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Ghosts of Empire and Spirits of Europe

The Labour Party and the Failure of the Briand Plan

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Abstract: In the interwar period, European integration was imagined as a political antidote to continental fragmentation. One of the most ambitious proposals of that era was the Briand Plan, a French initiative for a federal European Union under the League of Nations. Britain's response was polite but reserved. This article investigates why. Focusing on the British government's reply and the political stance of the then-ruling Labour Party, the article argues that Britain's reluctance reflected two interwoven factors: its status as a global colonial power and its ideological commitment to universalist internationalism through the League. Drawing on primary sources such as official responses, party manifestos, and diplomatic records the article situates Britain's position within broader political continuities that transcended party lines. The analysis reveals a political zeitgeist that privileged global imperial coherence over regional integration. The Briand Plan did not fail because it was too idealistic, but because it collided with a deeper British spirit: one that looked outward across oceans and turned away from Europe.

Keywords: Briand Plan • European integration • foreign policy • internationalism

1 Introduction

In a time of renewed geopolitical tensions across the world, opinions have been increasing that decry the previous optimism of the triumph of democracy and freedom, that has dominated the public since the fall of communism, as naïve. This sounds uncomfortably familiar. "It was not a treaty; it was a hope." This aphorism refers to the Treaty of Locarno of 1925 that allowed Germany's accession to the League of Nations and led to the spirit of Locarno. This spirit died with the Japanese invasion in Manchuria in 1931 – just as the illusion of global liberalism that emerged after the end of the Cold War died in Ukraine. Winged by this spirit and influenced by the millions of lives lost in the disastrous experience of the Great War, intellectuals and politicians elaborated several plans to create a stable European peace order.

One such effort was the Briand Plan, named after the French foreign minister of the time Aristide Briand and officially called *Mémorandum sur l'organisation d'un régime d'Union fédérale européenne*. It was the first plan on European integration to be discussed on an intergovernmental level and called for institutionalised cooperation among the European countries. Just like all the other governments, the British government reacted quite reluctantly.

This paper asks the question: Why was Britain's response to the Briand Plan so reserved? Britain is a well-suited case as it was the dominant power of the time. I argue that the British reluctance to the Briand Plan was influenced by its status as a major colonial power and in line with the Labour Party's stance on colonial and European policy – particularly the primacy of the League of Nations – and general British foreign policy. This period of Labour government is particularly intriguing, for the party still styled itself, at least rhetorically, as a revolutionary force. One might therefore anticipate a decisive break with established traditions of British foreign policy. Yet, as this paper will demonstrate, no such rupture occurred. Examining Labour's foreign policy within the context of party ideology colliding with long-standing policy conventions thus promises to yield valuable insights.

To study such endeavours is to peer into a continent at a crossroads, trapped between the horrors of the past and an uncertain future. The relevance of these interwar initiatives exceeds their failure. Britain's ambivalent stance, caught between Europe, the vast expanse of its empire and the commitment to the League of Nations, speaks to the enduring tensions between continuity, colonial ambition, and the promise of a united Europe.

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Therefore, I will firstly provide an overview of the current state of European integration during the interwar period, the League of Nations and British foreign and colonial politics as well as the Labour party's stance on these matters. Then the paper goes on to explain the case selection and the sources. This will be followed by locating and contextualising the Briand Plan alongside other ideas on European integration that were articulated at the same time. Then the analysis will follow. Firstly, I will analyse the Briand Plan itself followed by the British response. Finally, I will contextualise it within British and Labour policies towards colonies, the League of Nations and Europe.

2 Literature Review

As a foundation for the following analysis, this section will provide an overview of the state of the art in the different topics which this paper touches on, such as interwar approaches to European integration, the League of Nations, British policy towards the League and Europe, the tension between regional and international organisations, and the Labour Party's role and programme in foreign policy.

The failure of the Briand Plan has sparked research interest, since it was one of the most ambitious projects of European integration in the interwar period. In his essay on the Briand Plan, Roobol (2002) compared the circumstances in 1930 to those after the Second World War and identified a number of key causes for the project's failure: Europe was still the most important continent, the US government did not actively support European integration and Germany was more concerned with regaining what it had lost after the First World War than with European integration (Roobol 2002, p. 44). The League of Nations and Britain's role in it had also been the object of thorough research. Pedersen (2016) sees the League as association of states that renounced the resolu-

tion of international disputes by force but at the same time used the League to defend their imperial aspirations.

