

**Geopolitics, Education, and Empire: The Political Life of Sir
Halford Mackinder, 1895-1925**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the long political career of Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), the father of modern British geopolitics, underlining its crucial importance for the origins and evolution of the famous Heartland theory of 1904. Far from having a meta-historical significance, in fact, this elaborate geopolitical vision of Central Asia was the direct product of the cultural and strategic circumstances of the early twentieth century, reflecting Mackinder's patriotic commitment to the cause of the British Empire, threatened by new powerful foreign rivals like Germany and the United States. Seriously concerned about the future of Britain's international position, the Oxford geographer tried then to translate his brilliant educational talent in the political domain, supporting the tariff reform campaign of Joseph Chamberlain and fighting relentlessly for the political union of London with the overseas Dominions. Meanwhile he also focused his geographical imagination on the problem of India's defence, developing a bold containment strategy against the territorial expansion of Russia in Asia. However, both these initiatives failed to influence the official policies of the British government, while the parliamentary career of Mackinder at Westminster knew more frustrations than successes, due to the internal divisions of the Unionist Party and to the bitter constitutional disputes of the last antebellum years.

From this point of view, the outbreak of European hostilities in 1914 represented an important turning point for Mackinder's political and intellectual life, compelling him to partially modify his previous imperialist ethos and to recognise the need of a more balanced and democratic international society at the end of the conflict. Expressed originally in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, published in 1919, this new attitude toward international affairs found later its practical application in the activities of the Imperial Committees, successfully directed by Mackinder on cooperative lines for all the interwar years.

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Abbreviations

BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
ERDC	Empire Resources Development Committee
<i>Hansard</i>	Hansard Parliamentary Debates
LSE	London School of Economics
RGS	Royal Geographical Society
TNA	The National Archives

Introduction

The Geopolitical Legacy of Sir Halford Mackinder

Developed by a small group of European intellectuals in the early years of the twentieth century, geopolitics is probably one of the most controversial subject areas of modern International Relations Theory, provoking fierce debates both in political and academic circles. Indeed, many of its key theoretical assumptions are often condemned by progressive scholars as 'racist' and 'imperialist' discourses used to justify Western political and military interventions around the world, covering up the brutal self-interest of these actions under the guise of 'natural' geographical necessities.¹ According to John Agnew, for example, geopolitics is 'a constructed view of the world', generated mainly by European desires of control over spatial realities, while Simon Dalby has instead highlighted the aggressive military dimension of classical geopolitical accounts, remarking on the necessity to contest the conventional 'geographical tropes' behind defence and foreign policy rationales.² However, not all geopolitical analysts accept these critical interpretations of their discipline: in this sense, Colin Gray still believes that geopolitics offers a good way to understand the 'permanent' territorial nature of international affairs, while Daniel Deudney has also tried to sketch a more sophisticated theoretical model for the field, recognizing the dynamic interaction of geography and technology in the shaping of modern security policies.³

Needless to say, all these divergent perspectives do not even allow the existence of a shared definition of the term 'geopolitics', leaving it open to different methodological approaches and epistemological interpretations.⁴ One basic definition of the field might be the study of the dynamic interaction between geographical space and political power, with special emphasis on communication technologies and material resources, but such a broad generalisation remains clearly unsatisfactory, due to the persistent controversies

¹ This polemical approach is mainly expressed by the school of 'critical geopolitics' founded by Gearoid O Tuathail in the early 1990s. For a short overview of its main arguments, see Gearoid O Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London: Routledge, 1996).

² John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-7; Simon Dalby, 'Imperialism, Domination, Culture: The Continued Relevance of Critical Geopolitics', *Geopolitics*, 13 (2008), pp. 413-36.

³ Colin S. Gray, 'Inescapable Geography', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22 (1999), pp. 161-77; Daniel Deudney, 'Geopolitics as Theory: Historical Security Materialism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 6 (2000), pp. 77-107.

⁴ V.D. Mamadouh, 'Geopolitics in the Nineties: One Flag, Many Meanings', *GeoJournal*, 46 (1998), pp. 237-53.

surrounding the real scope and nature of the fascinating discipline created by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899. Moreover, these controversies are not only focused on abstract theoretical concepts, but also on the historical lives of their authors, generating further polemical discussions in the geopolitical domain.

In this sense, the case of Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) is a good example of these never ending academic quarrels, inspiring radically different accounts of his biographical experience as an educational reformer and political activist in early twentieth century Britain. Indeed, while Brian Blouet and W.H. Parker have generally depicted Mackinder's public career in very favourable terms, underlining the crucial importance of his geopolitical ideas for the security of the West during the Cold War era, Gerry Kearns has instead heavily criticized the character both on personal and intellectual grounds, presenting him as a racist chauvinist who willingly manipulated geographical knowledge in support of British imperialism in Africa and Asia.⁵ This negative evaluation, made even gloomier by the explicit accusation of murderous behaviour during the Mount Kenya expedition of 1899, is completely at odds with that provided by Parker and Blouet, leaving a certain degree of confusion and uneasiness about the real historical legacy of such a contested figure.⁶ After all, who was the 'real' Mackinder: a reactionary imperialist, defending 'the rule of the few over the many', or a sincere Liberal who dreamed 'a world of "balanced" autonomous communities', helping each other toward 'national development'?⁷ And how should we evaluate his intellectual contribution to the field of geopolitical studies? Is it still useful for modern international affairs or does it represent instead the outdated product of a bygone era, full of questionable cultural and political assumptions?

Both supporters and detractors of the character seem unable to provide a clear answer to these questions, presenting merely opposite rigid pictures of his long intellectual career. A closer look to Mackinder's own papers and writings, however, suggests a more complex and dynamic figure than the monolithic strategic genius or ruthless imperialist portrayed by the aforementioned biographers, underlining the limits of simplistic historical

⁵ Brian Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (Austin, TX: A&M University Press, 1987); W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ According to Kearns, Mackinder would have ordered the execution of eight native porters during the expedition, cancelling later any reference to this brutal action in the following reports of the journey to the British public. For a detailed summary of these allegations, see Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 107-12. Another view of the issue is provided by K.M. Barbour in *Halford Mackinder, The First Ascent of Mount Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 1-25.

⁷ Gearoid O Tuathail, 'Putting Mackinder in His Place: Material Transformations and Myth', *Political Geography*, 11 (1992), p. 115; Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 82.

interpretations. For example, a brief comparison between his celebrated lecture of 1904 on the 'geographical pivot of history' and a long narrative of world political events written in the early 1920s reveals small but significant changes in the author's main geopolitical ideas: indeed, while in the pre-war Pivot Paper Mackinder lamented the end of the prosperous Columbian age, replaced by a 'closed political system' based on 'the struggle for relative efficiency' among great nations, the large historical synthesis of twenty years later betrayed instead a more optimistic view of the international context, with modern aircraft completing 'the freedom of human movement' started by the same oceanic discoveries of Christopher Columbus.⁸ And even the approach to Britain's foreign rivals shows some interesting variations in the two texts: in 1904, the possible alliance between Germany and Russia was clearly a threat, altering 'the [global] balance of power' in their favour thanks to the 'vast continental resources' of the Eurasian landmass; twenty years later, after the wreckage of both nations during the Great War, they could equally contribute to the creation of 'a friendly and peaceful Europe', paving even the way to an irenic vision of Russia soon 'reconstructed by Western and German skill and capital.'⁹

Of course, this conciliatory language does not mean that Mackinder had suddenly ceased to be concerned about the geopolitical risks of the early twentieth century. Post-war Germany was still a great industrial state created by 'drastic Prussian methods', while Bolshevik Russia remained outside of the 'civilised world', threatening the West with the subversive influence of its communist experiment.¹⁰ But the general mood of his mid-1920s reflection is clearly different from the overt pessimism of the Edwardian paper, where Russia appeared strategically as a new dangerous version of the 'Mongol Empire', ready to expand its exceptional force 'over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia', plunging the whole world into a devastating struggle from France to Korea.¹¹ Now ordinary men could instead 'speak to one another across the Atlantic', while 'the little countries of Europe' would finally learn to come together 'into a single crowd', following the American, South African, and Australian example. Even geography was destined to radical simplification, with popular knowledge reduced only to two or three remarkable features like 'the continents,

⁸ Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), p. 422; Id., *The World War and After: A Concise Narrative and Some Tentative Ideas* (London: George Philip & Son, 1924), p. 278.

⁹ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 436; Mackinder, *World War*, pp. 225-7.

¹⁰ Mackinder, *World War*, pp. 224-6. It is interesting to note the presence of both tendencies in the same pages of the manuscript, sign of an unsolved intellectual tension in Mackinder's thought.

¹¹ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 436.

the oceans, the great deserts', and so forth.¹² Thus Mackinder's geopolitical thought cannot be reduced to some specific theme as 'Heartland' or 'Empire', despite the constant prominence of such issues in his intellectual reflection. And the same could be said for his public career, which was more rich and eclectic than the short portraits offered by Kearns, Parker, and Blouet in their respective biographical narratives. It is then necessary to look at Mackinder's life and work under a balanced and broader historical lens, acknowledging their complex development during the first half of the twentieth century.

Far from having a meta-historical significance, they were in fact the direct product of their own time, shaped by precise social, political, and intellectual circumstances. Indeed, Mackinder devised his main geopolitical theories in reaction to the contemporary problems of the British Empire, using his professional expertise in support of Britain's military and commercial interests, threatened by the successful competition of other European nations. From this point of view, his great geo-historical pictures of Eastern Europe and Central Asia were not entirely theoretical as later claimed by some biographers, but designed often explicitly in favour of British imperialist aims in those regions, keeping away dangerous foreign rivals from vital strategic territories on the road to India.¹³ At the same time Mackinder thought that the Royal Navy should be used aggressively to secure important foreign markets like China or South America for British manufacturers, avoiding 'cloaked defeat' in a competitive world economy and preserving the traditional hegemony of the United Kingdom over international trade.¹⁴ Therefore modern 'critical' scholars are partially right in their intellectual distrust of the character, considering him as the prime instigator of recent Anglo-American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for the control of vital energy resources.¹⁵ Moreover, Mackinder's geopolitical ideas were also used by General Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) to justify Nazi foreign policy in the late 1930s, contributing to their long political and academic ostracism after the Second World War. And today they are still popular in several sections of the Russian radical right, where clever ideologues like Aleksandr Dugin try to blend together spatial knowledge, racial theories, and occultist teachings in support of the nationalist agenda of the post-Soviet regime.¹⁶ Mackinder's

¹² Mackinder, *World War*, pp. 285-6.

¹³ For a classic view of Mackinder's work as 'unbiased' and 'non-nationalistic', see Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 244-5. The opposite case is instead presented in O Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp. 24-35.

¹⁴ 'Unionist Policy: Mr. Mackinder on Tariff Reform', *The Glasgow Herald*, 6 April 1909, p. 8.

¹⁵ See for example Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 1-14.

¹⁶ Holger Herwig, 'Geopolitik: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22 (1999), pp. 218-41; Alan Ingram, 'Alexander Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-Fascism in Post-Soviet Russia', *Political Geography*, 20 (2001), pp. 1029-51.

intellectual legacy appears then extremely ambiguous, and the suspicions of progressive academia are far from being without some good foundation.

However, it would be wrong to define such a legacy in purely negative terms, due to its close relationship with imperialism and great power politics during the twentieth century. Indeed, Mackinder was not only a forthright Social Darwinist believing in the 'natural' struggle between different nations for food and territory, following the strict biological and organic criteria of evolutionary laws, but he also showed some genuine concern for the general state of British constitutional democracy, using his educational activities to promote a 'conscious' citizenship among his fellow compatriots and campaigning for a substantial reform of the House of Lords during the last years of peace before the Great War.¹⁷ In this sense, he often emphasized the strong liberal nature of the British system of government, slowly developed across history and now spreading to the various corners of the world: 'The great achievement of more than twelve hundred years of English history...was the vindication of the law above the ruler. Respect for precedent and decided cases, as the strongest and most subtle defence of freedom, is characteristic of the entire British race, as well in the United States as within the Empire.'¹⁸ At the same time his enthusiastic commitment to the tariff reform movement led by Joseph Chamberlain in 1903 also testified a certain interest for social change, conducted along 'moderate' lines compatible with traditional national values. In this sense, he cooperated successfully with Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the consolidation of the London School of Economics, seen as an effective institution for the progressive amelioration of British society.

This direct involvement with the Fabians, who were often seen with distrust by other moderate politicians, was justified on both practical and ideal grounds, for the warning they gave about the need of limited reform to avoid more disruptive consequences. As Mackinder openly declared in 1910, in fact, the 'whole social and economic system of the world' was organised on a delicate 'balance between liberty and rule', requiring constant 'leadership' and 'rewards' to move toward more 'efficacy of work' in the future. Thus he supported a 'system of insurance' for workers which could legitimately satisfy all the main requests advanced by Socialists through 'safe methods', avoiding both anarchy and the social dictatorship of the 'great Chinese mandarin.'¹⁹ It was especially the fear of this last political figure, symbolizing the ruthless centralisation of human and economic resources,

¹⁷ On Mackinder's Social Darwinism, see Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 68-78.

¹⁸ Halford Mackinder, *The Modern British State: An Introduction to the Study of Civics* (London: George Philip, 1914), p. 216.

¹⁹ 'Mr. Mackinder, MP, on Socialism', *The Glasgow Herald*, 28 October 1910, p. 10.

which remained at the core of Mackinder's public activity in the following years, finding its ultimate expression in the famous indictment of the 'organiser' in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*: 'The thought of the organiser is essentially strategical, whereas that of the true democrat is essentially ethical. The organiser is thinking how to use men; but the democrat is thinking of the rights of men, which rights are so many rocks in the way of the organiser...The Nemesis of democratic idealism...is the supreme rule of the organiser and blind efficiency.'²⁰ And the only defence to such a totalitarian threat was to keep democracy safely tied to the permanent 'realities of time and space', adopting the constructive point of view of 'practical reformers' rather than the destructive one of 'political moralists.'²¹

Of course, these concerns about the nature of British democracy were often instrumental and quite paternalistic, justifying British imperial interests on moralistic grounds and ignoring the legitimate grievances of various subordinate groups in Edwardian society. On the crucial issue of women's vote, for example, Mackinder denied any serious concession, defending the traditional masculine view of Edwardian politics and using his staunch opposition to the suffragist movement as a powerful rhetorical argument during the general election of December 1910.²² At the same time he did not hide his personal hostility to any form of Home Rule for Ireland, rejecting even the moderate federal schemes advanced by fellow imperialists like Frederick Scott Oliver and Lord Selborne before the outbreak of the Great War.²³ Apart for some conventional anti-Catholic accents, this unrelenting opposition was mainly inspired by strategic reasons, perceiving a semi-independent Irish government as a dangerous menace to the security of imperial lines of communication. Thus, fearing foreign influence in Ireland, Mackinder warned his Scottish electors that it was time for 'a fight all along the line', neutralising those forces conjuring up against the country and the Empire.²⁴ In this sense, Irish freedom should be sacrificed to the vital interest of imperial defence, guaranteeing the lasting security of the British Isles in a very competitive world. Far from defending democratic liberties, Mackinder spoke then on

²⁰ Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable, 1919), pp. 20-1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²² Indeed, he also received the direct support of the Anti-Suffrage League on that occasion. See Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 163.

²³ On these federal proposals, see D.G. Boyce and J.O. Stubbs, 'F.S. Oliver, Lord Selborne and Federalism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 5 (1976), pp. 53-81.

²⁴ 'West of Scotland Liberal Unionists: Preparing for the Election', *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1910, p. 9.

the Irish question as one of the 'organisers' denounced in his political speeches, seeking more control and efficiency than progressive reform. And he did more or less the same in relation to the future condition of the tropical dependencies, supporting wide projects of European colonization in East Africa well into the late 1920s without any serious respect for indigenous rights. From this point of view, he was still the loyal 'imperial subject' of the Mount Kenya expedition of 1899, following and enforcing the strict racial lines learned during that fateful colonial adventure.²⁵

In spite of these strong limitations, however, Mackinder's liberal sensitivity cannot be dismissed simply as a superficial cover for a more subtle conservative agenda, designed to protect Britain's 'organic community' from the social and economic decline of the early twentieth century.²⁶ Far from sharing the strong authoritarian attitudes of other Edwardian political figures, in fact, Mackinder showed a genuine attachment to constitutional laws and parliamentary institutions, defending them from the assault both of right-wing populism and revolutionary socialism. In this sense, he reproached explicitly reactionary critics like Hilaire Belloc for their virulent attacks against parliamentary practices, reminding them that the British constitutional government worked on 'fair give and take' compromises between different parties, safeguarding the rights of minorities against the will of the majority.²⁷ And he openly distrusted a national political system centred exclusively on London, insisting on the preservation of local traditions, regional interests, and provincial liberties throughout his entire public career.

It is true that this concern for local life was often presented in very romantic terms, betraying a clear idealisation of rural England developed during Mackinder's childhood years in northern Lincolnshire. After all, his own native city of Gainsborough had been the idyllic model for George Eliot's masterpiece *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), which partially contributed to the later development of a distinct regional geography in British universities.²⁸ And Mackinder had also grown up into that peculiar 'centrality of locality' at the core of late Victorian politics, with its constant emphasis on public welfare, urban

²⁵ On this important point, see Gerry Kearns, 'The Imperial Subject: Geography and Travel in the Work of Mary Kingsley and Halford Mackinder', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 22 (1997), pp. 450-72.

²⁶ O Tuathail, 'Mackinder', pp. 109-14.

²⁷ *Hansard*, 5th series, House of Commons Deb., XXXIV, 1912, col. 370. Thereafter *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, etc.

²⁸ On the close relationship between 'local' literature and academic geography in late Victorian Britain, see Edmund W. Gilbert, *British Pioneers in Geography* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), pp. 116-27.

renewal, and direct democracy as the main antidotes against the enormous social problems of modern industrialisation.²⁹ Thus it was almost inevitable that he tended to associate the best moral and cultural qualities of his country to the local dimension, portraying it as ‘the oldest England’ at the root of national order and prosperity.³⁰ But if he exaggerated the positivity of rural life, comparing it to the general degradation of metropolitan London, there is no doubt that his attachment to the democratic tradition of Britain’s small provinces was relatively sincere, representing an important counterbalance to the larger imperial aspects of his geopolitical reflection.

Indeed, after the outbreak of the First World War, Mackinder’s provincialism also applied to the international arena, supporting the cause of small nations against the hegemonic ambitions of the Central Powers. This support was essentially directed toward the Slavic minorities of Austria-Hungary, recognising their strategic importance for the defence of the British Empire in the East, but it was not only dictated by mere instrumental reasons. Shocked by the extent of the conflict, Mackinder believed in fact that the world did not pertain again to the great territorial empires of the antebellum era, ready to jump on each other for the control of more markets or natural resources, but it required instead a new cooperative system between different countries, shaping the future reconstruction of the European continent on free and balanced political principles. In this sense, he remained sceptical toward the abstract democratic idealism of Woodrow Wilson, but he accepted the idea of a League of Nations as the best way to maintain peace and justice among rival states, countering the main ‘geographical realities’ behind international conflicts. Moreover, he thought that nations should be reorganised along provincial or regional lines, avoiding the creation of vast competing power interests and developing a genuine sense of fraternity between different countries: ‘The nation which is to be fraternal towards other nations, must be independent in an economic as in every other sense; it must have and keep a complete and balanced life...Therefore you must base national organisation on provincial communities...That is precisely what the real Freedom of Men requires – scope for a full life in their own locality.’³¹ Federalism appeared then as the most effective constitutional system to achieve such a balanced national development, and Mackinder tried to promote this kind of solution for the new independent countries of Eastern Europe,

²⁹ Philip Harling, ‘The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), pp. 216-34.

³⁰ Mackinder, *British State*, p. 1.

³¹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 253-4.

perceived as a pivotal element for the lasting stability of the post-war international order. Thus his ill-fated diplomatic mission to South Russia in 1919 can also be seen as an idealistic attempt to establish a democratic federation of states in the territories of the former Tsarist Empire, preserving the freedom of local nationalities from the double threat of Bolshevism and German imperialism.³²

Needless to say, this new geopolitical sensitivity did not infringe his traditional imperial patriotism, which continued to see the British Empire as ‘the most effective agency for peace on this earth’, thanks to its privileged strategic position around the globe: ‘In one capacity or another we intervene in every part of the world. The presence of Britain is decisive on the Rhine, in the Mediterranean and at Suez...In Africa, Australasia and in the Far East in different ways the same fact of British decisive interference holds.’³³ However, even Mackinder’s deep-rooted faith in Britain’s imperial power knew some sort of evolution in the post-war era, leaving behind the crude tones of his early political career for a more progressive view of imperial values and organisation. Indeed, he believed now that there was ‘no superiority’ in the ‘British blood’ except for ‘certain characteristics’, while the real greatness of Britain’s imperial structure resided instead in the ‘English tradition’ of Common Law and ‘Responsible Government’, which was ‘slowly transferable’ to other peoples, partially satisfying the growing request for political emancipation of the tropical dependencies.³⁴ In this sense, he looked with general favour to the ‘new India’ emerged by the conflict, praising its sacrifices for the common victory of the Empire and approving the institution of the Diarchy system in local colonial government. And he also partially revised his previous stance on Ireland, accepting the possibility of a constitutional reconstruction of the United Kingdom along broad federal lines. As he openly recognised in 1924, he was living in ‘a world of transition’, for the war had broken ‘some of the framework of human society’, setting free new political forces and requiring new answers to the previous problems of the British world.³⁵

Thus, inspired by this pragmatic acknowledgement of a changing reality, he adopted a more cooperative and inclusive approach toward imperial affairs in the following years, expressed mainly in his activities as chairman of the Imperial Shipping Committee and other

³² The classic account of this mission is Brian Blouet, ‘Sir Halford Mackinder as British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-1920’, *The Geographical Journal*, 142 (1976), pp. 228-36. For a more critical view of Mackinder’s initiative, see instead Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 195-224.

³³ Halford Mackinder, ‘The English Tradition and the Empire: Some Thoughts on Lord Milner’s Credo and the Imperial Commitment’, *United Empire*, 16 (1925), p. 728.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 726.

³⁵ Mackinder, *World War*, pp. 267-8.

influential economic advisory boards. Using his excellent administrative skills, in fact, he was often able to reconcile the divergent interests of Britain, India, and the Dominions into viable compromises, contributing to the positive development of British inter-imperial trade and to the creation of new harbour facilities across the world. By the time that Mackinder left all his public duties in the early 1930s, he could then look with considerable pride to the achievements of this second political career, which had certainly provided more fruitful application to his imperial ideals than the fiscal agitation of the Edwardian era. However, this remarkable period of his life has generally been ignored by modern biographers, who continue to depict him as 'a strategist without a context', reducing the multiple aspects of his public activity to some single monotonous theme as 'imperialism', 'Heartland' or 'tariff reform.'

Therefore this dissertation will try to reassess Mackinder's role as a public intellectual through a broader historical perspective, covering all the different sides of his eclectic career and acknowledging the dynamic nature of his geopolitical thought in the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, the main aim of this biographical exploration will be to underline the extreme complexity of Mackinder's ideas at that time, highlighting especially their partial change after the great social and political turmoil of the First World War. This appears as the best way to assess the historical legacy of the character today, avoiding easy generalisations and anachronistic interpretations of his variegated intellectual life. In this sense, the analysis will be conducted mainly on the basis of the numerous articles, letters and reviews sent by Mackinder to the press from the early 1890s to the late 1920s, including some minor interventions on the pages of the *Times*, the *New Europe*, and the *Glasgow Herald*. Such a detailed outlook of press sources will also be associated with a closer inspection of Mackinder's parliamentary speeches delivered at Westminster between 1910 and 1922, reconstructing his rhetorical skills through the long transcripts contained in the Fifth Series of the *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*. The reasons for this methodological approach are essentially two: the extreme dispersion of Mackinder's private papers and the special relevance of public materials for the analysis of political figures.

The most compelling one, of course, is the confused state of Mackinder's personal collections, divided between different academic institutions and devoid sometimes of a proper catalogue list. Apart for the papers at the Oxford School of Geography and at the London School of Economics (LSE), in fact, the rest of his private writings are dispersed among the wide collections of his numerous correspondents, requiring long exhausting

researches in several British university libraries. Moreover, the items contained in these collections are not always relevant to the main scope of this research, relating often to pure academic matters and ignoring several aspects of Mackinder's political career in the early twentieth century.³⁶ The responsibility for this negative state of affairs lies primarily on the shoulders of the same Mackinder, who left his own personal archive 'in a very chaotic and repetitious state', compelling the unfortunate heirs to continuous revisions and eliminations.³⁷ At the same time his irregular attempts at autobiography were only focused on the childhood period, with scarce emphasis on further academic and political events. It is then clear that any serious evaluation of his public activities can only pass through a careful analysis of the variegated materials published at the time, including the transcripts of Mackinder's interventions at the discussion of other papers presented at the RGS. Of course, this does not mean that primary sources will not be used in this work, but that they will represent only a limited part of the final bibliography employed in its creation, leaving more space to the texts found on the press or to the parliamentary discourses registered in the *Hansard* collection.

This choice also underlines the importance of speeches and articles for a correct appreciation of Mackinder's role as a public intellectual, which has too often been confused with the more personal aspects of his private life. As recently noticed by Philip Williamson, in fact, political figures tend to create a different 'public personality' from their private one, transforming literally themselves into another person with 'unusual properties' mainly expressed in 'speech-making and publication', because aimed at attracting and holding the support of 'diverse audiences' moved by changing beliefs, interests, and emotions. Thus any serious analysis of a political life should not ignore public materials, because they represent to a certain extent the 'real' dimension of the character's biographical experience, presented directly in front of the national community.³⁸ Although Williamson is referring to major political leaders like Stanley Baldwin, his suggestion appears quite valid even for secondary figures like Mackinder, who constantly struggled for 'a place in the sun' in the Edwardian parliamentary system. Indeed, a careful examination of his different articles and speeches reveals all the creative and dynamic effort behind his geopolitical

³⁶ The papers at Oxford, for example, relate mainly to the Mount Kenya expedition, while those in the Hewins' collection at Sheffield are only centred on the early development of the LSE, with few references to other relevant topics like the Coefficients or the tariff reform movement.

³⁷ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), WOOLEY, Box 1, Emilie Mackinder to Mrs Martha Morse (later Wolley), 13 November 1947.

³⁸ Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13-6.

theories, seen as a useful instrument to gain permanent influence on the British political establishment. Moreover, it also unveils the multiple difficulties faced by an intellectual in his personal bid for prestige and power in a competitive 'marketplace of ideas', dominated by clashing visions of Britain and the rest of the world.

Far from being accepted at face value by their contemporaries, in fact, Mackinder's assumptions were often challenged or contested by friends and enemies alike, suffering numerous setbacks in the course of their public discussion. Beatrice Webb, for example, who strongly supported Mackinder during his successful Directorship of the LSE, confessed later that she had no particular esteem of his political convictions, remarking their complete detachment from her own.³⁹ At the same time Alfred Zimmern described contemptuously his academic colleague at Oxford as '[a] Bismarckian Darwinist of the purest Milnerian water', expanding 'his hideous creed with all the rather artificial joviality of a new Parliamentary candidate.'⁴⁰ These two negative opinions show then that Mackinder had a tumultuous reception in his contemporary political world, fighting relentlessly to be accepted by his peers as an effective public personality. Therefore his articles and speeches, associated with their larger receipt in Edwardian society, can offer new powerful insights on the character's political life, leading to a more balanced appreciation of his historical legacy.

