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## **Britain, Mussolini and the 'Locarno-Geneva System'**

**The names Locarno and Mussolini** have come to symbolize almost directly antithetical aspects of European history between the two world wars — Locarno the 'honeymoon' years of optimism and international conciliation in the mid-1920s, Mussolini second only to Hitler as the personification of the aggressive and totalitarian nationalism of the 1930s. Yet Fascist Italy was a Locarno power and Mussolini personally attended the final stage of the conference to initial the treaties: indeed he considered himself unjustly excluded from the Nobel Peace Prizes awarded to Austen Chamberlain, Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann for their roles in the negotiations.<sup>1</sup> While this farcical claim has never been echoed, the incongruity of Mussolini's participation in Locarno has not escaped historians' attention. There has developed something of a 'Guilty Men' school of interpretation attacking those who 'appeased' Mussolini in the 1920s, similar to, if less vehement than, that which has aroused so much controversy concerning the 'men of Munich' in the late 1930s. Indeed, following the success of the original *Guilty Men*, a fictional *Trial of Mussolini* was published in 1943 in which Austen Chamberlain was called as the first witness to account for his relations with the accused.<sup>2</sup> The most significant and pungent expression of this view is to be found in A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*. In a passage which has passed virtually unchallenged in the decade and a half of intensive discussion of this controversial work, Taylor places considerable emphasis on Mussolini's place in Locarno.

The presence of Fascist Italy at Geneva, the actual presence of Mussolini at Locarno, were the extreme symbols of unreality in the democratic Europe of the League of Nations.

Taylor further states that 'the presence of Italy' was 'a greater flaw in the Locarno-Geneva system than the absence of the United States and Soviet Russia'. He argues that western statesmen — and he clearly regards Austen Chamberlain and the British government as the principal culprits — indulged in 'a tawdry pretence' by using insincere flattery to encourage Italy to attend both the Locarno conference and the League sessions at Geneva.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, well-documented studies of Mussolini's diplomacy have understandably concentrated on the problems that the Locarno formula, with its omission of any guarantee for Germany's southern frontier, posed for Italy's relations with Germany and France, and have left discussion of Anglo-Italian relations to the aftermath of Locarno.<sup>4</sup> This paper looks again at how Mussolini came to be at Locarno, with the emphasis on Britain's role. Was his attendance a case of the Duce following the British lead, as implied by a number of writers as well as Taylor,<sup>5</sup> or was this a 'fond illusion' of Chamberlain's, as Cassels states?<sup>6</sup> To what extent did Chamberlain press Mussolini to take part in the 'Locarno-Geneva system' and how deluded was he in doing so?

Mussolini received his first warning of the negotiations in January 1925 when his Ambassador in Paris, Baron Camillo Romano Avezzana, reported that the British, French and German governments were approaching a consensus on a security pact involving reciprocal guarantees by the Great Powers. From the outset Romano Avezzana voiced the fears that henceforth dominated Italian policy: firstly, that Italy should not be excluded from negotiations which could radically affect the future of Europe, and secondly that agreement should not be reached at the expense of Italian interests, above all by permitting the *Anschluss* to take place or even weakening opposition to it. French Prime Minister Edouard Herriot had seen the *Anschluss* as inevitable and British acquiescence as likely, Romano Avezzana continued, but Briand had been more hopeful of the possibility of a British guarantee of Italian and French borders as common frontiers.<sup>7</sup>

Mussolini immediately instructed his Ambassador in London, Marquis Pietro Della Toretta, to make sure that Chamberlain did not leave him out of any negotiations, and asked for Della Toretta's comments on the report.<sup>8</sup> The Ambassador replied correctly that it was most unlikely that Britain would guarantee the Brenner frontier between Austria and Italy, as British and Dominion public opinion saw a British interest only in the Rhine frontier. He none

the less secured from Chamberlain an assurance that he had not given any consideration to Austria either *per se* or as a factor in general policy, as well as the impression that there was no Anglo-French combination being formed from which Italy might be excluded.<sup>9</sup>