Further research has retraced the development of the Labour Party's foreign policy in the decades after the First World War up to 1931 (Ashworth, 2009). The resulting foreign policy was at the same time internationalist (Vickers, 2011), socialist (Gordon, 1969) and standing in the tradition of the older Liberal Party (Taylor, 1969). Gordon (1969) stresses the Party's unity in matters of foreign policy until the 1930s while Taylor (1969) sees it in the Liberal tradition of dissent. The Labour Party's foreign secretary Arthur Henderson has also been the object of research. Hughes (2006) investigated Henderson's past as member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet and then an early promoter of the League of Nations and evaluates his position as being in line with the party positions laid out in the 1928 pamphlet *Labour and the Nation*.

As we have seen, research has been conducted on all these topics. Yet so far, no study has explicitly devoted itself to the interconnectedness of these factors. The investigation of the Briand Plan should be a suitable case study for this.

3 Research Design and Case Selection

Among the multitude of plans on European integration the Briand Plan is a particularly well-suited example on the search of an explanation for the ultimate failure of all these plans. While most of these plans never went beyond being a theory, the Briand Plan was, "a rare translation of utopianism to politics"(Hewitson, 2012, p. 15). It was the first plan on European integration to be discussed on an intergovernmental level and as all the 26 governments that were asked to respond to the memorandum actually responded, the Briand plan and its responses produce a unique picture of the official government standpoints on European integration in the summer of 1930. All responses were, though polite, reserved to outright declinatory.

The British response to the Briand Plan sent to the French government on 16 July 1930, is a prime example. There is a consensus that Britain was heavily involved in both the creation of the League of Nations and the mandate system. And being the dominant world power at the time, Britain's decision served as an example for other countries (Bosco, 1998, p. 350; Boyce, 2018, p. 20). As I argue that colonialism contributed significantly to the memorandum's failure, Britain is an obvious choice as the British Empire encompassed a quarter of the world's surface (Shephard, 2007, p. 27).

At the time when Britain responded to the Briand Plan the Labour Party was in office. It was only the second time this party – which officially still propagated socialism – was ever in office in British history, after a first short stint in 1924 (Ashworth, 2009, p. 30; Thorpe, 2007, p. 7). To thus evaluate in the party's general stance, this paper will use the 1928 pamphlet Labour and the Nation (Labour Party, 1928).

Yet, MacDonald and Henderson were not only leading Labourites and trade unionists but also prime minister and minister of foreign affairs respectively in His Majesty's government. It is therefore vital to contextualise the British response to the Briand Plan in the broader context of British politics.

4 Briand Plan

4.1 Contextualisation

The optimism that followed the Treaty of Locarno nourished the emergence and growth of various organisations advocating for European integration (Bariéty, 1998, p. 9; Boyce, 2012, p. 75). A proper understanding of the British reaction, however, requires an initial examination of the plan itself. The socialist politician Aristide Briand was far from being the only person to have devised an elaborate plan for European integration. On the contrary, many intellectuals and politicians with very different political standpoints all developed their own ideas on Europe, even though Briand's plan stands out as having been discussed on an intergovernmental level in contrast to most plans that never made it beyond niche journals (Hewitson, 2012, p. 15). These ideas on European integration were not undisputed. Universalist and regionalist approaches to international order differed considerably. The League of Nations was the first attempt to develop a global, universalist order of international law (Czapliński, 2005, p. 255). As Schreuer (1995) argues, these two approaches were not mutually exclusive but rather complemented each other. Yet regionalism emerged out of a perceived inefficiency of universalism and a general preference for regional solutions (Schreuer, 1995, p. 477). Guieu (2012) sees this preference as evolving. After initial support, failures of the League, such as to prevent the Corfu Crisis of 1923 which led to aggressions between Italy and Greece, led legal scholars such as Scelle to question the universalist approach as premature (Guieu, 2012, p. 321). Consequently, they elaborated plans for regional integration as an alternative. The Briand Plan was a further push in this direction and sparked a debate (Guieu, 2012, p. 326).

4.2 The Briand Plan

Influenced by the plethora of ideas on Europe and winged by the albeit quickly fading spirit of Locarno, Aristide Briand, at the time French prime minister, delivered a speech to the General Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva on 5 September 1929. In this speech he proclaimed a federal bond between the nations of Europe (Briand, 1929, p. 52).