Following such a distinctive approach, this dissertation will discuss then Mackinder's eclectic career in seven main chapters, each devoted to a precise dimension of his long public life. In this sense, Chapter 1 will mainly deal with his activity as an educational reformer, following his ambitious attempt to transform geography into a disciplinary 'bridge' between the natural sciences and the humanities in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Although this great intellectual aim never materialised, due to the general hostility of the British geographical establishment and to the extreme vagueness of Mackinder's own proposals, it certainly helped its creator to become a leading figure in several academic circles, contributing to the general advance of the geographical discipline in national education in the late nineteenth century. At the same time Mackinder combined his personal campaign in favour of geography with more practical administrative duties at Reading College and at the LSE, although these positive achievements seemed unable to overcome the intellectual reservations of other members of the RGS, who accepted his

³⁹ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, III: The Power to Alter Things, 1905-1924*, ed. by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie (London: Virago, 1984), p. 95.

⁴⁰ BLPES, WALLAS/1/36, Alfred Zimmern to Graham Wallas, 12 May 1908.

ambitious design for an independent School of Geography at Oxford only after the Mount Kenya expedition of 1899. Indeed, that African travel was taken as a public test of Mackinder's fitness as an explorer, the conventional role model of nineteenth century geography, and its successful conclusion – obtained at the expense of local Swahili porters – gave way to the further academic expansion of geography in British universities before the First World War.

Meanwhile Mackinder tried to exploit his educational achievements in the political domain, and his numerous electoral attempts in the first decade of the twentieth century will be the subject of Chapter 2, together with the crucial issue of tariff reform. First a sincere Liberal Imperialist, committed to the 'national efficiency' movement led by Lord Rosebery, he joined in fact the Unionist ranks in the summer of 1903, supporting enthusiastically the protectionist proposals advanced by Chamberlain as a basic platform for imperial unity. Nevertheless, this party shift had negative effects on his political career, closing any parliamentary space until the double general election of 1910. Moreover, his unabated imperialism provoked the open distrust of old progressive friends like Beatrice Webb and H.G. Wells, fellow members of the Coefficients Dining Club, although it did not hamper Mackinder's academic work at the LSE, nurturing instead many crucial points of his future geopolitical reflection. Through the influence of Milner and Amery, for example, Mackinder began to focus his intellectual energies on Canada, seen as the future 'geographical pivot' of the British Empire. And this passionate interest for the North American Dominion remained well alive for the rest of his life, monopolising even the activities of the Imperial Shipping Committee in the post-war era.

Finally, Chapter 3 will close this first look at Mackinder's political career with a detailed analysis of his parliamentary years before 1914, dominated by the Irish question and the debate over the reform of the House of Lords. Partially unsettled by the political decline of tariff reform, Mackinder proved in fact able to devote his attention to other themes, suggesting personal solutions to the main problems of the day and defending the old constitutional order from the 'collectivist' agenda of the Asquith government. Although these efforts were often unsuccessful, they helped him to mature a better understanding of modern British society, which was later to have important consequences for his post-war public activities. Furthermore, they show us a different picture of the character from the conventional ones presented by his biographers, enlightening the more practical and variegated aspects of his political actions.

Put in the middle of the dissertation, Chapter 4 represents a sort of watershed in the biographical structure of the document, discussing at length the genesis of Mackinder's Heartland theory in its historical context. Indeed, the aim of this chapter is to view the famous Pivot Paper of 1904 as a direct product of the political and military culture of the time, influenced by popular debates about the role of sea power in modern international relations. Contrary to conventional interpretations of his work, Mackinder was in fact quite sympathetic toward the strategic theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the famous American naval historian, believing that a strong and reorganised British fleet could still be a powerful force in the twentieth century, keeping at bay new continental powers like Russia and the United States.⁴¹ And it was especially on the rising strength of the Tsarist Empire in Asia that he focused his geographical imagination, perceiving it as the modern heir of the Mongols and other great nomadic peoples of the Middle Ages. Isolated from the sea and empowered by the exceptional moving freedom of the steppes, these warrior societies had once conquered the entire Eurasian continent, compelling sea nations like Britain to seek their fortune across the Atlantic Ocean, giving life to the great and prosperous colonial empires of the 'Columbian era.' Now, however, the steady development of railway communications in Siberia and Central Asia meant the future re-emergence of land power in global politics, threatening the long historical hegemony of Western maritime countries. Therefore it was necessary to develop a proper containment strategy against such a dangerous menace, exploiting the traditional mobility of the Royal Navy.

Despite its huge meta-historical tones, the Pivot Paper expressed mainly Mackinder's own fear for the recent advance of Russia toward Indian frontiers, sharing the well-known strategic concerns of other imperialist figures like Curzon and Lord Roberts.⁴² Suggesting a broader view on the topic, the ambitious geographer also hoped to find new fields of application for his educational proposals, maybe in the military and diplomatic services. This design was partially achieved through the institution of the so-called 'Mackindergarten' in 1907, which consisted in a series of geographical and administrative courses organised by the LSE for Army officers under the direct patronage of the War Office. Thus Mackinder played a small but important role in the complex reform of British armed forces before the First World War, and the chapter will also discuss this aspect in

⁴¹ On Mahan's strategic ideas, see William Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954) and Jon Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁴² For a short overview of these concerns, see M.A. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21 (1987), pp. 647-65.

some detail, providing a balanced assessment of his personal influence on early twentieth century imperial defence. Last but not least, there will be even some attention for Mackinder's ambivalent position toward Germany, seen both as a model and a threat for the future of the British Empire.

After this long strategic excursus, Chapter 5 will go back to the main biographical line of this research, exploring Mackinder's political and intellectual evolution during the Great War. Indeed, while the conflict seemed to vindicate his previous protectionist campaign, compelling the British government to reject several aspects of its free trade orthodoxy, it also showed the limits of antebellum nationalist and imperialist myths, exemplified by the confused and inconclusive strategy adopted by the Lloyd George coalition after the disaster of the Somme in 1916.⁴³ Touched by the dramatic loss of human lives on the Western Front, Mackinder began then to express more peaceful and democratic lines in his public interventions, recognising the need of a different reconstruction of international society at the end of the war and collaborating effectively with the New Europe group led by Robert Seton-Watson, which advocated the independence of East European peoples from the authoritarian rule of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Indeed, Mackinder publicly campaigned in favour of the Serbs and other small Balkan nationalities, helping them to achieve their final liberation from the Central Powers at the end of the war. In 1917, inspired by the pivotal events of the Russian Revolution and of American intervention into the war, he devised even a rough scheme of European unification based on the permanent alliance between Britain and the other members of the Entente, seen as the best guarantee for the future preservation of world peace.

This idealist stance was certainly quite different from the cynicism and indifference of other British politicians like Balfour and Amery, who openly despised the 'perverted patriotism' of minor nationalities or saw the war against Germany only on narrow imperial terms, regretting the direct involvement in 'tiresome and trivial' European issues.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it never extended to the colonial territories of Asia and Africa, which were still regarded as the great material 'reservoir' of the Empire, ready to be exploited for the benefit of the exhausted British economy: in this sense, Mackinder's turbulent participation

⁴³ David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Brock Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy, 1916-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

⁴⁴ Jason Tomes, *Balfour and Foreign Policy: The International Thought of a Conservative Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 162; Richard S. Grayson, 'Imperialism in Conservative Defence and Foreign Policy: Leo Amery and the Chamberlains, 1903-39', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 34 (2006), p. 511.

to the activities of the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) shows the persistence of his old imperialist faith, designed to maximise the efficiency of the Empire against foreign competition.⁴⁵ On this side, he never changed, although the war partially moderated his previous Social Darwinism, encouraging a more pragmatic and cooperative approach toward the diverse problems of the 'imperial family.'

At the end of the war, Mackinder summed up his renewed geopolitical thought in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, hoping to gain some attention by the British delegates at the Paris Peace Conference. This book will be the main subject of Chapter 6, acknowledging all the novelties and contradictions of Mackinder's international reflection, including the wide revision of the original Heartland concept of 1904. Now this imagined geographical area covered in fact large part of Eastern Europe, and Mackinder underlined the importance of a solid system of independent states in the region, keeping separated Bolshevik Russia from the virulent nationalism of the defeated German Empire. Both these forces, in fact, represented a dangerous threat to the peace of the world, embodying strong authoritarian and centralistic attitudes ready to use the great material resources of the Heartland against the fragile democratic forces of the West. Thus it was necessary to build a powerful defensive barrier in the East against any possible Russo-German combination, destined to expand oppressive autocracy across the entire European continent, and Mackinder vigorously campaigned to transmit this concern to the British political establishment, using his official appointment as High Commissioner to South Russia in late 1919 to advance the bold project of a vast regional coalition against Bolshevism led by former Tsarist General Anton Denikin (1872-1947). However, the situation of anti-Bolshevik forces in the Caucasus at that time was almost desperate, while the British government wished only to save its diplomatic prestige in the area, balancing the conflicting interests of its local allies. Thus Mackinder's ideas were quickly dismissed by the Lloyd George cabinet, while the sudden collapse of Denikin's army in early 1920 proved the complete futility of his geopolitical proposals, showing even his unrealistic appreciation of local military circumstances.

But this dismal failure did not mark the end of his political career, which continued along unexpected lines throughout the 1920s. This aspect will be mainly discussed in Chapter 7, explaining the successful metamorphosis of Mackinder from geopolitical dreamer to practical director of several imperial advisory boards. At the head of these institutions, in

⁴⁵ On the controversial story of the ERDC, see David Killingray, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee and West Africa, 1916-20', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10 (1982), pp. 194-210.

fact, he was able to express his old imperial enthusiasm in new productive ways, adapting it to the changed political landscape of the interwar years. Recognising the new reality of the 'Commonwealth of Nations', for example, he used the Imperial Shipping Committee to develop strong economic ties between the different parts of the British Empire, while his patriotic emphasis became more peaceful and inclusive, partially rejecting the crude neo-mercantilist tones of the antebellum era. This sort of progressive 'conversion' was a clear sign of the gradual decline of Milnerism in British politics after the Great War, supplanted by less narrow and materialistic interpretations of imperial affairs. However, Mackinder never extended his new cooperative stance toward the tropical dependencies, believing that they still needed the direct control of white administrators to become prosperous and 'civilised' partners of the British world. In this sense, he arrived even to support some vague scheme of European colonisation in East Africa, designed to keep that vital strategic region under the permanent influence of the Colonial Office. Nevertheless, his post-war Liberalism was probably sincere, and it represented a serious but limited attempt to solve imperial problems in a pluralistic way, balancing old national interests with new international ideals.

Finally, the Conclusion of the dissertation will try to assess the complex public role played by Mackinder in more than thirty years of great historical changes, emphasizing the continuities and discontinuities of his main geopolitical reflection. At the same time it will also look at the historical and intellectual meaning of this reflection, providing a more balanced appreciation of its persistent legacy in modern international politics.

Chapter One

'The Nation's Need': Geography and the Reform of British Education

Modernized by Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859) during the first half of the nineteenth century, geography knew an impressive intellectual and educational development after the 1870s, when Germany, France and other European nations formally established the discipline at university level, organizing great scientific surveys of the physical and human environment of the modern world.¹ This remarkable transformation was the product of various scientific novelties, including the adoption of statistical methods, the creation of thematic maps, and the introduction of photography in physical surveys.² But it did not produce the same results in all the leading industrial powers of the time. Indeed, if Germany and the United States showed great precocity in the use and promotion of the so-called 'New Geography', Great Britain remained instead at the margins of such momentous change, provoking some serious distress within its own geographical community. The delay was in fact perceived as a dangerous sign of national 'backwardness', and it was denounced with strong words both by teachers and public functionaries. School inspector M.J. Barrington, for example, constantly expressed his contempt for the poor state of British elementary geography in several reports to the Committee of Council on Education in the late 1870s, lamenting the 'heart tedious strings of mere names' and 'stereotyped sets of words' regularly used by teachers in the classroom, which reduced promising young scholars to mere 'machines' devoid of any sort of rationality and imagination.³

The Committee recognized these grievances, advocating higher standards for the discipline, but the status quo remained substantially unchallenged for at least another decade. Indeed, the early 1880s were mainly dominated by provincial societies that tried to develop a utilitarian geography in favour of the colonial scramble for Africa, without any

¹ For a short summary of Ritter's and von Humboldt's activities, see Geoffrey J. Martin, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 4th edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 107-28.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 131-61.

³ Teresa Ploszajska, *Geographical Education, Empire and Citizenship: Geographical Teaching and Learning in English Schools, 1870-1944* (Liverpool: Historical Geography Research Group, 1999), pp. 71-2.

serious theoretical assessment of the subject.⁴ Their instrumental approach was not successful, and few of them survived the end of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, even scientific pioneers like Francis Galton and Douglas Freshfield found it quite difficult to attract public authorities toward the geographical field: Galton, for example, created a gold medal for distinguished students in the discipline, but it was awarded only to undergraduates of Liverpool College, while other institutions openly despised the initiative.⁵ And the same kind of institutional indifference also met Douglas Freshfield during his many speeches in favour of the subject, full of strong references to its crucial patriotic and imperial dimension: ‘Probably in the future...we may find ourselves the centre of a vast confederation strong enough to ensure the peace of the world, to maintain a *pax Britannica* which neither Slav nor Latin will venture to dispute. Do you think we are educating our children for this high destiny...by leaving them in comparative ignorance of the earth’s structure, of the natural laws by obedience to which they may go forth and win peaceful victories and fill up the void places of our planet?’⁶

However, these constant efforts finally compelled the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to take the matter in to its own hands, commissioning an official survey on the state of British and European geography in 1884. The man appointed for such task was John Scott Keltie, sub-editor of *Nature* and author of several geographical articles for the national press. He received £250 for travel expenses, and then left Britain for a long tour of schools and universities across Western Europe.⁷ Back in London, Keltie wrote a massive, detailed report where he denounced the poor state of British geography in front of its continental colleagues: according to his survey, in fact, the discipline was heavily neglected both in secondary and higher education, leaving it to untrained teachers, shallow maps, and dull textbooks. At the same time, he warned against the further division of the subject into narrow subfields, stressing instead the importance of geography as a unitary branch of knowledge:

⁴ John M. MacKenzie, ‘The Provincial Geographical Societies in Britain, 1884-1914’, in *Geography and Imperialism, 1820-1940*, ed. by Morag Bell, Robin Butlin, and Michael Heffernan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 93-124.

⁵ D.R. Stoddart, ‘The RGS and the “New Geography”’: Changing Aims and Changing Roles in Nineteenth Century Science’, *The Geographical Journal*, 146 (1980), p. 193. At the time Liverpool College was directed by Galton’s brother-in-law, and that could explain the ‘astounding’ success of the initiative among its students.

⁶ Douglas Freshfield, ‘The Place of Geography in Education’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 8 (1886), p. 701.

⁷ On the reasons behind the Keltie mission, see M.J. Wise, ‘The Scott Keltie Report 1885 and the Teaching of Geography in Britain’, *The Geographical Journal*, 152 (1986), pp. 368-70.

The separation which at present exists in most middle and higher schools between the different sections of geography seems to me to be mischievous. We do not find the general principles of chemistry separated from the great body of phenomena to which they are applicable; botany and zoology are not divided up, and relegated to different sections of a school and to different masters...There would not be much harm in having general physical geography taught by the science master, and political and special physical geography by a properly qualified class-master. But the two sections should be taught according to a common programme, a programme so constructed that the intimate connection between the matters treated of in the different sections would be clearly brought out and impressed upon the pupils. Were geography taught by qualified teachers as one single subject, all the parts of which are intimately connected, it would not only form a body of knowledge of high value, and cease to be the barren task which is now taught, but it could not fail to be a real discipline.⁸

Expressed in such a strong language, these reflections made a lasting impression on the directing members of the RGS, who decided to support more energetically the renovation of geography in educational institutions. A huge exhibition of maps and other didactic materials collected by Keltie in Europe was also organized in the heart of London, where it was opened with great pomp by the Marquis of Lorne in December 1885. The event was even accompanied by various supporting speeches from Francis Galton, E.G. Ravenstein, Peter Kropotkin, James Bryce, and H.N. Moseley. As a result of such an organising effort, more than 4000 people visited the exhibition during the winter 1885-86, and the Marquis of Lorne closed the occasion with a note of genuine optimism, believing that 'the mind of the public' had finally been 'greatly enlightened' on the real value of geography, with future significant 'improvement' for the treatment of the subject both in schools and universities.⁹ Some months later Keltie reiterated this positive view, claiming that geographical reform had already begun in British educational institutions, introducing new wall-maps in the classroom and stirring up teachers to recognize the 'undreamt capabilities' of the discipline 'when treated liberally and intelligently.'¹⁰

These early enthusiasms, however, were rather misplaced. Indeed, British geography continued to languish in higher education: an independent School of Geography, for example, was established at Oxford only in 1899, while the ambitious project of a great London Institute of Geography - modelled on similar structures in Central Europe and the

⁸ J.S. Keltie, *Geographical Education: Report to the Council of the Royal Geographical Society* (London: John Murray, 1885), pp. 18-9.

⁹ Wise, 'Keltie Report', p. 373.

¹⁰ J.S. Keltie, 'The Geographical Movement in England', *Science*, 10 (1887), p. 91.

United States - failed miserably for the absence of appropriate financial support.¹¹ Anyway the last decade of the nineteenth century saw also the emergence of charismatic figures like Halford Mackinder, who played a crucial role in the final spread and recognition of the 'New Geography' in the British academic system. These 'pioneers' have generally been praised for their brilliant collective achievement, without any critical attention toward the complexity of their individual careers. Mackinder, for example, is still seen as 'a godsend' for the RGS campaign, but few scholars have analyzed the real causes of his geographical choice.¹² Indeed, he did not show any early interest toward his future profession, pursuing instead a rigid programme of biological and zoological studies. This precise path was mainly decided by his father Draper, who wished a prestigious medical career for his son, even subjecting him to severe educational rules.¹³ A local surgeon in Lincolnshire, Draper was in fact a practical man with few illusions toward the world, which he perceived often in very crude terms: commenting on the traumatic birth of a couple of twins, later killed by breathing complications, he concluded that neither of them had 'sufficient physical power to sustain life', partially explaining the inefficiency of his resuscitation techniques.¹⁴ In another medical case, he faced instead the bizarre behaviour of an epileptic man, whose health problems were probably due to 'some vicious habits or moral indulgence.' This time, however, the young patient recovered from his condition, suddenly getting married and enjoying 'the comforts of a happy home.'¹⁵ From the general tone of his writing, Draper certainly appreciated such a positive outcome, hoping that his son would enjoy the same fate.

These paternal dreams, however, were destined to remain unfulfilled. Despite his overbearing father, in fact, Halford grew up as a shy and imaginative boy, attracted by the exhilarating accounts of Captain Cook's voyages and the romantic novels of George Eliot, set in the beautiful landscape of his native region.¹⁶ These literary influences were certainly important for his future professional career, but their effects were not visible at Epsom College, where the timid boy began his scientific education in 1874. There Mackinder

¹¹ L.M. Cantor, 'The Royal Geographical Society and the Projected London Institute of Geography, 1892-1899', *The Geographical Journal*, 128 (1962), pp. 30-5.

¹² Paul Coones, 'The Centenary of the Mackinder Readership at Oxford', *The Geographical Journal*, 155 (1989), p. 15.

¹³ Halford, for example, was often prevented from playing with other children outside the family circle. See BLPES, WOOLEY, Box 1, Martha Woolley, 'The Philosophy of Halford Mackinder' (unpublished manuscript, ca. 1978), p. 25.

¹⁴ Draper Mackinder, 'Cases of Resuscitation', *The British Medical Journal*, 3 October 1857, p. 828.

¹⁵ Draper Mackinder, 'Epilepsia Erratica', *The British Medical Journal*, 9 June 1866, p. 598.

¹⁶ Gilbert, *British Pioneers*, p. 141.

focused his attention primarily to natural sciences and popular sports, trying to realize that ideal synthesis of ‘physical development’ and ‘mental cultivation’ at the core of the educational mission of the Surrey institution.¹⁷ His final grades were quite good, but he twice failed the preliminary science examination at London University, inflicting a serious blow to Draper’s dreams of a medical degree. However, he received a prestigious Junior Studentship at Christ Church, Oxford, to pursue his scientific studies under the direction of H.N. Moseley, a former member of the *Challenger* expedition. Thus, in October 1880, he entered the celebrated gates of Britain’s most famous university, ready to receive a thorough training in natural sciences.

Oxford, however, was destined to change forever the life perspectives of such a promising freshman. At that time, in fact, the old college was shaken by the powerful lectures of John Ruskin and T.H. Green on social reform, while historians like Arnold Toynbee and Thomas Arnold discussed in detail the future development of the British Empire after the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869.¹⁸ On the other hand, fervent Darwinists as H.N. Moseley contested the religious tradition of the Victorian era, introducing Mackinder and his young fellows to the new evolutionary ideas developed by Darwin in his controversial biological writings. This crucible of different philosophical and methodological trends, fostered by the reformist movement of Charles Appleton and Norman Lockyer, shaped an entire generation of British statesmen and intellectuals, later involved in the great national and international struggles of the twentieth century: Leo Amery, for example, was deeply impressed by the lectures of J.R. Seeley and George Parkin on imperial federation, directing his adult efforts toward the achievement of such ambitious goal.¹⁹ And it certainly affected even Mackinder, partially diverting his attention from the natural sciences to the humanities. Indeed, after his graduation in physical science in 1883, he remained at Oxford for another year to study history, absorbing extensively a strong Anglocentric view of the national past, mainly focused on the ‘organic’ development of modern parliamentary institutions, which aimed to provide strong political lessons to the future public elite of the country, reinforcing popular notions of ‘character’, ‘service’, and ‘duty.’ Highly paternalistic, this historical approach – propagated by such famous Oxford scholars like William Stubbs and E.A. Freeman – constantly emphasized the triumphs of

¹⁷ ‘Epsom College’, *The British Medical Journal*, 6 August 1910, pp. 333-4.

¹⁸ For a short overview of all these authors, see Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 24-31.

¹⁹ Leo Amery, *My Political Life, I: England before the Storm, 1896-1914* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 37.

modern Liberal England, remarking the superiority of ‘English civilization’ over other countries, seen as the pinnacle of moral and political progress.²⁰

As many other students of the time, Mackinder was clearly fascinated by this idealized vision of England’s history, repeating it often in his future geographical works as the main justification for British imperial rule over non-European peoples. He firmly believed, for example, that Britain had brought ‘order and justice’ to India, providing an ‘efficient and fair government’ to the local population guaranteed by the international prestige of the English monarchy.²¹ At the same time, he was also inspired by the great moral tales of ancient history, where the dramatic expansion of the Roman Empire offered interesting parallels with that of the current British colonial system.²² Indeed, Mackinder’s main geopolitical writings would resonate sometimes of theoretical concepts taken from the classical world, including the old opposition between land power and sea power illustrated by Thucydides in the *Peloponnesian War*.

In all this eclectic upbringing, however, geography remained quite marginal, at least until Mackinder’s involvement in the Oxford University Extension movement in 1885. Led by Michael Sadler, this organization aimed to bring higher education to the working classes, offering lectures and courses in various industrial districts across Britain. Remuneration to the teachers was small, but the work gave the opportunity to develop skills for a future academic career. Indeed, Sadler often illustrated the various benefits of the scheme with ecstatic tones, describing it even as ‘missionary work on a broad basis’ welcomed by all sections of British society.²³ Thanks to his brilliant rhetoric and scientific education, Mackinder was chosen to give lessons on physical geography, connecting the topic with more popular subjects as history and economics.²⁴ The experience was very positive and it convinced the young Oxford graduate that geography was a promising field in popular

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of historical studies in late Victorian and Edwardian universities, see Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²¹ Mackinder, *British State*, p. 232.

²² On the influence of Roman history in late Victorian England, see Raymond F. Betts, ‘The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries’, *Victorian Studies*, 15 (1971), pp. 149-59, and Linda Dowling, ‘Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography’, *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985), pp. 579-607.

²³ Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 64.

²⁴ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 27-9.

education, ready to enjoy a higher status even in the traditional academic world.²⁵ Finally, during the Christmas vacation of 1885 he visited the great London exhibition of the RGS, where he met John Scott Keltie and listened to the passionate speeches of his old mentor H.N. Moseley in favour of geographical amelioration: that was probably the moment when he decided to devote his intellectual energies to such discipline, hoping to reach the extended electorate of the new democratic Britain.²⁶ The possibilities of a rewarding public career, in fact, seemed more promising in geography than in the overcrowded field of natural biology. And the subject also offered stimulating opportunities for scientific progress, connecting time and space in an original reflection over the general aspects of the human condition.

One year later, these first impressions were officially presented to the RGS in a long address, where Mackinder constantly emphasized the huge possibilities of geography for the future of British education, threatened by the growing specialization of its different subjects:

In the days of our fathers the ancient classics were the common element in the culture of all men, a ground on which the specialists could meet. The world is changing, and it would seem that the classics are also becoming a specialty. Whether we regret the turn which things have taken or whether we rejoice at it, it is equally our duty to find a substitute. To me it seems that geography combines some of the requisite qualities. To the practical man, whether he aim at distinction in the State or at the amassing of wealth, it is a store of invaluable information; to the student it is a stimulating basis from which to set out along a hundred special lines; to the teacher it would be an implement for the calling out of the powers of the intellect...All this we say on the assumption of the unity of the subject. The alternative is to divide the scientific from the practical. The result of its adoption will be the ruin of both. The practical will be rejected by the teacher, and will be found indigestible in after life. The scientific will be neglected by most men, because it lacks the element of utility in every-day life. The man of the world and the student, the scientist and the historian, will lose their common platform. The world will be the poorer.²⁷

Despite its original appearance, Mackinder's geographical proposal was substantially modelled on the academic work of German scholars like Ferdinand von Richthofen and Friedrich Ratzel, who had recently redesigned the field as an organic analysis of human and

²⁵ Gilbert, *British Pioneers*, p. 142. In three years as an extension lecturer, Mackinder covered almost 30,000 miles, engaging widely with audiences in Bradford, Exeter, Bath, Southampton, Rotherham, and Wolverhampton.

²⁶ Wise, 'Keltie Report', p. 374.

²⁷ Halford Mackinder, 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 9 (1887), p. 160.

natural interactions over the physical earth.²⁸ Richthofen, for example, stressed the importance of geology as the first step of any serious geographical enquiry, paving the way to the further examination of human relationships with the natural environment. Geography was then not merely a descriptive study of land features, but a complex theoretical reflection on the presence of certain physical and human characteristics in different regions, looking later at their common interaction across the world. Using the word *Erdkunde*, first coined by Carl Ritter in 1817, Richthofen believed that geography must refer only to the whole study of the globe, including biosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and atmosphere into a common analytical framework. This articulated vision deeply impressed Keltie, who visited Richthofen at Leipzig during his long European trip, leaving a cautious but positive description of his geographical ideas in the report of 1885:

Perhaps Professor Richthofen claims too much for the science, and it may be admitted that its bounds have need of more precise definition; though the same could be said of any department of research at the present day. The most ambitious German geographer now living, however, claims no more for geography than Kant did more than a century ago; he, and not Ritter, might well be regarded as the father of modern geographical research.²⁹

This confident judgment was also shared by Mackinder, who ten years later devoted an entire address to the intellectual debt of British geography toward its German counterpart, after the first successful international congress of the discipline hosted in London:

As a nation we may justly claim that for several generations we have been foremost in the work of the pioneer; nor need we view with dissatisfaction our contributions to precise survey, to hydrography, to climatology, and to biogeography. It is rather on the synthetic and philosophical, and therefore on the educational, side of our subject that we fall so markedly below the foreign and especially the German standard, and it is for this reason that we may regard the Sixth International Congress as a noteworthy object-lesson for English geographers and teachers. The time seems, moreover, to have been ripe for some such stimulating influence.³⁰

In perfect line with the German school, Mackinder believed that the geographer's main concern was 'with the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and the surface of the lithosphere', perceiving the complex interaction between these different spheres in the natural environment:

²⁸ For a general survey of the 'New Geography' in Germany, see Martin, *All Possible Worlds*, pp. 162-94.