Late in February the French told Mussolini that the official *démarche* had been made by Germany, indicating a willingness to adhere to a pact of the 'parties interested in the Rhine, above all France, Italy, Britain and Germany', to guarantee Germany's western frontier, as well as to arbitration treaties with her eastern neighbours. Mussolini's reaction was sensible, cautiously optimistic but non-committal: he clearly found the proposal neither 'wonderfully attractive', as Taylor states, nor totally abhorrent.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout early March, as Della Torretta and Romano Avezana pressed Mussolini to commit himself,<sup>11</sup> Chamberlain was working to overcome the French fear that Germany would expand eastward at the expense of France's allies and then, so strengthened, return to seek revenge on France. Thus preoccupied, his only reaction to the Italian argument that *Anschluss* might be precipitated was to say that Germany's pledge not to provoke a war implied a guarantee of the Austro-German frontier.<sup>12</sup>

The first sign of a commitment by Mussolini came on 14 March. Three days earlier, Della Torretta had reported a conversation with Sir Eyre Crowe, permanent head of the Foreign Office, on the Anglo-French talks in which Chamberlain had told Herriot that the proposed pact was the **only** way in which Britain would permit herself to be involved in a continental guarantee.<sup>13</sup> This, said Mussolini, was decisive: Italy would henceforth support the British viewpoint at the appropriate time in the negotiations and in the meantime the Italian delegate to the League of Nations would follow the lead of his British colleague.<sup>14</sup> Mussolini made no suggestion of any initiative to forestall the *Anschluss*, despite suggestions from both Della Torretta and Crowe that some bargaining with Germany might be possible.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the negotiations, both in London and Rome there were differences on the question of Italian participation between the officials of the two foreign ministries and their political heads. In Rome the diplomats trained in pre-Fascist foreign policy were consistently more favourable to the pact than Mussolini. They argued that Italy could not afford to be left out of an attempt to form a concert of the major European powers and attached impor-

tance to Italy's traditional links with Britain. Significantly, the first favourable reaction to the pact proposal in Rome came from the Palazzo Chigi and not from Mussolini personally. Early in March, while Della Torretta and Romano Avezana were still waiting for Mussolini to commit himself, Salvatore Contarini, Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry, told the German Ambassador in Rome that Italy was ready to take part in the negotiations and subsequently indicated to the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Graham, that Italy would give 'full support' to Britain.<sup>16</sup> Later in the month, Graham reported that Mussolini himself had promised Chamberlain his 'whole-hearted support'.<sup>17</sup>

At this point a degree of difference in attitude towards Mussolini's Italy between Chamberlain and his officials became apparent. Miles Lampson, head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, minuted:

We are promised whole-hearted Italian support. But we should not count too much upon it when the time comes. 'Sacred egoism' is more likely.

Chamberlain agreed but welcomed the decision in a reply to the Duce.<sup>18</sup> Italy was a minor factor in Foreign Office thinking at this time. A memorandum of 20 February on the European situation and British interests therein, prepared at Chamberlain's instigation after a meeting of all senior officials, did not mention Italy once.<sup>19</sup> Franco-German reconciliation, the need to give France security and to prevent Germany forming with Soviet Russia an anti-western bloc were the vital preoccupations of Whitehall. In this context officials were amused at, and somewhat contemptuous of, Italy's pretensions to Great Power status, her reluctance to be omitted from world councils and her indecisiveness. When Contarini, referring to the earlier proposal for an Anglo-Franco-Belgian Pact, had once said that Italy 'would dislike being omitted from such a combination but would be equally reluctant to join it', one official commented: 'What a perfect description of Italian policy!'<sup>20</sup> Chamberlain was no less aware of Italy's disproportionate claims: the difference was that, if a little flattery and solicitude would make Mussolini a member of the European concert being formed, rather than an opponent, he was willing to pay the price. As he said on another occasion, 'Fine manners (if not fine words) will butter more parsnips in Italy than anywhere else.'<sup>21</sup>

For two months, from late March to late May, the situation re-

mained essentially unchanged. In April an inspired press report stated that Italy favoured a guarantee pact between Italy, England, France, Belgium and Germany and regarded previous agreement between London, Rome, Paris and Brussels as necessary.<sup>22</sup> The amount of credence placed in such Italian affirmations can be gauged by the fact that the draft treaties which the Foreign Office started preparing in May listed the contracting parties as 'Belgium, the British Empire, France and Germany' with Italy either omitted completely or listed parenthetically with the Netherlands and Switzerland as possible additions.<sup>23</sup>