Building on this idea, the French government proposed a more elaborate plan on 1 May 1930: the *Mémorandum sur l'organisation d'un régime d'Union fédérale européenne*[1], which is colloquially known as the Briand Plan. While Briand was prime minister at the time of his speech, he now served as minister of foreign affairs in the second Tardieu government dominated by the centre-right *Alliance démocratique*[2]. The memorandum largely corresponds to the ideas of the speech: a federally organised European Union. However, there was one key difference: while Briand prioritised economic development over political integration, the memorandum prioritises political cooperation (Roobol, 2002, p. 43).

As it happens throughout the entirety of the text, the preamble already states that this European Union is to happen "sous le contrôle et dans l'esprit"[3] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 10) of the League of Nations. This European union was expected to promote "les possibilités d'élargissement du marché économique, les tentatives d'intensification et d'amélioration de la production indus-

[1] "Memorandum on the Organization of a European Federal Union"
[2] "Democratic Alliance"
[3] "Under the control and in the spirit"

trielle"[4] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 10) and at the same time an "organisation universelle de la paix"[5] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 10).

The main part then goes on to lay out the practical details. Membership in this European Union should originally be reserved to European member states of the League of Nations. Yet, "Europe" is not defined any more precisely (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 14). This potentially leaves room for possible later expansions beyond Europe or beyond the member states of the League of Nations. Even though the plan time and again underlines the primacy of the League of Nations, it foresees the creation of new, independent institutions exclusive to the new union. It foresees the establishment of a "Conférence européenne" (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 14), which is comprised of representatives of the member governments. A "comité politique permanent" (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 14) is to be charged with the day-to-day organisation and should meet in Geneva. The presidency of this committee should rotate among the members (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 15). All this shall, of course, happen "dans le cadre de la Société des Nations"[6] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 14). This contradiction between internationalism and regional integration was pointed out by contemporaries (Guieu, 2012, p. 327). The memorandum then goes on to underline the prevalence of political integration over economic integration. Political integration makes the "effort constructeur"[7] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 16). A focus on economy alone, on the other hand, "apparaitrait aux nations les plus faibles comme susceptible de les exposer"[8] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 16). Nothing is said about the role of colonies in Briand's vision for Europe. The memorandum ends on an enthusiastic note: this is the time for Europe to "disposer elle-même de son propre destin"[9] (League of Nations, 1930a, p. 20).

5 The British Response to the Briand Plan

On 16 July the British government responded to the proposal and sent its response to the French foreign office who forwarded it to the League of Nations (League of Nations 1930b). In twelve numbered points the British government elaborated its standpoint. After some introductory phrases about the careful study of the memorandum, the importance of empire and colonies and Britain's role not as a state among all the other states of Europe but as a part of a global network becomes evident. Exemplary is the formula the British government uses every time to refer to itself: "le gouvernement de Sa Majesté dans le Royaume-Uni"[10] (League of Nations, 1930b, pp. 73, 74, 75). This shows multiple things. The British government clearly differentiates between its own role as the United Kingdom's government on one hand and "tous les autres gouvernements de Sa Majesté dans le British Commonwealth"[11] (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 73) on the other. Thus, it makes no claim to represent the whole Empire – which is by then preferably called Commonwealth, the expression of a change in self-image which is heavily influenced by Labour's anti-imperialist tendency but also the changed legal framework after the Balfour Declaration and will be discussed in

[4] "possibilities of enlarging the economic market, intensification and improvement of industrial production"
[5] "universal peace organisation"
[6] "within the framework of the League of Nations"
[7] "effort of construction"
[8] "would appear to the weakest nations as likely to expose them"
[9] "to have control over its own destiny"
[10] "His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom"
[11] "all other governments of His Majesty in the British Commonwealth"

further detail in the sections about the Labour Party. But it also underlines the king's power beyond the English shores. And this formula furthermore touches on a subject that will become more explicit in the Labour party's pamphlet: the power relations and hierarchies between the metropole and its colonies and dominions. The British government stresses the preliminary character of all its subsequent statements as it wants to examine the memorandum "en constatation avec tous les Gouvernements de Sa Majesté dans le British Commonwealth"[12] (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 73). This implies at least rhetorically a community of equals.

In the British response the pillars of British foreign policy become evident: Empire and a traditional commitment to the League of Nations. In the debate on universalism and regionalism, Britain clearly took the universalist side.