²⁹ Keltie, *Geographical Education*, p. 54.

³⁰ Halford Mackinder, 'Modern Geography, German and English', *The Geographical Journal*, 6 (1895), p. 367.

The land-relief conditions the [atmospheric] circulation, and this in turn gradually changes the land-relief. The circulation modifies climates, and these, together with the relief, constitute the environments of plants, animals, and men. Shorn of complexities, this is the main line of the geographical argument. In the language of Richthofen, the earth's surface and man are the terminal links. It is clear that all depends on the accuracy of the first premises – the form of the lithosphere, and the movements within the hydrosphere and atmosphere. Before last century geographers ascertained the horizontal elements in form, but neglected the vertical.³¹

This was the only way to push geography beyond the narrow limits of geology, developing all the extreme richness of the discipline:

There are three correlated arts (all concerned chiefly with maps) which may be said to characterize geography – observation, cartography, and teaching. The observer obtains the material for the maps, which are constructed by the cartographer and interpreted by the teacher. It is almost needless to say that the map is here thought of as a subtle instrument of expression applicable to many orders of facts, and not the mere depository of names which still does duty in some of the most costly English atlases. Speaking generally, and apart from exceptions, we have had in England good observers, poor cartographers, and teachers perhaps a shade worse than cartographers. As a result, no small part of the raw material of geography is English, while the expression and interpretation are German.³²

Therefore the 'ideal geographer' was 'a man of trained imagination, more especially with the power of visualizing forms and movements in space of three dimensions.'³³ He could easily depict and read land features on the map, 'as a musician can hear music when his eyes read a silent score'; he could also visualize 'the movements of communities driven by their past history, stopped and diverted by the solid forms, conditioned in a thousand ways by the fluid circulations, acting and reacting on the communities around.' With these faculties, he could then play several roles in public life, dealing successfully with the numerous 'space-problems' presented by the geographical map. For Mackinder, in fact, geography was 'a subject for the higher rather than the lower parts of school', preparing future citizens and statesmen to 'an accurate appreciation of space-relations in history, as well time-relations.'³⁴ In an age of increasing competition and specialization, this represented clearly a great advantage for the British people, burdened by great imperial 'responsibilities' around the world. In this sense, geography could be a decisive factor in the

³¹ Mackinder, 'Modern Geography', pp. 368-9.

³² Ibid., pp. 374-5.

³³ Ibid., p. 376.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 379.

conduct of war or the preservation of peace, and it should be taught in schools and universities as a big universal subject, on the same lines of history and philosophy.

It was difficult, however, to persuade other scholars of the validity of this reasoning. Even if the 1887 address provided an academic readership for Mackinder in Oxford, partially funded by the RGS, the difficulties in promoting the 'New Geography' in British universities were immense.³⁵ There was no money for geographical teaching, and cooperation from scientific or humanistic faculties continued to be absent or minimal. The same Mackinder remembered later that his first lecture at Oxford was attended only by three students, 'one being a Don, who told me that he knew the Geography of Switzerland because he had just read Baedeker through from cover to cover, and the other two being ladies who brought their knitting, which was not usual at lectures at that time.'³⁶ In spite of such poor initial audience, the situation began to seriously improve in a couple of years, transforming the ancient university into a small 'promised land' for young British geographers. Thanks to the constant support of Michael Sadler, in fact, Mackinder attracted new students from the University Extension programme, opening even his classes to women without the payment of additional fees, while his courses were openly designed to connect geography with broader political and historical issues. In one of his annual reports to the RGS, for example, he emphasized the steady growth of students interested in the discipline, including '14 registered students of the Association for the Education of Women in Oxford, nearly all of whom attended throughout the year.'³⁷ At the same time, he also emphasized the ever increasing range of courses taught by his small staff, covering various aspects of the geographical practice. One syllabus for the academic year 1894/95, for example, was mainly focused on the history of geography and geographical discoveries, with numerous references to the exploits of Strabo, Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Carl Ritter. Another one centred instead on the growth of the modern European political system, devoting an entire lecture to the international position of England after 1815.³⁸ This interdisciplinary structure was highly instrumental in promoting Mackinder's new vision of

³⁵ For a general overview of Mackinder's readership at Oxford, see D.I. Scargill, 'The RGS and the Foundations of Geography at Oxford', *The Geographical Journal*, 142 (1976), pp. 444-6.

³⁶ Halford Mackinder, 'Geography as a Pivotal Subject in Education', *The Geographical Journal*, 57 (1921), p. 378.

³⁷ Halford Mackinder and J.Y. Buchanan, 'Geographical Education: The Year's Progress at Oxford and Cambridge', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 14 (1892), p. 398.

³⁸ Halford Mackinder, *Course of Ten Lectures on the History of Geography and Geographical Discovery, Part I and II* (London: Hampton & Co., 1894/95); Id., *Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on the Growth of the Political System of Europe, Part I and II* (London: unknown, 1894).

geography as a hybrid subject, open both to scientific and humanistic developments. As he remarked again several years later, 'geography is essentially a mode of thought which has its scientific, artistic, and philosophical aspects...It may very easily be made the pivot on which the other subjects may hang, and hang together.'³⁹

But this ambitious effort continued to receive scant attention from the old geographical establishment, still attached to traditional ideas of travel and exploration. The new President of the RGS, Clements Markham, was in fact quite sceptical toward the theoretical revolution of the 'New Geography', and he began to question Mackinder's original approach to the discipline. The slow results of the Oxford readership also gave him serious doubts on the feasibility of such endeavour: in 1892 Mackinder's role was confirmed by the Society with an annual contribution of £150, but three years later Markham expressed his growing concern to the writer H.F. Tozer, claiming that the Council of the RGS had not contemplated originally to subsidise the Oxford position for 'more than five years.'⁴⁰ Mackinder felt this mistrust toward his intellectual proposal, and he tried in many ways to strengthen his personal respectability with new academic commitments. In 1892, invited by American colleagues, he travelled for several months across the United States, lecturing on geography in Philadelphia, Toledo, and Chicago. He also visited great educational institutions such as Harvard and Princeton, where he was deeply impressed by the sophisticated laboratories created by local geographers for their own enquiries. Thus the temptation to seek a new academic post in America was quite strong, but in the end Mackinder decided to go back to the old country, using his foreign observations as an input for other progressive proposals to the RGS.⁴¹ In this sense, he began to advocate the creation of a great Geographical Institute in London for the systematic training of British geographers, based on the model of the huge Harvard laboratory led by the famous geologist William Morris Davis (1850-1934). A similar structure could in fact provide some solid 'opportunity for original work' to British students, freeing at the same time their overburdened teachers from the 'examination trammels' of regular academic life.⁴² Three years later, on the eve of the London International Geographical Congress, he reinstated his conviction to the RGS Council, presenting the new educational institute as the direct evolution of the Oxford readership:

³⁹ Mackinder, 'Geography as a Pivotal Subject', p. 382.

⁴⁰ Scargill, 'Foundations of Geography', p. 446.

⁴¹ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 50-1.

⁴² Cantor, 'Projected London Institute', p. 31

In other words we want in England something corresponding to the Geographical Institute of Vienna, or at least to the less developed Geographical Department of Harvard University. This I have naturally wished to see at Oxford, but am now coming to the conclusion that in the interest of National Education, it would be a more general advantage were it in London. It is of prime importance that the work of the Readership at Oxford should not be abandoned, but on the other hand the two or three University students who are occasionally attracted by the lectures to a special study of Geography might follow their post-graduate course as easily in London as at Oxford.⁴³

The response of the Society was finally positive, and Mackinder used his successful direction of the newborn Reading College, created with Michael Sadler in 1892, to support the proposal in business and academic circles. Indeed, the novel institution served more than 600 students in its first year, preparing them for further admission to Oxford, Cambridge, and other major universities. Thanks to the financial assistance of the British Dairy Farmers Association, which opened a Dairy Institute on the campus in 1895, it proved able to combine technical and liberal subjects into a common academic programme, fulfilling Mackinder's original idea of a higher education suitable both for practical and theoretical purposes.⁴⁴ In 1901, the College also hosted the Société Nationale des Professeurs de Français en Angleterre for its ninth congress, receiving the public praise of French ambassador Paul Cambon.⁴⁵ William M. Childs, who was destined to succeed Mackinder at the head of Reading in 1903, left a remarkable portrait of this extreme vitality of the early institution in his memoirs, discussing even at length the personality of Mackinder as a 'convincing and provocative' academic leader:

We were argumentative people, for our work had gripped our imagination. I lay it upon Mackinder...He had a way of blending dreams and hard sense, subtlety and simplicity, and he never seemed to know when he passed from the one to the other. He made some opponents, as a leader in stark earnest is bound to do. He sometimes ploughed ahead, leaving a wake of troubled waters, and he certainly gave the rest of us plenty to think and talk about. Masterful, he yet made us his partners. We could always speak our minds; our criticisms were considered; sometimes they were even acted upon. But before engaging our chief in argument, it was well to be sure of one's ground.⁴⁶

⁴³ Cantor, 'Projected London Institute', pp. 31-2.

⁴⁴ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 58-63. The College also received contributions from the local Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, which raised £500 for the academic year 1894/95.

⁴⁵ E.L. Milner-Barry and Walter Rippmann, 'Société Nationale des Professeurs de Français en Angleterre', *The Modern Language Quarterly*, 4 (1901), pp. 114-6. During the event Mackinder was also awarded the badge of *Officier de l'Instruction publique* for his remarkable educational career.

⁴⁶ W.M. Childs, *Making a University: An Account of the University Movement at Reading* (London: J.M. Dent, 1933), p. 11.

The sudden flowering of Reading, then, reinforced the personal credibility of the Oxford geographer as an educational reformer, even opening new unexpected possibilities in London to his brilliant skills. Indeed, Sidney Webb involved him in the foundation of the London School of Economics, where he worked under the supervision of W.A.S. Hewins, another member of Michael Sadler's extension group at Oxford. A rigorous economist, inspired by recent cultural and scientific trends from Germany, Hewins shared with Mackinder the strong desire for a new national university system, open to different intellectual approaches and designed for the special needs of the British Empire in the incoming twentieth century – an institution 'deliberately intended to represent important aspects of economic science and practical investigation' outside the closed theoretical framework of 'orthodox economics.'⁴⁷ Therefore the early members of the LSE staff were selected from 'different schools of thought', without any restriction or prejudice toward their respective ideas.⁴⁸

In this free environment, Mackinder was then able to develop his geographical thought in different ways, making imaginative connections with other disciplines in the School. He began as a lecturer in commercial geography, which was really a popular subject in late Victorian Britain: mobilised by the colonial race in Asia and Africa, many local societies advocated the geographical study of international economic conditions, providing useful background information to the pursuit of British imperial aims. The Manchester Geographical Society, for example, stated clearly that one of its objectives was 'to examine the possibility of opening new markets to commerce and to collect information as to the number, character, needs, natural products and resources of such populations as have not yet been brought into relation with British commerce and industry.'⁴⁹ The Tyneside Society tried instead to promote the field within a more internationalist perspective, stressing the need to understand 'the methods of trade adopted by countries beyond the sea' as a way to avoid the gradual stagnation of British domestic commerce.⁵⁰ On his part, Mackinder recognized both these needs in his early courses, sketching a couple of practical themes for the final essays of his students at the LSE: '1. Consider the geographical advantages and disadvantages, present and prospective, of the following countries, for the purposes of trade with China – England, France, Germany, Russia, India, Australia, Japan, USA, Canada,

⁴⁷ W.A.S. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist: Forty Years of Empire Policy*, I (London: Constable, 1929), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ MacKenzie, 'Provincial Geographical Societies', pp. 95-6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

or, 2. Consider where are likely to be the great maritime ports of Africa, when that continent shall have been wholly educed to orderly government and shall belong to the general trade of the world.’⁵¹

Later on, however, he introduced a more theoretical note in this pragmatic picture of commercial geography, inviting merchants and businessmen to blend their demands in the broader context of general geography: ‘Commercial geography...is simply one of the application of geography. It is applied geography – applied to the explanation of the phenomena of commerce – applied to the help of commerce.’⁵² Thus it was ‘a cardinal principle of teaching to teach one thing at once – first the geography, then the ways of commerce, and finally the application of the one to the other.’ This methodical approach was the only way to build a genuine geographical sensitivity, free from narrow statistical and material constraints: ‘This is geographical capacity – the mind which flits easily over the globe, which thinks in terms of the map, which quickly clothes the map with meaning, which correctly and intuitively places the commercial, historical, or political drama on its stage.’⁵³ Therefore teachers of commercial geography had to remember that their discipline was not aimed at making ‘walking encyclopaedias’, but instead at ‘turning out men who shall be supremely makers’ of their business profession, giving fresh impetus to the uncertain course of British international commerce.⁵⁴

But these principles were also valid for the new field of political geography, developed by Friedrich Ratzel in his famous writings of the late 1890s.⁵⁵ Indeed, Mackinder saw history as the official record of ‘Man’s variation’ to the physical environment, composing with geology the complex picture of the natural world. Travelling or settling across the centuries, mankind had deeply modified the surface of the earth, beating the resistance of permanent material obstacles with the sheer power of its creative imagination:

We can imagine a time...before paddles, before oars, before sails, when all movement was on land and the sea an absolute barrier. Then came an age of coasting, when the high seas, however, still defied the ancients...With the compass the resistance of the ocean fell, and it continued to fall until, at the

⁵¹ University of Sheffield Library, Hewins Papers, MS 74/44/71, Mackinder to Hewins, 19 August 1895.

⁵² Halford Mackinder, ‘On the Necessity of Thorough Teaching in General Geography as a Preliminary to Teaching of Commercial Geography’, *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, 6 (1890), p. 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ On Ratzel’s geographical ideas, see Franco Farinelli, ‘Friedrich Ratzel and the nature of (political) geography’, *Political Geography*, 19 (2000), pp. 943-55.

beginning of this century, all the shipping arts combined to give water so trifling a resistance as compared with rock that men took it inland in canals. Then suddenly George Stephenson almost reversed in this respect the whole current of history. The resistance of water continued to fall, it is true, but that of land fell so out of all proportion that it is now lower than that of water...Thus, while the mountains change their form almost imperceptibly in long ages, a daring leader, a mechanical discovery, a great engineering monument, may revolutionise man's relations to geography in the third of a generation.⁵⁶

Such great revolution now needed to be properly organized by modern nations, facing the new spatial factors introduced by the complete discovery and colonization of the physical world. And far from being a marginal examination, political geography could then enlighten the different forces behind historical change, providing useful suggestions to present and future generations of British statesmen:

The course of politics is the product of two sets of forces, impelling and guiding. The impetus is from the past, is the history imbedded in a people's character and traditions. The present guides the movement by economic wants and geographical opportunities. Statesmen and diplomatists succeed and fail pretty much as they recognise the irresistible power of these forces. This analysis is our only key to the future. In an age when democracy has ultimately to guide policy...broad principles can alone keep it right. The geographer has to help in stating these principles.⁵⁷

Presented in these strong terms, Mackinder's didactic proposals were extremely ambitious, in perfect line with the latest theoretical trends of the French and German geographical school. In Paris, for example, Paul Vidal de la Blache declared the 'intimate relationship' between geographical and social events, stressing the crucial importance of space among the main causes of regional and international differences: 'The cause which, in our opinion, introduced more differences between societies is [geographical] position. Following that, if a country is doomed to isolation, or it is instead open to the currents of general life, the relationships between men are quite different.'⁵⁸ But these broad reflections continued to receive scant attention from Clements Markham and the RGS Council, who still viewed geography as closely linked to an old era of romantic adventure and exploratory experience. Thus it was to persuade such exigent personalities of the validity of his educational ideas that Mackinder finally decided to climb Mount Kenya in 1899, with the help of Sidney Hinde and Campbell Hausburg, two close relatives of his

⁵⁶ Halford Mackinder, 'The Physical Basis of Political Geography', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 6 (1890), p. 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁸ Paul Vidal de la Blache, 'Les Conditions Géographiques des Faits Sociaux', *Annales de Géographie*, 11:55 (1902), p. 15. Translated from French.

wife's family. Challenging the dangerous environment of East Africa, he hoped to acquire the plain respect of his geographical peers, obtaining financial support for the ambitious project of an independent School of Geography in Oxford. At the same time, he was also fascinated by the peculiar characteristics of the African landscape, believing that it was necessary to study directly its physical features in order to arrive at a correct 'estimate' of its economic value for the British Empire.⁵⁹ But there were also deep private reasons behind the ambitious expedition to Mount Kenya: indeed, Mackinder felt the impellent need to re-affirm his personal masculinity, deeply affected by rising troubles with his wife Emilie and scarred by the premature death of his infant son eight years earlier. Indeed, imperial adventure appeared to late Victorians as 'the most alluring means of shaking off the shackles of domesticity', enjoying the pleasures of a new life free from the strict conventions of modern European culture.⁶⁰ This was the appealing myth expressed by Cecil Rhodes in South Africa or Kitchener in Sudan, and it represented a 'masculine revolt' against the increasing feminization of the domestic sphere, threatened even by the independent working woman of Mona Caird's popular novels.⁶¹ An insecure individual since his early childhood, Mackinder was easily attracted by such assertions of 'imperial virility', and he arrived in Kenya with the firm prospect of conquering another piece of land for the glory of British geography, following the heroic footsteps of David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley.

The expedition in East Africa, however, proved more a brutal nightmare than a romantic adventure. Arrived in Nairobi, in fact, Mackinder and his group found a country plagued by famine and disease, with local colonial authorities quite hostile to their projected ascent of Mount Kenya. As the same head explorer confessed later to a reporter of Reuter's Agency, the spectacle of starving natives was simply 'terrible': 'From Mombasa along the whole route of the railway there were dreadful scenes...Living skeletons collected round the various stations begging for a morsel of food to keep them alive...The woods near Nairobi station were full of dead bodies. Near Makindu I noticed a starving creature simply lie down and die.'⁶² This dreadful scenery, however, did not prevent him continuing the pursuit of his personal ambitions. Using his official connections with the RGS and the Foreign Office, the

⁵⁹ 'Mr. Mackinder on the Economic Possibilities of Africa', *The Practical Teacher*, 20 (1900), p. 397.

⁶⁰ John Tosh, 'Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain 1880-1914', in *Gender and Colonialism*, ed. by Timothy P. Foley and Lionel Pilkington (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995), p. 74.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

⁶² 'The Climbing of Mount Kenya: Mr. Mackinder's Experiences', *The Manchester Guardian*, November 8, 1899, p. 10.

Oxford geographer was finally able to collect enough supplies and porters for the march to the interior, even if logistical difficulties continued to hamper the European party for the rest of their voyage. Meanwhile, he and Hausburg applied a draconian discipline to their African attendants, never questioned or relaxed during the entire expedition. Indeed, Mackinder thought that local laws were quite different from those of 'civilized' England, justifying the use of violence for social and cultural reasons. Visiting Zanzibar before the land trip, for example, he was deeply impressed by the solid 'discipline' of the island population, simply enforced by the customary attitude to brutal force of local authorities: 'This is the land of the stick. Every important native man seems to carry one, which is often handsome. The police at the ship's side had whips.'⁶³ Moreover, he learned from European residents to despise the Swahilis as a 'slave race', similar more to dumb animals than human beings: 'We lunched with the Caves at the Consulate [of Zanzibar]...The root of all the slave difficulty lies in the fatalism and dislike of responsibility which characterises the Swahili. He has no morals...One day's work will support a Swahili for four days: he goes out to pick cloves and then returns to loaf in town.'⁶⁴ Thus the physical punishment of Swahili porters was often justified on the basis of these racist prejudices, although Mackinder never dared to extend the same treatment to the Kikuyu guides of his expedition, who showed instead a higher sense of their dignity, advising even their white employers on the further prosecution of the travel.⁶⁵ This independent attitude earned them the respect of Mackinder, who provided an elaborate description of their personal qualities to the RGS after the expedition:

Kamanga was an important elder verging on old age, a pleasant man, but of no strength of character. Magonie was a pushing, boisterous individual, friendly enough, but rather oppressive...Kerrerri was a young man of somewhat Japanese countenance, very pleasant and intelligent, but of slippery character...A young friend of his who joined us later was the handsomest man I saw in Africa, and it struck me frequently that the better-bred Wakikuyu, with their comparatively thin lips, copper skin, well-bridged noses, and slightly oblique eyes, were a far more intelligent people than the average negro, more intelligent also than the negroid rank and file of their own people. In some respects resembling the Masai, they differ markedly from them in character, for the Wakikuyu are mercurial, and the Masai are reserved and silent. Yet the

⁶³ Mackinder, *First Ascent*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157. On the complex relationship between the Kikuyu and British colonial power in East Africa, see G.H. Mungeam, 'Masai and Kikuyu Responses to the Establishment of British Administration in the East Africa Protectorate', *The Journal of African History*, 11 (1970), pp. 127-43.

Wakikuyu have nothing of the childish and fatalistic temperament of the Swahili. They are responsible free men, not emancipated slaves.⁶⁶

In spite of constant racist remarks, this depiction showed a certain degree of admiration for these men, acknowledging their human and individual virtues. This apparent benevolence, however, did not prevent serious abuses of the African members of the caravan, especially during the second part of the expedition. Indeed, after four weeks of exhausting marching across arid plains, the party reached the surroundings of Mount Kenya, and here it came in conflict with the powerful tribe of chief Wangombe, who refused to deliver food to the starving porters. In retaliation, Mackinder and Hausburg kidnapped him, compelling his village to provide supplies for his liberation.⁶⁷ The predictable result of such action was the bloody revenge of Wangombe's men, who ambushed and killed two porters, compelling the sudden dispatch of Hausburg towards Lake Navaisha in search of more food: it was a dramatic race against time, and it coincided with the brutal shooting of eight other porters for desertion or insubordination. The circumstances of the massacre are still unclear: analyzing the diaries of the expedition, Gerry Kearns has accused Mackinder of being the prime instigator of the shooting, but documentary evidence is too fragmentary to confirm this hypothesis.⁶⁸ At the same time Marc H. Dawson has warned against the reliability of Mackinder's travel notebooks, because they could often report events and descriptions taken from other accounts of the expedition, still unverified by modern scholars. Mackinder also revised the manuscripts for several years, rearranging entire paragraphs and adding further details completely absent from the early drafts.⁶⁹ Thus omissions and manipulations are so extended that it is extremely difficult to reconstruct a coherent picture of the events from archival papers, leaving serious doubts over the real details of the Mount Kenya expedition.

However, Mackinder did not show any regret for the suffering of his African aides, placing little value on their lives in the pursuit of his personal glory. Indeed, while Hausburg fought desperately to reach Navaisha, he stayed behind to climb the mountain, compelling the hungry and tired porters to a series of failed escalades across the Lewis Glacier. Without proper equipment and supplies, the situation became quickly dramatic, testing even Mackinder's own resolution: 'The high levels are beginning to tell. We are all in low

⁶⁶ Halford Mackinder, 'A Journey on the Summit of Mount Kenya, British East Africa', *The Geographical Journal*, 15 (1900), p. 460.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁶⁸ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 107-12.

⁶⁹ Marc H. Dawson and Halford J. Mackinder, 'The Many Minds of Sir Halford J. Mackinder: Dilemmas of Historical Editing', *History in Africa*, 14 (1987), pp. 27-42.

spirits and homesick. Reaction from the rare air, the failure to attain the summit, anxiety about the food caravans and frequent cold feet at night are an obvious explanation. But our nerves are on edge and I hope there will be no quarrelling. The Swahilis are getting a bit difficult. Poor devils.⁷⁰ Indeed, the tense moment allowed a certain degree of solidarity with African porters, accompanied by some moments of self-doubt about the real value of his party leadership: 'Two negroes are sleeping beside me in this tent. Everyone is silently respectful and obedient, though smiles are rare...The trust of the black in the white man is very pathetic.'⁷¹ The sudden arrival of food from Lake Navaisha, however, ended this uneasy interlude, leading to the conquest of the main peak in a few days. The exhilarating moment was still vivid in Mackinder's mind four months later, when he recollected it for the refined audience of the RGS:

A final rock scramble enabled us to set foot on the summit...precisely at noon on September 13 [1899]. The view from the Gate of the Mist had been magnificent. At the summit we were a few moments too late for the mist, driving up, gave only momentary glimpses into the valleys beneath...There was no snow there, and the thermometer slung in the air gave a temperature of 40° Fahr., while several kinds of lichen grew on the rocks. We dare, however, stay only forty minutes – time enough to make observations and to photograph – and then had to descend, not from any physical inconvenience due to the elevation, but for fear of the afternoon storm. We made our way downward from step to step cautiously in the mist, and reached our sleeping-place of the previous night at sunset; but we continued down the rocks by the moonlight, and arrived in camp after 10 p.m., exhausted, but victorious. We supped by the fire at midnight, with the sound of the Nairobi torrent ringing on the rocks...and from time to time with the hoot of an owl or bark of leopard, yet none of them seeming to break the silence of the great peak which rose among the stars, sternly graceful, in the cold light of the sinking moon.⁷²

Expressed in such elegant terms, devoid of any reference to the crude reality of the East African venture, the conquest of Mount Kenya earned him the final respect of his professional peers, who financially supported his scheme for a School of Geography in Oxford. The negotiations with academic authorities had already begun in early 1899, when Clements Markham and Sir Thomas Holdich met a committee of Hebdomadal Council to discuss the details of the projected institution. The university agreed to support the new department with £400 a year, placing Mackinder at the head of the entire organization, but Markham showed again some hesitancy toward his young colleague, remarking that the selected candidate 'should be a thorough physical geographer, as well as a surveyor and

⁷⁰ Mackinder, *First Ascent*, p. 197.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷² Mackinder, 'Journey on the Summit', pp. 473-4.

cartographer.⁷³ The Mount Kenya enterprise, however, pushed aside these last doubts, and in the spring of 1899 the School was definitely recognized by an official decree published in the *Oxford University Gazette*, with Mackinder as approved director of the new structure. His academic responsibilities now included two weekly lectures on historical geography and the appointment of a competent staff for the further development of the School's curriculum.

His first choice was Andrew John Herbertson, then lecturer in commercial geography at Edinburgh: a former assistant of the sociologist Patrick Geddes, he was mainly interested in regional studies, providing a valid complement to the wider global syntheses of his senior colleague. But Herbertson also shared Mackinder's strong faith in educational reform, seen as a crucial factor for the future of Britain in the twentieth century: 'The task of the universities is to fit young men to play their part worthily in the fierce struggle for distinguished existence in a world-wide arena. It will be a crime as well as a disaster if the men who are to shape the destinies of the next half century are out of touch with the wider culture which a university can and should supply, and through our universities losing touch with the widening interests of individual and national life.'⁷⁴ These strong assertions were perfectly tuned with those of Mackinder, who constantly warned that 'the universities of England must not be content until those who control the only education of the vast majority of the next generation are inspired by broad university ideals.'⁷⁵ Thus the common work of the two men at the School proved extremely successful, laying the foundations for the establishment of a full Professorship of Geography at Oxford in 1910.⁷⁶ Other important additions to Mackinder's early staff were then Henry Newton Dickson and G.B. Grundy, who lectured respectively on physical and ancient geography. With this small but skilled teaching group, the School began to hold its first courses in October 1900, releasing a one-year diploma in geography the following summer. Four candidates were successful, and this small number was quickly destined to grow in the next couple of years, thanks to the enlargement of the curriculum and the expansion of the lecturing staff. Lucien Gallois, then Professor of Geography at the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Paris, reviewed all this progress in a detailed article for the *Annales de Géographie*, written after a short tour of Oxford in 1905:

⁷³ Scargill, 'Foundations of Geography', p. 448.