None the less Mussolini's fundamental problem, the possibility of precipitating the *Anschluss*, had not been solved and two incidents arising from this fact led to a shift in Mussolini's position. The first involved Britain, for on 24 March the Italian Ambassador in Berlin reported that his British colleague, Lord D'Abernon, had talked of the *Anschluss* with Stresemann as a possible compensation for the concessions which Germany would have to make for the Rhineland pact. De Bosdari said that he did not know whether this was done on D'Abernon's own initiative or on Foreign Office instructions.<sup>24</sup> Mussolini referred the report to Della Toretta, who saw Chamberlain on 1 April. From both their accounts of the conversation, it is clear that the Ambassador made no specific mention of D'Abernon's alleged *démarche* but asked Chamberlain 'whether any mention had been made of Austria in any communication I [Chamberlain] had had with either the German or the French Government'. Chamberlain categorically denied any mention of Austria with the Germans, reassured Della Torretta in strong terms of Britain's opposition to any alteration of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and expressed his confidence that Germany had no intention of precipitating the *Anschluss*. Della Torretta, duly reassured, stated that Italy would 'gladly' adhere to the pact, provided that her opposition to treaty revision in general and the *Anschluss* in particular was made clear, while Chamberlain affirmed that Britain would undertake no new obligations in respect of Italian frontiers but would loyally observe her existing commitments.<sup>25</sup>

The form in which Della Torretta raised the question meant that the Foreign Office did not know of De Bosdari's report, but was well aware of Italian fears of German southward expansion. It was therefore caught by surprise when Graham reported a conversation with Contarini in which the Secretary-General had referred to

several indications by D'Abernon to De Bosdari that Britain 'would not regard the *Anschluss* with great disfavour'. Graham's protestations seemed to reassure Contarini as to British policy but not as to German intentions.<sup>26</sup> There was in fact a tendency on the part of Foreign Office officials to regard the *Anschluss* with less than total horror: typical of the departmental minutes was that by Harold Nicolson which argued that it 'would not be detrimental to British interests' and Britain might do best 'to lie low and see in what form the eventual storm develops'. Chamberlain completely disagreed: he stated that he was totally opposed to the *Anschluss*, that to talk of rewriting the peace treaties within six years of their signature was 'dangerous and foolish' and that peace required opposition to any revision of the treaty settlement.<sup>27</sup> Whether D'Abernon — who later absolutely denied raising the question<sup>28</sup> — had in fact thrown out feelers is far from clear, but there was no doubt as to the views of the Foreign Secretary. None the less, beyond constantly reassuring Italy concerning the innocence of German intentions (as the Foreign Office had done during the tense period when Hindenburg was elected President),<sup>29</sup> Chamberlain offered no real solution to Mussolini's dilemma: there was to be no attempt to extend the system of reciprocal guarantees to include Germany's southern borders.

The temporary tension in Anglo-Italian relations was kept within diplomatic channels, but was followed almost immediately by the well-known public clash between Mussolini and Stresemann, which need only be summarized here.<sup>30</sup> On 20 May Mussolini declared in the Senate that 'Not only must the Rhine frontiers be guaranteed but those of the Brenner also.' He followed this, it appears, with a sounding of the Germans on the possibility of a Brenner guarantee but was curtly told by Stresemann that this request was 'sent to the wrong address' as Germany could only give such a guarantee if the *Anschluss* had taken place. Mussolini quickly changed the official text of his speech to read 'The Rhine frontier must not be guaranteed in such a way as to weaken the guarantees for the Brenner' and he used this wording on 30 May when giving instructions to De Bosdari.<sup>31</sup> Cassels concludes that Stresemann and Mussolini reached a 'tacit, self-denying understanding' in a position of stalemate: Mussolini dropped the subject of Austria lest it bring the *Anschluss* nearer, Stresemann did likewise lest it lead to an international guarantee.<sup>32</sup> None the less Mussolini had clearly come very close to committing himself to non-participation in the negotiations

if the Brenner were not guaranteed: he chose to lie low rather than to try to gain some sort of official statement, short of an explicit guarantee, from Chamberlain. It took the best efforts of Contarini to stabilize his attitude as one of neutrality. The Duce's position, it was reported in London, was 'not one of rejection or of adherence in advance, but rather one of awaiting developments which events may produce'.<sup>33</sup>

Chamberlain, apparently surprised, called in the Italian Ambassador on 23 June to explain the shift in the Italian position since 1 April. Della Torretta stated that, while Italy was not seeking a guarantee of the Brenner frontier, apprehensions concerning the possibility of the *Anschluss* had made her more reserved.<sup>34</sup> The Foreign Office officials were rather less surprised and less concerned than their chief. Lampson wrote in the same month:

It is pretty evident that the Italians are still in two minds over the Pact. They hate to be left out: but they don't want the responsibility of being in. We should not reckon on having them in. Fortunately I do not think that we care in the least whether they are in or not: it is entirely their own affair.<sup>35</sup>

When shortly afterwards, Italy's reserved attitude was officially confirmed, Lampson said that this was only what was to be expected from Italy.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout July and early August Mussolini maintained this position, notwithstanding the repeated suggestions from Paris that the two Latin nations should act together to protect Austrian independence and the Brenner frontier, culminating in Briand's offer 'unconditionally' to give the Italians 'all the guarantees they would care to ask for'. To the frustration of Romano Avezana and Vittorio Scialoja, the Italian delegate at the League of Nations in Geneva, Mussolini's dislike of any suggestion of French patronage overcame any understanding of mutual Italo-French interests: after long uncertainty, Mussolini rejected the offer.<sup>37</sup>

What changed his attitude to the pact negotiations was simply the prospect that there might be a conference without him. In mid-August Della Torretta reported that the phase of diplomatic correspondence was coming to a successful conclusion, to be followed within two weeks by a meeting of legal advisers from the participating foreign ministries and subsequently a 'conversation' of the foreign ministers.<sup>38</sup> At the same time press rumours of a meeting of Chamberlain, Briand and Stresemann to be held in

Switzerland came to Mussolini's attention.<sup>39</sup> The prestige-conscious former journalist reacted almost automatically. He stated that he wanted Italy to be represented at the meeting of jurists 'in order to facilitate Italian adherence' to the pact and that he should himself attend any meeting of the major European foreign ministers. However, as he was most reluctant to leave Italy, he wanted such a meeting to be held in his own country.<sup>40</sup>

The reactions of Britain and France to these egocentric demands were significant. Briand declared that Italian participation would make the pact 'perfect' and 'Italy would be welcomed with open arms.' He said that he would be quite happy for the ministerial meetings to be held in Italy and renewed the offer for a separate guarantee for the Brenner.<sup>41</sup> Chamberlain took a perceptibly harder line. He wanted both the legal advisers' and the ministers' meetings to be held in London since it was there, he claimed, that the idea of the pact had been 'conceived and matured': Italy would be quite unacceptable. None the less he was prepared to renounce London's claims in favour of a location in Switzerland convenient to Mussolini.<sup>42</sup> Thus Locarno, in an Italian-speaking canton of Switzerland near the Italian border, came to give its name to a treaty and to a period of European history to suit the convenience of the Fascist dictator. As far as the jurists' meeting was concerned, both Briand and Chamberlain refused to entertain such an idea while Mussolini maintained his attitude of reserve in the negotiations: yet once Italy had expressed 'a willingness to participate', still without firm commitment to the pact, both Britain and France accepted Italian representation. The decision was so last-minute that the meeting had to be delayed by a day to allow the Italian representative to arrive from Rome.<sup>43</sup>

Even now Mussolini was not fully committed to the pact but was pressed step by step by British, French and Italian diplomats closer to participation. Each step was welcomed by Chamberlain who continued to make clear both his desire that Italy and Mussolini personally take part and his irritation at the Duce's inability to make up his mind. The succession of steps may be related to show how long Mussolini delayed his final commitment. Despite Italy's expressed 'willingness to participate', when Scialoja met with Chamberlain, Briand and Belgian Prime Minister Emile Vandervelde at Geneva on 9 September, he described his position as merely that of an observer.<sup>44</sup> It was at this time that Switzerland emerged as the compromise venue between Britain and Italy. Later that