After a short summary the document then goes on to proclaim peace as the "premiers des intérêts britanniques"[13] (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 73). The British government agrees with the French proposal of economic and political cooperation and underlines the common interests (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 74). But this agreement in principle quickly turns into open disagreement in detail. The government is openly opposed to Briand's idea of creating new institutions which it judges not "nécessaires ou désirables"[14] (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 74). It opposes these proposals as they are not in line with the League of Nations Covenant and part XII of the Treaty of Versailles (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 74). The creation of an exclusively European organisation distinct from the League of Nations might, as the British government fears, spark "rivalités et hostilités intercontinentales"[15] (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 74). It sees it as its task to diminish and avoid this danger.

Britain's role as centre of a colonial empire is explicitly stated, even though Britain only refers to itself as a member of the British Commonwealth, avoiding any mention of hierarchy within the Commonwealth. Finally, the government proposes to alter the memorandum so that it fully fits into the existing framework of the League of Nations (League of Nations, 1930b, p. 75). In the British response the pillars of British foreign policy become evident: Empire and a traditional commitment to the League of Nations. In the debate on universalism and regionalism, Britain clearly took the universalist side.

However, a government is never a monolithic bloc but always composed of individual members with their own agendas who are at the same time members of a political party. The positions of this party influence a politician's decisions. In the general elections of 1929 Labour had won 46,7% of seats. Yet even though it was dependant on Liberal support, the resulting Second MacDonald Ministry was exclusively composed of Labour ministers. Therefore, it suggests itself to investigate the Labour Party's more general political stance.

[12] "in consultation with all of Her Majesty's Governments in the British Commonwealth"
[13] "first of British interests"
[14] "necessary or desirable"
[15] "intercontinental rivalries and hostilities"

6 The Labour Party between Revolution and Continuity

6.1 The Labour Party on Colonialism and League of Nations Mandates

The outbreak of First World War and particularly the British declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914 plunged the Labour Party into a dilemma. Officially committed to the Second International's opposition to war, the majority of the Party supported the war (Thorpe, 2007, p. 6). Former opponents would soon find themselves collaborating in the same cabinet. Ramsay MacDonald, once the leader of the opponents of the war who had resigned from his office as parliamentary leader in protest against the war, would rise to become Britain's first Labour Prime Minister in 1924 and again in 1929. Both times he appointed Arthur Henderson as Foreign Secretary, who had joined both H.H. Asquith's and Lloyd George's wartime coalition governments (Thorpe, 2007, p. 7).

The Labour Party had traditionally neglected foreign policy to the benefit of domestic topics. However, by 1928 the Labour Party had developed with the help of international relations experts comprehensive positions on foreign policy (Ashworth, 2009). The result of this work becomes evident in Labour and the Nation, a manifesto laying out the party's vision for the country. It focuses on changing the society and commits the party to socialism in Britain (Hughes, 2006, p. 72). The Party's declared goal is to "end the capitalist dictatorship in which democracy finds everywhere its most insidious and most relentless foe" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 8). Whereas most of the text is dedicated to showing the Tories' responsibility for the deplorable situation and present Labour's solution, there are also passages on foreign policy. The Party portrays itself as the true promoter of peace in contrast to the Conservative Party (Labour Party, 1928, p. 12). The League of Nations is called "the principal bulwark which stands between the world and the horrors of another war" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 13). The "whole structure of peace and of a foreign policy of co-operation must be built firmly on the foundation of the League of Nations" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 46). Britain is defined as "at once part of Europe and detached from it" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 12). We can therefore establish that the unwavering preference for the League of Nations and the rather reservedly positive to indifferent reaction to European integration which clearly show in the British response to the Briand Plan are in line with Labour's general programme. [16]

The manifesto then goes on to demand closer cooperation between Great Britain, the Dominions and other states of the Commonwealth. The term Empire is not used and a whole paragraph is dedicated to the protection of indigenous people (Labour Party, 1928, p. 50). This may imply a different ideological approach to colonialism, particularly given the Party's anti-colonialist factions (Williams, 2021). Socialists in the closing years of the 19th century decried the British Empire and imperialism in general as serving only the aristocracy and the trading classes (Claeys, 2010, p. 225). While the general rise in popularity of imperialist ideas during the Boer Wars on the threshold of the 20th century also affected the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald was more steadfast (Claeys,

[16] This can also be explained on a biographical note, since Henderson was an early supporter of the League of Nations (Hughes, 2006, p. 70). But while supporting the idea of the League, he was not uncritical. He was, as Hughes puts it, a "practical utopian" (Hughes, 2006, p. 84). In 1922, in *Labour and Foreign Affairs*, he argues for the admission of new countries and to strengthen the role of the Assembly of League as compared to the Council and to abolish the principle of unanimity (Henderson, 1922, p. 9).