⁷⁴ A.J. Herbertson, 'Geography in the University', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 18 (1902), pp. 124-5.

⁷⁵ Halford Mackinder, 'Higher Education', in *The Nation's Need: Chapters on Education*, ed. by Spenser Wilkinson (London: Constable, 1903), p. 254.

⁷⁶ For a short profile of Herbertson's geographical career, see Gilbert, *British Pioneers*, pp. 180-210.

During the year 1904-05 the School [of Geography] has been attended by 325 students, 281 men and 44 women, including 9 external to the University. The number of students, for term, is on average from 110 to 150. The simple auditors, who come to visit the School of Geography as a complement to other studies, are the great majority. Few of them are veritable geographers and take part to the [final] exams: 9 obtained the diploma after 1900, and 8 the certificate after 1903. The Seminar has assembled, in 1904-05, from 4 to 10 students.⁷⁷

In spite of these limits, however, Gallois sincerely appreciated the extreme variety of the curriculum, including regional geography, historical geography, topography, geomorphology, climatology, and oceanography: 'Summing up, one devotes at Oxford an equal part [of his time] to physical and human geography, especially to history in its relationship with geography; it's here the main peculiarity of [the School's] teaching. Both history and geography are not neglected.'⁷⁸ This was in perfect line with Mackinder's original idea of a linking discipline between the natural sciences and the humanities, able to perceive the world in its ever changing aspect. He remarked again such creed at a London conference in 1904: 'Geography, rightly understood, is a matter of imagination, and its function in education is to extend and make precise and flexible the imagination.'⁷⁹ Thus it was not only a science, developed from natural observation, but also an art and a philosophy, concerned about the growing interdependence of the modern globe:

To visualize is the very essence of geographical power, which should be cultivated until it becomes possible to think of the whole World's surface at once in all its complexities, with its girdles of all kinds, telegraphic, railway, steamer, girdles of power, girdles of thought, for every touch of the helm of government, either at Westminster or in the City, produces a ripple which goes right round the World, like the wave in the air emitted from Krakatoa meeting obstacles and producing varied results. Nothing happens without producing results in every part.⁸⁰

The main object of this visual education was then to persuade British citizens to think of their 'whole Empire' in relation with other parts of the world.⁸¹ In an era increasingly dominated by colonial rivalries, economic crises and social unrest, Mackinder felt that only this spatial change of mind could save Britain from the spectre of international decline, so vivid after the military humiliations of the South African War. Indeed, from 1903 he joined

⁷⁷ Lucien Gallois, 'L'Enseignement de la Géographie à l'Université d'Oxford', *Annales de Géographie*, 15 (1906), pp. 267-8. Translated from French.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁷⁹ Halford Mackinder, 'The Development of Geographical Teaching Out of Nature Study', *The Geographical Teacher*, 2 (1904), p. 192.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

the ranks of the Tariff Reform League led by Joseph Chamberlain, where he used his geographical knowledge to promote the vision of a political and economic union between England and her white Dominions. Meanwhile, however, he was also involved in the administration of the London School of Economics, which was experiencing at the time a systematic expansion, both financial and intellectual.

Under Hewins' guidance, in fact, the institution had moved from Adelphi Terrace to Clare Market, where the magnate John Passmore Edwards agreed to support various scholarship schemes for a huge academic building in his honour. Realized by Maurice Adams, the new structure – later demolished in the 1930s – began to host hundreds and hundreds of students each year, multiplying its courses and receiving a regular grant from the University of London. There were also attacks against its 'socialist sympathies', but Sidney Webb proved always able to resist them, underlining the intellectual freedom of his creation.⁸² However, he was less successful in protecting the School from the unexpected consequences of Chamberlain's imperial crusade: indeed, Hewins decided to leave its Directorship for the Secretariat of the Tariff Reform Committee, and the Webbs had to find a new capable administrator for the growing London institute.

The choice fell almost naturally on Mackinder, due to his previous experience at Oxford and Reading. And in his first annual report the new Director proceeded to announce his ambitious programme for the upcoming years, beginning with a systematic series of evening lectures by distinguished public personalities designed to give full freedom of expression to all the main political and economic 'shades of thought' present in the Clare Market's institution and to establish 'an atmosphere of truly scientific discussion' in the heart of metropolitan London.⁸³ Then he proposed to expand the list of subjects taught at the School, adding new lecturers and permanent scholars to the small original staff created by Hewins. This important aim was partially achieved one year later, when the London institute could count sixty-nine postgraduate students involved in several fields of research, beating both Cambridge and Oxford in comparative terms.⁸⁴ At the same time Mackinder organized also a complex and efficient administrative system, ready to deal with the manifold problems of the ever growing School: a Professorial Committee, responsible for didactic appointments, a Management Committee, and a Finance and General Purposes

⁸² On the foundation and early development of the LSE, see Janet Beveridge, *An Epic of Clare Market: The Birth and Early Years of the London School of Economics* (London: Bell, 1960), pp. 45-52.

⁸³ Ralf Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economic and Political Science, 1895-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88-90.

Committee. This elaborate structure contributed to the steady rise of academic expenditure, which nearly quadrupled in comparison with Hewins' early years, but the costs were generally covered by a small and continuous flow of public and private donations. Indeed, Mackinder and Webb used all their personal connections to sustain the School, including those with H.H. Asquith, Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1906, who guaranteed a regular grant from the Treasury.⁸⁵

Meanwhile the formative offer widened with the introduction of sociology among the School's main disciplines, in close cooperation with the Sociological Society led by Victor Branford.⁸⁶ The new subject was generously sponsored by Martin White, a Scottish landowner, who wished to provide a more complete education to national civil servants. Both Branford and Mackinder hoped to install Patrick Geddes at the head of the department of sociology, but the undisciplined Scottish scholar failed the crucial interview for the job, leaving it to the free trader L.T. Hobhouse.⁸⁷ Despite their political differences, however, he and Mackinder cooperated successfully to the promotion of sociology in the School, thanks also to the important mediation of the Finnish anthropologist Edward Westermarck. After all, Hobhouse shared the organic vision of social sciences typical of the time, asking for a wider theoretical approach to the analysis of modern industrial society: 'For the completion of our task we need both a science and a philosophy, and it is only through the union of the two that we can bring the certainty and precision of systematic thought to bear upon the problems of practical life.'⁸⁸ Mackinder certainly subscribed to these ideas.

In all this feverish activity, Mackinder found even enough time to continue his geographical studies, establishing a strong disciplinary curriculum in the School. Helped by Arthur Sargent, a former lecturer in economic geography at Manchester, he closely linked geography with business subjects, increasing the practical aspect of the field. Indeed, the annual examination papers were all explicitly connected with economic issues, requiring a detailed analysis of specific regional characteristics. For example, one of them asked to 'divide up the South American continent' into distinct economic areas, explaining later the

⁸⁵ Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 93.

⁸⁶ On the activities of the Sociological Society, see John Scott and Christopher T. Husbands, 'Victor Branford and the Building of British Sociology', *The Sociological Review*, 55 (2007), pp. 460-84.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁸⁸ L.T. Hobhouse, 'The Roots of Modern Sociology', in *Sociology and Philosophy: A Centenary Collection of Essays and Articles*, with an Introduction by Morris Ginsberg (London: Bell, 1966), p. 19.

reasons of such division.⁸⁹ These exercises aimed to create a group of trained geographical teachers, recognized by an official certificate established by the School in 1905. Indeed, students had to follow at least 100 hours of formal study to get it, including special classes conducted by Sargent and Mackinder. The first teaching certificate went to James Fairgrieve, destined to become reader of geography at the University of London, while other successful applicants were Alice Thistle Robinson, Hilda Ormsby, Ellen Smith, and Catherine Matthews.⁹⁰ This amazing group of female scholars, involved later in regular publications on regional geography, represents a curious counterpoint to the usual image of Mackinder as a male-chauvinist personality, deeply committed to the anti-suffrage campaign of the Edwardian era.⁹¹ He showed in fact a constant respect for his female pupils, and during the Great War he even cooperated successfully with Ellen Rickard of the Geographical Association for the further promotion of geography as a unitary discipline in national education.⁹²

In 1908, Mackinder left the LSE to pursue a political career under the flag of tariff reform, gaining a parliamentary seat for the Camlachie constituency two years later. Of course, the new position was extremely demanding, but his unrelenting passion for geography did not suffer from the exhausting sessions of the House of Commons during the long constitutional crisis of the last years before World War I. On the contrary, he still published a considerable amount of books, articles, and public letters on the subject. In 1908, for example, he wrote a long monograph on the Rhine valley, seen as a pivotal point of European history, but his accurate prose did not impress all the reviewers of the specialized press, who lamented the absence of the more pleasant 'literary aspects of the subject' in such a detailed discussion of the Western European landscape.⁹³ This was a small setback for the imaginative Oxford geographer, and he tried to recover his original grasp of the discipline with a series of lectures on India for the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, enriched by the professional photographs of Hugh Fisher. The work had been

⁸⁹ Michael Wise and Robert Estall, *A Century of Geography at LSE (1895 to 1995)* (London: LSE, 2000), p. 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8. On the life and ideas of Hilda Ormsby, who succeeded Mackinder as reader of geography at the LSE in 1932, see Avril Maddrell, 'Revisiting the Region: Ordinary and Exceptional Regions in the Work of Hilda Ormsby, 1917-1940', *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006), pp. 1739-52.

⁹¹ For this peculiar view of Mackinder's character, see Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 91-105.

⁹² Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, 'The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892-1914; the Controversy and the Outcome', *The Geographical Journal*, 162 (1996), p. 304.

⁹³ 'The Rhine: Its Valley and History (Chatto & Windus)', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 24 (1908), p. 214.

commissioned in 1907, but it could be completed only three years later, due to Fisher's long preparatory tour in the Raj.⁹⁴ With thousands of photos, sketches and paintings at his disposal, Mackinder built an elaborate travel narrative, ready to capture the reader with its highly colourful tones:

We land. Dark gesticulating figures surround us, scantily clad in white cotton. The morning sun casts long shadows, but there is a throng of people, for the work in India is done in the cool of the morning. The express train to Madras is waiting, but we have a short time for that first stroll, which leaves so deep an impression on the traveller setting foot in a new land. Tuticorin is a remote provincial city, a Dover or a Calais, on the passage from Ceylon. Here is a picture of its little bazaar with dark people in flowing white robes...Next we have a nearer view of the spinning mill with a half-naked workman in the foreground. Under the shades of these leafy trees is a flock of ducks for sale. At every turn we see something characteristic, and must ask questions.⁹⁵

Thus the constant intersection of text and images transmitted to the literary audience all the main features of the Indian landscape, giving crucial information on the local environment in an entertaining way. In describing the various photos, in fact, Mackinder appealed always to the sheer imagination of the reader, transfiguring the 'reality' of Fisher's pictures with a fluent, evocative prose. The depiction of the Nilgiri Hills in Southern India, for example, is a small masterpiece of refined exoticism, full of charm, curiosity, and mystery:

There are magnificent landscapes at the edge of the Nilgiris, where the mountains descend abruptly to the plains...The vegetation of the heights is naturally different from that of the lowlands, and the cultivation of the Nilgiris is chiefly tea and cinchona, from the latter of which crops quinine is prepared. Amid the great forests of the slopes large game is numerous, such as sambur, or Indian elk, and tiger. Here also tribes of savage peoples have survived through all the centuries of history practically untouched by the civilization of the plains. One of these tribes, the smallest but the most interesting, are the Todas, who number less than a thousand, but have their own strange, unwritten language.⁹⁶

The language is not very far from that of a modern touristic website specialized in 'adventurous' tours of the subcontinent: 'Nilgiris derives its charm from its natural setting. The steep hills and fantastically narrow valleys with numerous rivers and rivulets running in all directions with a few fine waterfalls here and there provide beautiful scenery...The

⁹⁴ James R. Ryan, 'Visualizing Imperial Geography: Halford Mackinder and the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, 1902-11', *Ecumene*, 1 (1994), pp. 158-9. Fisher visited also Canada, Australia, Somaliland, and Singapore, in preparation for other illustrated lectures on the British Empire.

⁹⁵ Halford Mackinder, *India: Eight Lectures Prepared for the Visual Instruction Committee of the Colonial Office* (London: George Philip & Son, 1910), p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

major tea growing areas in the South are the Nilgiris and these tea gardens are beautiful to watch.⁹⁷ Indeed, Mackinder's text was also designed to sell a certain 'product', the British Empire, to a young and naive public, fostering the colonial cause of the Visual Committee. This was plainly recognized by the Earl of Meath, chairman of the London organization, who praised the fine style of the India lectures, 'presenting in their relative importance and proportion all the chief facts essential to the popular understanding of His Majesty's Indian Dominions.'⁹⁸ And among these 'chief facts' the strategic position of the Raj was of primary importance, due to the near threat of the expanding Russian Empire. In this sense, following the suggestions of his previous Pivot Paper, Mackinder constantly emphasized in his writing the defence needs of the Indian borders, especially those of the long northwest frontier with Persia and Afghanistan: 'The valley of the Kabul river on the one hand, and the oasis of Seistan on the other, might in the hands of an enemy become bases wherein to prepare the invasion of India. Therefore...we have declared it to be the policy of Britain to exclude from Afghanistan and from Seistan all foreign powers.'⁹⁹ A policy which was becoming more and more difficult to sustain, but Britain could not withdraw now from the subcontinent 'without throwing India into disorder, and causing untold suffering among three hundred million of our fellow human beings.'¹⁰⁰ Therefore British citizens required 'knowledge of India' to deal with such a terrible task, and geography provided all the necessary tools for this vital imperial need. Mackinder stated again this firm conviction at the Technical College of Glasgow in November 1910, warning local students that they would have 'a very great influence' over the 'next generation' of British citizens, making 'constructive work' as teachers in the 'management' of the country and its colonial possessions. Indeed, their public role was 'fully equivalent to that of the statesman', properly instructing the democratic institutions of Britain on the peculiar conditions of their tropical dependencies.¹⁰¹ This view was also shared by other leading imperialists like Milner, who claimed for geography 'an honourable and important place among the sciences', due to the practical value of 'the geographical habit of mind' for the sphere of national government and colonial administration.¹⁰²

Despite all these propaganda efforts, however, the position of the discipline in national universities remained quite marginal, suffering even further setbacks in the crucial domain

⁹⁷ <<http://www.hill-stations-india.com/nilgiri-hills/>> [accessed: 8 July 2011]

⁹⁸ Mackinder, *India*, p. vii.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

¹⁰¹ 'Geography of India: Lecture by Mr. Mackinder', *The Glasgow Herald*, 28 November 1910, p. 5.

¹⁰² Viscount Milner, 'Geography and Statecraft', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 23 (1907), p. 618.

of public schools: in 1913, with the Circular No. 826, the Secondary Branch of the Board of Education reaffirmed in fact the old subordination of geography to history, stopping the separate teaching of the former at the age of 15. It was a heavy blow to Mackinder's idea of an organic subject, closely integrated with other fields of knowledge, and he still lamented the 'evil influence' of the Circular in the early 1920s, claiming that 'discrimination' against geography in secondary schools was becoming 'widespread and dangerous' even in institutions supported by 'really distinguished teachers of the subject.'¹⁰³ These assertions were greatly exaggerated, considering the popular expansion of geographical knowledge after the Great War, and they were not taken seriously even at the LSE, where new lecturers like Llewellyn Rodwell Jones emphasized instead the general achievements of the previous decades, asking for a more constructive dialogue with educational authorities: 'Exaggeration is no longer called for, if even it ever were. Modern geography, as a school and university study, has arrived. There is no need to push at an open door.'¹⁰⁴

Thus these bitter remarks probably reflected the personal dismay of the late Edwardian scholar at the partial failure of his ambitious 'imperial geography', supplanted by more Liberal courses on international cooperation and the League of Nations.¹⁰⁵ After all, young geographers like Herbert J. Fleure proposed a different view of global spaces, seeking a more equal relationship with colonized peoples: 'It will be well not to over-emphasize the old idea that we should think of the negro as producing cocoa and sisal for us, or of the Indian as producing tea or jute for our benefit. That way lies the danger of encouragement of egocentric ideas, always dangerously strong.'¹⁰⁶ The sad memory of the Great War certainly encouraged this rejection of traditional assumptions, opening British geography to the influx of new political and philosophical attitudes. Therefore an old imperial zealot like Mackinder found himself at odds with such new reality, lamenting sometimes the sudden end of his juvenile ideals. However, he tried to adapt his imaginative thought to the changed circumstances, presenting fascinating visions of the future to Martha Woolley and other students of the LSE:

I remember how...Mackinder anticipated the energy shortage, which, as he saw it, would ultimately be solved by using the Sahara Desert as a trap for the rays of the Sun, and broadcasting heat to the world. I remember how he envisioned the appearance of the Sputnik...and a certain day when the aeroplane would be moored to its station in space, as the horse is hitched to

¹⁰³ Mackinder, 'Geography as a Pivotal Subject', pp. 380-1.

¹⁰⁴ Ll. Rodwell Jones, 'Geography and the University', *Economica*, 15 (1925), p. 241.

¹⁰⁵ Ploszajska, *Geographical Education*, p. 279.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

the post, seldom standing in need of going below for refuelling or repair. I remember how Mackinder paused, a far-away look on his face, a look way and beyond the Kuznetak and Krasnoyarsk coal basins, each of which is now capable of supplying the requirements of the whole world for over 300 years. But the look went even farther...to the time when other resources of the Heartland of Asia, nearing exhaustion (always barring that unforeseen act on the part of Nature, Man or the Almighty) the world would be governed from the greater Heartland of Africa - Mackinder never overlooked the greater Heartland of Africa.¹⁰⁷

Such was the geographical power constantly advocated by the old teacher in almost forty years of academic career. And it was a power now perfectly assimilated by young British geographers like Kenneth Mason, a former surveyor of the Himalayan region, who was selected by Oxford as its new Professor of Geography in 1932: delivering his inaugural address in front of the same Mackinder, in fact, he praised all the members of the RGS for their 'successful efforts' in restoring the discipline in ancient universities after 'a certain eclipse', redefining its major role as 'the study of the earth as the home of man.'¹⁰⁸ Such formal recognition of his didactic ideas certainly satisfied the former Director of the LSE, ready to set in motion again the intellectual march of the subject after the new technical and scientific revolution of the post-war era, which was 'enveloping the lands of the world' in a closed network of regional geographical data, interconnected from the North Pole to the deserts of Egypt:

Gravity surveys, amphibious in their scope, are beginning to impose a pattern of forces upon the map depicting forms, and the new accessibility of all the surface of the globe gives promise of such simultaneous and spherically complete data as will enable us to judge of the ever shifting balance of currents in the fluid atmosphere and hydrosphere. Subject to the play of forces from without and from within the globe, we should then be able to forecast the kaleidoscopic changes of seasonal pattern on the world's surface, upon which in turn depend the local yielding of the crops and the relative economic fates of the nations. At long last, and the sum of the required data is colossal, we shall transform the map of the world from a static to a dynamic pattern, in which the various categories of cause will be wielded into a synthesis of effects, regional and global.¹⁰⁹

Thus, reviewing the revolutionary change in the 'power of geographical investigation' across his entire career, Mackinder remarked on the centrality of geography as a linking 'bridge' between the physical sciences and the humanities, replacing classical education in the associated study of 'facts' and 'values'. This was essential for 'the mind of the ordinary

¹⁰⁷ BLPES, WOOLEY, Box 1, Woolley, 'Philosophy', pp. 14-5.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Home of Man', *The Times*, 18 November 1932, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Halford Mackinder, 'Progress of Geography in the Field and in the Study during the Reign of His Majesty King George the Fifth', *The Geographical Journal*, (1935), p. 5.

man', connecting him to the surrounding universe and preparing his future choices in the new democratic system of the mid-twentieth century: 'To be a governing influence the world pattern must have slowly imbued the whole subconscious mind. Is not the imprinting of that pattern well worthy of a considerable part in our national scheme of education? Like the multiplication table the map of the world is with us for life. Enriched by scientific and historical contributions the map becomes the mental image of a dynamic system.'¹¹⁰ Far from undervaluing experimental research, this synthetic approach went beyond the narrowness of academic specialization, generating 'a concrete philosophy, with both scientific and humanistic roots, though with its own technique both of research and expression.' And, in a European society 'divided horizontally into classes and vertically into nations', it also offered a complete and interdependent view of the world, replacing the old classics as the major way to public eminence 'in Church and State.'¹¹¹

Therefore, in spite of delusions and setbacks, Mackinder continued to believe in his dream of a 'new humanism' for the industrial age, restating his late Victorian creed with brilliant determination till the end of his professional life. However, the final results of such remarkable intellectual effort are extremely mixed: indeed, while Mackinder certainly won his personal battle in favour of geography within British higher education, transforming this misconceived discipline into a respected field of study, it is also true that he failed to develop the subject into a modern social science, keeping it instead in an ambiguous position between history, literature, and philosophy. In this sense, a direct comparison with the contemporary work of Alfred Marshall, the father of twentieth century British economics, is quite unfavourable to Mackinder, because Marshall was able to design his own field of study with great theoretical precision, establishing serious and complex academic standards for the admission to the economic profession.¹¹² On the contrary, Mackinder was unable to define properly his geographical studies, presenting them mainly as an undefined area of enquiry open to all kinds of practical applications, from the commercial to the political and administrative one. This theoretical vagueness had clearly its own advantages, allowing the quick spread of geographical positions across British universities, but it also represented a serious limit to the possibilities of the subject, nurturing even the persistent scepticism of the educational establishment. Indeed, it was

¹¹⁰ Mackinder, 'Progress of Geography', pp. 7-9.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-2.

¹¹² On Marshall and his lasting influence on British economic thought, see John Maloney, 'Marshall, Cunningham, and the Emerging Economic Profession', *The Economic History Review*, 29 (1976), pp. 440-51, and Peter Groenewegen, *A Soaring Eagle: Alfred Marshall, 1842-1924* (Aldershot: Elgar, 1995).

only after the so-called 'Great Debate' of the mid-1970s that geography gained at last a firm position in the national school curriculum, although not devoid of new disciplinary problems.¹¹³ Thus the traditional picture of Mackinder as the successful 'founder' of the field, propagated by Edmund Gilbert and other popular historians of British geography, should not be accepted unquestioningly, recognizing instead the numerous inconsistencies of his theoretical proposals.

Nevertheless, Mackinder's geographical career could not be dismissed either as a failure, because his relentless educational campaigns – conducted with other brilliant scholars like Sargent and Herbertson – certainly contributed to the establishment of an advanced geographical school in Britain, concerned more about human relationships with the physical environment rather than outdated ideas of romantic exploration. Moreover, emphasizing the possible ties between geographical studies and practical political applications, he was also able to capture the interest of a large indifferent public, providing new financial and intellectual energies for the future progress of the discipline in the twentieth century. And this is definitely a remarkable achievement even for our present times, where theoretical complexity and technological specialization represent often a powerful obstacle to the active interaction between ordinary citizens and academic professionals, condemning scholarly research to irrelevance or isolation in its broad socio-historical context. From this point of view, Mackinder was instead able to create a huge 'impact' for his own studies in late Victorian society, laying down a solid effective basis for further political and cultural initiatives in the first decades of the twentieth century. He had found his safe place in the turbulent 'marketplace of ideas' of the time.

¹¹³E.M. Rawling, *Changing the Subject: The Impact of National Policy on School Geography, 1980-2000* (Sheffield: The Geographical Association, 2001); Christine Winters, 'Just Maps: The Geography Curriculum in English Schools', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33 (2007), pp. 349-66.

Chapter Two

‘Money-Power and Man-Power’: The Political Philosophy of a Tariff Reformer

There are generally few doubts about Mackinder’s personal and intellectual commitment to the British Empire. All his letters, articles, and books present clear and constant references to the subject, sometimes expressed with passionate conviction. In October 1903, for example, he openly advised his previous electors at Leamington and Warwick to support Alfred Lyttelton, his old Conservative opponent and new Secretary of State for the Colonies, in the incoming by-election for the local parliamentary seat. The reasons for this public endorsement were eminently related to the future of the British imperial system:

This is not an ordinary election...The result of Friday’s poll will...be known in the remotest townlets of the Colonies...They will take the decision as an omen of England’s feeling on the great Imperial issue...Therefore, with the most cordial respect for the views of Liberals, I felt it my duty to appeal to any at Warwick and Leamington who might think as I do on the fiscal issue to sink for the moment our purely English differences and to vote on this occasion for Mr. Lyttelton.¹

Remembering his unfortunate bid as a Liberal candidate in the same constituency three years earlier, Mackinder exposed then the rationale behind his new political position, claiming that mere social and educational reforms would not be able to save Britain from the fierce competition of her expanding continental rivals: ‘Nothing will in the long run avail to hold the Empire together without some change in our fiscal relations with other countries. There are some Liberals...who take the same view; and I felt it my duty to them not to remain silent.’² Indeed, such drastic measures seemed more promising with Joseph Chamberlain’s tariff reform campaign than the economic orthodoxy of the Liberal Party. And Lyttelton’s affiliation with the old establishment of the Conservative Party, led by Arthur Balfour, was not an obstacle to his election under a vague programme of imperial preference, because the acceptance of Balfour’s cautious policy did not prevent ‘the power

¹ H.J. Mackinder, ‘The Warwick Election’, *The Times*, 22 October 1903, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*

of taking or refusing' Chamberlain's fiscal proposals 'at some future date', giving a strong imperial message to the overseas colonies.

The letter to the *Times* was a last attempt to influence the Leamington election after strong demonstrations of hostility toward Mackinder's involvement in the local Conservative campaign: when another of his letters was read during a meeting of Lyttelton's supporters, for example, it provoked violent reactions in the audience, including 'loud laughter and hisses' at the address of the speaker.³ Moreover, members of the Lyttelton's entourage advised the Oxford geographer to stay away even from official electoral events, because 'a threat of interruption on the part of a small section of Liberals was likely to preclude the possibility of his making any reasoned statement with regard to his position.' Deluded by these reactions, Mackinder decided then to explain to the press the reasons for his political choice, claiming that although being 'the son and grandson of Liberals' he saw nothing 'inconsistent' in 'a man of sound Liberal views expressing approval of Mr. Chamberlain's policy.'⁴In the end, it is doubtful that this pronouncement found any sympathetic hearing among local electors, both Liberals and Conservatives, but it did not prevent Lyttelton from winning the Leamington seat with a narrow majority, reinforcing Mackinder's personal commitment to the protectionist campaign of the Edwardian era.

But what were the real causes of this political conversion, so controversial and outrageous in the eyes of many British voters of the time? According to Bernard Semmel and Brian Blouet, Mackinder's decision was not an opportunistic act, fuelled by the delusion of the electoral defeat of 1900, but instead a meditated choice on the future of the British Empire, seen at a critical point of its historical existence.⁵ Indeed, through his geographical studies, Mackinder had arrived at the conclusion that the new century would have been dominated by great continental empires, favoured by the emergence of long railway networks across the globe. Accompanied by the partial decline of traditional sea power, main force of the now closed 'Columbian epoch', this huge historical change promised the partition of the world into different economic provinces, competing one against another for the exploitation of limited natural resources. And, far from being the leading actor of the process, 'Little England' risked ending up among the losers of this vast 'historical selection', falling behind new energetic powers like Germany and Russia:

³ 'Election Intelligence: Warwick and Leamington', *The Times*, 20 October 1903, p. 8.

⁴ 'Election Intelligence: Warwick and Leamington', *The Times*, 22 October 1903, p. 4.

⁵ Bernard Semmel, 'Sir Halford Mackinder: Theorist of Imperialism', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 24 (1958), pp. 554-61; Brian Blouet, 'The Imperial Vision of Halford Mackinder', *The Geographical Journal*, 170 (2004), pp. 322-9.

