponent and that Lloyd George, being fully aware of the damage that Henderson could do him, deployed his political skills to great effect.

This view of course chimes perfectly with the perceived characters of the two politicians, but a careful reading of the debate actually suggests that in this particular instance at least the stereotypes should be abandoned. On the principal charges surrounding the period between 8 and 10 August - that he had misled the Cabinet regarding his intentions on the Stockholm vote and misled Labour delegates by failing to reveal the contents of the Nabokov note - Henderson's case was not strong, especially regarding the first of these accusations. Yet by a combination of careful preparation, pugnacious obfuscation, and a failure on the part of his opponents to press home their advantage, he nevertheless emerged from the contest with his political integrity less fractured than he may have feared. References have already been made to the arguments presented in the post-resignation

⁵⁷ Hamilton, *Henderson*, pp: 155-156, 162.

⁵⁸ Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.69; Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, pp: 215-216; Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.119.

debate on the Paris affair, in which similar techniques had been deployed. Assisted by Bonar Law's failure to make the most of his argument, Henderson had emerged from this part of his defence relatively unscathed. We may now examine his handling of the rather more serious accusations relating to the later period.⁵⁹

Henderson devoted many words in his statement to refuting Lloyd George's main charge. He began unsurprisingly by alluding to what he described as 'the very strange proceeding' of the Prime Minister in raising in the press the issue as to 'why it was, knowing as I did the views of my colleagues, I did not resign.' Much of his answer to this crucial question was essentially irrelevant: the fact, for example, that he had already tendered his resignation on 26 July and it had been refused; that ministerial statements during his visit to Paris had been unwarranted; and that this justified his taking the view that the onus of bringing about his departure from the Cabinet rested with his colleagues rather than himself. The only point he made which was directly related to his decision to leave ministers uninformed of his intentions at the Labour conference was that his prior resignation would have deflected delegates from proper consideration of the merits or otherwise of attendance at Stockholm.⁶⁰

Henderson was undoubtedly aided in his defence by the failure of the Prime Minister, like Bonar Law earlier, to make the most of his case. Instead of focussing his attack on the above stated question as to why Henderson had not offered his resignation, on the grounds that he could not support the Cabinet's goals at the conference, Lloyd George foolishly

⁵⁹ For the section of the parliamentary debate covering this ground, see *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cc: 916-932.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, cc: 916-918.

overstated his argument. He accused Henderson not merely of remaining silent on his intentions, but of having clearly indicated to his Cabinet colleagues that 'he had made up his mind....to turn down the Stockholm Conference' when he addressed the Labour delegates. This allowed Henderson to take the offensive, challenging Lloyd George to declare whether anything in the Cabinet minutes supported this accusation.

We must assume that Henderson had consulted the minutes and knew very well that they did not support the Prime Minister's specific claim. Lloyd George on the other hand appeared unaware of the precise contents of the Cabinet record, but had 'refreshed' his memory of the words exchanged at the Cabinet and remained confident that these confirmed his judgement. He further alleged that Henderson had made similar indications on the evening of the 7th. After more cross examination from Henderson however, he began to founder, referring vaguely to 'various conversations', the times and other details of which he clearly remembered less well than his opponent. His final recourse was to maintain that not only he, but all those who also attended the 8 August meeting, came away with 'the impression' that Henderson was going to 'turn down the Stockholm Conference' on the 10th.⁶¹ All this allowed Henderson to defend himself against a charge which could not be substantiated. Strongly insisting that he had never suggested to his colleagues that he had changed his mind over Stockholm, nor had they ever asked him to represent the Cabinet position when he addressed his own party, he went a considerable way to letting himself, rather than Lloyd George, off the hook.⁶²

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, cc: 925-928.

⁶² *Ibid.*, c.916.

Hamilton's contrary view, as we noted above, rests on another proposition that can be challenged: her belief that Henderson, unlike Lloyd George, weakened his own case by failing to use evidence that was confidential. Henderson certainly claimed this, stating that he was 'content to join the interesting list of ex-Ministers who are awaiting an opportunity to state the full facts of their case when they can do so without prejudice to the interests of the nation.'⁶³ He was indeed prevented from utilising some classified material which he would have found useful, notably Buchanan's continuing judgement that British attendance at Stockholm would not damage British interests.⁶⁴ Clearly however the revelation he had prominently in mind at this moment was the fact that in May Lloyd George had himself been in favour of Stockholm. He hinted as much by remarking darkly that there were questions regarding the Stockholm affair which the Government would eventually have difficulty facing, but which in the public interest he would open up no more than was necessary to clear himself of the charges made against him.⁶⁵ Leventhal records that Henderson 'intimated' to James Middleton, Assistant Secretary to the Labour party, that had he fully revealed the Prime Minister's earlier position 'it would so embarrass the Government as to cause its downfall.'⁶⁶ Was this however a credible judgement?

The War Cabinet were certainly aware that Henderson might make this point. Meeting prior to the debate, ministers discussed how best they would respond should he do so. Having rehearsed the main lines of the argument they had been presenting over the previous ten days, they concluded that 'no difficulty would be found in proving.....that the conditions [in Russia] had completely changed since May 1917.' The main problem they apparently feared

⁶³ *Ibid.*, c.910.

⁶⁴ Buchanan, *Mission*, p.161.

⁶⁵ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, c.924.

⁶⁶ Leventhal, *Henderson*, p.69.

in having to present this argument was that it might be an embarrassment to Kerensky. It was therefore agreed that the Prime Minister should 'have to use the greatest discretion in dealing this matter in Parliament', but that it would be possible to blame the situation on Henderson's 'great disservice' to the Russians 'in raising this question at this precise moment.'⁶⁷ We should note finally that Henderson's restraint on this matter was not long lived. At the adjourned Labour conference eight days later he stated, to a chorus of cheers and laughter from the delegates, that the 'Prime Minister has been in favour of this [Stockholm] Conference once.....What was a virtue in May ought not to be crime in August.'⁶⁸

The handling on 13 August of their respective arguments by Henderson and Lloyd George show the former rather than the latter as the more successful. Henderson was obviously not able to win over a House of Commons which was predominantly and fundamentally opposed to Stockholm, but this was not his real concern. The real battleground, both for him and for Lloyd George, was the labour movement. One especially interesting exchange during the Commons debate is worth noting in this respect. In defending his decision not to resign from the Cabinet, Henderson offered the curious argument that had he done so he would have secured an even larger vote at the Labour conference. Contending that the issue foremost in delegates' minds would have been that of his own resignation, party loyalties would have ensured this more emphatic personal victory. This opinion was probably shared, he believed, by the other Labour members of the government. Lloyd George dismissed Henderson's contention as 'an insult to intelligent people.' Was it likely, he asked, that 'the responsible Labour leaders of the kingdom', if informed that Britain and the Allied

⁶⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 13 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (213).

⁶⁸ LHA, Report of Adjourned Conference, 21 August 1917, p.4.

governments all considered the sending of delegates to Stockholm 'a dangerous expedient', would have flouted this collective official opinion by a bigger majority?⁶⁹

But whose views were in this instance the more credible? It is probably impossible to say, since the specific manner in which a pre-conference resignation might have occurred, and the extent to which either party may have succeeded in presenting the facts favourably to their cause, would have had a major bearing on the outcome. It may be doubted whether either man could really be confident in his assumptions. The situation was after all without precedent. We have already seen that Lloyd George took seriously the possibility that some members of the labour movement could take umbrage over the government laying down the law on what might have been seen as a party matter, and the consequent departure from government of the party's most senior figure would certainly have been seen as an additional concern. Regarding Henderson the evidence is more circumstantial. Had he been confident that a break with the government really would assist his cause at the Labour conference (and it must be remembered that before 10 August the question was not how large a majority he was to receive, but whether or not a majority could be secured at all) then why would he not have acted to bring his resignation about, particularly since this would have the additional benefit of removing the aura of devious and misleading behaviour which was likely to accompany his alternative course?

As we have argued above, all the options open to Henderson during the days leading up to the conference were to some degree problematical, and a pre-conference resignation would undoubtedly have raised serious difficulties, not least in relation to the legal position. For all

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cols: 918, 928.

the risks involved in the course he finally chose, in the end this choice proved successful. Opposition to Stockholm remained strong within Labour, but when the party met at the adjourned conference on 21 August not one of Henderson's opponents took up the charges of deception levelled against him elsewhere. It is interesting to note also that Henderson was on this occasion leaving nothing to chance. Offered the opportunity to make a 'personal statement' at the beginning of the conference, he again provided a lengthy rebuttal of the case against him, concluding with the confession that whilst he may in some ways have failed or erred, this 'has only been because of my loyalty to labour'.⁷⁰

The battle for the hearts and minds of Britain's trade unionists was undoubtedly won by Henderson, but he was again helped by difficulties faced by Lloyd George. The Prime Minister was keen to pin the charge on Henderson that he had deceived not just the War Cabinet but the Labour conference. He had failed to let delegates know that the Cabinet was opposed to Stockholm, and had failed also to reveal the information contained in the Nabokov note, which would have shown them that Russian leaders were no longer supporters of the conference. The first part of this charge was of course difficult to press home. It had after all been the Cabinet's own decision on 8 August that the government's opinion should be withheld from the Labour conference. To fully explain why this decision had been taken could only put ministers in a bad light. The fact that as a still serving member of the government, the views Henderson expressed at the conference were likely to be seen by delegates as 'not inconsistent' with the views of the Cabinet was a valid point, but under the circumstances a hard one on which to place too great an emphasis.⁷¹ The Prime Minister chose therefore to attach greater weight to the second element of

⁷⁰ LHA, *Report of Adjourned Conference*, 21 August 1917, p.3.

⁷¹ See Lloyd George's letter to Henderson of 11 August, *The Times*, 13 August 1917, p.7.

Henderson's alleged deception: that he had failed to reveal the contents of the Nabokov note.