2010, pp. 126, 199). However, in 1908 he saw potential for the Empire as "a powerful element in the maintenance of peace and the promotion of the international spirit" (Claeys, 2010, p. 201).

Once in power, Labour could not evade the inherent responsibility of having to govern an Empire stretching from Canada to Suez to Hong Kong and encompassing over 400 million people. Apart from rhetoric, little distinguished Labour's colonial politics from its conservative predecessors. This rhetoric, however, stayed, as Labour and the Nation showed, consistently sceptical of colonialism.

In the interwar years, British colonial policy was chiefly preoccupied with charting a course of action in relation to the mandate territories entrusted to it by the League of Nations, territories carved from the fallen German and Ottoman Empires. Within the Mandate System two regions were particularly important to Britain: Tanganyika and Iraq (Pedersen, 2015, pp. 222; 261). The Labour government's actions in the Tanganyika question were not as bold as *Labour and the Nation* would lead one to expect as they did not categorically reject the idea of white settler colonialism (Pedersen, 2015, p. 229).

In Iraq, by contrast, Labour undertook bold and unexpected measures: on 4 November 1929 it announced its intention for Iraq to attain sovereignty and membership of the League of Nations by 1932, thus hastening a Liberal initiative already in motion (Pedersen, 2015, p. 263). Labour merely accelerated this process. This was, however, too abrupt in the eyes of the League of Nation's Mandate Commission. But instead of slowing down and trying to comply, Foreign Secretary Henderson tried to bypass the Commission by questioning its responsibility (Pedersen, 2015, p. 167). How does this fit into the claim made in *Labour and the Nation* that "Labour's policy will thus be built upon the foundation of the League" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 46)?

When investigating Labour's policy towards the League, it must be recognised that neither the Party nor the Labour government agreed on that matter. Generally, Labour's attitude was, at least compared to the Conservatives' opposition and the Liberals' support, rather ambiguous (McCarthy, 2014, p. 63). Parts of the Party's leadership were considerably more enthusiastic than the middle-class dominated grassroots level (McCarthy, 2014, p. 66). There were considerable professional discrepancies between MacDonald and Henderson. Yet, they also disagreed on private matters. Furthermore, the questions of collective security and the League of Nations were particularly contested (Hughes, 2006, p. 74).

Hence, we can conclude that a rhetorically strong theoretical commitment to the League of Nations was widely accepted within the Labour Party, as *Labour and the Nation* has shown. When it came to realising these promises in practice, however, opinions varied significantly. The language used in the British response to the Briand Plan aligns with this theoretical commitment.

6.2 The Labour Party on Europe

European integration was no priority for the Labour Party. In Labour and Nation, only a short paragraph talks explicitly about Europe, showing its position on Britain's position in and relationship to Europe was ambivalent: Britain is defined as "at once part of Europe and detached from it – because she neither lies aloof in remote isolation nor lives with her eyes fixed on her frontiers" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 12). Henderson does not address it at all in *Labour and Foreign Affairs*. This low priority for a political Europe is nothing new. British politics traditionally only devoted little attention to projects of European cooperation (Boyce, 2018, p. 24).

After the First World War, the primary focus was on reordering Europe and Labour had a clear position on the Paris Treaties and the reparations which had been imposed on Germany. "The Peace Treaties have failed" (Henderson, 1922, p. 2) states Henderson in *Labour and Foreign Affairs* and cites Keynes: "The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation [...] should be abhorrent and detestable" (Henderson, 1922, p. 3). Furthermore, the Party demands "the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Rhineland." (Labour Party, 1928, p. 48) Seeing the French perseverance in the German question as main obstacle to a stable peace order in Europe, the Labour government became "almost pathologically francophobe" (Boyce, 2018, p. 21).