The spaces within the Russian Empire and Mongolia are so vast, and their potentialities in population, wheat, cotton, fuel, and metals so incalculably great, that it is inevitable that a vast economic world, more or less apart, will there develop inaccessible to oceanic commerce...Russia replaces the Mongol Empire...In the world at large she occupies the central strategical position held by Germany in Europe...The full development of her modern railway mobility is merely a matter of time.⁶

Inspired by the ideas of J.A. Froude and J.R. Seeley, Mackinder's vision was thus extremely pessimistic, placing war and imperialism at the centre of his geopolitical thought.⁷ At the core of this negative appreciation of reality was also the serious military crisis opened by the South African War, where the British army had suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of unprofessional Boer farmers, generating a persistent panic over the future of Britain's position in the world.⁸ As poignantly remarked by Arnold White in 1901, the conflict had not merely revealed the poor quality of the national government, full of mediocre bureaucrats and inept administrators, but it had also uncovered 'the cankers of a long peace', expressed in the physical and moral degeneracy of the whole population, made up now by feeble 'white-faced workmen' unable to guarantee a safe demographic future for the country.⁹ To redress this dangerous situation, which threatened the very existence of the British Empire, White suggested a radical program of eugenics, with the elimination of all the physically and mentally 'inefficient', but few critics of the old political regime were ready to adopt such extreme measures. Others like Charles Dilke and George Parkin supported instead bold projects of imperial federation, uniting Britain and her settler colonies into a common political and military structure. It was part of the same 'governing tendency' of the time, with the triumph of vast national entities over small territorial realities:

American unity, German unity, Italian unity, Austro-Hungarian unity – the expansion of Russia without loss of unity – these are the accomplished facts of our time which we have to face. More than this... Race adds its influence to the tendency. Pan-Sclavism[sic] – Pan-Latinism – Pan-Teutonism are more than names. They are forces which play their part in moulding the destinies of nations and governments. The aspect of the whole world irresistibly suggests the thought that we are passing from a nation epoch to a federation epoch.

⁶ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', pp. 434-6.

⁷ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 134-6.

⁸ For a short summary of the political and cultural crisis opened by the South African War, see Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

⁹ Arnold White, *Efficiency and Empire* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 96.

That British people should fall in with this tendency is in the strict line of historical continuity.¹⁰

With its strong geographical flavour, this thesis was perfectly fit for Mackinder's oratorical skills, and he constantly used it during his 1900 electoral campaign, reminding his voters that no other course was open to Britain than to bind herself with her colonies into 'a league of democracies, defended by a united Navy and an efficient Army.'¹¹ This stance was not too far from that expressed by the Imperial Federation League in the late 1880s, echoing often the military considerations advanced by naval experts like J.C.R. Colomb at the time: 'Military stations and naval bases have been established by other Powers on oceans and seas...now of huge Imperial importance to us...They make up a union of common war risks against which general insurance must be paid and joint precautions taken. They can only be met with success by co-operation and joint action between the several parts of the Empire upon a settled system and a developed plan.'¹² The constant failure of these appeals for imperial unity, however, compelled Mackinder to rethink the whole problem in broader intellectual terms, and deepen his knowledge of international affairs. Indeed, it was necessary to convince the British public of the beneficial effect of a united empire, but how to achieve that goal in a country still imbued by the peaceful internationalism of Richard Cobden and William Gladstone, developed around the seductive principles of free trade and minimal government?

Mackinder tried to solve such a puzzle for more than thirty years, often changing the terms of his party allegiance and theoretical reflection. Indeed, he once described his political career as 'a long succession of adventures and resignations', similar to the march of a 'rolling stone', but leading towards the same final objective: the military and economic security of the British Empire, perceived as the true guarantor of democratic freedom in the world.¹³ Few biographers have acknowledged the 'erratic' character of this quest, presenting often Mackinder as a staunch imperialist doctrinaire, without any sort of intellectual flexibility. Gerry Kearns, for example, has generally downplayed the idealistic tracts of his personality, viewing him merely as a crude advocate of force obsessed by the

¹⁰ George Parkin, *Imperial Federation: The Problem of National Unity* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1892), pp. 26-7.

¹¹ Mackinder, 'The Warwick Election', p. 8. Mackinder quoted his own electoral speech of 1900 to show the sincerity of his political reflection to the electors of the Warwick constituency.

¹² J.C.R. Colomb, *Imperial Federation: Naval and Military* (London: Harrison, 1886), p. 6. For a short history of the Imperial Federation League, see J.E. Tyler, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity, 1868-1895* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1938), pp. 176-208.

¹³ Geoffrey Sloan, 'Sir Halford J. Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22 (1999), p. 15.

physical 'mass' of human communities, while Brian Blouet has been unable to 'categorize' his imperialist beliefs, underlining the many contradictions of his political philosophy.¹⁴ At the same time both authors have paid scant attention to the importance of Canada in his political reflection over the Empire, presenting it instead in broader general terms. Therefore this chapter will try to explore Mackinder's imperialist thought before the outbreak of World War I, retracing its origins in the experience of dining clubs like the Coefficients and in the tariff reform debate of the Edwardian era. This story has already been told by other scholars, but the focus will be more on the gradual evolution of his political creed from cosmopolitanism to nationalism, with special emphasis on newspaper articles and fiscal pamphlets like *Money-Power and Man-Power*, where Mackinder tried to formulate an alternative policy to the traditional free trade of British Liberalism. Moreover there will also be a broader analysis of his geopolitical view of Canada as the vital centre of the British imperial structure, deserving protection from the economic expansionism of the United States. Contrary to the ideas of the Round Table, however, Mackinder showed a different approach to the Canadian problem, recognizing the limits of federationist schemes and asking instead for a proper fiscal agreement between Britain and its North American Dominion. In this sense, he was more pragmatic than other imperial visionaries of the time, accepting the development of autonomous national interests in the self-governing colonies and pressing for their positive conciliation with those of the mother country.

As mentioned before, Mackinder's political career began during the 'khaki election' of 1900, when the young Oxford geographer presented himself as a Liberal candidate for the Warwick and Leamington constituency. Mixing social and patriotic themes, his electoral campaign seemed on the verge of ousting Alfred Lyttelton from the seat, compelling Joseph Chamberlain to a direct intervention in favour of the Conservative candidate. Even the local press recognized the impressive qualities of the new Liberal politician, following his public contest with genuine interest. The *Birmingham Daily Post*, for example, described Mackinder as a 'Radical candidate', fully committed to the establishment of old-age pensions in favour of the working class, while the *Leeds Mercury* was favourably impressed by his 'excellent fight' against the Tories, praising him as 'a Liberal Imperialist, a strong advocate of army reform, a man of Protestant sympathies, and an excellent speaker.'¹⁵ In the end, however, Chamberlain's intervention proved decisive, and Lyttelton won the seat

¹⁴ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 143-4; Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 150-1.

¹⁵ 'The General Election: Warwick and Leamington', *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 September 1900, p. 3; 'Election Foot-Notes', *The Leeds Mercury*, 2 October 1900, p. 3.

with more than 800 votes over his opponent.¹⁶ Far from being demoralized by the defeat, Mackinder continued to focus his energies on political issues, but he tried instead to present his ideas more on the intellectual scene, participating in the activities of the Coefficients Dining Club founded by Sidney Webb in late 1902.

According to Leo Amery, the group was originally thought of as 'a Brain Trust or General Staff' to promote progressive causes across the political spectrum, and it included personalities like Richard Burdon Haldane, Leopold Maxse, Sir Edward Grey, Bertrand Russell, and Herbert George Wells among its leading members.¹⁷ The first meeting was held in December 1902, and it dealt with the possibilities of a closer political union between Britain and its white Dominions. The main argument was presented by William Pember Reeves, then Agent General of New Zealand in London, who advocated the institution of 'a permanent advisory committee and a periodical conference between the Imperial ministers and the ministers of the self-governing Colonies' as a good solution to the traditional difficulties of inter-imperial relationships. Reeves' suggestion seemed to meet the general favour of the club, but the following discussion produced 'no definite result' due to the emergence of 'greater differences of opinion' on other aspects of the question.¹⁸ These differences exploded later during the second meeting of January 1903, when the economist William Hewins introduced the delicate theme of preferential trade within the Empire, warning against the dangerous weakness of Britain's economy towards its protectionist rivals: indeed, the mild suggestion of a closed 'self-sufficient' Empire, modelled on the recent example of the United States, provoked the strong resistance of several members of the club, who opposed 'any change' to the existing imperial system based on free trade.¹⁹ The final minute of the meeting does not identify the different sides of the controversy, but it is easy to retrace them in Wells' memoirs, which presents an ironic portrait of the famous 'Brain Trust' imagined by Sidney Webb: according to Wells, in fact, the Coefficients were basically monopolized by a group of 'Young Imperialists', composed of Amery, Maxse, Hewins, and Mackinder, who supported harsh political and military measures to retrieve Britain from the humiliating experience of the South African War. This patriotic zeal, 'profoundly alarmed by the naval and military aggressiveness of Germany', provoked the

¹⁶ *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, ed. by F.W.S. Craig (Dartmouth: Parliamentary Research Services, 1989), p. 203.

¹⁷ Amery, *My Political Life*, I, pp. 223-4.

¹⁸ BLPES, ASSOC 17, Coefficients Minutes [microfilm], Paper I, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ BLPES, ASSOC 17, Coefficients Minutes [microfilm], Paper II, pp. 1-2. On the political and economic impact of American protectionism over the British Empire, see Marc-William Palen, 'Protection, Federation and Union: The Global Impact of the McKinley Tariff upon the British Empire, 1890-94', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38 (2010), pp. 395-418.

reaction of old Liberals like Reeves, Russell, and the same Wells in defence of the British democratic tradition, maybe reformed under a new Republican government.²⁰

Wells' account has generally been used by modern scholars to depict Mackinder as a nationalist political thinker, deeply committed to the new imperialist spirit of the Edwardian era. The picture is certainly true, and it is confirmed by other first-hand evidence of the period, including the private diary of Beatrice Webb, close collaborator of the geographer during his Directorship of the LSE: recollecting a dinner with Mackinder and Beatrice Chamberlain, for example, she presented him as 'a coarse-grained individual' with 'a certain capacity for oratory, and strong picturesque statement', partially hampered by the frequent rudeness of his public behaviour.²¹ It would be wrong, however, to believe that Mackinder's conversion to tariff reform was simply pre-ordained by some peculiar aspect of his personality or by the sentimental appeal of the imperial experience. In 1900, he had given an elaborate lecture on international commerce at the London Institute of Bankers, where the orthodox praise for the free trade system of the British Empire was expressed with genuine conviction:

It appears...quite possible that the financial importance of the City of London may continue to increase, while the industry, at any rate, of Britain, becomes relatively less. This gives the real key to the struggle between our free trade policy and the protection of other countries – we are essentially the people with capital, and those who have capital always share the proceeds of the activity of brains and muscles of other countries. It is eternally true 'that to him that hath shall be given'. It is for the maintenance of our position in the world, because we are the great lenders, that we have been driven to increase our empire.²²

These optimistic assumptions towards the future of Britain remained alive even after the shock of the South African conflict, thanks to the 'national efficiency' cry aroused by Lord Rosebery in his vibrant speeches to the nation. Partially rejecting the cosmopolitan tradition of Gladstone, Rosebery advocated a daring fusion of Liberal and Imperialist ideals to save the country from international decay and racial degeneracy, preparing its human

²⁰ H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), pp. 764-5.

²¹ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, II: All the Good Things of Life, 1892-1905*, ed. by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie (London: Virago, 1983), p. 252.

²² Halford Mackinder, 'The Great Trade Routes', *Journal of the Institute of Bankers*, 21 (1900), pp. 154-5.

resources for the struggles of the new century.²³ His main suggestion was to ‘clean the slate’, moving faster than Britain’s enemies in the pursuit of ‘national efficiency’:

There are men who sit still with the fly-blown phylacteries of obsolete policies bound round their foreheads, who do not remember that, while they have been mumbling their incantations to themselves, the world has been marching and revolving, and that if they have any hope of leading or guiding it they must march and move with it too...If we have not learned from this war that we have greatly lagged behind in Efficiency, we have learned nothing, and our treasure and our lives are thrown away unless we learn the lessons which the war has given us.²⁴

Such argument, clearly inspired by the biological doctrines of Social Darwinism, provoked the fierce reaction of young Radicals like J.A. Hobson, who considered organic visions of society as a brutal negation of old democratic ideals, but attracted instead the support of progressive reformers like Webb and Haldane, critical of the individualist thought of the Victorian era. According to Webb, in fact, it was necessary to create ‘a new England’ based on communal thinking, which promoted the maximum development of the whole population, putting aside narrow economic interests for the benefit of the ‘imperial race’.²⁵ This mixture of socialist and nationalist values proved extremely attractive to new academic professionals like Mackinder, who was seriously struggling at the time to establish geography as a respectable field of study in British universities, and his personal esteem for Webb and Rosebery was another crucial factor in his political involvement at Warwick in 1900. During his electoral campaign he justified his Liberal affiliation on strong imperial grounds, believing that ‘no other party’ was ‘sufficiently free’ to create a solid and united ‘federal Empire’ capable of dealing effectively with new foreign rivals around the world.²⁶ His personal faith in a renewed Liberalism, completely devoted to the needs of imperial defence, persisted for three more years, requiring a certain effort from other members of the Coefficients to move him away from the tormented organization led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, full of ‘pro-Boers’ and radical isolationists. Leo Amery, for example, claimed of having persuaded him only ‘after several talks’, suggesting a complex work of dialectic negotiation.²⁷ And, in a letter to Joseph Chamberlain of June 1903, Charles Boyd acknowledged the fact that the brilliant geographer had even been approached by Herbert Gladstone to organize the anti-preferential tariff campaign of the Liberals, due to

²³ On Rosebery’s political ideology, see Searle, *National Efficiency*, pp. 54-106.

²⁴ Samuel Henry Jeyes, *The Earl of Rosebery* (London: J.M. Dent, 1906), pp. 243-5.

²⁵ Sidney Webb, ‘Lord Rosebery’s Escape from Houndsditch’, *Nineteenth Century*, 50 (1901), pp. 366-86.

²⁶ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, p. 51.

²⁷ Amery, *My Political Life*, I, p. 224.

his 'very Liberal' credentials. Of course, the offer was later declined, and Boyd suggested to Chamberlain to 'bear Mackinder's name in mind', as a compensation for this personal and political 'sacrifice'.²⁸

In the end, it was probably the failure of Lord Rosebery's reformist programme, marginalized by the mainstream section of the Liberal Party, which pushed Mackinder towards the Conservative ranks. As recognized even by Wells, 'Liberalism was no longer a larger enterprise' having become just 'a generous indolence' devoid of any real idealistic energy.²⁹ And Sir Edward Grey also lamented the serious decline of Gladstone's old party on the British political scene, clinging only to the 'faint hope' that 'the genius of Rosebery' might succeed in 'redeeming' an irremediably outdated and divided political organisation.³⁰ Thus the real future of the British Empire seemed to belong to the protectionist agenda of Joseph Chamberlain, and Mackinder chose to side with him in the coming struggle against selfish 'Little England'.

This new political position was originally expressed in a public appeal on *The Times*, drafted by Amery in late July 1903.³¹ Signed by Mackinder, Charles Tennant, T.A. Brassey, and Benjamin Kidd, the appeal supported the idea of 'mutual tariff preferences' as 'the only practicable approach to the federation of the States constituting the British Empire.' It rebuked the charge of 'dear food' posed by the Liberals and envisaged instead a rapid increase in agricultural production 'under the stimulus of an intelligently directed fiscal policy', putting British food supplies for the future upon 'a cheaper and surer basis.' Then the piece closed with a strong warning to the readers: 'It is our opinion...that to arm ourselves with powers of self-protection in our negotiations with foreign Powers is no longer a matter of possible expediency, but rather one of urgent national necessity.'³² The international context had changed, and British public opinion should have accepted the discussion of the topic along different lines from those of the mid-Victorian period. Published on the same day of the first reunion of the Tariff Reform League, led in Birmingham by Joseph Chamberlain, the appeal aimed to detach other disillusioned Liberals from free trade orthodoxy and to bolster the personal careers of its signatories, all claiming

²⁸ Julian Amery, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, V: Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign, 1901-1903* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 306. In the letter, Boyd also described Mackinder as 'a very able man, and a writer of distinction on Imperial Questions.'

²⁹ Wells, *Experiment*, p. 764.

³⁰ H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Elite* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 81.

³¹ 'Liberals and Fiscal Policy', *The Times*, 21 July 1903, p. 5.

³² *Ibid.*

a special role in the future organization of the protectionist crusade. As Amery had previously confessed to Hewins, in fact, it was important that the tariff reform movement 'should be mainly run by the 'progressives'', showing the real constructive nature of Chamberlain's proposal to the British public.³³ In the case of Mackinder, it was then tried to give him a prominent position in the directive committee of the League, but this attempt was frustrated by the direct action of C.A. Pearson, influential proprietor of the *Daily Express*, who wanted to have more 'amenable' people under his supervision.³⁴ Amery was outraged by such behaviour, but he was unable to reverse Pearson's decision and Mackinder agreed to support the tariff reform campaign in an informal manner, presenting the case as Director of the LSE.

In his memoirs, Amery considered this choice as a clear retreat from the political scene, and he blamed himself for Mackinder's disadvantage, who could have found a more rewarding career in the Liberal Party, especially after the pivotal election of 1906.³⁵ However, the position gained at the LSE allowed Mackinder to deepen his grasp of economic and international matters, later developed in *Money-Power and Man-Power*, a short pamphlet written for the electoral campaign of December 1905. When he returned on the public scene in 1908, sponsored by the authoritative figure of Lord Milner, he had then a sophisticated worldview to present to his possible electors, matured through the constant interaction in the academic environment with different intellectual personalities. Moreover, he also continued to attend the meetings of the Coefficients, sharing that activity with those of another dining club, the Compatriots, created by Amery to spread the tariff reform 'credo' across the Empire.

The new group was composed by F.S. Oliver, John Buchan, J.L. Garvin, and Gerard Craig-Sellar, and it proposed a strong vision of imperial unity developed around Britain and her self-governing colonies. This was not surprising, considering the presence of some former members of the Milner 'Kindergarten' in South Africa, but such stress over inter-imperial relationships was always connected to specific economic issues, relating to the partial decline of British manufacturing power at the turn of the twentieth century. In this sense, J.L. Garvin provided a set of defined principles for the new protectionist movement in a very long lecture on 'Constructive Economics', which was collected in the first (and only)

³³ University of Sheffield Library, Hewins Papers, MS 74/46/43, Amery to Hewins, 15 July 1903.

³⁴ Amery, *My Political Life*, I, p. 239.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

volume edited by the Compatriots in 1905.³⁶ Acknowledging the theoretical superiority of the free trade front, united under the simple creed of *laissez-faire*, the future editor of the *Observer* called for the institution of an opposite development doctrine based on the firm valorisation of national resources. This doctrine started from ‘the direct denial of *laissez-faire*’, holding instead an active role for the State in the promotion of economic activity: ‘Government, in a word, should be the brain of the State, even in the sphere of commerce.’³⁷ Free from any serious competition for several decades, England was comparable to an ‘octogenarian who had never gone to bed sober for half a century’, simply believing in ‘the vigour of an exceptional constitution.’ Now, however, such assumption was brutally tested by the emergence of powerful rivals like Germany and the United States, whose commercial dynamism was gradually eroding the foundations of British industrial position, ousting its products from large markets of the world. The only solution to this dangerous trend was to adopt a vigorous ‘theory of energy’, based on the idea that the State could still give ‘a powerful and decisive impulse to national industry.’³⁸ Production, not commerce, was the main goal of economic activity; and national tariffs were the proper way to stimulate the manufacturing forces of the British Empire, saving them from the spectre of decline and disintegration.

Full of romantic and melodramatic tones, Garvin’s address resonated with the nationalist theses of Friedrich List (1789-1846), the German economist who had first criticized free trade theories in the mid-nineteenth century, and whose works constantly attacked the cosmopolitan nature of British capitalism, seen as a destructive element of international economy.³⁹ A railway pioneer and a champion of German economic unity, List considered wealth as ‘productive power’, and advocated the protection of industries through extended tariff walls, aimed at balancing the effects of foreign competition on the general development of the nation. Indeed, according to his doctrines, the ‘national economy’ was superior to the ‘individual economy’, because it prevented the interference of ‘foreign power’, increasing the productive resources of society. Thus every state had a duty to support its own industrial expansion through import duties on foreign goods, creating a ‘harmonious balance’ between agricultural, industrial, and commercial

³⁶ J.L. Garvin, ‘The Principles of Constructive Economics as Applied to the Maintenance of the Empire’, in *Compatriots’ Club Lectures: First Series*, ed. by the Committee of the Compatriots’ Club (London: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 1-81.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁹ For a general overview of List’s ideas, see W.O. Henderson, *Friedrich List: Economist and Visionary, 1789-1846* (London: Frank Cass, 1983).

interests.⁴⁰ But such measures should not have been considered as a static and universal doctrine, similar to those elaborated by Adam Smith and the Physiocrats in the late eighteenth century: different nations passed through different historical stages, each requiring different trade policies. So commercial restrictions were 'not so much the inventions of mere speculative minds, as the natural consequences of the diversity of interests' in the world; thus every nation was free to modify its economic system according to the measure of its own progress, adopting free trade or reverting to protectionism through the years.⁴¹ The idea of a single economic doctrine, teaching the way of peace and prosperity to the entire human race, was simply illusory:

*The popular school has assumed as being actually in existence a state of things which has yet to come into existence. It assumes the existence of a universal union and a state of perpetual peace, and deduces therefrom the great benefits of free trade...however, under the existing conditions of the world, the result of a general free trade would not be a universal republic, but, on the contrary, a universal subjection of the less advanced nations to the supremacy of the predominant manufacturing, commercial, and naval power...The system of protection, inasmuch as it forms the only means of placing those nations which are far behind in civilisation on equal terms with the one predominating nation...appears to be the most efficient means of furthering the final union of nations, and hence also of promoting true freedom of trade.*⁴²

This realistic approach to political economy, full of anti-cosmopolitan accents, was really appreciated by tariff reformers like W.A.S. Hewins and William Ashley, who designed their fiscal and social doctrines according to the large vision presented by List and his main continental disciples. Hewins, for example, considered the current difficulties of the British Empire as part of a global movement affecting every industrialized country, due to the rise of economic nationalism around the world, and he believed that the best way to deal with them was 'not to cling to old theories' but to 'investigate the new conditions' of world trade, organising the British Empire into 'an ordered comity of nations united in allegiance to the British Crown.'⁴³ On the other hand, Ashley recognized the risk of an improvised reversal of British traditional policies, but he advised that the State could not shirk a difficult duty without abdicating its essential functions. Therefore it was necessary to accept the sacrifice for the good of the Empire, 'the fairest hope of humanity.'⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Henderson, *List*, pp. 146-7.

⁴¹ Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy (1837)*, translated by Sampson S. Lloyd (London and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1904), pp. 92-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3. Emphasis in the original text.

⁴³ Hewins, *Apologia*, I, pp. 37-8.

⁴⁴ Bernard Semmel, 'Sir William Ashley as "Socialist of the Chair"', *Economica*, 24 (1957), pp. 347-8.

Mackinder was deeply influenced by such opinions, especially in the close academic environment of the LSE, where Hewins had left his intellectual mark before his public resignation in 1903. At the same time, List's great historical pictures, based on an organic fusion of different environmental factors and statistical data, seriously appealed to his imaginative faculties, strengthening the personal search for a more unitary attitude towards social sciences. Thus the appearance of *Money-Power and Man-Power*, on the eve of the political elections of 1906, was no surprise to the friends and colleagues of the respected geographer: it was just the natural evolution of his previous ideas, even if Beatrice Webb expressed some genuine distaste for such a 'blood and money' philosophy, based on the enormous overvaluation of 'purely material factors.'⁴⁵ A similar attitude was also shared by Alfred Zimmern, who did not appreciate an imperialist lecture on Canada given by Mackinder to his Oxford undergraduate students, lamenting the political crudeness of his academic colleague: 'The greatness of modern Unionism is due to its having found a 'philosophy', whereas the Liberals are still groping...But the philosophy is just the old struggle for life, without the slightest contact with the higher impulses with which ordinary philosophy is concerned, and the 'facts' are purely economic and exclude arguing that can not be measured in Dreadnoughts and Dreadnoughts[sic] crews.'⁴⁶

Such a powerful indictment was probably ungenerous, considering the depth of Mackinder's reflection in *Money-Power and Man-Power*, but it certainly underlined the deep divide created in Britain by Chamberlain's initiative, opposing established ideals of international cooperation against new concepts of national competition. It was a clear-cut divide that did not allow middle positions: Unionist 'Free Fooders' like Hugh Cecil, for example, suffered an authentic persecution within their own party, orchestrated by protectionist extremists like Leo Maxse and Henry Page Croft.⁴⁷ Far from these ideological excesses, however, Mackinder tried to present his case for protectionism along rational lines, assessing the tariff reform question with relative calm and open mindedness:

The arguments, good and bad, have been put with practised skill, and have appealed to every interest and sentiment in the land. But they have all possessed one quality – they have been chosen and pointed with a view to effective use under platform and newspaper conditions. Will you allow me...to ask your attention during a quiet hour, not for a repetition of these arguments,

⁴⁵ *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 49.

⁴⁶ BLPEs, WALLAS/1/36, Alfred Zimmern to Graham Wallas, 12 May 1908.

⁴⁷ Alan Sykes, 'The Confederacy and the Purge of the Unionist Free Traders, 1906-1910', *The Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), pp. 349-66.

but for a few considerations of larger scope which, in my opinion, go to the root of the whole matter?⁴⁸

The intellectual enquiry then began with a blunt recognition of the main facts of international life, dominated by the crude notion of 'Power', on which the 'welfare' of Britain's 'teeming population' ultimately rested, despite the peaceful prosperity of the last decades.⁴⁹ Indeed, all recent history testified to the persistence of this ancient force in modern times, guaranteeing the final safety of the country during moments of serious international unrest: in 1898, for example, Britain had used its naval power to expel the French from Sudan, while the following outbreak of the South African War required again the unchallenged deterrence of the Royal Navy to protect the country from 'widespread and bitter' foreign hostility. Thus the exercise of 'Power' in foreign affairs was 'a normal and peaceful function of the national life', which did not deserve the prejudicial hostility of the British people. After all, it had also been skilfully exerted in connection with substantial economic interests, securing the supremacy of national manufacturers in distant markets like China, Turkey, Egypt, and South America.⁵⁰ But the preservation of this supremacy was now in serious danger, because British power was no more 'adequate' to the changed circumstances of the time: 'A small fleet would be adequate for the command of the ocean if other countries had no fleets. Among the blind the one-eyed man is king. It is therefore useless to compare our present power with our power in the past: we must set it beside other powers of the present.'⁵¹ Indeed, the rise of new global actors like Germany, Japan, and the United States compelled British statesmen to rethink the terms of their traditional hegemony, retaining better the various components of national strength:

Let us regard Power, Trade, and Labour as forming a circle...Power shelters Trade, Trade supplies Wages, Wages maintain Labour, and Labour is the source of Power. Much power is needed to shelter a great trade. A great trade can alone supply much wages and support a great and efficient population. A great and efficient population is the only firm source of great power...The great States of the world have lately increased, are increasing, and, to all appearance, will continue to increase in power. Therefore, if Britain is to remain among them, a broader base of trade, wages, and labour must be found for her.⁵²

⁴⁸ Halford Mackinder, *Money-Power and Man-Power: The Underlying Principles Rather Than the Statistics of Tariff Reform* (London: Simkin Marshall, 1906), p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

And this expanded base was only available in the self-governing colonies of Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. But what was their real share in the growing burden of the British imperial system? How could they have been involved in the defence of the home country from foreign competition?