This too however was to prove ineffective. Henderson had two reasonable responses to the note, firstly that he had been aware of its contents since 8 August and had adequately covered its substance in his address to the conference; and secondly, that what Tereshchenko was actually quoted as saying in the note, as opposed to the gloss put on it by Nabokov himself, was uncontroversial.⁷² Henderson would subsequently win his moral victory on this question when Tereshchenko stated that neither he nor Kerensky had changed their minds on Stockholm, that they both still emphasised the necessity 'of issuing passports to Allied Socialists for Stockholm' and that Nabokov's personal comments 'arose exclusively through his own interpretation of what appeared in certain English papers regarding Russia's relations with the Stockholm Conference.'⁷³

Henderson appears to have had some good fortune in the ways in which the post-resignation war of words with Lloyd George played out. In important respects however the cards were very much stacked in his favour. The great esteem in which he was held by the nation's trade unionists, even if this came under strain at times in 1917, contrasted markedly with attitudes towards Lloyd George. Persistent complaints within the labour movement over profiteering, rising prices, extended conscription and 'dilution' of longstanding trade union practices in the interests of increased war production were readily

⁷² The Russian foreign minister's remarks could be interpreted as no more than a reiteration of the formal position that Stockholm was a soviet rather than a governmental concern, Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, pp:1133-1135; *Hansard*, H C Debs, 13 August 1917, vol.97, cols: 919-921.

⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1917, p.5.

focussed on the Prime Minister personally.⁷⁴ Although these complaints did not seriously erode Labour support for the war, trade unionists were not immune from the growing doubts by now surrounding the nature of Allied war aims. Traditionally aligned on foreign affairs to a 'moderate internationalism', some at least amongst the nation's workforce were ready to challenge the expansionist war aims actively promoted by the political right.⁷⁵

Henderson's victory in the post-resignation war of words with Lloyd George, at least as far as the majority of his party was concerned, was vital. If 10 August was but a necessary first step to Henderson's wider ambition, it was imperative that he should not be perceived as having won this first round by dubious means. Onward movement from the Stockholm vote was in any case likely to be difficult, since it was obvious that the conference, if it took place at all, was unlikely to engender anything amenable to Allied socialists and their governments. During the remainder of August the prospects for British involvement in the affairs of the Socialist International actually appeared to recede rather than to develop. In the adjourned conference of 21 August, and still more so at the Allied socialist conference the following week, the conspicuous rifts between 'patriots' and 'pacifists' did nothing to encourage those who hoped to see progress on the international front.⁷⁶ Ironically, Henderson did at last succeed in moving forward on his long term agenda at the very venue on which the War Cabinet had pinned its own hopes for a reassertion of labour 'patriotism' -

⁷⁴ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, pp: 177-183; for wider ranging discussion on the domestic grievances within the Labour movement see *op. cit, passim*; Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1987); John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991).

⁷⁵ Paul Bridgen, *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace, 1910-1924* (Woodbridge, 2009), p.90

⁷⁶ See Beatrice Webb's account of the 'fiasco' of the Inter-Allied conference, LSE Digital Diary, Beatrice Webb Diary, p.56, entry for 1 September 1917.

the autumn gathering of the TUC.⁷⁷ As Labour party fraternal delegate to the Congress, Henderson noted that people were now declaring Stockholm dead. But whilst he accepted that this was so as far as the planned conference of the summer was concerned, he forcefully repudiated the suggestion that the 'idea' of Stockholm had died.⁷⁸ We may now consider how Henderson put flesh over the coming period on this 'idea'.

The Campaign for a Labour Peace, 1917-1919

On the second day of the TUC annual congress (4 September), the Parliamentary Committee declared 'that a Conference at Stockholm at the present moment could not be successful.' But it chose against leaving the matter at that and returning to its earlier wartime perspective. Instead it proposed a new course of action involving an 'attempt in every possible way to secure general agreement of aim among the working classes of the allied nations' as a prelude to a future International Labour conference, subject to the by now familiar strictures regarding national representations. Although the discussion on this new course revealed much strongly expressed opposition, both within the Parliamentary Committee itself and on the floor of the Congress, the proposals were comfortably carried by 2,849,000 votes to 91,000.⁷⁹ When Henderson addressed the Congress later in the week he welcomed 'most enthusiastically' the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee and looked forward to 'the mother of Congresses taking her proper place in the

⁷⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 11 August 1917, CAB/23/3 (212).

⁷⁸ *Report of the Proceedings of the 49th Trade Union Congress, September 1917*, p.275.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp:70-90.

international field.....'⁸⁰ The stage was set for the cooperation of the NEC and the PCTUC over the autumn. The two bodies soon combined to form a Joint International Committee, the first fruits of which appeared in December with the presentation of the '*Memorandum on War Aims*' to a further Special Labour conference on 29 December 1917.⁸¹

No difficulties faced the acceptance of this progressively worded memorandum which, according to the conference chairman was adopted practically unanimously following a show of hands.⁸² This provided the platform for a comprehensive resolution on international policy, proposed by Henderson and seconded by MacDonald, at the Labour party annual conference the following month. A programme designed to culminate in a full International Socialist conference was set out in this resolution. A third Allied socialist conference on 20 February 1918, for which arrangements were already in place, was approved. Participants in this upcoming conference were to consider and adopt a comprehensive statement of desired Allied war aims, and to call on the socialist parties of the Central Powers to respond. In the meantime, socialists on both sides of the conflict were to be enjoined to press their respective governments for statements of war aims matching the principles adopted by their parties. On the assumption that this international programme would proceed towards fruition, the parties would urge their 'several Governments.....to allow facilities for attendance at an International Congress in some neutral State.....at which organised working class opinion of all the countries may be represented, in order that nothing may be

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.273.

⁸¹ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.102.

⁸² *The Times*, 29 December 1917, pp:7-8.

left undone to bring into harmony the desires of the working classes of all the belligerents.’⁸³

This was a massively ambitious undertaking. The disharmony between and within the world’s labour movements which had been evident in the summer was far from being resolved at the end of the year. Even the unity within the British movement demonstrated on 29 December was in reality only partial. Labour ‘pacifists’ certainly welcomed the fact that the party was at last prepared to state its own views on war aims, and to urge that governments should do the same.⁸⁴ They remained uneasy however over the readiness of the Labour executive and the trade unionists to accommodate their conclusions to the aspirations of the Allied powers. As *The Times* observed when the approved draft had been published, the proposed ‘territorial readjustments.....not merely accessory but essential to a lasting peace.....’ were a ‘proof that the heart and head of British Labour are sound.’⁸⁵ This partiality towards the aims of the Allied governments was carried through into the statement adopted by the February Allied Socialist Conference, which was to be presented to the socialists of the Central Powers as the possible basis on which a full international conference could be convened. There were doubts amongst ‘pacifists’ over the statement’s fitness for this purpose. As MacDonald privately acknowledged, German socialists might simply reject the Allied statement and ‘pull it to pieces as indeed they will find it far too easy to do.’⁸⁶

⁸³ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1918*, p.105.

⁸⁴ *Labour Leader*, 20 December 1917, p.1.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 19 December 1917, p.7.

⁸⁶ TNA, MacDonald Diary, 23 February 1918, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/1753.

MacDonald was right. Although the Austro/Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish socialists as well as the German USPD offered replies that their Allied counterparts deemed satisfactory, the SPD failed to provide a formal response. The party's views had to be gleaned by way of suggestions emanating from the Dutch socialist, Pieter Troelstra, who was known to have maintained good links with the German majority socialists, and from individual responses in the German press. It was apparent from these sources that serious criticisms of the Allied socialist statement were to be expected.⁸⁷ On 17 September a fourth Allied Socialist Conference was convened, like the previous three in London, at which the appropriate reaction to the SPD's non-cooperation was heatedly debated. The British delegation recommended to the conference that 'deep regret' should be expressed in relation to the failure of the German majority socialists to respond adequately to the Allied initiative. The door to German involvement should not however, in the British view, be shut. It was urged, rather, that those enemy socialists whose replies had satisfied the conference should be encouraged to use their influence to change the minds of the German majority. Simultaneously, the conference should inform the SDP that their attitude created 'an obstacle' to the holding of an international conference.⁸⁸

Powerful voices were raised in favour of a much firmer response to the recalcitrant German socialists. One of these voices was that of Samuel Gompers, President of the AFL. We have seen that Henderson had been keen since the previous summer to bring the AFL into the renewed labour diplomacy, yet this conference was the first that the AFL had attended. To Henderson's regret Gompers and the AFL still spoke in the strong, anti-socialist and

⁸⁷ LHA, Vandervelde and de Brouckère to Henderson, 19 August 1918, LSI 2/2/2; Hermann Müller, 'The War Aims Memorandum of the Allied Socialists and the proposed League of Nations', *Die Neue Zeit*, 5 July 1918, English translation, LSI 5/4/20.

⁸⁸ LHA, Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, 17-20 September 1918, LSI 1/29, p.5.

'patriotic' terms which had been common in the TUC three years earlier but now largely abandoned.⁸⁹ Gompers approach to the German problem was to formally propose that the Allied socialists would meet in conference 'with those only of the Central Powers who are in open revolt against their autocratic governors.' Vandervelde also advocated a tougher line. 'So long as the German majority socialists remain the agents, the accomplices, and the slaves of their Government,' he insisted, 'the Conference must not say there is a "difficulty" about meeting them; it must say that it is impossible.'⁹⁰ Members of the British delegation added their voices to the strong anti-German mood. Thorne presented a resolution precluding the offer of any peace terms 'until the Central Powers had been punished for their brutalities' and Sexton added a resolution 'on the same lines.'⁹¹

Unsurprisingly, British 'patriots' had also been creating difficulties for Henderson at home. The summer of 1918 was a period during which disgruntled Labour MPs and BWL stalwarts flexed their muscles against the party's newly adopted 'pacifist' leanings. Their principal goal was to create an independent trade union party, which in the end proved unachievable.⁹² But opposition to Henderson's internationalist programme was also readily attacked, as a brief account of his frustrations attests. Huysmans, already in Britain in a supporting role towards Henderson, had proposed in May that the presence of Branting and Troelstra in London would be desirable.⁹³ There were concerns however regarding the perceived sympathies of the latter towards Germany. Barnes was initially able to reassure Henderson

⁸⁹ Henry Pelling, *America and the British Left: From Bright to Bevan* (London, 1956), pp: 117-127.

