

The British International History Group

(under the auspices of the British International Studies Association)

NEWSLETTER

Number 2 - September 1997
1997 Annual Conference

The BIHG annual conference was held at the University of Ulster's Coleraine campus from 11 to 13 September. Events were overshadowed by the tragic death of the Group's Treasurer, Dick Richardson, in a car crash near Carlisle as he made his way home. Also in the car was Dick's colleague at Teesside University, and another of the Group's Committee members, Carolyn Kitching, who was seriously injured. There is an obituary to Dick elsewhere in the Newsletter. Carolyn is unfortunately still in hospital and likely to be there for several weeks. Our thoughts are with her and with both their families.

The accident was a distressing conclusion to what had been a very successful conference, attended by over forty delegates from Northern Ireland, Britain and abroad. It began, as is now traditional, with our Thursday Guest Lecture. On this occasion Keith Kyle, well known for his study of the crisis, talked about 'The Aftermath of Suez'. On Friday and Saturday there were four panel sessions, as well as a lively Plenary discussion on the significance of the year 1947 for those studying Imperial and Cold War history. Each of the panel sessions included three separate panels with two papers each. The papers ranged chronologically from the origins of American diplomacy to British attempts to mediate in the Vietnam War, and there was a remarkably wide list of topics, from disarmament and intelligence issues to atomic questions and the international control of narcotics.

The campus setting, on the banks of the River Bann, helped create a relaxing atmosphere and, for those who remained on Saturday afternoon, the conference convenor, Professor Alan Sharp, organised a trip to the Bushmills whisky distillery and Giants Causeway. Alan and his wife also held a party that evening. We would like to thank both them and other staff at Coleraine for entertaining us so fulsomely.

Next year's conference will be held at the University of Leicester from Thursday 10 September to Saturday 12 September.

The BIHG Thesis Prize

The prize was awarded for the first time this year. As we had expected, the number of theses submitted was few, but all of them were viewed by the Panel as publishable. Two, indeed, were virtually publishable as they stood, including that of the winner, Joseph Maiolo of the London School of Economics. His work on Admiralty War Planning, Armaments Diplomacy and Intelligence Perceptions of German Seapower, and their influence on British foreign and defence policy, 1933-9 impressed us with its sophisticated structure, comprehensive mix of source materials and genuinely original contribution to our understanding of a much-discussed period.

Erik Goldstein. Glyn Stone. John Young.

The BIHG Thesis Prize was established in 1996. It is awarded annually to the best doctoral thesis, on any aspect and any period of International History, which has been awarded a degree by a British University or a British College of Higher Education during the calendar year.

Address: The Secretary BIHG, Faculty of Humanities, University of the West of England Bristol, St Matthias Campus, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2JP.

Obituary: *Dick Richardson*

Dick Richardson, who was tragically killed in a car accident on 14 September whilst returning home from our annual conference, had been Treasurer of BIHG since its inception in 1988 and was one of those responsible for founding the Group. He presented a paper on Disarmament in the Edwardian era to the conference held at the University of Ulster at Coleraine just a few days before. He had taught at the University of Teesside since 1973, first as a lecturer in History more recently as reader in Politics and International Relations.

As an undergraduate in the International History Department of the London School of Economics in the 1960s, Dick was the Department's first student representative and founder of the International History Society. He later remembered it as 'both authoritarian and an excellent teaching department' and, after completing a Master's degree at the University of British Columbia, he returned to LSE to register for a Ph.D. under the supervision of George Grün. The thesis was published in 1989, by Pinter, as The Evolution of British Disarmament in the 1920s. It tackled an important but neglected topic and changed the way in which the foreign policy of the Baldwin years is understood.

Apart from his many articles and essays on disarmament and arms control, Dick was co-editor of Decisions and Diplomacy: essays in twentieth century international history, (Routledge), written in memory of George Grün and Esmonde Robertson. The latter had supervised the thesis of Dick's co-editor, the BIHG Secretary, Glyn Stone. The day before Dick died he and Glyn had travelled in Dick's car to Giants Causeway, and spent a lot of time discussing football: Dick was a great supporter of York City.

Members of BIHG may be unaware that Dick also researched and taught in the field of Green politics. He stood as a candidate for the Green Party and, at one point, edited their newsletter. He had begun to build up a Green archive at Teesside and recently completed a co-authored book on the subject.

Dick was also strongly committed to family life. He and his wife, Marianne, together with their children lived in a small village near Whitby. A family funeral was held on 22 September but their will be a chance for those who knew him to celebrate his life on 1 November, which would have been his fifty-first birthday.