month, Italian assent was secured before the French note inviting the Germans to Locarno was sent and Mussolini 'intimated that if by any mischance it was impossible for him to attend himself, he would send someone to represent him'.<sup>45</sup> On 1 October, awaiting the announcement of the Italian delegation, Chamberlain expressed his annoyance that the Duce still had not agreed to attend 'personally the conference fixed at Locarno especially to suit his convenience',<sup>46</sup> but on the same day it was stated that Scialoja would lead the Italian delegation.<sup>47</sup> When Scialoja came to Locarno, he told Chamberlain that he was no longer just an observer but 'now had authority to adhere... to the western pact if it were concluded in the terms which had been foreshadowed'.<sup>48</sup> On 9 October Scialoja told Chamberlain that, following a favourable report to Mussolini on the proceedings of the conference, he was 'even more authorised to participate'.<sup>49</sup> On the following day Scialoja had Italy's name inserted in the preamble to the treaty as a participant. At Scialoja's request, Chamberlain supported the Italian tactic of giving this move the appearance of 'not a sudden, unexpected decision, but a confirmation of an intention previously indicated'.<sup>50</sup> There was still no sign of Mussolini himself, although at the opening of the conference Scialoja had hinted at the possibility of his attending the later stages. As argued elsewhere, it was probably Della Torretta's telegram of 12 October which led to Mussolini arriving at Locarno on the 15th, the eve of the ceremonial signing of the treaties.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to see why Cassels should say his attendance was presented 'for public consumption... as an 11th-hour decision':<sup>52</sup> it was indeed a last-minute decision, spuriously presented as if the culmination of long planning.

The sequence of events related above does not sustain the view that Mussolini's attendance at Locarno was the result of British pressure or sycophantic flattery. Chamberlain used 'fine words' when Mussolini seemed willing to participate, and irritable words when he vacillated, but the only concession he made was a relatively minor one at the expense of his own prestige as the honest broker between the French and the Germans, by allowing the conference to be held near, but not in, Italy rather than in London (where the treaties initialled at Locarno in October were formally signed in December). He was very well aware of the obstacle that made Italian participation difficult, but made no move to help Mussolini overcome it. No doubt Chamberlain felt that Germany's western and eastern frontiers posed enough problems without bringing the

southern borders into consideration; as we have seen, it was generally assumed that British and Dominion public opinion would permit a British commitment on the Rhine only.

But there was a further aspect. Mussolini's sensitivity on the related problems of the Brenner frontier and German irredentism in the Alto Adige made him an ally in the battle to maintain the Versailles peace settlement to which Chamberlain was deeply committed, and an opponent of any existing or potential 'revisionist' forces. To what extent Chamberlain was conscious of this during the actual Locarno negotiations is not clear, but he made skilful use of it in subsequent years, when Mussolini hinted at associating himself with 'revisionist' powers. In 1928, when Mussolini stated in a major speech that the territorial clauses of the Treaty of Trianon 'cut too deeply into Hungary's flesh' and ought to be revised, Chamberlain pointed out to the Italian Ambassador that 'in this country those who were most inclined to sympathize with Hungarian claims were also the people who were most inclined to criticize the frontier drawn by the treaties through the Tyrol.'<sup>53</sup> Until the rise of Hitler, who in effect sacrificed the German irredentists in the Alto Adige in return for Mussolini's support elsewhere, this was a strong card for Chamberlain to play. He received apologetic assurances from Italian spokesmen that Italy 'had no idea of encouraging the revision of frontiers' and Mussolini soft-pedalled his sympathy for Hungarian aspirations until after Chamberlain left office.<sup>54</sup>

Rather than offering excessively generous encouragement to Mussolini, Chamberlain seems to have deliberately refrained from exerting all the pressure and personal influence he possessed. One is left with the impression that he was using the Locarno negotiations as a test of Mussolini, to see whether the Duce would accept the responsibility of joining the concert of powers being formed. One may put this into a wider context for, as Seton-Watson has pointed out, Italy had inherited from the Risorgimento two attitudes towards foreign policy.<sup>55</sup> On the right, the Cavour tradition, generally dominant during the half-century from the Risorgimento to the March on Rome, favoured a realistic adjustment of ambitions to means and a steady growth in Italy's importance on the world scene in a way acceptable to the European Great Powers. For this approach, British friendship was a *sine qua non*. On the left, Mazzinian nationalism had left a legacy of crusading defiance of the Powers. Originally intended to liberate oppressed

peoples, this became debased to a series of imperialist adventures, like those of Crispi in Ethiopia in 1896 and Giolitti in Libya in 1911. More recently, Mussolini himself had flouted European opinion and Britain in particular in the Corfu incident of 1923.<sup>56</sup> The assessment which the Foreign Office had constantly to make was whether this was just a rash adventure, unlikely to be repeated, or whether Mussolini would elevate this defiant expansionism to the predominant place in Italian foreign policy and risk everything in an attempt to break the British hold over the Mediterranean. By participating in Locarno after minimal British pressure, Mussolini seemed to indicate that he had accepted the need for a traditional, British-oriented policy, that the prestige of being treated as a Great Power with equal status with Britain as co-guarantor of the Franco-German treaty outweighed the temptation to act as the rebel outsider, defying all the rules and conventions.