According to Mackinder, sentiment alone was not enough to 'stand the strain of a life and death struggle with a great Power.' Therefore inter-imperial relationships should be strengthened in the near future, especially on an economic level, preparing the framework for a solid federation between Britain and her colonies: 'If the connection between Power and Commerce were similarly strengthened as regards all trade within the Empire, we should soon arrive at a time when political federation would be called for to deal with our large common interests.'⁵³ At the moment, however, such a political project was 'unwise' because it would have only marked the concrete separation of interests within the British Empire. Thus the unique way open to British statesmen was the adoption of retaliatory tariffs against their foreign rivals: the strong example of Germany, prospering under the protectionist system designed by Friedrich List, clearly synthesized the excellent results of this policy. At first, protection had checked the growth of German economy, reducing total production and increasing manufacturing costs, but then the adoption of 'a more comprehensive and 'scientific' system' had favoured the rise of great industrial groups, transforming the country into a powerful continental nation. Hence, there was no reason to judge the efficacy of tariff reform by its first effects; incipient losses were in reality 'a national investment to bear subsequent fruit.'⁵⁴ The real fact behind all the fiscal debate was the failure of Britain's bid for global supremacy, due to the absurdity of her ideological attachment to free trade:

We are being steadily forced into a defensive position. Formerly, we supplied our home and the European markets; then we were partly shut out of the latter, and had to resort more largely than before to distant markets. Now growing power is being brought to bear by foreign countries to win a footing in these distant markets, and even in the United Kingdom we experience dumping from industrial countries with greater home-markets than our own. Our only, our inevitable, remedy is to abandon the policy of Free Imports, adopted half a century ago under totally different political conditions. We must recover the habit of making bargains based upon trade.⁵⁵

⁵³ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, pp. 15-6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

It was not only a question of financial resources, but also of 'Man-Power', a central element for the preservation of Britain's position in the world:

Power...is incessantly needed, whether we like to admit it or not, for the support of our trade. But our power is based upon the men and wealth within these islands, and to a less degree – under existing conditions – on the men and wealth within our dominions beyond the seas. May we, for shortness, refer to the labouring and fighting power of the country as its Man-Power? It appears to me that the Free Importers attach too little significance to our Man-Power, and too much to our Money-power – too little to our power of doing, and too much to our power of buying.⁵⁶

Tariff reform asked instead the general improvement of imperial 'Man-Power', investing economic wealth in the protection of British labour:

He [the tariff reformer] asks the nation to retain the Man-Power which it produces, not to suffer it to be added to the power of rivals. He views with gratitude every sound effort to economise Man-power, whether by the temperance, better housing, or education, and with the same object he would judiciously help the unemployed, lest they become unemployable. Therefore, he should be supported by the Labour interest, for his whole attitude makes him value the labourer and guard his wages.⁵⁷

Thus the shift to protectionism was also the basis of 'a wise philanthropy', which defended properly the interests of the working class, fostering 'the seeds from which grow great industrial trees': 'I claim that Tariff Reform implies the nobler ideal, and that the Tariff Reformer sees life more nearly whole than does the Free Importer. If some there be who are offended by my plain recognition of the element of force in this imperfect world, I reply that our God, our Sovereign ideal, is all-powerful as well as all-wise and beneficent. There is such a thing as the power to do good.'⁵⁸

These religious accents, however, were not enough to avoid the massive defeat of tariff reform at the ballot box, where the Conservative Party lost more than half of its parliamentary seats to the Liberal free traders, seeing even the emergence of the Labour Party as another pivotal force in the public arena.⁵⁹ Connected with the slow deterioration of Chamberlain's physical health, culminating in his dramatic stroke in the summer of 1906, the event seemed to seal forever the hopes of Mackinder and his fellow imperialists for a sound regeneration of British power at home and abroad. Anyway, the commitment of

⁵⁶ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁹ On the crucial election of 1906, see A.K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: the General Election of 1906* (Hamden: Anchor Books, 1973).

tariff reformers to their long-term objectives did not end with this catastrophic debacle: on the contrary, the partial success of protectionist candidates, who covered the great part of the remaining Conservative seats, fuelled another public campaign in favour of preferential tariffs across the Empire, perceived as the first step towards a closer union with the self-governing colonies in America and Oceania. The Conservative leader Arthur Balfour was highly sceptical about such an occurrence, but he supported the protectionist agitation to stop the aggressive press campaign mounted by Leo Maxse against his position in the party.⁶⁰ Another factor in this partial 'conversion' to tariff reform was also the threat of Lord Milner's rivalry, even if the former High Commissioner in South Africa always denied any ambition to pursue a parliamentary career in national politics. Balfour never trusted this official denial, but Milner was probably sincere: he regarded himself as a 'Free Lance', who wanted to influence the events behind the scenes, carefully preparing British public opinion for a further step in inter-imperial relationships.⁶¹ In this sense, he had also become a member of the Coefficients, where he clearly supported the imperialist position of Amery and Mackinder. Even Wells was positively impressed by his contributions to the club, finding him 'the most satisfactory intelligence' among its new members.⁶² Therefore it was almost inevitable that Mackinder's brilliant intellect crossed paths with Milner's personal quest for 'imperial unity', creating another unexpected turn to Mackinder's dynamic political career.

Again, things developed from the energetic efforts of Leo Amery, who had unsuccessfully tried to involve Milner in the propaganda activities of the Tariff Reform League. In 1908, he asked the former proconsul to finance a group of selected speakers able to spread the imperial message in the Dominions. After some initial reluctance, Milner agreed and chose Mackinder for a round of conferences in Canada, which was at the time the most sensible theatre of action for the imperialist movement. The Rhodes Trust would have provided all the funds necessary for the venture, including a regular fee of £ 1,000 over the next four years for further studies on imperial matters.⁶³ According to Brian Blouet, Milner had read *Money-Power and Man-Power*, using it as a theoretical platform for his speeches on the fiscal issue: thus the choice of Mackinder was not accidental, but based

⁶⁰ John A. Hutcheson, Jr., *Leopold Maxse and the "National Review", 1893-1914: Right-Wing Populism and Journalism in the Edwardian Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), pp. 233-55.

⁶¹ A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London: Blond, 1964), pp. 112-4.

⁶² Wells, *Experiment*, p. 765. Other personalities who joined the club in 1905-06 were Lord Robert Cecil, Michael Sadler, J.L. Garvin, Josiah Wedgwood, and Henry Newbolt.

⁶³ Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: The "Kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), p. 144.

on a serious appreciation of his rhetorical and intellectual skills, observed also during the pleasant meetings of the Coefficients.⁶⁴

Flattered by Milner's trust, Mackinder left the Directorship of the LSE, to the open chagrin of Beatrice Webb, who lamented the departure of 'the best of colleagues', mainly responsible for the improved organization of the new institution. However, there was 'no particular friendship' in such farewell, due to the strong political divergence between Mackinder's ideals and those of the Webbs, although the outgoing Director sincerely recognized his personal debt to his old fellow Coefficients, thanking them for their moral and professional support after the break-up of his marriage in 1900.⁶⁵ One of his last public commitments with the School was the attendance to the annual dinner of the local Students' Union, presided over by the French ambassador Paul Cambon, where Mackinder emphasized the recent successes of his Directorship: the inclusion of the LSE in the official list of universities funded by the Treasury grant and the transformation of several appointed teachers into tenured professors, on the same level of other prestigious institutions. Cambon was greatly impressed by such results, and he compared the experience of the new university with that of the Ecole Libre de Sciences Politiques in Paris, pointing to the 'mutual interpenetration' of the two countries in the political and academic sphere. Thus the Anglo-French Entente was really becoming 'indestructible', with positive effects for the future 'peace of the world.'⁶⁶ His speech was greeted with sincere enthusiasm by all those present, including Sir Alfred Lyall, Felix Schuster, and Sidney Webb.

It was then with great personal satisfaction that Mackinder left England for Canada, where he participated in the celebrations for the tercentenary of European settlement in Quebec. On that occasion, he travelled to the North American Dominion on the cruiser *Russell* with his fellow Coefficient Julian Corbett, the famous naval historian, and both men passed the long days of navigation across the Atlantic giving lectures on Canadian history and geography to the ship's flag officers.⁶⁷ Arrived at Quebec City, Mackinder and Corbett attended then the grandiose celebrations of the local tercentenary, with a huge theatrical performance played by almost 4000 actors, representing the arrival of the explorer Jacques Cartier in Canada and the final unification of the country after the victory of General Wolfe at the Plains of Abraham in 1759. Both men were really enthusiastic about the spectacle,

⁶⁴ Blouet, *Mackinder*, p. 144.

⁶⁵ *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 95; Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 33.

⁶⁶ 'London School of Economics', *The Times*, 2 March 1908, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Donald M. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854-1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. 101.

full of 'gaily dressed men and women', and they passed the rest of the night on the deck of the *Russell*, pondering the future of the British imperial construction.⁶⁸ Some days later, Mackinder left Quebec for a general tour of the country, from the St. Lawrence to the coast of British Columbia, giving strong speeches in favour of closer economic and political ties within the Empire. In Winnipeg, for example, he supported the construction of a great imperial fleet, reminding his audience of the necessity of sea power for the future of Britain's international position: indeed, India was only held 'by the sea power of Great Britain, for, in the event of war, not a solitary soldier could be got there over land.'⁶⁹ At the same time he warned Canadians that the Monroe Doctrine had been enunciated by the United States 'purely for their own benefit', representing not a solid guarantee for the permanent freedom of the North American Dominion. On the contrary, Canada should base its national defence on the global power of the British fleet, reuniting its forces with those of the mother country and the other self-governing colonies against the 'autocratic' threat coming from Germany, Russia, and 'the blind forces rising in the east of Asia.' Here the reference was clearly to the controversial problem of Asian immigration into British Columbia and it won a loud applause to the speaker, together with his final peroration in favour of imperial unity: 'Let us work so that at the next imperial conference we may make the next step and not merely talk. And the next step must be...some step in the direction of giving us a truly imperial weapon of some sort for the settlement of policy. Something which shall be the beginning of an imperial order for the conduct of foreign affairs and ultimately for the higher management of imperial defences. I conclude by saying: "Good luck to your Navy lead."'⁷⁰

Generally, these rhetorical interventions aimed to prepare the imminent visit of Lord Milner to North America, where he would try to foster imperial feelings in the most rural areas of Alberta and Manitoba. However, Mackinder also used the journey to collect precious data on the social and economic development of the Dominion, analyzing local political issues through the lens of his deep geographical knowledge. His interest for Canadian affairs was far from recent: in 1904 he had edited a lengthy monograph on the region by Israel Russell, the famous American explorer of Alaska, where the author criticized the existence of a political border between Canada and the United States,

⁶⁸ Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 104-5. According to Schurman, Corbett left no record of this conversation in his private papers, while there is also no mention of any Mackinder's letter or note related to the event.

⁶⁹ 'Talked of Great Issues of Empire: Members of Canadian Club Hear Weighty Address on Vital Imperial Problems', *Manitoba Free Press*, 11 September 1908, p. 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

suggesting instead the fusion of both countries into a single 'self-contained' unit according to the peculiar geographical features of North America.⁷¹ The book was bitterly criticized by the British press for this 'Pan-North American' vision, but Mackinder defended his editorial choice, reminding the public of the 'danger' of not taking seriously the geopolitical ideals of Britain's 'chief competitors.'⁷² Indeed, it was absolutely important to see 'geographical facts from the American or German standpoint', learning different views for the sake of the British Empire, and the Canadian travel was thus designed as the practical enforcement of this intellectual attitude, providing the Oxford geographer with direct information on the general state of the North American Dominion.

The final result of this political and geographical enquiry was a series of lectures given to the Compatriots in December 1908, where he depicted a complex and variegated picture of Canadian society to his responsive audience: 'No one could travel across the North American Dominion, meeting men of all stations and all degrees of responsibility, without being conscious that in some degree, at any rate, there was to-day a Canadian nation in the large sense – the nation of the Canadian Dominion, and not merely of the St. Lawrence Valley.'⁷³ Such an extraordinary fact was still plagued by serious provincial rivalries, especially prominent in the Western regions, but political allegiances in Canada were more and more determined by national priorities, even going beyond the traditional division between French and English speakers. This change was the product of particular, almost unique, geographical circumstances:

Canada presented one of the most interesting problems at present on the face of the globe – an unparalleled struggle between the physical environment of a nation and a designed policy based on a national idea, to control by means of modern material resources and the political policies which could be based upon them the destinies of a race, rather than to allow that race to be controlled by the blind forces which in the past had so very materially managed men and mice...Again and again one heard the same expression, 'Ours is a geographical problem', meaning 'Ours is a problem of conquering geography'.⁷⁴

Therefore such visionary local statesmen as Sir John Macdonald had played a pivotal role in the creation of contemporary Canada, avoiding the mistakes of the American Constitution and establishing a federal system near to the original spirit of the British tradition. Canada was thus an excellent model for the future of the British Empire, reunited

⁷¹ Israel C. Russell, *North America* (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), pp. 421-3.

⁷² H.J. Mackinder, 'Russell's North America', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 August 1904, p. 254.

⁷³ 'Mr. Mackinder on Canada', *The Times*, 1 December 1908, p. 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

under a common 'legal constitution', but the path to this objective was long and full of unexpected obstacles. Indeed, even Canada was imbued with a strong 'spirit of manly independence', highly critical of the 'old country' and its parliamentary institutions:

There was criticism, in the first place, of the record of past Imperial diplomacy. The line of the international frontier was a constant incentive to such complaints. Then there was criticism of certain of the immigrants from this country – the immigrant that for one reason or another called and held attention to himself and compelled criticism. Then there was also the criticism of the democrat, who said that the people in the old country belonged to Europe, and were involved in the aristocratic conditions of Europe, and the New World must have no part in that. There was another element which saw in the Imperial bond a check to the freedom of Canada when she sought to deal with the problem of Oriental immigrants.⁷⁵

Of course, this did not mean that Canadians wanted to desert the Empire, but 'they were conscious of their strength, and of the opportunities which nature offered them, and they saw no limits to the power of their country.' Thus the threat of a voluntary union with the United States, promoted by common strategic and economic interests, reminded British politicians of their responsibility in developing a true 'amalgamation of British and Canadian trade interests', avoiding the transformation of North America into a single great power:

By tariff reform, by a preference on wheat now, as soon as we could do it, we should play a stroke which would not only make for the Empire, but make powerfully for the Canadian nation. What was wanted was a new note from the British nation. However much at this moment the idea of preference might be slumbering in Canada, if the voice of the people of this country expressed in the next general election went out across the Atlantic with a reply that could not be mistaken to the Canadian invitation, that reply would be accepted as evidence that not merely a leader here and there, a Chamberlain or a Milner, but that the people of this country were awake to a new idea and to a new future.⁷⁶

Mackinder's lectures were truly appreciated by his fellow Compatriots, including Alfred Lyttelton and Leo Maxse, but it is quite difficult to assess their impact on the ensuing actions of the imperialist movement. Indeed, their attitude towards 'imperial unity' was more cautious than enthusiastic, remarking the material difficulties of the process: without the clear settlement of British trade policies, any federation scheme would have been counterproductive, strengthening the traditional suspicion of the Dominions against London. At the same time, Mackinder also tried to show the complex ambivalence of colonial feelings towards the mother country, giving partial voice to those Canadian critics

⁷⁵ 'The Empire and Canada', *The Times*, 15 December 1908, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

who rejected imperial ties for different reasons. Thus the extreme variety of a country composed of French, American, and English immigrants required a careful approach from the British imperial movement, acknowledging the need of a concrete basis for further negotiation with the Ottawa government. This prudent pragmatism was also necessary due to the future development of the North American Dominion, ready to become the economic and strategic centre of the British Empire in the twentieth century:

It may be that Canada and the United States a generation or two hence may be more or less equal rivals in the Pacific, Canada acting directly from her western area, the United States effectively only through the Panama canal. If that should happen, we may picture to ourselves that Canada will not merely be an important part of the British Empire, but the very centre of that empire. Those who ask if Canada is to be loyal to the empire are forgetful of the fact, which I believe Canadians are beginning to realize, that Canada is probably to be the centre of the Empire.⁷⁷

Therefore British authorities had to respect the growing national sensitivity of Canadians, even on thorny issues as the immigration of Indian coolies in North America, which became the subject of bitter negotiations between London and Ottawa during the summer of 1908.⁷⁸ From his part, Mackinder justified Canadian restrictive legislation both on racial and cultural grounds, warning against the repetition of ‘the long-drawn tragedy of black and white’ in the United States and the installation of an alien ‘caste system’ fatal to local democratic ideals. Indeed, if Indian intellectuals could receive the most sincere and well organized ‘hospitality’ across the Empire, their fellow manual workers were instead placed ‘at the mercy of the average society around’, igniting dangerous racial conflicts and destructing the ‘very bases’ of the hosting society. Thus the Empire should remain divided among ‘separate White and Indian colonies’, and London had no merit in criticizing Canadian policies, because ‘the white nations of the Empire’ must learn to ‘interpret themselves and their conditions to each other’, avoiding harmful misrepresentations.⁷⁹ In spite of these polite tones, however, the message was clear and very near to the racial advocacy of other imperial paladins like George Parkin: Canada had to remain a ‘white country’, free from the ‘colour question’ of the United States and the African colonies,

⁷⁷ W.L. Grant, ‘Geographical Conditions Affecting the Development of Canada: Discussion’, *The Geographical Journal*, 38 (1911), p. 378.

⁷⁸ Kirt Niergarth, ‘“This Continent must belong to the White Races”: William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canadian Diplomacy and Immigration Law, 1908’, *The International History Review*, 32 (2010), pp. 599-617.

⁷⁹ H.J Mackinder, ‘What London Thinks’, *The Times*, 8 September 1908, p. 6.

training resourceful men to industry and foresight in one of the future 'great and powerful nations of the world.'⁸⁰

However, all these considerations did not find much attention in Milner's group, which was mainly formed by the young idealists of the 'Kindergarten', convinced that simple methods of organization and propaganda would have been sufficient to win the Dominions to the imperial cause. Indeed, the successful Union of South Africa in 1910 galvanized them, leading to a series of bold proposals for the constitution of an imperial federation accessible to all the self-governing colonies. Their inability to appreciate the different attitudes of the Dominions towards such a scheme, however, proved fatal to the success of their initiatives, culminating in the disappointing Imperial Conference of 1911.⁸¹ In this sense, Mackinder's position was more pragmatic than that presented by the Round Table, acknowledging the powerful impact of 'colonial nationalism' on inter-imperial relationships and advocating an 'imperial alliance' with the settler colonies based on solid economic and military arrangements. Indeed, tariff reform was a key aspect of his imperialist schemes, providing a substantial and appealing platform for the creation of a united group of independent British nations 'with one fleet on the ocean, but local flotillas, one fleet, and one foreign policy.'⁸² The same belief was shared by Richard Jebb, who thought that the substitution of 'imperial reciprocity for imperial free trade' represented the first step toward a 'more intimate and comprehensive' alliance between Britain and its overseas Dominions, avoiding the dangers involved in a stronger unitary system as that advocated by Milner's young disciples:

Alliance recognizes separate national aspirations: federation aims at national unity...The assumption which underlies such phrases as 'the expansion of England', or 'Greater Britain', and suggests the familiar principle of federation as the logical form of closer union, is not justified by the tendency...of actual developments in Canada and Australia...There is not, in fact, any growing consciousness of a common nationality, but exactly the reverse. In other words, the basis of imperial federation, instead of expanding and solidifying, is melting away.⁸³

Even Hewins followed more or less these reflections, warning that the Dominions would 'in no circumstances' have sacrificed 'their fiscal autonomy' for an abstract ideal of imperial union, leaving only a 'large scheme' of trade preferences as the 'best expression' of

⁸⁰ Grant, 'Geographical Conditions: Discussion', p. 376.

⁸¹ John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1975), pp. 111-4.

⁸² 'Unionist Policy: Mr. Mackinder on Tariff Reform', *The Glasgow Herald*, 6 April 1909, p. 8.

⁸³ Richard Jebb, *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* (London: Arnold, 1905), p. viii.

Britain's constructive sentiments toward its self-governing colonies.⁸⁴ Therefore it is no surprise that Mackinder's name does not appear among the leading members of the Round Table, the new movement created by Milner in 1909 to spread his old dreams of imperial federation. He had also decided to run again for a parliamentary seat, this time in the Scottish constituency of Hawick Burghs.

The venture did not go well, but Mackinder's performance got the attention of local Conservatives, who offered him another candidacy in Camlachie, an important constituency of the Glasgow area. The place was far from being an easy spot for a Conservative exponent, due to the prevalence of working class voters employed in the local shipbuilding industry, but Mackinder insisted on having a popular constituency, because he wanted to show the importance of tariff reform for the future of British labourers. Indeed, his main political speeches in the years 1909-1910 were all focused on the defence of national manufactures, threatened by American and German competition: 'We had been driven from the near markets to the distant markets of the world. If we were driven from these distant markets there were none beyond...Of late years the European nations and America, having created deep industries behind their tariff walls, had begun to bid for those markets.'⁸⁵ Thus it was absolutely necessary to give preferential treatment to the colonies, investing more financial resources in the development of British industrial power. He knew that a large section of the electorate was now ready to try tariff reform, because it was getting tired of the 'quack medicine' called free trade. Therefore he constantly emphasized the connection between fiscal and social change, promising better housing and education for the people of Camlachie. He also remarked 'the need of a strong Navy' so that Britain might be able to maintain her international position, avoiding 'not only naked defeat but cloaked defeat in the markets of the world.'⁸⁶ In the end, this fierce rhetoric won him the seat by more than 400 votes over the Liberal candidate. During the campaign, however, he sometimes suffered the attention of hecklers, who derided his arguments or shouted insults to his address. Speaking on the Anglo-German naval rivalry, for example, Mackinder was 'subjected to considerable interruption', culminating in a sharp exchange with two members of the audience:

He [Mackinder] went on to refer to the expansion of Germany and her naval development, when one of his audience interrupted with the remark – 'Declare war against them, then.' 'No', Mr. Mackinder replied, 'I don't want to

⁸⁴ Hewins, *Apologia*, I, p. 137.

⁸⁵ 'Unionist Policy', p. 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

declare war.' 'You preach it', rejoined the interrupter. While proceeding to argue that as long as we kept a strong Navy the danger of war would be avoided, an elderly interrupter who occupied a front seat rose and approached the candidate with the remark – 'Britain can't be beaten.' He was ejected.⁸⁷

It was really an embarrassing experience, closed only by the direct intervention of J.H. Kelly, the chairman of the debate, who 'appealed to those who disagreed with the views expressed to wait till question time.' In the end, Mackinder was not damaged by the hecklers, winning a vote of confidence from the audience, but the inability to respond properly to such disturbances indicated the limits of his political experience – a fact destined to have serious repercussions in the tangled space of the House of Commons.

For the moment, however, the oratorical skills matured in a long academic career proved quite fruitful, and Mackinder's maiden speech in Parliament received the praise of several Liberal and Conservative colleagues, including Austen Chamberlain, who wrote an enthusiastic letter to his father on the 'real addition' made to the forces of tariff reform on the backbenches.⁸⁸ Indeed, addressing the Commons on the delicate subject of emigration, Mackinder stressed the dramatic export of 'the finest, and most cherished, capital of this country', condemning the indifference of the government to the constant decline of British industries:

From the capitalist's point of view of course it matters comparatively little whether the capital is here or elsewhere. But surely the problem has only to be indicated to be answered...I want to deal with this matter not from the point of view of pounds, shillings and pence, so easily and so frequently quoted, but rather continuously from the point of view of the human beings who constitute the real nation. There is a competition at the present moment among the nations of the world for this live capital. We have now a condition of things vastly different from that of the times of Adam Smith.⁸⁹

Then, comparing the difficult situation of Britain with that of Germany, he suggested two methods to keep 'human equality' with other nations, securing Britain's international position: 'We may maintain the population by supplying employment here, and we may ask the Colonies to join with us in forming the basis of the great fleet which is to enable us to hold our place in the world.'⁹⁰ Anyway, both methods required the previous adoption of

⁸⁷ 'Mr. Mackinder on Naval Rivalry', *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 January 1910, p. 11. On the tumultuous atmosphere of Edwardian politics, see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language, and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁸⁸ Austen Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside: An Epistolary Chronicle, 1906-1914* (London: Cassell, 1936), p. 204.

⁸⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIV, 1910, col. 317.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 321.

tariff reform as the only viable remedy to the economic weakness of the nation. The object of such a move, in fact, was to accumulate enough 'human capital' in Britain to sustain the rising competition of her international rivals, preserving the freedom and prosperity she had enjoyed in the last century:

The question is whether under the present conditions of the world this country, becoming a small country, will long retain that wealth which she has. We cannot depend alone on the Imperial sentiment that has been handed down to us. We want a basis of common interest. At the present time democracy itself is at stake, and the question is whether democracy...will be able to take a forward view, to look into the future, and do as other countries are doing, notably those where there are bureaucratic and undemocratic Governments, whether we shall as a democracy be able to hold our own with the results of those scientific policies which are possible in countries in which parties matter little...The question is whether we can look to the future, regarding human life as capital for fighting for work, and for creating capital.⁹¹

In spite of its rhetorical efficacy, the speech was bluntly criticized by Alfred Mond, Liberal MP for Swansea, who considered tariff reform as a dangerous threat to international peace, dreading the day when the political economy of the country 'will be put into the hands of those who make such wild and ridiculous statements as to how commerce should be carried on.'⁹² This was not the first public contestation of Mackinder's arguments in the Commons, and it was followed by even stronger forms of rhetorical dissent. In another debate on the commercial relationships between Britain and Canada, for example, he harshly criticized laissez-faire attitudes in imperial affairs, warning of their negative effects on Britain's international position:

It is the duty of statesmen to study not the boom of this year, but the general trend of trade...Our markets in China, India, Africa, and even our South American markets, where we help to maintain the Monroe doctrine, are ultimately held by force, and you refuse to widen the basis of your power. Your whole system is becoming top heavy. You are dependent on the Colonies and other places for the raw materials and food. And they at any time by their policy can consume their raw material and their food in their own countries, and cut off your supplies. You will thus be left with your population on your hands. You will find yourselves under the necessity ultimately of giving way in all international negotiations, because you dare not trust your strength.⁹³

This sharp critique, however, was stigmatized by another MP as 'a doctrine of despair', provoking the indignant reaction of the speaker, furious for the 'distortion' of his own

⁹¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIV, 1910, cols. 322-3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, col. 323.

⁹³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIX, 1910, col. 1474.

words.⁹⁴ But it was the news of the Canadian-American Reciprocity Agreement, signed in the early months of 1911, which resulted in one of Mackinder's most vibrant and powerful speeches at Westminster. During the animated debate over the issue, in fact, he tried to present the deep reasons of his protectionist faith, restating the sincerity of such approach to imperial affairs: 'As a private Member I frankly state that I was a Free Trader. So were we all...Events have converted us...Apparently gentlemen on the other side [of the House of Commons] are uninfluenced...by the events which have taken place. As an individual I am not in the least ashamed at having been converted by a new situation.'⁹⁵ Then he insisted on the grave fallacy of free trade, which had been outdated by the sheer force of events: 'Our complaint is that the Free Trade argument, from beginning to end, omits time. Our case...is an investment for the future...We have come to the time when nations, like individuals, must invest for the future, not merely for the present.'⁹⁶ Indeed, the current 'scale of production' was no longer in favour of Britain, putting the fate of the country in the hands of its more powerful settler colonies. Thus any significant rupture with them, as testified by the recent choices of the Canadian government, could have brought the disintegration of the Empire in the world, leaving only a weakened England in defence of the old international order:

Ultimately we have to look to the question of power...and power rests upon economic development. If Canada is drawn into the orbit of Washington, then this Empire loses its great opportunity. The dismemberment of the Empire will not be limited to Canada. Australia will avail herself of the power of the American fleet in the Pacific, and she will not long depend on a decaying and breaking Empire. Then with the resources of this island country you will be left to maintain your position in India...Three great Powers by their balance maintain the peace of the world. If the British Empire goes under, then you come to the position of one great Power in America and another in Europe, and no third Power between them. That means in the long run a contest between those two Powers, and the tyranny of the world. That constitutes, in my opinion, the significance of the present crisis. We are at the turning of the tide.