⁹⁰ LHA, Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, 17-20 September 1918, LSI 1/29, p12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁹² Paul U.Kellogg and Arthur Gleason, *British Labor and the War: Reconstructors for a New World* (New York, 1919), pp: 257-272.

⁹³ LHA, LSI 2/6/2.

that the Foreign Office would raise no objections to the Dutchman's admission.⁹⁴ Objections were raised however by Labour MPs, in particular Thorne, who was convinced that Troelstra was 'a rampant pro-German' and 'in collusion with the German Foreign Office.'⁹⁵ Following Henderson's refusal to accept this judgement Thorne declared that he would raise the question in the House of Commons.⁹⁶

On 19 June the matter came under consideration by the War Cabinet. Having received a report on the Dutch socialist's activities from the Director of Military Intelligence, and learning also that the government in Paris had denied Troelstra entry into France, the Cabinet refused to permit him to land on British soil.⁹⁷ In response, a Labour delegation including Henderson was commissioned to travel to Switzerland to speak with Troelstra on neutral territory, but they were refused passports.⁹⁸ Passports *were* issued in October, when Henderson and Bowerman wished to travel to Paris to attend a meeting of the organising committee created by the September inter-Allied conference. Their journey however was halted at Folkestone by members of the National Union of Seamen who refused to carry them across the Channel. The reason given by the crew for their hostile attitude, Henderson revealed, 'was that I and my friends were doing our work with the assistance of German money.'⁹⁹

These tribulations were soon cut short by the unexpected military collapse of the Central Powers, which moved Henderson's peace programme onto new ground. The focus

⁹⁴ LHA, Barnes to Henderson, 3 June 1918, LSI 2/6/8.

⁹⁵ LHA, Thorne to Henderson, 10 June 1918, LSI 2/6/11.

⁹⁶ LHA, Thorne to Henderson, 17 June 1918, LSI 2/6/13.

⁹⁷ TNA, War Cabinet, 19 June 1918, CAB/23/6 (432).

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 9 August 1918, p.6.

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 26 October 1918, p.7.

necessarily shifted to what had become the programme's principal goal: the convening of an international socialist conference 'at the same time and in the same place as the official peace congress.'¹⁰⁰ Following a confused and stressful period during the weeks following the armistice, at least one of these criteria was achieved. Refused permission to stage a socialist conference in Paris, a gathering in Berne did deliberate on peace terms simultaneously with the assembled statesmen now in France.

By no means all labour and socialist parties were willing to attend the Berne conference. Belgians and Americans who had rejected meeting with Germans at the proposed Stockholm conference continued to take this line eighteen months later and were therefore amongst the absentees. French *majoritaires*, although they finally agreed to attend, were also reluctant. Thomas had written to Henderson in December stating that he was 'entirely sceptical' regarding a full international conference and that separate conferences 'would have been preferable at this time.'¹⁰¹ When Henderson arrived in Paris *en route* to Switzerland to prepare for the speedy convention of the Berne conference there was talk that the *majoritaires* were still hoping to push ahead with alternative inter-Allied conferences, which would clearly imperil the hope of a united socialist world offering its perspectives on the settlement prior to governments agreeing terms.¹⁰²

Henderson continued to Berne undaunted to help form an organising committee which began 'a series of informal preliminary conferences' with 'such delegates as had arrived' by

¹⁰⁰ LHA, Henderson to Branting, 12 September 1918, LSI 2/10/10.

¹⁰¹ LHA, Thomas to Henderson, 25 December 1918, LSI 5/1/19.

¹⁰² LHA, Interview with Henderson in *L'Humanité*, 16 January 1919, LSI, 3/238.

26 January 1919. The Conference proper commenced a week later on 3 February.¹⁰³ Henderson opened proceedings with a short statement apologising for any irregularities there may have been in the hurried convocation of the conference, but insisting on the priority of ensuring that an international labour voice be brought to bear 'on the great problems of the World's peace' by now under consideration in Paris.¹⁰⁴ Delegates from both belligerent blocs (including representatives of the SPD), from neutral countries, and from national groups whose statehood was yet to be confirmed, contributed over the following days to that labour voice. The progressive and internationalist resolutions on which the delegates agreed were delivered in person to the French President, Georges Clemenceau, presiding over the preliminary peace conference in Paris. They would fail however to exert anything like the influence for which Henderson and the Berne delegates hoped.¹⁰⁵

As the above summary shows, Henderson was deeply and continuously involved in the process which culminated in Berne. We have seen also in previous chapters that there are good reasons to believe that this process began not at some moment after 10 August 1917, but rather around the earlier date of 17 July, when Henderson initially conferred with Branting and Huysmans. The 10 August was of course immensely significant, in that it allowed him the freedom to pursue his objectives ever more openly and, no less importantly, cemented his leadership role in a party convinced that he had been treated shoddily by a widely mistrusted Prime Minister. Henderson's goals were, as has also been suggested, very much in line with the 1915 Allied socialist resolution. This was not only evident from the fact that this resolution was placed at the fore of subsequent Allied

¹⁰³ Austin Van Der Slice, *International Labor, Diplomacy and Peace, 1914-1919* (Philadelphia, 1941), p.316.

¹⁰⁴ LHA, 'Official Bulletin of the International Labour and Socialist Conference', Berne, 1919, LSI 6/31, p.1.

¹⁰⁵ Henry R. Winkler, *Paths Not Taken: British Labour and International Policy in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill, 1994), p.40.

socialist statements, but was clear also from the series of articles, interviews and conference addresses produced by Henderson at this time.

This abundance of personal statements, along with party declarations he obviously inspired, has contributed to a general consensus amongst historians regarding Henderson's goals at the end of the war. Nobody denies that he was above all insistent that the war should be concluded by a 'people's' or 'democratic' peace, to use the contemporary terminology. The main goal of such a peace, as declared in the *Memorandum on War Aims*, was that there should 'be henceforth on earth no more war.'¹⁰⁶ This would require 'the frank abandonment of every form of imperialism', 'the suppression of secret diplomacy', 'concerted action....for the universal abolition of compulsory military service', 'the common limitation of.....armaments by which all peoples are burdened', and 'the entire abolition of profit-making armament firms.' Additionally, the establishment of 'a Supernational Authority, or League of Nations' incorporating the sovereign states of the world should 'be an essential part of the treaty of peace itself.' Such a League should establish an 'International High Court' as well as an 'International Legislature' and should develop 'appropriate machinery for prompt and effective mediation between states.' In the event that these various mechanisms might not on every occasion work, the member states would need to make common cause against any individual nation which refused to accept binding agreements reached by the relevant bodies.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The *Memorandum* is reproduced in Peter Stansky, ed., *The Left and War: the British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), pp: 318-326.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.319.

Regarding the territorial and economic clauses of a future settlement the *Memorandum* rejected 'the attempts made, now in this quarter, and now in that, to convert this war into a war of conquest, whether what is sought to be acquired by force is territory or wealth.' Territorial readjustments would be permissible only 'if arrived at by common agreement on the general principle of allowing all people to settle their own destinies' or 'for the purpose of removing any obvious cause of future international conflict.' On the economic aspect of the peace settlement, the party declared 'against all the projects now being prepared by Imperialists and capitalists, not in any one country only, but in most countries, for an economic war after peace has been secured.'¹⁰⁸ Henderson himself would insist that if a lasting peace were to be achieved, 'everything must be done to prevent the division of Europe into two separate and hostile economic camps after the war.'¹⁰⁹

Whilst it is accepted by all labour historians that Henderson was earnest in his pursuit of a progressive peace, how this was balanced with other concerns he is believed to have had at this time is a question on which there has been room for divergent views. As we observed in the introduction to this thesis, Henderson pursued two important post-resignation objectives, one of which was the internationalist programme described above, and the other the constitutional reorganisation of the Labour party. Following Winter's influential 1972 article the latter goal has become related to the belief that Henderson's anxiety over the advance of Bolshevism in Russia may have extended to concern that this perfidious doctrine could take hold elsewhere, including in Britain. One of the aims of Henderson's constitutional changes, argues Winter, was to make of the Labour party a 'moderate socialist alternative' to extra-parliamentary action or revolution itself: 'Just as he had

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp: 319-324.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Henderson, *The Aims of Labour* (New York, 1919), p.57.

supported the provisional government in Petrograd as the leftist alternative to Bolshevism, so he advocated a few months later the reconstruction of the Labour party with an ideological base [the famous Clause 4 commitment to the party's socialist objective] as the bulwark of the British parliamentary system.'¹¹⁰

This argument raises some questions. Firstly, to state that Henderson wanted his reconstructed party to be a moderate and democratic alternative to any form of extremism is essentially to state the obvious. He had always wanted the Labour party to be thus, and presumably judged prior to 1917 that this was not seriously at issue. What needs to be shown is that he came to believe that the party as constituted was no longer adequately equipped to preserve this character and that this belief played a significant part in his decision to reconstruct the party. It is certainly arguable that the experience of war was itself a significant encouragement to radical sentiment, both on the left and right of the party.¹¹¹ It may also be something of a truism, but for societies at war, confining violence to the battlefield is not always easy. Winter quotes a long passage from an article written by Henderson in 1917 which shows that this may have been a perception he shared. Henderson warns that the end of the war would see the belligerent nations 'flooded with hardy veterans' fully trained in the military arts. If insurrectionary movements were to arise and barricades to be 'erected in our streets', he continues, 'they will be manned by men who have learned how to fight....' Revolution, if it came, would be 'veritable civil war....'¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.771.

¹¹¹ See for example, Brock Millman, 'The Battle of Cory Hall, November 1916: Patriots Meet Dissenters in Wartime Cardiff', *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol.35, No.1 (2000), pp: 57-83.

¹¹² Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.771.