A trust fund is being set up so that we can have an annual prize for the best piece of work in Environmental Studies or International Relations in memory of Dick. If you would like to contribute, please send a cheque, payable to University of Teesside, to Mark Cowling, SSS, University of Teesside, Middlesborough, Cleveland, TS1 3BA

The Meaning of Decline

Andrew Gamble

Martin Wiener once described British decline as the most important problem in twentieth century British history. But before we can agree with him it is necessary to decide what exactly it is that is said to have declined. The many meanings of decline arise from the origin of the term in political experience and conflict. Contests over its meaning and its implications have been a key part of the discourse of twentieth century politics. Decline is a concept which many British politicians from Joseph Chamberlain to Margaret Thatcher have used to understand the world around them and urge particular courses of action. Its different meanings are therefore closely tied to the various strategies for halting or managing it which have emerged at different times and in different contexts during the last hundred years.

As John Young makes clear in his contribution to this series there are two crucial senses in which Britain can be said to have been in decline this century - an absolute decline in world power symbolised by the end of Empire and a relative economic decline. He further suggests that the two are quite distinct. I would argue that although they can be separated analytically they are not separate in either popular or elite political experience. The most potent populist characterisations of decline such as Social imperialism and Thatcherism have always linked economic decline with Britain's place in the world and therefore with threats to British and more specifically English identity. In this way the loss of empire has resonated in popular experience and imagination and influenced other perceptions. The tabloid newspapers have helped fuel new forms of English nationalism and xenophobia, most recently in relation to the European Union. Any reduction in British sovereignty is interpreted as a threat to national identity. In this way the performance of the British economy in the twentieth century, although by any absolute standard a considerable success, has often been presented as a symptom of national decline because it cannot be associated with an unequivocal assertion of British power and self-sufficiency, and because other nations to which Britain has been accustomed to regarding itself as superior have had economies plainly performing better than Britain's.

Future historians may find it puzzling that so much of elite discourse in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century was obsessed with the idea of economic decline at a time when the country was more prosperous than it had ever been. In its discourse on decline the political class portrayed Britain as constantly under-performing and slipping further and further behind its rivals, although the majority of the population has enjoyed rising not falling living standards. The quality of life for the great majority of British citizens has improved in measurable ways during the twentieth century. But the British political elite has had a different experience. Its members no longer inhabit a state which is either the leading state in the international system of states or the dominant economy in the global economy, yet they are constantly reminded in innumerable small ways of what has been lost. In an important sense therefore decline has been a state of mind.

Andrew Gamble is Professor of Politics, University of Sheffield, and a contributor to Richard English and Mike Kenny (eds.) *Rethinking Decline*, Macmillan 1998.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Evolution of Diplomacy

Workshop at the Conference on
"The 350th Anniversary of the Peace of Westphalia"
Muenster, Germany, 16-19 July 1998

This is a workshop of 9 sessions over 3 days, jointly submitted by Raymond Cohen, Jan Melissen and Sasson Sofer. The workshop would come under the auspices of the Diplomatic Studies Programme.

If the Treaty of Westphalia is viewed as the foundation stone of modern diplomacy, the anniversary of its signature is an appropriate moment to place within an historical and civilisationally comparative context the *diplomatic regime* - the machinery for conducting international relationships - which it established. A number of questions raise themselves: Are there elements of diplomatic method which have remained fixed and definitive over the course of history? Have functions of diplomacy changed? How and why do diplomatic regimes evolve? Are they always functional in terms of the practical requirements of the larger international systems they are supposed to serve? Why and how does diplomacy break down? Are the representatives of states the only practitioners of diplomacy? We envisage the workshop being organised around three themes:

The personal details of the convenors are as follows:

- **Professor Raymond Cohen**, Chair, Dept of International Relations, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 91905, Israel. Tel +972-2-6513226; fax +972-2-5882989; e-mail <msrcohen@pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il>
- **Dr Jan Melissen**, Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, England. Tel +44 116 2522797; Fax +44 116 2525082; e-mail <jm33@leicester.ac.uk>
- **Dr Sasson Sofer**, Director, Leonard Davis Institute of International Affairs, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 91905, Israel. Tel +972 2 5882340; Fax +972 2 5882989; e-mail <mssofer@pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il>

New Book Information

The Origins of the Second World War

Arnold Readers in History

Edited by Patrick Finney

Hardback ISBN 0 340 67641 8 c.£45.00

Paperback ISBN 0 340 67640 x c.£15.99

Forthcoming Conferences

15 - 17 December 1997
BISA Annual Conference, Leeds

10 - 12 September, 1998
BIHG University of Leicester

If you would like to join BIHG contact:

Pauline Kelly
BISA Administrator
16 Ridgcroft
Stone
Staffs
ST15 8PN