And how wrong was this assumption? We now know, of course, not only what Mussolini was to do in the 1930s but also of his nascent plans in the 1920s, especially his covert association with Balkan revisionism.<sup>57</sup> Yet his activities in the 'Locarno-Geneva system' in the mid-1920s were relatively unexceptionable. The latest study of Locarno diplomacy scarcely mentions Mussolini, and then usually to note Italian support for British policy.<sup>58</sup> It was not Fascist Italy which destroyed Locarno but the internal stresses of the Anglo-Franco-German relationship.

Nor were Mussolini's actions at Geneva, which Taylor is right to link closely with Locarno, seriously blameworthy for some years. Chamberlain made a point of attending sessions of the League Council and Assembly, largely because he saw real value in the opportunities for foreign ministers to meet and discuss issues in an informal atmosphere. He therefore regretted Mussolini's absence: as he once wrote,

it is an immense pity that he [Mussolini] cannot come regularly to Geneva, for I think (and others have the same impression) that, brooding alone in Rome, he feels out of it and becomes suspicious and sees plots and plotters everywhere and in every gathering of other foreign Ministers.<sup>59</sup>

None the less Italy continued to be represented at Geneva by senior diplomats and both Mussolini and his subordinates went out of their way to assure Chamberlain that the Duce was 'in the spirit of the League'.<sup>60</sup> Chamberlain told the Imperial Conference in Oc-

tober 1926 that Mussolini's attitude to the League was improving<sup>61</sup> and the following January sent a copy of a speech he had given on the League, together with a personal letter in which he argued that the League was now a reality and consequently practical men, who dealt with the real world and not nebulous ideals, had to take account of its existence.<sup>62</sup> All reports seemed to indicate that this had the desired impact upon the Duce.<sup>63</sup>

Chamberlain was therefore shocked and disappointed when in September 1927, Mussolini's position on the Hungarian-Romanian dispute over the 'Transylvanian optants' was patently dictated by political bargaining.<sup>64</sup> At a time when great hopes were pinned to the development of the quasi-judicial activities of the League, Mussolini's unconditional support of Hungary seemed a reversion to precisely the sort of international power politics that had supposedly been superseded, as well as a potentially dangerous association with an avowedly 'revisionist' nation. Chamberlain's personal involvement as *rappporteur* to the Council exacerbated the wound. Furious, he told Scialoja:

that this was monstrous, that if in a matter in which the Council was acting in a semi-judicial way, Mussolini with no knowledge of the facts, without having studied any of the documents or awaiting the issue of the discussions, was going to act in this way, we should be better without Italy... What Mussolini had in fact done was to sell the vote of Italy, in a matter in which he had no direct interest, for some indirect and obscure political aim.<sup>65</sup>

After this chastisement, Mussolini took a neutral attitude to the League, claiming to support it while the Fascist press abused it. Only in the 1930s, in the context of the international system created by the advent of Hitler, did Mussolini openly and irrevocably adopt an actively destructive course.

Is it true, then, that 'the presence of Italy' was 'a greater flaw in the Locarno-Geneva system than the absence of the United States and Soviet Russia' because it was 'a tawdry pretence'?<sup>66</sup> In the context of 1925-26, Italy's role at Geneva and Mussolini's presence at Locarno appear more intelligible than they do in hindsight. Chamberlain and other British statesmen did make flattering references to Mussolini while encouraging Italian participation in both Locarno and the League, not because they 'no longer believed their own phrases' but because they believed that Italy could be induced to act responsibly in the international system being created, if only

granted the prestige and dignity of Great Power status. Fascism, it must be remembered, was still a new and largely mysterious phenomenon. The tentative conclusion of Graham and the Foreign Office, as has been shown elsewhere,<sup>67</sup> was that Mussolini, for all his faults, was doing more good than harm internally: for Chamberlain, the test of whether this could equally be said of Fascist foreign policy lay in Mussolini's attitude to Locarno. What was needed was evidence that Mussolini would resist pressure from the more extreme elements in Rome and follow the advice of diplomats like Della Torretta and Scialoja, both of whom had been foreign ministers under liberal parliamentary regimes before the March on Rome. When Mussolini finally decided to sign the treaty, after Chamberlain had deliberately abstained from exerting as much pressure as he might have, it seemed to augur well. Italy would, it seemed reasonable to conclude, play her proper role as a major European power, at Locarno and at Geneva; she would be in the European concert, the comity of nations, not outside it playing a disruptive and destructive role as in the Corfu incident. This proved ten years later to be an overconfident belief but, given the evidence of the time, was not unjustifiable. Taylor's picture of the fraudulent braggart Mussolini being flattered by western statesmen who were deceiving themselves and their peoples owes more to his knowledge of the events of the 1930s and 1940s than it does to the evidence of the mid-1920s on which those statesmen had to base their assessments and actions.<sup>68</sup>