The article contains however many reassuring comments to the effect that violent revolution was 'alien to the British character' and that the 'growth of political democracy' had been marked in Britain by 'few violent crises.' One thing Henderson certainly learned from his visit to Russia was how very different that country was to Britain in this respect.¹¹³ It is not at all obvious why he may have feared a Russian style revolution (of either the February or October variety) in his own nation. The reassurances regarding the nature of British politics appear a great deal more characteristic of Henderson's style than his article's opening apocalyptic visions 'of barricades in the streets and blood in the gutters'.¹¹⁴

Indeed the article soon moves on to more characteristically British forms of (largely non-violent) militancy, specifically addressing the pre-war 'feverish industrial unrest' during which proponents of 'direct action' had lost faith in the political process and 'sedulously fostered' the idea that the working masses should deploy their industrial strength as a more effective means of achieving their objectives.¹¹⁵ Given its British pedigree, a recurrence of this sort of militancy undoubtedly seems a more realistic apprehension than a Bolshevik style uprising. And as the historical record shows, 'direct action' did indeed, to Henderson's dismay, undergo a powerful resurgence in the post-war years.¹¹⁶ Taken in its entirety, Henderson's article was, as its title might suggest, a plea for compromise rather than revolution when the labour movement faced, as was widely anticipated, a period of conflict with the forces of reaction in the aftermath of the war.¹¹⁷ It is indeed a warning against the

¹¹³ See especially his analysis of Russian affairs in his final War Cabinet report, TNA, Henderson, 'British Mission', CAB/24/4 (G 152).

¹¹⁴ For the full article, entitled 'Revolution or Compromise', see Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, pp: 67-74.

¹¹⁵ Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, pp: 71-72.

¹¹⁶ G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), pp: 103-114.

¹¹⁷ In another article of this period Henderson referred to the years following the Napoleonic wars, widely remembered as an era of fierce reaction, as 'the nearest parallel' to existing circumstances, Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, p.19.

party turning aside 'from the path of ordered social change by constitutional methods.'¹¹⁸

What is most interesting about this article in relation to Winter's hypothesis however, is that it could easily have been presented solely in terms of the warnings against a revival of pre-war 'direct action'. It is difficult to avoid the impression that the uncharacteristically alarmist language depicting the horror of revolution was largely designed to give the central argument greater force.

A second problem for Winter's argument is that Henderson's desire to reorganise the party can very easily be explained in other ways. As Winter himself notes, quoting from another late wartime article, it 'was a fact of enormous importance that the development of democratic ideals and purposes synchronises with the introduction of a franchise measure which opens a tremendous vista of political achievement.'¹¹⁹ To take 'full advantage of the potential re-distribution of political power,' the Labour party's existing form of organisation was 'plainly inadequate.'¹²⁰ Speaking to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in December 1917, Henderson thought it possible that a reorganised Labour party could run as many as 500 candidates at the next election, a number much greater than had been feasible before the war.¹²¹ Surely the desire to create a party carefully honed to achieve electoral success would under the circumstances have been incentive enough for Henderson's reorganisation. We may legitimately ask whether his determination to make such changes would have been any the less had he never been to Russia nor seen any Bolsheviks.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70.

¹¹⁹ Winter, *Historical Journal*, p.771; Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, p.14.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹²¹ Trevor Wilson, ed., *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott: 1911-1928* (London, 1970), p.317, entry for 11-12 December 1917.

A further difficulty with Winter's argument, especially when it has been more succinctly or crudely expressed as has been the case over the years, lies in the latitude with which the term 'Bolshevism' has been used. The initial and most precise meaning of Bolshevism obviously refers to the political programme of the Leninist faction of the Russian socialist party. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this programme during the First World War was its almost complete indifference to the issues for which the combatants believed or claimed they were fighting. The war was seen, rather, as an opportunity for the true socialists of all nations to exploit the resultant social and economic upheavals with the object of overthrowing the existing bourgeois regimes and installing in their place proletarian rule.

Lenin's politics were based on a too literal reading of the observation by Marx and Engels in their 1849 Communist manifesto that the 'working men have no country.'¹²² For the majority of working people in the belligerent countries who did in fact believe that the liberty and values of their respective nations were under attack by foreign powers, and who were therefore determined to play their part in 'national defence', Lenin had little but contempt. Towards the anti-war minorities who shared his view that the conflict should be characterised as 'imperialist' he was even more scathing, dismissing them as 'bourgeois pacifists' who had failed to understand that since war was an inevitable outcome of capitalist rivalries only the overthrow of capitalism itself could produce lasting peace. By deluding the masses into the belief that political pressures could force governments into

¹²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (one-volume edition), (London, 1968), p.51.

seeking a settlement the 'pacifists' were siphoning off radical elements within the labour movements who might otherwise support the Bolshevik view.¹²³

Lenin's doctrines were, in short, too extreme to make much appeal to the vast majority of wartime socialists, and to British socialists probably least of all.¹²⁴ Matters began to change after the Bolsheviks succeeded in taking power in Russia. In establishing in 1919 a communist Third International in opposition to the pre-war Second International the new rulers of Russia mounted a serious doctrinal threat to the established socialist parties. Emerging from its internal Russian and wartime contexts, this second version of 'Bolshevism' represented a new interpretation of Marx's ideas which showed a frightening ability to lure more radical elements in the West away from their conservative socialist leaderships. Henderson himself would become involved in the complicated three way battle of the Internationals which followed the establishment of the Moscow based Comintern.¹²⁵ The issue on which the democratic internationals were particularly opposed to each other was their respective responses to the new Russian regime and to the military interventions against it by the capitalist powers. Clearly however these arguments, and probably also the existence of the Third international, were a consequence of the Bolshevik seizure and retention of power in Russia which few foresaw in 1917.

¹²³ R Craig Nation, *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Durham, 1989), *passim*; Richard K Debo, *Revolution and Survival: the foreign policy of Soviet Russia, 1917-1918* (Toronto, 1979), pp: 5-16.

¹²⁴ For a discussion of the various factors which made the British working class, as compared with its main European counterparts, resistant to class based ideologies, see Ross McKibbin, 'Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?', *English Historical Review*, Vol.99, No.391 (1984), pp: 297-331.

¹²⁵ The divisions which had emerged between majority and minority socialists during the war persisted into the peace and were manifested in the creation of two non-communist internationals, see G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. 4, Part 1: Communism and Social Democracy, 1914-1931* (London, 1958), pp: 287-342.

A third usage of the word 'Bolshevism', which developed in the latter years of the war, was as an all-purpose denigration of left wing perspectives of almost any variety. During the election campaign of December 1918, for example, Lloyd George saw fit to brand even the leadership of the Labour party as an 'extreme pacifist Bolshevik group.'¹²⁶ Though obviously open to this sort of abuse the adoption of this terminology was nevertheless a reflection of fears created by a widespread tendency towards popular unrest during the latter years of the war and into the peace. The outstanding manifestation of this sort of 'Bolshevism' was paradoxically the non-Bolshevik revolution in Russia in March 1917. And no doubt too this first Russian revolution greatly encouraged the radicalism which would break out elsewhere, leading to erosions of military discipline within the belligerents' armed forces and to strikes and demonstrations on the home fronts.¹²⁷ Although Britain was spared the more serious manifestations of this period of unrest, it was not immune. During the spring of 1917 widespread strikes broke out in the engineering industry. Threatening as these were to the supply of munitions for the Western front, they caused still further consternation in that they were led by shop stewards in defiance of the formal trade union leaderships.¹²⁸ In the weeks before he departed for Russia Henderson, who deplored this rank and file usurpation of industrial power, had been deeply involved on the part of the Cabinet in the resolution of this damaging disturbance.¹²⁹

We may reasonably assume that this flexible use of the term 'Bolshevism', more so than those indicated above, is the principal sense in which it is possible to argue, as does Winter,

¹²⁶ *The Times*, 14 December 1918, p.6.

¹²⁷ Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *France and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2003), pp: 113-145; F.L. Carsten, *War Against War* (London, 1982), pp: 112-177; Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London, 2015), pp:468-491; John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967), pp: 47-55.

¹²⁸ James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973), pp: 196-212.

¹²⁹ Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, pp:184-204.

that Henderson's concerns over the phenomenon affected his domestic political activity in 1917. We may also conclude then that whilst Henderson had genuine concerns over the militancy of sections of his party these were unlikely to have been rooted in what he had seen of Russian Bolshevism. He had moreover opposed domestic militant tendencies in the past and might reasonably have anticipated opposing them in similar ways in the future. The extension of the franchise in 1918 would not of itself eliminate extremism in labour circles. It would however undercut a powerful argument used by militants in the past: that parliamentary or constitutional politics under restricted franchises clearly favoured the ruling classes and forced workers into the adoption of other means by which to defend their interests.

Almost thirty years after the publication of Winter's analysis, Bridgen appears to have recognised some of its problems. 'Contrary to the view of some commentators,' he writes, 'fear of a Russian-style working-class revolt was not a major motivating factor in Henderson's actions at this time.'¹³⁰ Bridgen is nevertheless keen to uphold the idea of a causative relationship between Henderson's encounter with Bolshevism in Russia and his subsequent political initiatives in Britain. His ability to reach this conclusion however rests on the unsustainable assumption that Henderson foresaw whilst in Russia the danger of an 'extreme left-wing government' gaining control in Petrograd and 'encouraging pacifistic and revolutionary tendencies throughout Europe.' Conscious as he was of deepening labour divisions at home, Henderson doubted (so Bridgen believes) whether his party 'would survive intact the divisive influence of a Russian government pledged wholeheartedly to a

¹³⁰ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.93.

peace by negotiation.’¹³¹ Leaving aside the lack of evidence that Henderson foresaw matters in this way, a further difficulty with this presumption is that in Britain the Menshevik dominated Provisional Government was itself widely and correctly associated with the desire for a negotiated settlement. Following the Bolshevik take-over divisions within labour movements over Russia, in Britain as elsewhere, did develop during 1918 and beyond. These were largely driven however by the decisions of Allied governments to intervene militarily against a socialist regime which had withdrawn from the war, and whose durability was grossly underestimated.¹³²

Bridgen differs from Winter in that he sees the threat emanating from Russia less in terms of the Labour party’s post war politics and more in the immediate ‘pacifist’ campaign for a negotiated peace. He draws attention to a question on which labour historians have never reached a settled answer. How far did Henderson move in the final phase of the war along the ‘patriot’-‘pacifist’ axis? A key determinant of any such movement would be the extent to which he was prepared to advocate a negotiated peace. Bridgen strongly insists that he remained opposed to the idea.¹³³ Here again he differs from Winter who is somewhat more equivocal. It is in fact hard to detect Winter’s view on this question. He comments at the start of his article on Henderson’s belief during ‘the first three years of the war’ in ‘the necessity of total military victory over Germany....’. He implies later in the text that this commitment extended beyond these earlier years: Henderson ‘never wavered.....in his

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp: 96-97.

