Report of a conversation which took place between
Mr. Arthur HENDERSON and M. Louis BARTHOU on April 7th, 1934.

M. AGHNIDES, Director of the Disarmament Section of the
Secretariat at Geneva, and M. Jean PAUL-BONCOUR, Secretary-
General of the French Delegation, were also present.

The conversation opened at 9.45 a.m., at the Quai
d'Orsay.

After assuring the President of the Conference in a
few words of his devotion to the cause of peace and
disarmament, M. BARTHOU observed that the first action he
had taken in that sphere was the letter he had written to
Mr. Henderson on February 10th. Apart from a few correc-
tions, it was identical with the letter that had already
been prepared before he took over the Ministry, and would
have been signed by M. Paul-Boncour or M. Daladier if
either of them had still been Minister for Foreign Affairs.
All the subsequent utterances - the reply of February 14th
to Germany, the reply of March 17th to the United Kingdom,
and the note handed to Lord Tyrrell on the previous day -
were conceived in the same spirit as that letter of February
10th. It was the expression of a disarmament policy to
which France would remain faithful, no matter what might be
the complexion of her Government.

Mr. HENDERSON observed that certain possibilities of
agreement seemed to emerge from all the notes that had been
exchanged during the last few months; whereupon M. BARTHOU
remarked that they had reached a decisive moment, but he
thought it was a favourable one. In particular, he
mentioned that they had obtained from the United Kingdom
Government a declaration in favour of...
execution, and he thanked Mr. Henderson for all the efforts he had made to bring about that result in his capacity of Rapporteur on the question.

Mr. HENDERSON pointed out that, when he had received French proposals on that subject at the beginning of December, he had at once brought them to the notice of Sir John Simon, and intimated that he would be prepared to discuss them with him at any time. When he found that conversations were developing on the subject between France and the United Kingdom, he had preferred not to interfere, but to await the outcome.

After summarising the British Embassy's note of March 28th, M. BARTHOU gave M. ACHNIDES (who translated on the spot for Mr. Henderson) the reply he had handed to Lord Tyrrell the previous day, which had had the unanimous approval of the French Cabinet. In reading this document, he emphasised certain essential phrases, notably the allusions to the meeting of the General Commission, and pointed out that all parties in France, especially the Socialists, were fundamentally in favour of that reply, even if they did not say so. He was not content with promises; the French Government had already taken active steps: an exhaustive survey of the question of guarantees of execution was shortly to be discussed by the Government, and thereafter transmitted to the United Kingdom Government in accordance with the desire expressed through Lord Tyrrell.

Mr. HENDERSON then said he would like to make two remarks.

In the first place, the reply that had just been read contained references to the Treaty of Versailles. Was it really desirable to keep bringing up that question again and again? The French Government had frequently urged upon him
that Germany's rearmament was an accomplished fact. He thought it might be best to bear that in mind when drafting a new convention which would be signed not only by the countries that were still at the Conference, but also by Germany.

Secondly, all these exchanges of diplomatic notes had taken a good deal of time, during which Germany continued to rearm; was it not rather dangerous to continue on those lines indefinitely? Some other method, such as bilateral conversations between qualified French and British representatives, would perhaps be preferable.

Dealing with the first point, M. BARTHOU observed that nothing was further from his thoughts than any idea of victors and vanquished, or any intention of appealing to the Treaty of Versailles in a vexatious manner.

He agreed that they were on the way towards a new convention which, except on such points as would not suffer modification, would amount to an amendment of the Treaty of Versailles. The references to that Treaty in the French note were not an end in themselves, but a starting-point: the principles that had led to the Disarmament Conference must not be forgotten.

As to Mr. Henderson's second point, M. Barthou assured him that although he (M. Barthou) was a member of the Academy, it was no pleasure for him to draft a fresh diplomatic note once a fortnight. Conversations would certainly be a quicker method, but it must be remembered that difficulties arose in negotiations between parliamentary Governments, which had not the same freedom of action as dictatorships.

Mr. HENDERSON said that his sole reason for raising the first point was that he had observed only too
often what a painful impression was made on the ex-enemy Powers by allusions to the military clauses of the Peace Treaties. As to the second point, he was not asking for negotiations that would at once become binding upon the Governments; but it was conceivable that qualified representatives might negotiate and pave the way for agreements subject to ratification, their conclusions being afterwards submitted to the Governments. Speedy action was necessary, for the Conference had entered upon its third year.

M. BARTHOU did not reject Mr. Henderson's proposed procedure. He intimated that the French proposals regarding guarantees of execution, to which he had referred, might very well form the subject of such conversations as Mr. Henderson desired, after they had received the approval of the French Government; the United Kingdom Government might be asked to send a representative to discuss them with a French representative in Paris.

The conversation then turned upon the procedure for the forthcoming work of the Conference. M. BARTHOU asked the President what was his view of the situation.

Mr. HENDERSON referred to the Bureau's decision regarding the "parallel and supplementary efforts" to be pursued diplomatically in preparation for the resumption of work. He did not think that those diplomatic negotiations could continue indefinitely, but felt that it was time to return to Geneva; on the other hand, due account must be taken of the Franco-British conversations in progress on a question to which he attached so much importance that he had himself undertaken to act as Rapporteur - the question of guarantees of execution.
Since the beginning of the current year he had several times had to consider, with the Vice-President, M. Politis, and the General Rapporteur, M. Beneš, what further allowance of time might be necessary. Personally, he and his colleagues were anxious to avoid the responsibility of delaying the resumption of work; at their last conversations it had been decided that the Bureau should not be convened until April 10th, when the results of Mr. Eden's mission would be known. He had, however, no power to postpone the meeting longer than that, nor did he wish to do so.