But the dramatic note provoked merely the ridicule of the Liberal benches, who continuously interrupted the speech with their disdainful laughter. In the end, Mackinder closed his argument with a bitter remark: 'Hon. Members who laugh have not the

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIX, 1910, cols. 1476-7.

⁹⁵ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXI, 1911, col. 319.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 324.

imagination to see that from those small beginnings still under our control in this country great things may come. Let them bear their responsibility in the eyes of posterity.⁹⁷

In spite of their grave emphasis, however, these words did not mark the end of Mackinder's political commitment to tariff reform. On the contrary, he continued to press on the issue in other parliamentary speeches and on the popular press until the outbreak of European hostilities in 1914, insisting on the fiscal and political unification of the Empire. Some months after the demeaning debate over American-Canadian trade relations, for example, he advocated again the adoption of preferential tariffs in the Commons, suggesting this time their extension to the Indian economy: 'We impose on India at the present time a policy of Free Trade. I venture to think it will be impossible in the long run to impose that policy upon India when we do not impose it upon the other portions of the Empire, which have not at all the same significance, from the point of view of population, in the Empire, as India itself.'⁹⁸ This bold idea was rejected by the Liberal majority, but it seemed to underline the increasing hiatus existing between 'old' and 'new' politicians of the Edwardian era: as the same Mackinder observed at the end of his speech, the traditional establishment was unable to look beyond the narrow present, while young tariff reformers were essentially building the future, adopting a principle which would have changed Britain into 'a practical business nation, ready to bargain and do business, not merely with nations within the Empire, but with nations outside it.'⁹⁹ This energetic vision was shared by other junior Conservatives like Henry Page Croft, who led a fierce campaign against the hesitant leadership of Arthur Balfour in 1911, ousting him from office in favour of the more pragmatic Andrew Bonar Law. Mackinder participated initially in this 'subversive' activity, subscribing to the ambitious manifesto of the Unionist Reveille Movement founded by Croft and Willoughby de Broke:

The significance of the Reveille programme lies in the fact that from beginning to end it concentrates attention on the constructive side of Unionism. In ordinary times it is no doubt the first duty of an Opposition to oppose. But these are not ordinary times...A wave of vague but none the less real and bitter discontent is sweeping through the popular mind, both of this country and the Continent...In the moment of disillusionment, when the bankruptcy of Radicalism is evident and Socialism has failed to bring relief, it is of the first importance to remind the electors that Unionism is not...merely negative and obstructive. The Unionist Party is a great democratic party...and it stands for a

⁹⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXI, 1911, col. 326.

⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXV, 1911, col. 68.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 69.

scheme of constructive statesmanship, full of hope because essentially practical.¹⁰⁰

Stressing the need for ‘a coherent and united plan of action’, the Reveille aimed then to press the leadership of the Conservative Party in adopting a stronger position on imperial issues, with special reference to the naval and fiscal question: ‘The national policy may be compared to a dock. If the water is to stand deep in the dock the gates must be kept in repair. The gates of our national dock must be our Navy and our tariff.’¹⁰¹ However, Mackinder tried not to present the movement as completely opposed to the old Tory establishment, claiming instead in the press that its manifesto had received the ‘express sanction and approval’ of Balfour and his closest collaborators.¹⁰² This conciliatory statement simply outraged Leo Maxse, who threatened to withdraw his support to the Reveille campaign, and it forced Croft to liquidate Mackinder’s words as the product of ‘unintentional enthusiasm’, trying to mollify the virulent reactions of his fellow activists.¹⁰³ But the Camlachie MP openly defended the rationale of his declaration, explaining to his Scottish constituents that the main aim of the Reveille movement was to ‘keep the constructive Unionist policy in its entirety and in its high levels before the country’, counteracting the destructive efforts of their Liberal opponents. In his own view, this was the best way to present the ‘inseparable character’ of the Unionist programme before the electorate, showing that ‘the tariff, the Navy, and [social] insurance’ were all aspects of ‘one and the same national policy.’¹⁰⁴ Of course, not all political observers were convinced by this kind of argument: an anonymous ‘Manufacturer’, for example, sent to the *Glasgow Herald* a long negative comment on Mackinder’s public explanations, asking ironically if ‘a new party with a French name’ should be formed in support of the weak and incoherent views of tariff reformers.¹⁰⁵ However, the publication of the Reveille manifesto and the following debate on its real meaning compelled Balfour to adopt a more positive approach toward the internal ‘rebels’ of his party, seeking to restrain their growing anxiety with a strong speech at Glasgow in defence of British naval supremacy, where he denounced the inconsistent attitude of the Liberal government on the matter and urged the steady

¹⁰⁰ ‘The Unionist Reveille Movement’, *The Times*, 19 October 1910, p. 10. A short list of the Reveille members is in Larry L. Witherell, *Rebel on the Right: Henry Page Croft and the Crisis of British Conservatism, 1903-1914* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1997), pp. 221-5.

¹⁰¹ ‘Unionist Reveille Movement’, p. 10.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Witherell, *Rebel on the Right*, p. 132. The episode is also covered in Hutcheson, *Maxse*, pp. 337-8.

¹⁰⁴ ‘The Reveille Movement: Speech by Mr. Mackinder’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 26 October 1910, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Manufacturer, ‘The Reveille Movement’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 28 October 1910, p. 5.

increase of public expenditure on the fleet.¹⁰⁶ Maxse was delighted by this result, and he paid implicitly his compliments to Mackinder for the acumen of his political action, arguing that the timely publication of the Reville programme 'on the morning of Balfour's Naval speech' – organized by the Camlachie MP – was 'a great stroke', transforming the movement into an influential presence on the national scene.¹⁰⁷ Hence the entire episode showed the growing confidence of Mackinder as a minor political figure, capable of defending firmly his opinions against criticism and of dealing creatively with the conflicts generated by their public exposition.

Nevertheless, he and the other members of the Reville movement failed to move Balfour from his cautious position on the fiscal question, and the ensuing defeat of the Unionists at the general election of December 1910 deepened the internal crisis of the party, resulting in a massive revolt of tariff reformers against the 'discredited' leadership of the organization. This large 'mutiny' led to Balfour's resignation in the autumn of 1911, but the new Unionist leader, Andrew Bonar Law, did not wish to press further the case for fiscal reform, acknowledging the negative response given by the British electorate to the protectionist programme. Two years later even the Tariff Reform League accepted to temporarily drop their original claims for some sort of imperial preference until the positive result of a new general election. In reality, Bonar Law had given to it 'ten years of political rope with which to hang itself', moving permanently the attention of Unionist ranks to the growing controversy over Irish Home Rule.¹⁰⁸ Thus Chamberlain's crusade was never to regain its central position in British political life, although the war years seemed partially to 'vindicate' the main arguments of its supporters, compelling the national government to adopt some 'constructive' economic policies as a reaction to the increasing shortage of men and materials on the Western Front. But this relative success was short-lived, and by the end of the conflict protectionism was substantially relegated to the margins of the political debate, overwhelmed by the extraordinary problems generated by the unprecedented military struggle in Europe and Asia.

However, these changes did not impinge particularly on the successful prosecution of Mackinder's parliamentary career, focused now on other pressing matters like the debate over women's suffrage and the constitutional conflict around the House of Lords. Sometimes the Camlachie MP spoke again in favour of fiscal reform, criticizing the Liberal

¹⁰⁶ 'Mr. Balfour on Imperial Defence', *The Times*, 20 October 1910, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Witherell, *Rebel on the Right*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew S. Thompson, 'Tariff Reform: An Imperial Strategy, 1903-1913', *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), p. 1051.

government for its feeble and incoherent attitude toward imperial affairs. In July 1911, for example, he ridiculed the new Royal Commission set up to investigate 'the resources and commerce of the Empire', stressing the absurdity of a mere quantitative appreciation of the relationship between Britain and its overseas territories: 'What is the Royal Commission going to do? Is it going to rove about the Empire and obtain statistics which can be obtained in a far more effective way than by sending a certain number of great persons to different parts of the Empire?...Are we to incur great cost in sending away statesmen of the future or of the past...simply to obtain an education in what are the relations of the different parts of the Empire?'¹⁰⁹ But these caustic notes were probably the last ones of his political speeches dedicated to tariff reform and imperial unity before the outbreak of World War I. He was still deeply committed to these crucial issues, but their gradual eclipse in the Unionist programme compelled him to devote his attention to the more domestic concerns of 'Little England', leaving aside the imaginative visions of 'Greater Britain' entertained during the early phases of his public career. Indeed, he had to readjust his constructive imperialism to the peculiar conditions of the last antebellum Parliament, marked by violent rhetorical intransigence and bitter party conflicts. And the final success of this political adaptation, which allowed him to maintain his parliamentary seat for almost a decade, represents the most important tribute to Mackinder's dialectical and intellectual skills, capable to project him into a privileged position through the tumultuous waves of Edwardian public life.

On the other hand, his genuine commitment to tariff reform proved to be a powerful obstacle to the complete achievement of his political ambitions, relegating his personal talents to a marginal role within the middle ranks of the Unionist party. Despite the early promises of 1903, in fact, his 'betrayal' of traditional Liberalism on the fiscal question failed to pay off at the ballot box, generating even some form of popular hostility toward his figure, while the constant struggle between free traders, moderates, and protectionists for the control of Conservative policymaking seriously jeopardized any chance of success for Chamberlain's bold imperial crusade, condemning its enthusiastic supporters to permanent political frustration.¹¹⁰ It is true that Mackinder was able to exploit positively this negative situation, developing better his political ideas in the safe environment of the LSE, and the final electoral success at Camlachie in 1910 seemed to repay all the previous years of

¹⁰⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXVIII, 1911, col. 1311.

¹¹⁰ For a short overview of these internal conflicts within the Unionist party, see Neal Blewett, 'Free Fooders, Balfourites, Whole Hoggers: Factionalism within the Unionist Party, 1906-10', *The Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), pp. 95-124.

dismal failures, providing him with an important rhetorical platform in the House of Commons. But his rigid professorial attitude, coupled with an excessive tendency to melodramatic speeches, did not impress his Liberal opponents, who ignored or derided his imperialist faith in several parliamentary debates.

At the same time, Mackinder's grasp of imperial affairs did not appear as firm as generally believed, betraying instead a remarkable series of romantic distortions and blunt generalizations. His view of the Dominions as an inexhaustible source of men and materials for British international power, for example, was quite unrealistic and it curiously underestimated the geographical obstacles to the further development of these countries, including the extreme climatic conditions of Canada and Australia.¹¹¹ This was a 'cardinal sin' for a man who had made geography his own field of study and it represented a fatal weakness for the accuracy of his political analyses, limiting their impact upon more informed observers on the reality of the overseas territories. Moreover, his rigid support for the strict anti-Asian immigration policies of Canada, rooted in the racist vision of a united 'white' empire, was at odds with the security of British interests in the Pacific region, dependent upon the benevolent friendship of 'coloured nations' like China and Japan. As observed by Avner Offer, these kinds of policies in the Dominions simply encouraged anti-colonial nationalism among Asian peoples, driving the British Empire into a violent racial and cultural conflict which it could not hope to control.¹¹² In his speech at Winnipeg, Mackinder seriously misinterpreted this reality, stating that the question of Asian immigration could merely be solved through some form of diplomatic pressure on Japan, putting 'the whole strength of the empire' behind Canadian legitimate concerns.¹¹³ He did not understand that similar initiatives could only alienate Japan from its pivotal alliance with Britain in the Far East, confusing different national and imperial interests in his discussion of the immigration problem. A foreign policy expert like Balfour would have probably demurred from such a rude treatment of 'delicate' international issues.

These personal limits, coupled with the constant failure of tariff reform at the polls, compelled Mackinder to moderate his public aspirations, delaying his direct involvement in parliamentary activities for several years. When he finally entered at Westminster, however, the vital part of his political programme had suffered a fatal setback, leaving the

¹¹¹ Daniel Deudney, 'Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis?: Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells on Britain in the Global Industrial Era', *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), pp. 199-203.

¹¹² Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 212.

¹¹³ 'Talked of Great Issues', p. 6.

centre of national debates to other pressing issues like Irish Home Rule and women's suffrage. How Mackinder coped with this unexpected situation will be the main subject of the next chapter, revealing the surprising complexity of his political views outside the closed boundaries of imperial protectionism.

Chapter Three

Defending the Empire at Home: The Parliamentary Battle against Liberal England

As a Member of Parliament, Halford Mackinder has never enjoyed the full appreciation of his modern biographers. Indeed, all of them have remarked the numerous shortcomings of his parliamentary career, portraying the unfavourable picture of a man out of his field of action. According to Brian Blouet, for example, Mackinder always suffered the constant harassment of more skilled orators, while his ‘university lecturing style’ was generally resented by the House of Commons after his successful debut of February 1910.¹ This sharp judgment seems to also be shared by W.H. Parker, who underlines the ‘unconscious touch of arrogance’ of Mackinder’s parliamentary speeches, reminiscent of his rhetorical supremacy in the closed sphere of academia. Such behaviour definitely limited the ‘sharp logic’ of his public interventions, generating the scorn and scepticism of his political colleagues. Parker, however, still considers Mackinder as ‘a far sighted thinker’, and he reports some pieces of his parliamentary debates, showing the dramatic brilliance of his speaking talent, barely grasped by ‘men of lesser intellectual capacity.’²

The picture proposed by both authors is partially confirmed by contemporary sources, which often remarked on the political shortcomings of the former Director of the LSE. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, considered Mackinder’s electoral speeches at Hawick Burghs in 1909 as ‘long and “dreich”’, more similar to cold ‘professorial lectures’ than to genuine popular appeals.³ Ten years later, reviewing the lengthy volume of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, the same newspaper confirmed its previous evaluation, defining the Scottish deputy as a ‘more excellent’ geographer than politician and praising the book only for its meticulous ‘geographical part.’⁴ Even old friends like Leo Amery proved quite blunt in their appreciation of Mackinder’s political skills, claiming instead that ‘his real strength’ laid in the precise ‘insight’ over complex historical and geographical issues.⁵ All these critical statements, however, do not explain how Mackinder won two consecutive elections as a

¹ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 149-52.

² Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 45.

³ ‘The Border Burghs’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1909, p. 9.

⁴ ‘New Books: The “World Island”’, *The Manchester Guardian*, May 28, 1919, p. 5.

⁵ Amery, *My Political Life*, I, p. 228.

Unionist candidate in the working-class constituency of Camlachie before 1914, maintaining the seat even during the first troubled years of the interwar period. Indeed, Bernard Semmel has noticed that his first political campaign of 1910 was quite 'persuasive', combining economic and imperial concerns in an effective way.⁶ At the same time the traditional negative view seems extremely vague and generic, without any direct reference to Mackinder's parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities of the late Edwardian era. Blouet, for example, does not quote at length any specific legislative debate in his narrative of the years before World War I, while Parker presents some of them in a very fragmentary form, paying scant attention to the general political context of those days.⁷ The final result is a serious misrepresentation of the character during one of the most tumultuous phases of his life, marked by a frenetic intellectual and rhetorical activity.

Indeed, Mackinder played a small but important role in the great debates of the antebellum era, using his professional expertise to defend the traditional British constitution from the 'progressive attack' of Asquith's Liberal government. From Irish Home Rule to the reform of the House of Lords, passing through the thorny debate over women's suffrage, he tried to forestall the radical designs of his political opponents, preserving the domestic foundations of the imperial structure from utter disintegration. The final results of this attempt were not rewarding, but nonetheless they partially explain the later success of Mackinder as Chairman of the Imperial Shipping Committee in the 1920s. The dialectical and diplomatic skills learned during his long parliamentary experience, in fact, were refined and adapted for the needs of the new institution, contributing to its relative efficiency in the difficult domain of inter-imperial relationships. On the other hand, Mackinder's struggle in Edwardian politics reflects the deep transformations of British national life before the Great War, showing the painful transition of the Conservative Party towards its modern mass organization of the twentieth century. It is a story generally presented under the popular idea of a 'crisis of Conservatism', marked by political disasters and internal divisions, but recently this conventional view has been criticized by young scholars, who depict a more positive picture of the Tories under the leadership of Balfour and Bonar Law.⁸ Therefore this chapter will try to redefine Mackinder's parliamentary adventure in the 1910s according to such new historiographical trends, using his extensive collection of

⁶ Semmel, 'Mackinder', p. 560.

⁷ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 145-52; Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 41-51.

⁸ The classic view of a 'Conservative crisis' is thoroughly presented in E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995). For a good summary of its recent criticism, see instead David Thackeray, 'Rethinking the Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism', *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), pp. 191-213.

public speeches to dispel the myth of an 'academic dilettante' lost in Westminster, easy prey of his more experienced opponents. Instead it will show a brilliant intellectual fully committed to the pursuit of his own ideas and capable to discuss publicly different issues, offering sometimes valid contributions to the internal debate of his own party. In this sense, his involvement with the Halsbury Club for the reform of the House of Lords in 1912 confirms the image of a flexible and heterodox personality, ready to elaborate original solutions for the main problems of his age.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Mackinder finally won a seat in the House of Commons for the constituency of Camlachie, near Glasgow, in January 1910. This personal success also reflected the general recovery of the Conservative Party after the electoral disaster of 1906: thanks to the active agitation of tariff reformers, in fact, who opposed their fiscal proposal to the progressive budget of Lloyd George, the Tories were able to regain several positions in the country, compelling Asquith to rely on the Irish Nationalists for the survival of his government.⁹ The victory galvanized the protectionist front, promising the final realization of Joseph Chamberlain's original programme, and it filled the benches of Westminster with young imperial enthusiasts, ready to fight for the future regeneration of the country. In this sense, Mackinder perfectly caught the spirit of the new Parliament during his maiden speech at the Commons, where he remarked the importance of an 'adequate population' for the future of the British Empire:

You cannot in the long run hold the position of a great Power in the world unless you are reasonably equal in resources to the great Powers with which you are competing. We have two methods of maintaining our human equality. We may maintain the population by supplying employment here, and we may ask the Colonies to join with us in forming the basis of the great fleet which is to enable us to hold our place in the world. But whichever of these methods you take I suggest that in the long run you must do it by means of a tariff.¹⁰

This emphasis on tariff reform as the solution of British economic and military weakness, clearly inspired by the mercantilist philosophy of Friedrich List, was repeated again in another major speech in July 1910, where Mackinder faced the argument from a broader imperial point of view, making good use of his direct knowledge of Canadian trade policies. Attacking the removal of the Canadian surtax on German trade, in fact, he insisted on the positive effect of such a protectionist measure, guaranteeing the special relationship between Britain and its North American Dominion: 'It was because Canada stood by the

⁹ Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 77-82.

¹⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIV, 1910, cols. 320-1.

Empire that she imposed the surtax [against Germany], and if a triumph has been won, the triumph has been won by Canada, because she had the courage to act her part alone. I venture to ask that if such is the triumph that a relatively small country, as Canada is in the economic sense, can inflict on great Germany, how much easier would have been the victory if the whole power of the Empire had been behind Canada?’¹¹ Needless to say, the cause of this imperial setback was Britain’s ‘*laissez-faire* attitude’, which was ‘no doubt suitable to the time of Adam Smith’, but now it seriously risked to jeopardize the frail structure of the Empire, beginning from the Canadian colonies threatened by the economic ‘pressure’ of the United States. Thus it was necessary to elaborate a more ‘constructive policy’, showing that democratic Britain was not ‘incapable’ of ‘constructing a tariff’ like ‘other nations...less troubled perhaps by democracy.’¹²

This call to protectionism in defence of democracy did not impress J.M. Roberts, a staunch Liberal MP for Tyneside, who ridiculed at length Mackinder’s argument, underlining the limited importance of colonial trade for the general state of the British economy.¹³ Enraged but undeterred by such a cool reception, the Unionist MP continued to campaign in favour of tariff reform during the second general election of December 1910, insisting on the crucial importance of a new fiscal policy for the general security of the British Empire: ‘Our whole object in raising the tariff movement has been defence for this country and for the Empire...A movement to vary tariffs was in no case a movement to abolish tariffs. The need for the defensive tariff would remain.’¹⁴ However, this kind of patriotic rhetoric was not enough to secure the election, which saw instead no further Unionist gains across the country, due mainly to the unclear and incoherent character of Balfour’s party leadership. The same Mackinder suffered a serious erosion of consent in his own constituency, maintaining the parliamentary seat by only 26 votes.¹⁵ Prominent tariff reformers like Richard Jebb were furious for this electoral reverse, asking plainly for ‘the speedy creation of a new [Unionist] party, based on constitutional tradition and devoted to Tariff Reform’, capable of ‘restoring confidence not only in the future of [Imperial] Preference but also in the sanity of the Mother Country and the Imperial Parliament.’¹⁶ Organized later by Maxse, Croft, and other radical imperialists, such a massive internal

¹¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XIX, 1910, cols. 1468-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, cols. 1469-72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, cols. 1476-8.

¹⁴ ‘West of Scotland Liberal Unionists: Preparing for the Election’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1910, p. 9.

¹⁵ Blouet, *Mackinder*, p. 152.

¹⁶ University of Leeds Library, Austen Chamberlain Papers [microfilm], AC 8/7/17, Richard Jebb to Austen Chamberlain, 6 December 1910.

agitation finally compelled Balfour to resign in the autumn of 1911, and tariff reform seemed again on the verge of political recovery, winning its last important victory against the Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty some weeks later.

Conducted fiercely on both sides of the Atlantic, the anti-Treaty campaign seemed in fact to realize the constructive cooperation between British and Canadian imperialists which had been sought by Mackinder, Garvin, and other Unionist intellectuals for almost a decade.¹⁷ Maxse, for example, used a wide range of Canadian sources to support the repeal of Reciprocity among British readers, while the *Morning Post* freely exchanged information with the *Toronto News* against Canada's trade policy.¹⁸ On his part Mackinder intervened both in parliament and in the press, using his Canadian expertise to trash the Treaty and defend the traditional position of British commerce in the North American Dominion. At Glasgow, for example, he gave a long address on the Canadian question accompanied by 'an interesting series of limelight views', modelled on those recently prepared on India for the Visual Instruction Committee of the Colonial Office, describing at length the geographical and historical development of the North American Dominion to local Unionist sympathizers.¹⁹ At the same time, he also wrote an elaborate letter to the *Times*, claiming that the battle over the Reciprocity Treaty was far from over, representing also a golden opportunity for the protectionist front: 'Even should the Treaty become law, the cause of Imperial Preference will not for a while be lost. The east and west momentum begotten of the Canadian 'National' policy will not be destroyed in an instant, and in this country the dramatic utterance of events may perhaps convince where mere argument has failed.'²⁰ Then he fiercely contested the geographical argument of free traders, who presented the economic separation of Canada and the United States as 'against nature', thus accepting the inevitability of a final fusion between the two countries:

Is it not strange that, in a country which has ruled India for two centuries, a simple fact of geography should to-day be held as necessarily fatal to a political policy? Does our modern material civilization, our power of fixing capital and interests, count for so little in this twentieth century? Europe surely bristles with successful national enterprises 'against nature.' Have not Budapest and Fiume been built up on a system of railway fares and freights 'against nature'? Is not the policy of the German Empire essentially artificial and the contrary of *laissez faire*? Let the party which for the time being has persuaded or confused

¹⁷ On this crucial aspect of the Reciprocity debate, see Simon J. Potter, 'The Imperial Significance of the Canadian-American Reciprocity Proposals of 1911', *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 81-100.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

¹⁹ 'Aspects of Canadian Reciprocity: Address by Mr. Mackinder', *The Glasgow Herald*, 25 March 1911, p. 10.

²⁰ H.J. Mackinder, 'The Reciprocity Agreement', *The Times*, 2 February 1911, p. 10.

the British electorate and exhausted Canadian patience bear its responsibility. At the least let us not abet it in making 'nature' its whipping horse.²¹

One week later this criticism of geographical determinism recurred again in the House of Commons, where Mackinder articulated at length the territorial complexity of North America, asking for political sympathy in support of Canadian unity and independence:

There are at the present time two Canadas – Western Canada and Eastern Canada. These two Canadas are knitted together by a system of railways through what is for practical purposes almost a waste for a thousand of miles. The great problem for Canadian statesmen at the present time is to hold Western Canada to Eastern...If you will not help to strengthen the Eastern and Western bonds, the time may come when the Eastern and Western bonds will be not sufficiently strong to hold the West, and what clearly is the position is that the West might take its own destiny into its own hands and break away and join the United States. The Eastern statesmen have to face that position. With all the eloquence they could command compatible with national dignity they ask you to strengthen their hands. You refuse to strengthen their hands, and, as practical men, they have to consider affairs. Sentiment is still good, and rather than run the risk of losing the West now they save the present at the cost of the future.²²

Ultimately Canada's position in the Empire was 'a question of power' resting upon 'economic development', threatening even the future dismemberment of the British world system if there were no adequate measures against the 'present crisis': 'If the British Empire goes under, then you come to the position of one great Power in America and another in Europe, and no third Power between them. That means in the long run a contest between those two Powers, and the tyranny of the world...We are at the turning of the tide.'²³ This last note was too apocalyptic, and it provoked merely the scornful ridicule of Liberal backbenchers, but Mackinder claimed to have shown again a coherent and lucid perception of the tariff question, leaving the final responsibility of a possible 'imperial disaster' on the shoulders of his opponents. The following rejection of the Treaty by the Canadian government partially vindicated his argument, even if the victory over Reciprocity did not save tariff reform from its sudden political decline. However, it secured stronger ties between British and Canadian imperial activists, providing that common framework later utilized by the Imperial Shipping Committee and other Commonwealth institutions in the interwar years.²⁴

²¹ Mackinder, 'Reciprocity Agreement', p. 10.

²² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXI, 1911, cols. 320-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, col. 326.

²⁴ On the final impact of the Canadian crisis upon imperial relations, see Potter, 'Canadian-American Reciprocity', pp. 97-100.

In the following years, Mackinder continued to speak in favour of imperial preference, but the gradual disappearance of the topic from the Unionist programme – directly encouraged by the new Unionist leader Andrew Bonar Law - compelled him to focus on different issues, readjusting his constructive imperialism to the turbulent conditions of the last antebellum Parliament. In the end he was quite successful in this political adaptation, even if not all his projects and supported causes survived the virulent debates of the time. It is still important to notice, however, that Mackinder always showed great dialectical and intellectual energies in his public performance, maintaining a firm coherence with the fundamental beliefs of his political philosophy. He was never an opportunist, even if he recognized sometimes the need to change his original position, accepting the new circumstances of the day.

Thus his other main parliamentary interventions before 1914 aimed to defend the traditional nature of the British Constitution from the irresistible advance of modern collectivism, seen as the only remedy against the social and cultural upheaval of the early twentieth century. Indeed, prominent Liberal intellectuals like J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse were advocating strong social reforms to fight poverty and avoid class warfare in British industrial society, including progressive taxation and the redistribution of unearned income to the lower classes. Rejecting the old utilitarianism of the Manchester School, they also supported an active role of the state in economic activities, ensuring individual rights and social welfare to all sectors of national life.²⁵ When this reformist ideology became institutionalized in the official policies of the Asquith coalition, the Unionists found themselves in an awkward position: as the traditional defenders of property, with several representatives coming from the landed aristocracy and the business community, they were absolutely opposed to any sort of wealth redistribution, fearing social dispossession and the serious infringement of the old constitutional order.²⁶ On the other hand, however, they could not ignore the needs and requests of the poorest segments of the British population, because it was also on their contribution that the wider structure of the Empire seriously depended. In this sense, tariff reform had offered a positive but imperfect cover to such a dilemma, presenting social reform as a patriotic choice and promising to reconcile labour and capital into a common organic unity. As Lord Milner declared in 1906, in fact,

²⁵ For a short analysis of this new political philosophy, see Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 1-24.