¹³² Stephen Richards Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution: 1917-1924* (Cambridge, Mass.), pp:57-63; for the decisions of Allied governments to intervene in Russia, Richard H.Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921: Intervention and the War* (Princeton, 1961), *passim*.

¹³³ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.107.

determination to see an Allied victory over Germany.’¹³⁴ He also writes however that Henderson’s ‘approach to peace negotiations’ completely changed ‘after his mission to Petrograd.....’ and refers to Henderson’s ‘commitment to a socialist policy to help end the war.....’¹³⁵ Many other accounts of the 1960s and 1970s share the view that Henderson was converted to the idea of a negotiated peace ‘as the most likely means of keeping the new Russian government in the war and preventing a Bolshevik take-over.’¹³⁶ A more recent study also states that Henderson became convinced in Russia ‘of the need to find a negotiated peace before the Eastern front collapsed completely and the Russians were forced into a separate peace.’¹³⁷

Although Henderson undoubtedly remained wary of identifying too closely with the many ‘pacifists’ who persistently advocated a negotiated peace, there are indications that he was not wholly averse to the idea. He publicly insisted in November 1917 that since ‘the consequences of the war were so appalling’ he would not hold back if he saw even the smallest opportunity of reaching a lasting peace, simply in order to inflict a ‘knock-out blow’ on the enemy.¹³⁸ At the conference of 28 December at which he recommended the *Memorandum on War Aims*, he reminded the party that the war was now far into its fourth year and continuing to take its daily toll of ‘sacrifice, destruction and death’. He asserted that a ‘crushed and bleeding humanity’ now wished to know ‘if the continuance of this tragedy is essential to a just and lasting peace.’ Speaking specifically for Britain, he went on

¹³⁴ Winter, *Historical Journal*, pp: 753, 766; we shall see below that the absence of the word ‘military’ in the second of these statements, whether deliberate or not, has some significance.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp: 753, 769.

¹³⁶ Bill Jones, *The Russia Complex: the British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 1977), p.3; for similar conclusions see Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (London, 1961), p.41; David Howell, *British Social Democracy: a Study in Development and Decay* (London, 1976), p.31; Roger Moore, *The Emergence of the Labour Party 1880-1924* (London, 1978), p.154.

¹³⁷ John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A history* (London, 2007), p.47.

¹³⁸ Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.124.

to ask whether the Government was 'using all the means at its disposal calculated to assist in shortening the period of hostilities?' The behaviour of ministers, he suggested, did not 'afford much encouragement on this point.' He raised as an example the recent capture by British forces of Jerusalem. Before this event, he noted, Carson, still a member of the War Cabinet, had indicated that both Austria and Turkey had no wish to continue the war. If this was so, why were the Allies not treating with them, especially Turkey? 'Did we prefer to take Jerusalem by force? Was it not surprising, he pointedly asked, that 'in neutral countries, in Russia, and even in America, Britain should be suspected of Imperialistic and annexationist designs?'

The Labour party too would demand clarification. The longstanding support of the movement for the war effort could be jeopardised if it became clear that this effort was being continued for reprehensible ends: 'If the workers are to be called upon to make further sacrifices,' Henderson declared, 'they must secure a definite assurance that such sacrifices are essential to the winning of an honourable and righteous peace.' Although he reaffirmed in his address the often repeated call that 'Germany's policy of aggressive militarism and world domination must be destroyed', this was followed by the recognition that militarism was also to be found elsewhere and that it must be 'universally.....for ever destroyed.' The agency most likely to achieve this – the proposed League of Nations – had, he also noted, been treated 'with scorn and contempt' both by sections of the press and (again) by Carson.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ For a full report on the conference, see *The Times*, 29 December 1917, pp:7-8; for a further example of Henderson's criticism of the government at this time, see his support for Lord Lansdowne, whose widely condemned letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, calling for an early peace, had just been published, *The Herald*, 8 December 1917, p.5.

Although there was some 'patriotic' reaction to Henderson's sentiments, conference speakers for the most part assumed similar positions. Even J. H. Thomas, who criticised Henderson for having contemplated a separate peace with the lesser enemy powers, took the view that it was reasonable at least to test out the Germans by engaging with them in discussions over war aims. 'Was there not general agreement that every means ought to be used to bring peace at the earliest possible moment,' he asked the conference, 'and were not their main complaints that, so far as the Governments of all the countries were concerned, they were indulging in too many ambiguous phrases instead of coming down to real concrete terms?'¹⁴⁰ At the party's annual conference the following month Henderson informed delegates that he remained strongly of the opinion that the war 'had been unnecessarily prolonged on account of the refusal during the past six or eight months to state the War Aims of the Allied countries.....'¹⁴¹

The implications of Henderson's above quoted statements during the winter of 1917-1918 are clear. They may not have represented a denial of the need for victory over Prussian militarism, but they certainly defined this victory in a new way. For most people, Henderson wrote, 'the meaning of victory is limited to.....military success.' In his view however, any victory 'which falls short of the realisation of the ideals with which we entered the war, will not be a victory but a defeat.' The reluctance of Allied governments to fully and convincingly demonstrate that their war aims were consistent with their own earlier proclaimed ideals suggested that the military victory on which they remained bent was not a victory that Henderson (along with many in his party) would recognise as such.¹⁴² To say that Henderson

¹⁴⁰ *The Times*, 29 December 1917, pp:7-8;

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1918*, p.105.

¹⁴² Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, p.84.

never wavered in his pursuit of victory is only arguable if victory is defined as he came to define it. Similarly, to argue that he remained firmly opposed to a negotiated settlement, one must take into account the lack of clarity in Britain as to what would represent a satisfactory basis on which to agree terms.

Henderson's leanings towards the possibility of a negotiated settlement were however short lived. This was a consequence of military developments. Following the stunningly successful breaching of Allied defences by German armies on 21 March 1918, the prolonged stalemate on the Western front was suddenly displaced by a 'war of movement' last seen in 1914. And as seen in that year, initial enemy advances and the prospect of an Allied defeat rendered talk of peace obviously inappropriate. 'Pacifist' campaigns were generally silenced as a result.¹⁴³ Henderson conceded on 8 April that Labour's 'moral, political and diplomatic effort' would have to be placed 'under temporary suspension.'¹⁴⁴ Even when the tide turned in mid-summer, it remained difficult to push for peace now that the Allies appeared at last to be winning.¹⁴⁵ The long and dispiriting stalemate of trench warfare, with the continuing uncertainty as to when it would ever be broken, had undoubtedly encouraged a willingness on all sides to talk of peace. When this stalemate ended peace terms became highly dependent on the movement of armies, and it became the nature of these terms, rather than the process of discussing them, which returned to centre stage. The fear that the soon to be victorious Allies might seek to impose a punitive peace became a major concern for Labour and other progressives.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2000), p.257.

¹⁴⁴ Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.125.

¹⁴⁵ Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff, 1976), p.161.

¹⁴⁶ Laurence W. Martin, *Peace Without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (New Haven, 1958), pp: 170-173.

Notwithstanding their several differences both Winter and Bridgen subscribe to what we may call the fear of Bolshevism (or left-wing extremism as Bridgen more usually and wisely describes it) hypothesis. This conception has arguably assumed an unwarranted prominence. Although references to it have generally been attributed to Winter, Bridgen provides its fullest and most coherent expression. At the core of this hypothesis are two central beliefs: firstly, that Henderson saw the threat to his party as coming primarily from the left; and secondly, that he believed the best way to deal with this challenge was to take over the left's own programme and place it firmly under his own control.

In Bridgen's version of this hypothesis, Henderson is seen to have two major concerns. The first of these emerged in early 1917, as the ILP responded to changes in the procedures for electing the Labour executive which would work to the advantage of the trade union wing of the party.¹⁴⁷ With relations between socialists and unionists at a particularly low ebb, there was talk in ILP circles of leaving the party. How seriously Henderson may have taken mutterings to this effect is questionable. Bridgen himself acknowledges that for the ILP the prospects for any new party 'appeared bleak.' An attempt to create one would have been 'a gamble unworthy of the risk.'¹⁴⁸ By the spring and early summer, suggests Bridgen, the matter had, anyway been overtaken by the different responses of 'patriots' and 'pacifists' towards the revolution in Russia, culminating in the USC sponsored Leeds convention in June. (Henderson was in Russia at the time of this controversial event, but was quick to condemn it on his return, declining 'to have anything to do with any organisation established in this country which sought to set up in Great Britain bodies analogous to the

¹⁴⁷ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party: 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974), pp:90-91.

¹⁴⁸ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.91.