According to the agenda of Tuesday's meeting, the President was to make a statement. He could not very well give all the details of the diplomatic negotiations of the past few months, not having taken any direct part in them himself, and he had told Sir John Simon and Mr. Eden that it was the business of the United Kingdom delegation, which had taken the initiative in the "parallel and supplementary efforts", to tell the Bureau the results. That meant, of course, that the United Kingdom delegation would at the same time take the responsibility of urging that further delay was necessary, and he was afraid that the United Kingdom Government would not be prepared to take that responsibility.

When the General Commission of the Conference was still in session, in the previous summer, it had passed a resolution adopting the United Kingdom draft Convention, not merely as a basis of discussion, but as a basis for a Convention. The situation had been completely altered by the exchanges of diplomatic notes during the past few months; and, that being so, he did not see what good the Bureau could do by taking up the task that the General Commission had entrusted to it - that of preparing a revised text of the MacDonald Plan to facilitate its second reading by the General Commission. What they
would now have to do would be to make an entirely fresh draft.

The best course would therefore be that on Tuesday the President should make an introductory announcement, to be followed by a statement by the United Kingdom Delegation. The Bureau would realise that it was itself unable to prepare the necessary texts for a resumption of the proceedings of the General Commission. The United Kingdom delegation, which was already responsible for the procedure by diplomatic negotiations and which at Geneva had taken the initiative of introducing the MacDonald Plan - now completely altered - would have to be asked to undertake the preparation of the necessary new texts itself, it being understood that these texts would be taken as a basis of discussion by the General Commission, without prejudice of course to any amendments or proposals which the various Delegations might think fit to bring forward. This procedure having been accepted, they could appoint a date for the meeting of the General Commission in three or four weeks; the Foreign Office would have to send the texts it had prepared, direct to the various Governments, in time to enable the latter to give their Delegations at Geneva the necessary instructions. The General Commission might meet at the beginning of May.

M. BARTHOU said he had no comments to make on the President's review of the events of the last few months; he merely wished to recall that France had a clear conscience in regard to responsibility for the successive postponements. For his own part he had done everything in his power, during his two months at the Quai d'Orsay, to work quickly and effectively.

As regards procedure, he understood the President's difficulties and hoped to help him to find a way out: he
had no objection to the procedure proposed by Mr. Henderson and would be present at the General Commission on whatever date was fixed. If, however, the Commission were to meet at the beginning of May, M. Barthou would have barely returned from the visits that he proposed paying to Warsaw and Prague. At the same time he considered it his duty to be present at Geneva in person and could not set out immediately after his return to Paris. The end of May would be preferable. It was clearly essential to avoid creating the impression that the Conference was unable to resume its activities; for that purpose it would, however, be sufficient to fix a definite and not too distant date.

Mr. HENDERSON said he could see no objection to falling in with M. Barthou's wishes, provided that the entire procedure he had described were accepted by the Bureau. He again emphasised his view that the United Kingdom Government should assume the responsibility of producing a new draft, though in so doing they would naturally be able to request the assistance of the Rapporteurs of the Conference, who, in consultation with the various Delegations, might keep those responsible for drafting the plan informed of such opinions as were brought to their notice. It would be impossible to wait until the end of May unless the General Commission were then to receive a definite text. It was necessary that the Commission should have texts to discuss and that a Convention should be ready for signature at the next Assembly of the League of Nations in September.

M. BARTHOU concurred in the view that without a definite text as a basis of discussion the General Commission would find itself in exactly the same position as the Bureau on the following Tuesday. When the General Commission met on the appointed date, he would be there. He would merely add one last word: in this striving for disarmament there were two factors: a man and an ideal - the President of the Conference,
to whom he wished to pay a personal tribute for what he had done in the last two years, and the ideal, of which, he again wished to repeat, he remained a wholehearted supporter.

Mr. HENDERSON asked who would represent France at the meeting of the Bureau. On M. BARTHOU’s replying that it would be M. Massigli who would be at Geneva, Mr. HENDERSON asked whether M. Massigli would be authorised either himself to propose, or at least to support the Delegation which took the initiative of proposing, the convening of the General Commission.

M. BARTHOU stated that when M. Massigli went to Geneva he would have all the necessary powers in virtue both of his own position and of the instructions which the Government would give him. If the Bureau intended to convene the General Commission for the second half of May, France, through M. Massigli, would undertake to be present.

Mr. HENDERSON said that he might have some difficulty in finding a Delegation willing to propose the summoning of the General Commission, to which M. BARTHOU replied that he refused to believe that if the President made a reasonable, clear and definite proposal he could fail to find a mouthpiece. In any case, why should Mr. Henderson not make the proposal himself?

The conversation terminated at 11 a.m., after the following communiqué had been drafted:

"A long conversation of an hour and a quarter took place this morning between Mr. Henderson and M. Barthou on the general position of the work of the Disarmament Conference, and more especially on the Bureau’s meeting in Geneva on Tuesday.

"In the event of its being proposed to convene the General Commission of the Conference for Wednesday, May 23rd, M. Barthou assured Mr. Henderson that such a proposal would have the French Delegation’s support."