### Notes

1. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, settima serie (hereafter DDI), Vol. IV, no. 532, Chiamonte Bordonaro to Compans di Brichanteau (Oslo), 10 December 1926. Mussolini's claim was reported to the Foreign Office: see Austen Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham Library (hereafter AC), 38/2/1, Sir F. O. Lindley (Oslo) to Chamberlain, 14 December 1926.

2. 'Cassius' (pseud. of M. M. Foot), *The Trial of Mussolini* (London 1943), 15-16.

3. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, first edition, 1961), 56-7. Readers of other editions will find the passage near the end of Chapter

3, 'The Post-War Decade.'

4. A. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton 1970), Chapter 14; G. Carocci, *La Politicia Estera Dell' Italia Fascista 1925-1928* (Bari 1969), Chapter 4; C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London and Boston 1975), 200-210. Denis Mack Smith *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York 1976), reverts to the historiographical traditions of twenty years ago by passing hastily over the 1920s, with but one paragraph on Locarno (p. 7) and another on the relationship with Britain under Austen Chamberlain (p. 14).

5. For example, W. Selby, *Diplomatic Twilight 1930-1940* (London 1953), 135. Sir Walford Selby attended the Locarno Conference as Chamberlain's private secretary.

6. Cassels, *op. cit.*, 288-9.

7. DDI, III, nos. 682, 685, 689, Romano Avezzana to Mussolini, 23, 23, 30 January 1925.

8. DDI, III, no. 697, Mussolini to Della Torretta, 30 January 1925.

9. DDI, III, nos. 703, 707, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 2, 5 February 1925.

10. DDI, III, nos. 733, 734, Mussolini to Della Torretta, Romano Avezzana and De Bosdari, 23 February 1925; Taylor, *op. cit.*, 53.

11. DDI, III, nos. 743, 751, 754, 756, 757.

12. DDI, III, no. 751, Romano Avezzana to Mussolini, 7 March 1925.

13. DDI, III, no. 757, Della Torretta, 11 March 1925.

14. DDI, III, no. 761, Mussolini to Della Torretta, 14 March 1925.

15. DDI, III, nos. 754, 757, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 10, 11 March 1925.

16. Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office papers (hereafter FO) 371/10727, C2969/459/18, Lord D'Abernon (Berlin) to Chamberlain, 1 March 1925; FO 371/10728, C3624/459/18, Graham to Chamberlain, 12 March 1925.

17. FO 370/10729, C4091/459/18, Graham to Chamberlain, 23 March 1925.

18. *Ibid.*, minutes by Lampson and Chamberlain, 25 March 1925.

19. FO 371/10727, C2201/459/18, memorandum by Harold Nicolson, 20 February 1925.

20. FO 371/10728, C3624/459/18, Graham to Chamberlain, 12 March 1925; minute by (?) J. C. Sterndale Bennett.

21. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Series IA (hereafter DBFP), Vol. II, no. 243, minute by Chamberlain, 7 October 1926.

22. FO 371/10730, C4803/459/18, Graham to Chamberlain, 3 April 1925.

23. FO 371/10731, C6579/459/18 and C6580/459/18, 12, 13 May 1925.

24. DDI, III no. 772, De Bosdari to Mussolini, 24 March 1925; see A. Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism 1922-1935', *Journal of Modern History* 25 (1963), 145-6.

25. DDI, III, nos. 787-8, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 2 April 1925; FO 371/10730, C4638/459/18, Chamberlain to Graham, 1 April 1925.

26. FO 371/10660, C6680/249/3, Graham to Chamberlain, 15 May 1925.

27. *Ibid.*, minutes by Howard Smith, Nicolson, Lampson, Tyrrell, 21 May, Chamberlain, 22 May 1925.