Russian Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils.¹⁴⁹) When news of the Leeds convention reached Russia this would, in Bridgen's view, have strengthened Henderson's perception 'that the threat to Labour's unity was becoming acute.' This perception, combined with 'his experiences in Russia....convinced Henderson to change his mind and support the Stockholm conference.'¹⁵⁰

Henderson's experiences in Russia, in particular his supposed awareness that 'a more extreme left-wing government' there could encourage 'pacifistic and revolutionary tendencies throughout Europe' is the second of those major concerns which would push him not only to support Stockholm, but also the post-Stockholm internationalist campaign.¹⁵¹ Bridgen makes clear that in pursuing these 'pacifist' objectives Henderson was in reality trying to maintain his 'patriotic' position. By offering 'pacifists' within the party a programme with which they could readily identify, he helped ensure that there would be no significant radical defection. By setting limits as to how far the party would go in its new direction, he also ensured that the party remained fundamentally committed to the principal national war aim of defeating Prussian militarism.¹⁵² Henderson is seen then as pursuing the same ends as other 'patriots' (excluding the more chauvinistic supporters of the BWL). It was the means by which he believed these ends could best be achieved in which he differed from his fellow moderate 'patriots'. Rather than confront and oppose the party minority, as had so often been the case in previous years, he would seek to appease them by offering them the least harmful of their goals as an all party project.

¹⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 July 1917, p.5.

¹⁵⁰ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, p.97.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp: 96-99.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp: 102-108.

This is an argument which can obviously be used to diminish the significance of Henderson's forays into the dangerous territory of a negotiated peace. More generally, it can diminish the wider internationalist campaign, making this appear less important to Henderson's objectives than the need to confront the threat from the 'pacifist' left. But at least one aspect of Henderson's activity in the latter months of the war would appear to go rather further than could be seen as necessary to curb the ILP and its supporters. Within moments of leaving the Cabinet room on 10 August 1917 following his final angry confrontation with Lloyd George, Henderson ran into Thomas Jones, an individual described by one historian as 'the solitary progressive member of the War Cabinet Secretariat.'¹⁵³ Jones recalls him talking freely about the future of his party. As well as planning to develop a more critical stance towards the government, he hoped to 'recast Labour representation in such a way as to bring in a larger infusion of the non-trade-unionists. He mentioned no names, but was clearly referring to the younger intellectuals who are keenly sympathetic with Labour.'¹⁵⁴ Speaking later in the year to Scott, Henderson confirmed his desire to 'enlarge the bounds' of his party and to bring in 'intellectuals as candidates.'¹⁵⁵

These comments point to one significant aspect of Henderson's party reorganisation: the creation of Advisory Committees, often staffed by new party members with appropriate expertise. Particular attention has been given by historians to the Advisory Committee on International Questions, which incorporated many disaffected Liberal recruits to the party, a significant number of which were members of, or sympathetic to, the UDC.¹⁵⁶ One result of

¹⁵³ Douglas Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918-1919* (Oxford, 1997), p.43.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary, Vol.1 :1916-1925*, ed. Keith Middlemas, (London,1969), p.36.

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott*, p.316, entry for 11-12 December 1917.

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Ann Cline, *Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party 1914-1931* (New York,1963), pp:68-72; Winkler, *Paths Not Taken*, pp: 24-25.

this radical influx, it has been suggested, was that Labour party policy at the end of the war differed little from that of the UDC itself.¹⁵⁷ Bridgen rejects this conclusion, drawing attention to some important differences of opinion between Labour politicians and liberal intellectuals on international affairs.¹⁵⁸ But this was surely to be expected. In no organisation involved in discussion of foreign affairs, especially at the conclusion of a major war, were individuals agreed on every issue. Bridgen arguably makes a more telling point in stressing that an advisory committee can advise but not determine a party's policy.¹⁵⁹ Yet his view remains extremely revisionist and difficult to sustain. The influence of UDC individuals, and still more their ideas, does seem to have had taken Labour foreign policy into new 'pacifist' territory by the end of the war.

As noted above, the peace by negotiations campaign lost much of its force during the final months of the war, becoming largely displaced by growing concerns over the peace terms the Allies might be tempted to impose when the war was brought to its conclusion. Henderson and his party were of course well prepared, having addressed this issue continuously since the previous summer. Central to this sustained endeavour had been the demand that Allied governments should open their war aims for public discussion. Largely perhaps as a result of this labour pressure, this demand was met at least in Britain when on 5 January 1918 Lloyd George delivered (significantly to a trade union audience) a reasonably full statement of British war aims.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford, 1971), pp: 208-210; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939* (London, 1957), pp: 154-156.

¹⁵⁸ Bridgen, *The Labour Party*, pp: 104-108.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp: 19-20.

¹⁶⁰ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, pp: 1490-1492.

Henderson commended the Prime Minister's initiative at the Labour conference later that month.¹⁶¹ However, as a comprehensive set of peace proposals in conformity with labour views Lloyd George's statement suffered in comparison with Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', which happened to be released a mere three days later.¹⁶² Wilson had been demonstrating his desire for a progressive peace over a long period of time, and the United States had been no party to the 'secret treaties' by this time released to the West by the Bolsheviks. Close comparison of the two leaders' texts could moreover reveal omissions and equivocations in Lloyd George's statement, which encouraged 'pacifists' to ask whether the British government would also endorse the American statement.¹⁶³ This was a step the government, like those in Paris and Rome, was unwilling to take. Repeated efforts, culminating in a call from the Allied socialist conference in September for their governments to make 'a public and collective declaration' that they would subscribe to Wilson's fourteen points were in vain.¹⁶⁴ It was the German government the following month, having recognised that it was now defeated, which accepted the Fourteen Points, obviously in the hope of being granted a less punitive settlement than they could expect from the European Allies.

If the German government hoped that Wilson's terms would be less onerous than those desired by the European Allies, so too did the progressive community in Britain. For Henderson and his international colleagues this possibility inspired the strategy they adopted in 1918: the convening of an International Socialist conference to coincide with the

¹⁶¹ *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, January, 1918*, p.105.

¹⁶² In a labour statement of 9 January, both Lloyd George's and Wilson's speeches were commended for having transformed the international situation, but the praise in what followed was heaped exclusively on the American President, *The Times*, 10 January 1918, p.8.

¹⁶³ Carl F. Brand, 'The Reaction of British Labor to the Policies of President Wilson During the World War', *American Historical Review*, Vol.38: no.2 (1933), p.279; Martin, *Peace Without Victory*, p.167.

¹⁶⁴ LHA, LSI, 3/31/1.

official peace congress. Henderson acknowledged that not all the Allied Governments could be 'trusted, without reserve or qualification, to apply the principles of democracy in the peace settlement', and clearly hoped that by holding the simultaneous Labour conference Wilson could be encouraged in his coming battle for a good peace.¹⁶⁵

Henderson also devoted much effort to winning domestic support for his programme. We can see this clearly in his much repeated advocacy of a 'democratic' or 'peoples' peace'. This meant in part a commitment to a new style of diplomacy. As he told the TUC in 1917, 'we shall not allow [the peace settlement] to rest in the hands of diplomatists, secret plenipotentiaries, or politicians of the official stamp, unless they are prepared to have some regard for the opinion of the common people.'¹⁶⁶ It also involved a concept of 'democracy' which went further than the much deployed propaganda argument which depicted the war as a conflict between inherently peace loving parliamentary democracies and autocracies constitutionally prone to militarist aggression.'¹⁶⁷ This was for Henderson a concept which fused domestic and international concerns, drawing clear connections between a progressive peace and the political and economic advancement of working people in all nations. On detailed territorial questions regarding the peace Henderson was apparently prepared to be flexible, as the changing suggestions in successive war aims statements in relation to Alsace-Lorraine, to African colonies, and to the future of Austria-Hungary make clear.¹⁶⁸ On economic arrangements for the post war period, and on the necessity for a

¹⁶⁵ LHA, Henderson to Branting, 12 September 1918, LSI 2/10/10.

¹⁶⁶ *Report of the Proceedings of the 49th Trade Union Congress, September 1917*, p.275.

¹⁶⁷ Henderson was himself willing to use this argument when he felt it appropriate, see for example Arthur Henderson, *A People's Peace* (London, 1917), p.1. This Labour party pamphlet was a reprint of an article in the *Daily News* of 28 September 1917 a large part of which was devoted to the 'democratisation of Germany' and the destruction of 'the Kaiser's power'.

¹⁶⁸ Compare for example the *Memorandum on War Aims* with the modified Allied War Aims statement of February 1918, Stansky, *Left and War*, pp: 320-323, Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, pp: 102-106.

‘Supernational Authority’ to create a new basis for international relations, he was by contrast very consistent.

Democracy was awake he declared, and aware of its power both at home and abroad.¹⁶⁹ The linking of progressive advance in the domestic and international spheres was to be a manifestation of that power. The League of Nations, to which he attached great importance, was not to be seen solely as ‘a barrier against aggressive militarism.’ He stressed also the ‘constructive functions’ it could adopt in the social and economic spheres of member nations, notably on the question of ‘international labour legislation.’ Whilst there was an ongoing domestic debate over ‘reconstruction’ in Britain in which the Labour party was deeply involved, he also believed that equality of industrial conditions across countries would be an important factor in ‘promoting and maintaining friendly international relations’, not least by removing one of the more potent arguments in support of tariffs.¹⁷⁰

Henderson envisaged a new world order which would see states cooperating both diplomatically and economically through the League of Nations to the benefit of all, and democratic governments removing the inequalities which had blighted their societies for centuries past. But all this depended in the first instance on the democratic peace settlement for which labour was calling, which would be responsible on the one hand for creating the League itself, but no less for creating the conditions under which all states would be willing to participate. Old international grievances would need to be removed and

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁷⁰ LHA, Henderson interview, undated, LSI 5.4.9.

the imposition of new injustices prevented.¹⁷¹ Freed from the age old resentments between nations and the insecurities that had perpetuated militarism and autocracy, harmony between peoples would encourage harmony between classes within individual states.¹⁷²

The creation of a properly constituted League of Nations as part of a just and ameliorative peace was for Henderson a matter of world historical importance. But this was not merely for him a secular issue of peace and progress, but one that touched profoundly on his religious idealism, as the language in *Aims of Labour* often shows. In a pamphlet he wrote for the Brotherhood Movement on the eve of the peace conference he repeated his view of that humanity now faced a critical choice.¹⁷³ But in addressing his fellow evangelicals he also laid emphasis on the role that *they* could and should play in reaffirming the certitudes of Christian faith, presenting to the people a new vision of life, and providing the moral leadership necessary to confront the problems of the day.¹⁷⁴ He himself was in earnest in performing these tasks.¹⁷⁵

It was of course obvious that the crucial decisions he highlighted would be taken by governments, many of which were inclined to think in traditional ways - hence the importance to him of an international socialist campaign to supplement domestic activity, and in particular the convening of an international labour conference 'to sit concurrently

¹⁷¹ The required peace would 'assuage all legitimate grievances and causes of friction' between nations, who could then live together 'in amity and concord.', Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, p.44.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, pp: 49-50, 92-93.