Much more attention was given to the economic relationship with the Continent. Britain was committed to the most-favoured-nation principle and both in 1925 and 1928 the Board of Trade, a government agency, blocked any derogation from it (Boyce, 2018, p. 23). The Labour Party was particularly adherent to free trade (Boyce, 2018, p. 20). It aimed to abolish "obstacles to commerce" (Labour Party, 1928, p. 48). Against the backdrop of worsening economic conditions, the Chancellor of the Exchequer only narrowly succeeded in obtaining the Cabinet's approval to a tariff truce among several mainly Northern European trading nations (Boyce, 2018, p. 23). Yet, on the Imperial Conference in Ottawa in 1932 Britain, pressured by its Dominions, agreed to the principle of imperial preference and publicly denounced regional trade agreements among foreign countries (Boyce, 2018, pp. 29–30).

We can therefore conclude that Labour, in its reluctance and partially outright refusal to participate in Briand's European Union, was in line with the reactions of previous and subsequent governments. Even where there were signs of European integration - in the economic sphere, to which Labor was the most open - the colonial ties acted as a restraining factor, which illustrates their influence.

7 Conclusion

The Briand Plan was not merely a political proposal; it was the expression of a fragile, fleeting European zeitgeist born from the ashes of war and animated by the hope of a different future. In Britain, that spirit found no home.

This paper showed that Britain's reluctance was indeed influenced by its colonies. This is clearly visible in the British response to the Briand Plan, in which the government explicitly cites its obligations on other continents as a reason for opposition and stresses the need to consult the other governments of the Commonwealth. The extent of the colonies' influence on British politics became increasingly evident during the Imperial Conference in Ottawa in 1932 when the Dominions succeeded to pressure Britain into abandoning its longstanding policy of free trade and adopt the principle of imperial preference.

Another reason for Britain to respond in this reserved way was, as I showed, its commitment to the League of Nations. The government, in its response to Briand, clearly expresses its opposition to the creation of international institutions outside of the framework of the League of Nations. This commitment to the League of Nations is a constant factor of British foreign policy during the interwar period.

As the Labour Party, that was in power at the time Briand proposed his memorandum, used a radical rhetoric and proclaimed its commitment to lead Britain to socialism, it would be logical to assume a radical shift in policy after the Party's second accession to power in 1929. Yet, as I was able to demonstrate using the example of the Briand Plan and Labour's colonial and European policy,

this was not the case. Neither in matters of colonial policy nor in those of foreign or European policy deviated Labour radically from the course set by previous governments. In colonial politics it continued the politics towards the British mandates and merely, giving some credit to its electoral promises in *Labour and the Nation*, accelerated the process of transforming them into independent states. In its attitude towards the League of Nations, Labour maintained a strongly supportive rhetoric. The challenge Briand's European Union with its own set of institutions would pose to the authority of the League was its main argument against the plan. Policy actions, however, were highly contested among leading Labourites and not everyone was as enthusiastic about the League. Consequently, its policies were not as supportive as a reader of their manifesto might well expect. In its relation to Europe, Labour was notably ambiguous. While particularly its positions on Allied attitudes towards Germany were quite far-reaching, the Party did not agitate for European cooperation beyond peace and free trade. It thus followed the path of previous governments in a time that witnessed a general development away from free trade towards tariffs.

Neither in matters of colonial policy nor in those of foreign or European policy deviated Labour radically from the course set by previous governments.

Hence, we can conclude that the British response to the Briand Plan was indeed influenced by Britain's status as the major colonial power and dominating world power of its time and the Labour Party's political stance even though the general British policy was much more influential. While this study showed the influence of political continuity, it only briefly touched upon the relevance of economic matters. Aimed at retracing the official reasons for British reluctance vis-à-vis European integration, this paper used official government and party communiqués as primary sources. The scope was not to focus on personal motivations, although research in that area may provide insightful results. Focusing on the influence of colonies and Labour politics, this paper only briefly touched on economic factors. Particularly against the backdrop of a precipitously deteriorating economic situation in Europe following the Wall Street crash and the predominant role of economic policies, this topic surely deserves attention. Further research should explore this correlation in greater depth. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the political processes and continuities that defined Britain's reserved approach to European integration during the interwar years by interpreting their communiqués not only as statements, but performative utterance.

The British response to the Briand Plan was indeed influenced by Britain's status as the major colonial power and dominating world power of its time and the Labour Party's political stance even though the general British policy was much more influential.

In the end, the spirit of Locarno did not fail because it was too idealistic. It failed because it did not prevail against the spirits already in power: the ghosts of empire, of exceptionalism, of cautious self-preservation. The British response to the Briand Plan was not a misstep. It was the echo of a zeitgeist that looked across oceans and turned its back on Europe.

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