28. FO 371/10660, C7824/249/3, D'Abernon to Chamberlain, 6 June 1925.

29. DDI, III, nos. 824-6, 828, 831 and especially 832, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 2 May 1925.

30. See Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism', *op. cit.*, and the sources cited there.

31. DDI, IV no. 13, Mussolini to De Bosdari, 30 May 1925.
32. Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism,' op. cit., 153.
33. FO 371/10735, C8986/459/18, Graham to Chamberlain, 3 July 1925.
34. FO 371/10734, C8475/459/18, Chamberlain to Graham, 23 June 1925; DDI, IV, no. 43, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 24 June 1925.
35. FO 371/10733, C8001/459/18, minute by Lampson, 16 June 1925.
36. FO 371/10734, C8345/459/18, minute by Lampson, 23 June 1925.
37. DDI, III, nos. 743, 751, 756, 787; IV, nos. 17, 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, 32, 37, 42, 120, 129, 130. See Carocci, op. cit., 43-45; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, op. cit., 277-8; Lowe and Marzari, op. cit., 200-210; C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925* (London 1967), 688-91.
38. DDI, IV, no. 93, Della Torretta to Mussolini, 13 August 1925.
39. DDI, IV, no. 102, Mussolini to De Bosdari, Romano Avezzana and Della Torretta, 20 August 1925.
40. DDI, IV, nos. 95, 102, Mussolini to Della Torretta and others, 17, 20 August 1925.
41. DDI, IV, nos. 111-12, Summonte (Paris) to Mussolini, 27-8 August 1925.
42. DDI, IV, nos. 118-19, Grandi (Geneva) to Mussolini, 8 September 1925; FO 307/10739, C11670/459/18, memorandum by Chamberlain (Geneva), 9 September 1925.
43. FO 371/10739, C11101/459/18 and C11220/459/18, Phipps (Paris) to Chamberlain, 26, 29 August 1925, et seq.
44. FO 371/10739, C11670/459/18, memorandum by Chamberlain (Geneva), 9 September 1925.
45. FO 371/10739, C11789/459/18, Chamberlain to Ovey (Rome), 16 September 1925; FO 371/10740, C12119/459/18, memorandum by Nicolson, 21 September 1925.
46. AC 38/1/1, no. 73, Chamberlain to Seymour (Rome), 1 October 1925.
47. Ibid., no. 77, Seymour to Chamberlain, 2 October 1925.
48. Ibid., no. 87, memorandum by Chamberlain (Locarno), 4 October 1925.
49. Ibid., no. 125, memorandum by Chamberlain, 9 October 1925.
50. Ibid., nos. 132-4.
51. P. G. Edwards, 'The Austen Chamberlain-Mussolini Meetings,' *The Historical Journal*, 14 (1971), 155-6.
52. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, op. cit., 278.
53. FO 371/12960, C5033/4353/22, Chamberlain to Graham, 28 June 1928; cf. DDI, VI, no. 443, Chiaramonte Bordonaro to Mussolini, 29 June 1928.
54. FO 371/12960, C9878/4353/22, Chamberlain to Graham, 18 December 1928.
55. C. Seton-Watson, op. cit., 32-7.
56. See J. Barros, *The Corfu Incident of 1923* (Princeton 1965).
57. See Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, op. cit., especially chapters 12-20.
58. J. Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West 1925-1929* (Princeton 1972).
59. AC 53/137, Chamberlain to Sir G. Clerk (Constantinople), 29 December 1926.
60. See for example DBFP, II, no. 205, Chamberlain (Geneva) to Wingfield (Rome), 13 September 1926.
61. DBFP, II, Appendix at p. 928.
62. DBFP, II, no. 387, Chamberlain to Graham and Chamberlain to Mussolini,

10 January 1927. The full text of the speech is published in J. A. Chamberlain, *Peace in Our Time: Addresses on Europe and the Empire* (London 1928), 146-71.

63. AC 54/213, 216, 217, Graham to Chamberlain, Chamberlain to Graham, Graham to Chamberlain, 14 January, 25 January, 4 February 1927.

64. See Royal Institute for International Affairs, *Survey of International Affairs 1928* (London 1929), 168-82.

65. FO 800/261, Chamberlain (Geneva) to Tyrrell, 19 September 1927.

66. See note 3.

67. P. G. Edwards, 'The Foreign Office and Fascism 1924-1929,' *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1970), 154.

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