¹⁷³ Arthur Henderson, *At the Cross Roads* (London, 1919), pp: 1-2. As described in the pamphlet the Brotherhood Movement 'is essentially a forward movement within the Church led mainly by laymen, to revitalise the moral authority of the Church as a whole and to provide a new source of inspiration', p.6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp: 6-9.

¹⁷⁵ Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, *passim*.

with the official Conference.¹⁷⁶ There can be very little doubt as to the priority Henderson gave to this conference and its timing. Having been informed by 19 December that the official conference might open on either the 6th or 13th January, Henderson wrote lengthy letters the same day to the Secretary of the French Socialist Party, to Branting, to Vandervelde and to Gompers, as well as a telegram to Huysmans, whom he urged to proceed straight to Lausanne (where the socialist conference was at this time expected to be staged).¹⁷⁷ Two things stand out in these letters: firstly, the sheer scale of the procedural, practical and political obstacles that needed to be overcome before the conference could be convened; and secondly, Henderson's anxiety that his colleagues were as yet not applying themselves sufficiently to the overcoming of these obstacles to ensure that the labour conference could also open by early or mid-January.

In the event, and largely as a consequence of Henderson's sense of urgency, the Berne Conference opened on 3 February, only sixteen days after the formal commencement of the Paris peace conference. It was clear from the start what was envisaged as its main purpose. Branting, in his opening address, lavished praise on President Wilson, declaring him 'a pioneer of the International policy of the working class' and offering him the support of the representatives of that class there assembled. With this vital backing those in Paris bent on 'muddling' the President's programme could more easily be thwarted.¹⁷⁸ As the conference proceeded however this central goal became overshadowed by other concerns, on which delegates were in strong disagreement. This was a matter of disappointment to Henderson,

¹⁷⁶ LHA, Memorandum on the International Peace Conference (undated, but probably December 1918), LSI/3/135, pp: 4-5.

¹⁷⁷ LHA, Henderson to Frossard, 19 December 1918, LSI/3/146; Henderson to Branting, 19 December 1918, LSI/3/149; Henderson to Vandervelde, 19 December 1918, LSI/3/152; Henderson to Buckler (for Gompers), 19 December 1918, LSI/3/153.

¹⁷⁸ Van Der Slice, *International Labor*, p.317; LHA, 'Official Bulletin of the International Labour and Socialist Conference', Berne, 1919, LSI 6/31, pp:1-3.

who had long stressed the importance to democratic forces of concentrating their power through 'unity of purpose and action.' There would inevitably be disagreements 'regarding the methods by which our aims and ideals may be achieved,' he had conceded, but 'a greater disposition on all sides to seek accommodation' could keep these differences in check.¹⁷⁹ Unity and purpose at Berne however were not wholly achieved, as two major internecine conflicts were to impose themselves on the conference.

The first of these was over the unwillingness of many of the Allied 'patriots' to forgive or forget the 'crimes.....towards Socialism' of the enemy majorities in supporting the aggression of their governments.¹⁸⁰ In a memorandum prior to the conference Henderson and Huysmans had stressed that the purpose of this gathering was not to settle longstanding differences between majority and minority socialists or to engage in divisive debate on the origins of the war.¹⁸¹ Albert Thomas and his supporters clearly felt otherwise and two days of bitter debate predictably followed.¹⁸² Largely due to the efforts of Henderson and the British delegation the issue of war responsibility was eventually deflected to some future date, permitting the conference to move on to areas on which some consensus could be reached.¹⁸³ Henderson was duly praised in the German press.¹⁸⁴ At the time however he was clearly frustrated. Speaking after the squabble surrounding the German socialists he expressed his concern to delegates, stating that he was 'not sure that we are doing all we can to speak effectively to the Paris Conference or that we are bringing to bear the fullest measure of our influence for practical purposes.' The remainder of his

¹⁷⁹ Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, pp: 36-37.

¹⁸⁰ See the statement of Albert Thomas, LHA, 'Official Bulletin, Berne, LSI 6/31, p.4.

¹⁸¹ LHA, Joint International Sub-Committee Memorandum on International Situation, LSI 5/4/6, p.4.

¹⁸² Fainsod, *International Socialism*, pp.194-195; Van Der Slice, *International Labor*, p.317.

¹⁸³ Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931* (Oxford, 1994), pp: 239-240.

¹⁸⁴ See extracts from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Vorwärts* of 16 February 1919, LHA, LSI 5/4/33.

address focused on several of the topics over which the Paris conference was then deliberating, which were of vital concern to 'the peoples whom we represent.'¹⁸⁵ The object of Berne was, in short, precisely as had been stated in the earlier Henderson/Huysmans memorandum, 'to give the advice of Labour on the solution of the questions submitted to the examination of the Diplomatic Conference.'¹⁸⁶ Or, as many might have put it, to discourage the peacemakers from reverting to the ills of Old Diplomacy!

A second divisive issue was brought forth towards the end on the conference: that of Bolshevism. It appears that the organising committee of the conference (which included Henderson) had initially hoped to avoid this discussion. When faced with demands from both left and right to permit the debate, the topic was placed at the bottom of agenda, perhaps in the hope that time would run out for it. In the event the closing of the conference was delayed, so that the protagonists could have their say.¹⁸⁷ In the predictable absence of any agreement, two opposed resolutions were presented under the heading of 'Democracy versus Dictatorship'. The majority of delegates supported a resolution presented by Branting critical of the political methods employed by the Bolsheviks. A minority backed the joint resolution of Longuet and the Austrian, Friedrich Adler, which objected to the stigmatisation and the passing of premature judgement on the Russian government, which could only support 'the manoeuvres and interested calumnies of bourgeois governments.'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ LHA, LSI 6/2/13.

¹⁸⁶ LHA, Memorandum on International Situation, LSI 5/4/6, p.4.

¹⁸⁷ See the notes of an observer commissioned by the British authorities, a copy of which found its way into the Labour archive, LHA, LSI 5/1/54.

¹⁸⁸ Fainsod, *International Socialism*, pp:196-197; Cole, *Socialist Thought*, pp: 293-296.

Henderson initially opted not to speak in this debate, leaving MacDonald to address the conference on behalf of the British. Only when he felt himself traduced by some remarks of Adler's did he intervene and declare his sympathy with Branting's view.¹⁸⁹ Henderson did in the end make his position on Bolshevism 'abundantly clear'.¹⁹⁰ But his initial unwillingness to take part in this debate shows no less clearly where his priorities lay at this time. What we have shown above regarding his determination to bring about the Berne conference, and the strong sense of what he conceived as its main objective, powerfully support the central proposition of this thesis: that his actions in the international socialist arena following his visit to Russia were principally oriented to fulfilling the stipulations for a socialist peace articulated in February 1915.

His powerful reaction to the peace terms which soon emerged further demonstrates the validity of this proposition. In a sixteen page pamphlet of 1 June he utterly condemned the terms being presented to the Germans by the victorious Allies. The details of these terms were shown in many cases to be inconsistent with 'Labour's conception of a Peace of justice and right', as well as at odds with Wilson's Fourteen Points. But the treaty was defective not just in so many of its individual provisions, but more fundamentally in the fact that it was based on

.....the very political principles or premises which were the ultimate cause of this war,
and which must, if adhered to, produce not only other wars, but a perpetuation in peace

¹⁸⁹ LHA, Report of the Berne conference, LSI 6/658.

¹⁹⁰ Wrigley, *Henderson*, p.129.

time of those economic and social conditions which it is the object of the workers to abolish.¹⁹¹

Characteristically Henderson refused to despair. Over the following years he continued to work to undo the damage he believed had been created by the Versailles settlement, in the first place by calling for treaty revision, but increasingly later, especially in his final years, to promote the role of the League of Nations in the conduct of international affairs and to preside over the hoped for comprehensive process of universal disarmament. This chapter has attempted to show that a single broad purpose, commencing on or around 17 July 1917 and terminating with the Presidency of the Disarmament Conference and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, can be seen as a major animating force in Henderson's later political career.

¹⁹¹ Arthur Henderson, *The Peace Terms* (London, 1919), p.1.

Conclusion

This thesis naturally divides into two parts: the first of these parts constitutes a historiographical critique of the Russo-centric standard account of Henderson's actions in the summer of 1917. This critique can be delivered with a good deal of confidence. As has been demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three above, the narratives we have been provided over the past hundred years clearly fail to withstand close scrutiny. The second part of the thesis incorporates what may best be described as preliminary ideas regarding the shape of a more convincing narrative which could take the place of these older accounts. This is by necessity a more speculative endeavour. But is speculation not inevitable when dealing with a character as unrevealing of his 'thinking processes' as Arthur Henderson? It could certainly be argued that *all* the historians who have between them developed the standard account share one rather significant speculative assumption: that Henderson's statements during the course of the Stockholm campaign accurately and fully reflected his underlying ideas and motives. The principal assumption guiding this thesis is different. In applying a 'high politics' analysis to Henderson actions and statements we have seen that his words were carefully designed to achieve outcomes about which he was less than transparent. The course adopted in this study has been therefore one of informed conjecture, from which any hard and fast certainties cannot be expected. We are left then in the realms of plausibility and coherence. What sort of narrative can be constructed which most plausibly fits with the available evidence and also enables the episode as a whole to

appear coherent? The central proposition of this thesis is that the narrative offered here comes closer to meeting these criteria than hitherto established accounts.

The Stockholm episode has always posed a number of key questions. Where, firstly, lay Henderson's driving concern: Russia or Britain? To choose Russia as the answer to this question can be justified by Henderson's own statements. But we should be able to answer an important further question. If Henderson believed that British attendance at Stockholm would assist the revolutionary regime in Petrograd how exactly did he imagine this would be achieved. On this his own words are unconvincing. The only specific way in which he suggests British labour at Stockholm would influence events in Russia is through 'educational propaganda work', by which misrepresentations of Allied war aims could be challenged.¹ On the face of it this seems more of a benefit to Britain than to Russia. Historians have been understandably keen to find a fuller answer and have been massively helped in this quest by the subsequent Bolshevik revolution.

We have seen that Henderson would later accept retrospective credit for having tried to avert this unhappy event. Evidence that Henderson anticipated the Bolshevik takeover, whether during his stay in Russia or during the course of his domestic campaign, is however conspicuously lacking. It seems likely that the political and ideological battle between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks assumed its significance for Henderson's Stockholm decision only later when that battle had reached its decisive dénouement. But this battle was fought and eventually won on Russian soil and it is highly questionable whether the Stockholm conference could have had much influence on its outcome. It was certainly the case that

¹ *Hansard*, H C Debs, Vol.96, cc: 2195-2196, 1 August 1917; Peter Stansky, ed., *The Left and War: the British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), pp: 222-229.

Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had opposing views on the conference, but it hardly follows from this that its convention could of itself have significantly weakened the Bolsheviks. What might have mattered, on the other hand, was what the conference could have achieved.

We know what the Mensheviks *hoped* it would achieve. By forging a united socialist response to the war, pressures could be generated on the belligerent states to secure an early peace. Any such peace would represent a massive boost to Russia's moderate socialists. Amongst the several factors that allowed the Bolsheviks to gather popular support, the continuation of the war was among the most potent. For the Mensheviks then, an international conference which really could harness the massed ranks of world labour in favour of peace would have been an immense blessing. Henderson, we know, was aware of this, but aware also that the sort of peace the Russians might well settle for would amount for the Allies to a 'general surrender'.² We have also seen how strongly he objected to the Russian determination to create a mandatory conference. Henderson was not going to lead his party to Stockholm in order to have it told that it must henceforth actively oppose the British government. But had he succeeded in securing the consultative conference he apparently desired, the outcome would surely have given fuel to Bolshevik propaganda. It was after all a significant part of that propaganda that the majority socialists of the belligerent nations had sold out to their imperialist masters. In publicly affirming their support for their own governments' continuation of the war Allied socialists would, in the view of Bolsheviks and others on the far Russian left, be condemning themselves out of their own mouths.

² TNA, Henderson to Lloyd George, 1 July 1917, FO 371/2997, f.55.

We cannot assume that Henderson would have had any confidence that British attendance at Stockholm, on terms he would accept, could have benefitted in any significant way those in Russia he wished to support. The view that he did believe this was most fully articulated not by Henderson himself but by Hamilton in her 1938 biography. Hamilton's opinion on this, though never directly refuted by subsequent historians, has long given way to the emphasis on the wider international threat posed by Bolshevism, not least to the British Labour party, presented by Winter in 1972. Winter's article then allows us to conclude that the political situation in Britain was probably of more concern to Henderson than that of Russia. This is certainly realistic. The evidence suggests that Henderson was fully aware that there was little he could do to influence events in Russia. In Britain however, as a member of the War Cabinet and leader of a political party, he was more significantly empowered.

This brings us to a second key question: what issue in domestic British politics was he determined to address? Winter's apparent view, now a longstanding orthodoxy, is that the danger of Bolshevism or Bolshevik inspired radicalism taking a grip on the Labour party became a major concern for Henderson to which his *volte face* on Stockholm provided a potential solution. This hypothesis however suffers from precisely the same defects as the earlier position favoured by Hamilton. In the first place it rests on an extraordinarily flimsy evidential base. Henderson's untypical hyperbole in the opening sentences of his article 'Revolution or Compromise' largely provides the foundation for Winter's argument that refashioning the Labour party as a 'moderate socialist alternative to extra-parliamentary

action or even revolution itself....' was an important 'legacy of his experience in Russia.'³

But a full reading of Henderson's late 1917 articles as gathered together in *The Aims of Labour* reveals a much greater concern for the forthcoming peace settlement than it does for any Bolshevist threat to the Labour party. And as argued above, the widening of the franchise provides a more obvious and compelling explanation for party reform at this time.

And again, it is not at all obvious how Stockholm plays into this possible concern. Winter suggests that 'Revolution or Compromise' was written 'shortly after' the Bolshevik revolution.⁴ Henderson's decision to support British attendance at Stockholm took place several months earlier when he appears to have been discounting such a revolution. Moreover, it is again the case that no credible way has been suggested in which Henderson may have perceived that the presence of a British delegation at Stockholm could have had the effect of reducing militant tendencies in his party. The most obvious effect of such a presence would surely have been to encourage the 'pacifists' in labour ranks. How this could have spawned a more moderate demeanour in the party post-war is decidedly unclear.

The alternative view offered here – that Henderson became convinced whilst in Russia that the British Labour party should not continue to stand aside from the revival of socialist internationalism both inspired by and conspicuous within the Russian revolution – certainly appears to be a more straightforward explanation than those considered above of his decision to back the proposed Stockholm conference. Exactly how he perceived this change of direction becoming established when he returned to Britain must remain unknown, and

³ J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, Vol.15, No.4 (1972), p.771.

⁴ *Idem*

could hardly have been fully clear to him at the time. We can however see, and have endeavoured to trace in this thesis, the path that he eventually persuaded his party to follow over the remaining period of the war and indeed beyond.

The view of Henderson's Stockholm campaign elaborated here clearly places his actions in a very different context from that provided in traditional Russo-centric accounts. This is the context referred to in Chapter One above in which the government of which Henderson was a part sought to challenge the rising domestic concerns over the cost and longevity of the war, and the canvassing, mostly from abroad, of suggestions by which the war might be terminated short of a decisive Allied victory. The first eight months of 1917 brought forth the interventions of Woodrow Wilson, the calls of the Provisional Government in Russia for a conference on Allied war aims, the Reichstag resolution in Berlin, as well as peace proposals emerging from the Vatican. Seeing these interventions as a threat to the patriotic consensus in Britain the Coalition government sought ways to reinvigorate this consensus. It is a significant coincidence, not generally noted in earlier accounts of Henderson's departure from the government, that an important part of the War Cabinet's response to these developments – the creation of the National War Aims Committee - emerged at precisely the moment that Henderson was demonstrating his own readiness to engage in war aims discussions with foreign socialists. The NWAC was of course designed to discourage discussion about specific war aims or speculation on peace, reasserting instead the original spirit of the patriotic consensus and the need to remain steadfast and united in the continuing and necessary struggle.⁵

⁵ See the report of the NWAC launch, including Lloyd George's address, in *The Times*, 6 August, 1917, p.4.

Henderson and Lloyd George were quite plainly at cross purposes. Henderson, we must assume, knew this all along, but succeeded in keeping this reality from his Prime Minister until after he had achieved his initial goal at the Labour conference of 10 August. His removal from office was thereafter inevitable. Whilst this thesis has been principally concerned with providing a better understanding of Henderson's actions in this period, the highlighting of this particular context, rather than that of Russia or Bolshevism, offers a new dimension to the discussion of these events. Henderson may be seen in these terms as facing the same dilemma as many of the nation's progressives who had committed to the war in 1914 but now felt some unease over the chronic uncertainty of the war's duration and the nature of the eventual settlement which would follow.⁶ Henderson however differed significantly from the rest in that he found a politically effective way of marshalling these concerns.

His achievement in leading the bulk of the Labour party towards an independent and challenging position on war aims during the final period of the war has long been recognised as considerable. It has however in all probability been understated. Traditional accounts, although they treat his failed campaign for Stockholm with sympathy, can really only begin evaluating his subsequent achievement from the point at which he was removed from the Cabinet, an outcome that he has been believed never to have sought. The preceding month has tended to appear as something of a muddle. Initially persuaded that a reversal of his party's stance on the Stockholm conference could in some way shore up the Kerensky

⁶ The editor of the progressive *Westminster Gazette* recalled in his memoirs the many letters he had received at this time from people who had 'tired of mere denunciation of the enemy and would not be starved of argument and reason.' The struggle to retain faith in his earlier views of the fictional Mr Britling, in a book that attained a vast readership in 1917, also points to this unease amongst progressive opinion, see H. G. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (London, 1916).

government and its 'moderate' socialist supporters against the threat of Bolshevism (always an unlikely proposition), he pursued this objective following his return to Britain for long past the point that its failure was inevitable. Whether driven by some self-defeating stubborn assurance in the correctness of his judgement on Russia, or anger at his humiliation on the 'doormat', he succeeded only in bringing about his supposed unwanted dismissal from the War Cabinet. Only as a result of these somewhat curious proceedings, so we have been led to believe, did he finally find himself in a position to lead his party in a direction its majority had hitherto strongly opposed.

The conclusion reached by this thesis is that the above is essentially untenable and that the best available alternative explanation for the period concerned rests instead on the proposition that when Henderson did decide to reverse his position on Stockholm this decision was merely the initial element in a much wider determination regarding his party's existing political stance. The fuller details of his political planning during the summer of 1917 will always remain obscure, but we have presented at least some plausible speculations based on the assumption that his ultimate objective seems to have been the securing of a progressive peace, by this stage of the war a real possibility given the positions shared by the two new Allied governments of Washington and Petrograd. In taking such a far reaching decision whilst so far from British shores Henderson was surely impelled by a deep sense of personal conviction, sufficient to overcome the expectation he must have had of future political difficulties. This being so, we must surely conclude that the campaign for Stockholm, the departure from the War Cabinet, and the subsequent internationalist programme, can best be seen as a single unfolding political process. And in viewing this long and difficult process, we may also bear witness to an extraordinary combination of stamina,

courage and political resourcefulness for which Henderson has never been properly credited.



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