²⁶ On the Tories as the 'party of property', see Ian Packer, 'The Conservatives and the Ideology of Landownership, 1910-1914', in *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990*, ed. by Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 38-57.

the main ideal of Chamberlain's movement was to see 'the greater number of people living healthy and independent lives by means of productive work' in Britain, building up a solid 'great family' bound by 'indissoluble ties' to the 'kindred families' of the Dominions.²⁷ But this ambitious vision had remained a 'dead letter', with all the public oaths of social amelioration sacrificed to the chimerical pursuit of imperial preference, seen as the ultimate solution to national poverty and unemployment.²⁸ Therefore the final eclipse of the tariff reform movement after the general elections of 1910 compelled the Tories to find a new political platform from which to resist the 'radical' measures proposed by the Liberal government. It was not an easy process, and it generated more strain and confusion within the various ranks of the party.

As an ardent tariff reformer and a former acquaintance of the Fabians, who constantly campaigned in favour of a collectivist reorganization of British society, Mackinder felt all the stress of the new situation. He had fought hard for Chamberlain's fiscal proposal, renouncing even his academic career at the London School of Economics to represent tariff reform in Parliament, and now he had to deal with the gradual demise of his previous political agenda, ousted by the constitutional debates over Ireland and the House of Lords. Moreover his position on these specific issues was far from clear: if he was overtly hostile to Irish Home Rule, in fact, his attitude toward the Lords was more ambiguous, due also to his previous Liberal upbringing. A man of modest origins, promoter of a new geographical discipline in national universities, Mackinder had very few common traits with the old aristocratic peers of the Second Chamber, including their traditional distaste for modern democracy. Indeed, while the Lords did not believe in education as an effective instrument for the political enfranchisement of the masses, his experience with the Oxford University Extension movement and the LSE suggested instead the potentialities of a well-educated population for the healthy functioning of the national public sphere.²⁹ In this sense, his social vision was more democratic than that of traditional Tories, even if it was clearly designed in defence of the British Empire, as he already recognized in 1903:

What manner of men and women will England require twenty and thirty years hence? Let the secrets of the future be what they may, there can be no doubt that the nearest duty of a nation burdened with new Empire and strained by industrial competition is to impart a liberal education to a greater proportion of its number, and to make their technical equipment at once more exact and

²⁷ 'Lord Milner's Speeches', *Monthly Notes on Tariff Reform*, 6 (1907), p. 43.

²⁸ On the achievements and failures of the tariff reform campaign, see Thompson, 'Tariff Reform', pp. 1033-54.

²⁹ Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 91-8.

more resourceful. If Britain fails in the contests of the half-visible future, it will not be because the best products of her education are inferior to those of Germany or America...but because the great majority of her soldiers, civil servants, merchants, clerks, and artisans, whatever their advantages of character, are less professionally expert and less generally informed than are the ordinary people of certain other countries.³⁰

At the same time, however, Mackinder also believed that Britain – for its geographical insularity from the rest of Europe – had been able to avoid ‘tyranny’ and to retain ‘the legacy of freedom’ of the ancient Germanic peoples, fitting it to ‘the complex conditions of modern civilisation.’ Thus the following expansion of the nation across the oceans had allowed ‘a fertility of private initiative’ unparalleled by other countries, spreading British social and political liberties around the world.³¹ It was then necessary to defend this venerable democratic tradition from any sort of infringement, including the organizational and centralistic ambitions of progressive Liberalism. Indeed, faithful to the regional approach of his geographical philosophy, he considered ‘rooted provincialism’ as the real source of British liberty, favouring the development of small local communities rather than the growth of great urban conglomerates. His distrust of ‘Metropolitan England’ – mainly represented by London and its huge financial apparatus – was open and persistent, denouncing all the alienating and inconvenient aspects of modern city life: ‘He [the Londoner] lives in a suburb; he is shot through a tube to an office-room in the City, and then shot back to his bedroom in the suburb; only on Saturdays and Sundays has he time for communal life, and then he amuses himself with neighbours who are tied to him by nothing essential.’³² But he admired Birmingham and the industrial North for their independent and communitarian spirit, still organized around decentralized ‘subject boroughs’ and local ‘daily newspapers’ free from the dictations of London cosmopolitanism.³³ Therefore this proud localism reconciled him with mainstream Tory views of small government and social obligation, softening his partial abandonment of tariff reform and nurturing his determinate opposition to Liberal initiatives.³⁴ If it was impossible to promote the imperial interest on the fiscal ground, then it was absolutely necessary to defend it in the domestic domain, preserving the rural and independent virtues that had made great the British people in the last centuries. From this point of view, Mackinder

³⁰ Mackinder, ‘Higher Education’, p. 248.

³¹ Halford Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London: Heinemann, 1902), pp. 11-2.

³² Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 249.

³³ Mackinder, *British Seas*, p. 258.

³⁴ On the complex political philosophy of Edwardian Conservatives, see Matthew Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism, 1886-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 23-43.

remained loyal to his previous political philosophy, translating it successfully along other channels during the crucial years before 1914.

The tenacious defence of British traditional values was mainly fought over Ireland, where Mackinder could use his geographical expertise in support of the Unionist cause. But it was also exercised in favour of the House of Lords, especially after the passage of the Parliament Act in April 1911. During the debate over the proposal Mackinder had attacked the government action on practical grounds, reminiscent sometimes of his persistent focus on the fiscal question: 'A Budget Bill might be introduced containing a tariff based on certain principles, and the object of the measure would obviously and admittedly be not merely to raise funds but to effect certain ulterior objects...It seems to me that if in such a case we were to prevent the House of Lords from expressing its opinion on the whole of such a policy, then we would be taking a very dangerous course.'³⁵ Later on he tried to shift the argument on a non-partisan basis, supporting the old referendum theory of Lord Salisbury as a solution to legislative conflicts between the two Houses of Parliament and as a limit to the power of the parliamentary majority upon certain issues: 'The question always before the country is how far at the time of any election does the electorate understand that it is giving a mandate down that vista...There is the trouble about accepting the policy of a party as a whole...And the fundamental difficulty which has been raised in the recent history of our country is precisely that you do not know what the policy for practical mandate purposes is, and what is merely the general philosophy of the party to be brought into action if circumstances and time allow.'³⁶ The final tone of the appeal was even populist, partially betraying the distrust of the speaker toward the twists and intricacies of official party politics: 'I have more faith in the common-sense of our people than to believe that they will call for an initiative, and that they will allow any organisation in the land to draft a Bill, and that they will accept that Bill by the large number which will be necessary in the case of an initiative to send it to a Referendum before the country.'³⁷ The inability to stop the Liberal initiative with these formalities, however, compelled him to directly tackle the thorny question of the Lords' reform, contributing to the debates of the Halsbury Club in 1912.

³⁵ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXIV, 1911, cols. 272-3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1847. On the referendum theory, see Corinne Comstock Weston, *The House of Lords and Ideological Politics: Lord Salisbury's Referendal Theory and the Conservative Party, 1846-1922* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1995), pp. 1-11.

³⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXIV, 1911, col. 1848.

Founded and directed by Lord Selborne, an ardent imperialist and former proconsul in South Africa, the Club wanted to present an alternative scheme for the reconstruction of the Second Chamber after the passage of the Parliament Act, sponsoring the referendum and a democratic enlargement of the peerage system.³⁸ Thanks probably to the intercession of Milner, Mackinder was among the few MPs allowed into the exclusive membership of the group, which included personalities like Lord Willoughby de Broke and Robert Cecil, and he brought an original intellectual note to its numerous confidential meetings. Indeed, it was crucial for him that the reformed Second Chamber should be elected by the same electorate of the House of Commons, guaranteeing a formal equality between the two branches of Parliament. This conviction gained the favour of other members of the Club, who recognized that 'no variation or selection' of the Lords electorate 'on the grounds of property or longer residence' could be maintained, maybe assigning the voting right only on the basis of age.³⁹ But Mackinder went further with this proposal, elaborating a complete reorganization of electoral constituencies in a memorandum later presented to the group for further discussion: in this document, he divided Britain into 17 larger constituencies, built around traditional connections, similarity of interests, and railway facilities, and he also counselled the 'radial division' of London into smaller electoral quadrants, tied to the various suburbs of the metropolis.⁴⁰ In spite of its own geographical imperfections, symbolized by the maintenance of Ireland as a single electoral division, this ambitious devolutionist scheme clearly represented the regional perspective of its author, sceptical toward the centralization of British political activities and willing to transform the voting system in defence of local communities. In this sense, the electoral fragmentation of London aimed to preserve the administrative independence of south-eastern boroughs from the expanding bureaucratic machinery of the imperial capital, guaranteeing the permanence of traditional local liberties.

The scheme found the appreciation of the other members of the Club, but it failed to become the centre of their following debates on the reform of the Second Chamber. Instead the discussion continued to focus on the future electorate of the Lords, with the fear of party manipulation over the electors and the need to safeguard the institutional

³⁸ On the genesis of the Club, see Weston, *House of Lords*, pp. 202-15.

³⁹ BLPES, COLL MISC 0866, Folder 1, Halsbury Club Confidential Meeting Minutes, 19 January 1912, p. 1.

⁴⁰ BLPES, COLL MISC 0866, Folder 1, Halsbury Club Confidential Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1912, pp. 1-2.

autonomy of the peers from the changing fortunes of the voting process.⁴¹ From this point of view, class took precedence over geography, and the Halsbury Club devoted again its energies to the fiscal and hereditary prerogatives of the Second Chamber, even discarding the old referendum appeal as a grave 'danger' due to Lloyd George's ability in 'framing his financial proposals with a single eye to the cupidity or prejudices of the electors.'⁴² At the same time the group became excessively monopolized by Selborne's intransigent personality, alienating other peers like the Duke of Northumberland and provoking bitter divisions within its own ranks.⁴³ In spite of these limits, however, the experience proved quite fruitful to Mackinder because it helped him to adapt his academic skills to the subtleties of the political debate, challenging official Liberal policies on more extensive grounds. He also learned a lot on the constitutional mechanisms of the British system, adding new strength to his personal defence of a balanced and ordered democratic government. Indeed, he attacked vehemently the Liberal majority for its 'destructive' constitutional reforms, seen as a dangerous shift to plebiscitary government:

You worship majorities. If a majority is in your favour you believe you are right in proceeding to extremes...For my part I do not worship King Demos; I am of a more rationalistic turn of mind. I share two, and only two, reasons as to why I should obey the majority: I am willing to obey the majority if that majority has all the physical force necessary to coerce me – if it is a considerable majority, if it is a virile majority. We hope, in this twentieth century, however, that we are rising above appeal to physical force. Then there must be some moral qualities in the majority. I should yield to that majority, because I believe that it represents some of the best elements in the country, and that it has thought out questions. Though it has come to a different opinion from that which I hold, I bow to the reasoned opinion arrived at by a considerable majority of the country.⁴⁴

Of course, this was not the case with the Asquith coalition, divided by various competing interests and disgracefully indifferent to the popular opinion of England, the largest and richest part of the United Kingdom: 'It seems to me that your majority is a majority not entitled to any very great intellectual respect. No; the question is coercion, the question is whether you wish to coerce a majority in England.'⁴⁵ The final result of this approach was the foolish destruction of important national institutions, 'built up by painful and long

⁴¹ BLPES, COLL MISC 0866, Folder 1, Halsbury Club Confidential Meeting Minutes, 1 February 1912, pp. 1-6.

⁴² BLPES, COLL MISC 0866, Folder 1, Halsbury Club Confidential Meeting Minutes, 17 April 1912, p. 4.

⁴³ Weston, *House of Lords*, pp. 215-7.

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, cols. 367-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 368.

constructive efforts', and the establishment of crude authoritarian rule, driving people to desperate measures like 'riots' or other 'unconstitutional resort to force.'⁴⁶

Today Mackinder's argument appears exaggerated and specious, clearly designed for polemical reasons; it also recalls sometimes the violent rhetoric used by the Edwardian Radical Right in defence of the old social order, threatened by the 'subversive' forces of Socialism and New Liberalism.⁴⁷ Led by sanguine figures like Maxse, Croft, and Willoughby de Broke, this particular section of the Conservative Party – composed by bourgeois Milnerites and aristocratic Diehards - challenged both the government and the party leadership with its riotous extra-parliamentary activities, supporting a staunch preservation of the Union and a solid strengthening of imperial ties with the Dominions. It also campaigned hard against Lloyd George's redistribution policies and promoted the adoption of conscription as a remedy to the growing military imbalance between Britain and its continental rivals.⁴⁸ In the end, however, its political action proved quite sterile, due to the constant divisions of its members over the development of constructive alternative policies against those of the Liberal government: Milner, for example, partially advocated federalism for Ireland, something completely unacceptable to intransigent Ulstermen like Sir Edward Carson, while Lord Hugh Cecil opposed both Home Rule and tariff reform in support of more limited views over political and economic regulation.⁴⁹ At the same time Unionist backbenchers rarely committed themselves to the full radical programme of the movement, limiting their attention to some specific issues and rejecting the general anti-democratic attitude of radical Conservatism.⁵⁰

This was clearly the case of Mackinder, who participated in several campaigns of the Tory Right, but without any ultimate subscription to the populist, 'desperate' creed of its colleagues. Instead he remained confident in the final effectiveness of the parliamentary system, based on the usual 'give-and-take' dialogue between different political parties,

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, cols. 370-1.

⁴⁷ On the Edwardian Radical Right, see Gregory D. Phillips, *The Diehards: Aristocratic Society and Politics in Edwardian England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Alan Sykes, 'The Radical Right and the Crisis of Conservatism before the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 661-76; Frans and Marilyn Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), pp. 515-37; and Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴⁸ For a short summary of these activities and their political impact, see Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, pp. 107-59.

⁴⁹ Sykes, 'Radical Right', pp. 663-5.

⁵⁰ Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right', pp. 529-30.

devoting his intellectual energies to the restoration of the traditional parliamentary balance as the proper bulwark against the authoritarian evils of 'party government':

It is a most extraordinary position...that the whole power of the nation is entrusted to a party representative of a bare majority of the nation, and on occasion not even that. On what principle is it possible to carry on a Constitution like the British Constitution? Only if that party power is not ruthlessly exercised. Only if there is a spirit of 'give-and-take', such as we believe to be consonant with the practical British character. I believe one reason people at this time are doubting the value of party government in our modern State is that they see an attempt to push to a ruthless and tyrannous extreme the powers that formerly were exercised under very different conditions.⁵¹

In spite of his violent tones, then, he constantly advised the government to respect minority rights, restoring the traditional 'give-and-take' game and exercising its executive powers with moderation.⁵² Otherwise the country risked to descend into civil war, following the tragic example of the United States in the 1860s and losing forever that perfect constitutional 'triumph' achieved only 'in very few other countries.'⁵³ This gloomy warning was already true for Ireland, torn by the raging controversy over Home Rule, and the rest of Mackinder's pre-war speeches were mainly concerned with such crucial issues, defending the rights of the Ulster minority and safeguarding the unity of the British Empire in an age of great international competition. Ironically, this stubborn defence would partially put his devolutionist ideals in the shade, giving space to a traditional Unionist view which seemed completely out of touch with the new reality of Anglo-Irish political relations. Indeed, Mackinder championed the mere preservation of the old status quo for Ireland, without any concession to local self-government, and he maintained such an orthodox position until the end of World War I, when the denial of Irish nationalist requests was almost impossible. But even then his perspective remained partially unmoved by the changed circumstances, conceding very little to the political emancipation of the 'Emerald Isle.'

What were the reasons of this 'diehard' attitude toward Irish affairs? According to Gerry Kearns, Mackinder was mainly hostile to the Irishmen for religious reasons, due to the militancy of his father Draper in the British Freemasonry, but this explanation is not completely satisfactory.⁵⁴ After all, other members of the Conservative Party were also imbued with the classical anti-popish prejudices of the Anglican establishment, perceiving

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, L, 1913, col. 277.

⁵² *Ibid.*, col. 279.

⁵³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, col. 371.

⁵⁴ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, p. 50.

Ireland as 'a hotbed for disloyalty' always 'plotting' against English Protestantism, but this old prejudice did not prevent them to accept some sort of reform of the Anglo-Irish Union in the late 1910s, especially along devolutionary and federal lines.⁵⁵ Indeed, the traditional negative attitude toward Irish self-government, which had still guaranteed Lord Salisbury's dominance of the party in the first Home Rule Crisis of 1886, seemed now outdated by the recent evolution of imperial relationships, with the successful federation of the Dominions and the wider debate over fiscal preference within the Empire.⁵⁶ From this point of view, even an arch-imperialist like Milner recognized the need for 'Home Rule in some form', maybe organized on a provincial basis like that of Quebec, while Earl Grey, the former Governor General of Canada, supported the establishment of a 'Federal Constitution' in Britain with 'certain provisions' in defence of property and civil liberties.⁵⁷ These early proposals were later elaborated by the Round Table in the glamorous call for 'Home Rule All Round', with the creation of a federal Parliament for the Empire and the distinct separation of British domestic affairs from international ones: in this sense, Lionel Curtis, Philip Kerr, and the other members of the 'Moot' believed that the best way to promote social reform at home was to establish different legislative assemblies across the United Kingdom, decentralizing the parliamentary power of Westminster and reuniting the various parts of the country into a broader political union similar to that established in South Africa after the Boer War.⁵⁸ But this radical project did not encounter the favour of old Conservative leaders like Balfour and Walter Long, who feared the utter disintegration of Britain as a result of legislative devolution, and it also failed to persuade a large segment of Tory MPs, confused by the mismanagement of federalist terms in the constitutional debate over Ireland.⁵⁹ Among them Mackinder was particularly outspoken against the federal solution, contesting it both on constitutional and geographical grounds:

What sort of Federal scheme are we presented with?...How is it possible that England, with its thirty-five or thirty-six millions of people, is to be represented in the [Federal] Senate on the same principle or in anything like the same

⁵⁵ For a short summary of the Conservative position over Ireland in the early twentieth century, see Jeremy Smith, 'Conservative Ideology and Representations of the Union with Ireland, 1885-1914', in *The Conservatives and British Society*, pp. 18-38.

⁵⁶ Smith, 'Conservative Ideology', pp. 28-9.

⁵⁷ John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), pp. 112, 117.

⁵⁸ On the federal schemes of the Round Table, see John Kendle, 'The Round Table Movement and "Home Rule All Round"', *The Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), pp. 332-53, and Gary Peatling, 'The Last Defence of the Union?: The Round Table and Ireland, 1910-1925', in *The Round Table: The Empire/Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy*, ed. by Andrea Bosco and Alex May (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1997), pp. 283-303.

⁵⁹ Kendle, *Ireland*, pp. 3-4.

proportionate number of representatives as will come from Scotland or Ireland. You are attempting something that is unprecedented in the world. In Canada you have two provinces, Quebec and Ontario; they are much of a size; there you can have federation in which they balance one another in the general Assembly. In Australia you have the same thing, for there you find New South Wales and Victoria balancing one another...This is a bogus and a sham agitation. You put this question up as a stalking horse, but what you want to do is to help Irish Home Rule...In Scotland you say it means devolution, but in Ireland it means that there are two separate races, and you want one of those races to dominate the other.⁶⁰

This idea of an Ireland divided into two 'different races', without any real possibility of federal administration, was repeated again and again, underlining the difficult position of Ulster in all the proposed changes to the traditional Union structure. Even Canada was a fallacious case in support of Anglo-Irish federalism, because it contained not only 'an example of good', but also 'a warning of evil' for British constitutional reformers:

Prior to the federation of Canada, in 1867, you had...a period of a whole generation during which two nationalities, Quebec and Ontario, were boxed into a single Constitution. They could not consort together. We know it was only with the greatest possible care that it was possible to work the Constitution of Canada as it stood during the fifties and sixties of the last century. It was only because during the later portion of the time they knew that the greatest preparations were being made in order to reverse the decision that had been come to, and in order to give free expression to these two peoples, that they submitted to the Constitution at all. In face of that warning we claim you have no right to press this measure. In face of that warning you are repeating precisely the conditions that prevailed in Canada. You are placing together two majorities, in Ulster and in the remainder of Ireland, and making them work a Constitution under almost precisely similar conditions to those under which Quebec and Ontario failed to work. That is one of the reasons why we say that you have no mandate at the present time in the ordinary sense of the word from Ireland for Home Rule. You have a mandate for a portion of Ireland, but you have also the protest of a separate community in Ireland.⁶¹

For all these reasons, it was absolutely necessary to maintain the old order, maybe passing apt legislative measures to increase 'the ever-increasing prosperity' going on in Ireland, but avoiding any sort of devolution, which would be harmful to the general health of the British Empire. Indeed, England was still too strong to allow an 'equal representation' of different states in a common federal system, guaranteeing both small and large communities, and it was 'very essential' to every 'true federation' to have not 'a single

⁶⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, cols. 1462-3.

⁶¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, L, 1913, col. 280.

predominant partner, but a balance of power' between its own members.⁶² This negative position was also justified by serious strategic circumstances, illustrated by Mackinder in his geographical masterpiece *Britain and the British Seas* in 1902. In this detailed study, published in 'The Regions of the World' series, Mackinder had depicted the Irish Sea as a closed 'marine antechamber' between the British Isles, structurally similar to the Mediterranean, where all the 'ocean-ways' of the world converged toward Liverpool and other important western ports of Britain.⁶³ Thus Ireland was completely insulated from the rest of Europe and wholly absorbed in the sphere of influence of its geographical neighbour, who had formally claimed the sovereignty of its 'narrow seas' since medieval times, sending regularly out its fleet to 'keep the peace upon them.'⁶⁴ The strategic implications of this condition were quite obvious: as the defence of Britain rested fundamentally upon the 'command of the sea', Ireland and its 'remarkable' harbours had to be controlled at all costs, avoiding the establishment of 'nests of hostile cruisers' along the oceanic 'antechamber' of the British coast. At the same time Ireland also contained, with northern England and Scotland, a crucial amount of 'reserves of men and constructive power' indispensable for the defence of London and the south-east, more exposed to amphibious attacks from continental Europe.⁶⁵ Any infringement of these industrial and military resources, maybe provoked by a conflict of interests between Irish and British political authorities, could be dangerous for the entire security of the British Empire based on the economic and administrative centres of 'Metropolitan England.'

Therefore it was on vital strategic and geopolitical grounds that Mackinder objected to all kinds of Home Rule schemes, constantly reminding his colleagues and his electors of the threat represented by an independent Ireland to the safety of British international power. Indeed, the French invasion of 1798 had already showed this troubling weakness in the defensive chain around Britain, resolved only two years later by the Act of Union, which had set up an 'all-powerful policeman' in Ireland, neutralizing both foreign intervention and the traditional religious conflict of the country. But in the following century Liberal governments had constantly undermined the authority of this 'policeman', endangering again the future of the British Empire: 'You disarmed the minority. You did it in 1829, you had to do it in 1869, and you had to do it in 1886. Having taken away the pistols and having disarmed your minority in Ulster, you now propose to withdraw the policeman. The [Home

⁶² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXVII, 1912, cols. 2131-3.

⁶³ Mackinder, *British Seas*, pp. 19-21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-4.

Rule] position is an impossible position.⁶⁶ Instead he praised the historical success of Scotland in the Union with England after the Jacobite Rising of 1745, suggesting that even Ireland could find its place on similar terms in the free and prosperous structure of the British Empire. After all, his own electoral city, Glasgow, had achieved a 'magnificent prosperity' through the numerous 'opportunities' derived from the political union with England, including the shared administration of vast and rich colonial territories.⁶⁷

There was probably more than a biographical note in such a proud apologia of Scottish Unionism and the entire argument completely ignored the main historical differences between Ireland and Scotland, including the dramatic famine of 1846 and the following rise of Irish nationalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ In this sense, Mackinder was generally insensitive toward the grievances of the Catholic majority of the island, and he campaigned only for the rights of the Ulster minority, denouncing any degree of Home Rule as an oppressive measure against Irish Protestants and justifying his opposition to devolution as a reaction to government hypocrisy:

They want Home Rule not as part of a Federal system; they want it because they wish one of the races in Ireland to control the other. It is a question of conflict between two races; it is not a question of devolution in Ireland, and that is the reason why we are not now allowed to consider the question of devolution, which they regard as a mere matter of mechanism in government, and they look upon devolution, giving administrative government to the separate parts of the United Kingdom, as being for purely local purposes.⁶⁹

This intransigent attitude was shared by other prominent Conservatives like Walter Long, who feared the further disintegration of the British state after the passage of Home Rule, and it quickly became the platform used by Andrew Bonar Law to reunite the party under his leadership, resisting the 'revolutionary' pressure of the Liberal coalition.⁷⁰ Faithful to his defence of constitutional liberties, however, Mackinder could accept some form of Irish political autonomy under precise legal 'safeguards' for the Ulster minority, protecting the country from the concrete risk of civil war: 'We want some words in this [Government of Ireland] Act upon which private organisations in Ireland appealing to the Privy Council in

⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, cols. 369-70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, cols. 1459-60.

⁶⁸ Indeed, Mackinder's family had probably Scottish origins, having moved to Lincolnshire from the north in the mid-eighteenth century. On this point, see Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, col. 365.

⁷⁰ John Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland, and the Union, 1905-1920* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Jeremy Smith, *The Tories and Ireland, 1910-1914: Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).

such a time – because the Government will not help them – may rest.⁷¹ Having placed power into the hands of a future ‘Parliament of Ireland’, Asquith and his cabinet had the duty to lay down ‘some general terms’ indicative of the way in which this power should be exercised.⁷² This seemed an effective way to reabsorb the exasperation of the Ulstermen along peaceful channels, avoiding the radicalisation of Irish politics on its traditional religious divide; when Mackinder made this declaration, in fact, Sir Edward Carson had already organized the first paramilitary units of the Ulster Volunteer Force, moving the acrimonious debate over Home Rule toward new dangerous heights. Milner was enthusiastic about this turn of events, rejecting his previous federal sympathies for ‘a sharp fierce struggle’ against the enemies of the Union, but Mackinder did not seem to share such a radical approach to the solution of the Irish question, warning the government of the possible catastrophic consequences of its actions:

You remove the constitutional methods of expression, and, as a result, you will find, and probably find in the Ulster case, that you have gone down below those splendid conventions which we have erected in this country as the result of our history, and you are going back to the naked facts of party government. If it does come to such a resort to resistance then we may be perfectly certain that the resort will not be confined to Ulster. You cannot have resistance of the kind I speak of with a limited liability. The whole country inevitably will be involved. What we say is, and you may call it a bogey if you like, that you are driving us nearer and nearer to the point. What we say is that by removing this power of forcing a majority, with the gigantic executive powers of the country solely in its hands, back to its masters in the country, you are plucking out by the very roots all those conventions which we call our Constitution, and you are going back to the naked hostilities of marshalled parties in our own areas which, within the recollection of some still living, did, across the Atlantic, result in civil war.⁷³

Finally the outbreak of European war in 1914 saved Britain from this gloomy prediction, freezing Home Rule and reuniting the country in the struggle against German expansionism. However, Ireland continued to dominate national political discourses, with a new dramatic boost after the Easter Rising of 1916, which partially confirmed Mackinder’s worst fears on the strategic vulnerability of the ‘Emerald Isle.’ But this time he knew that a merely negative attitude toward Irish requests was impossible and unrealistic, due to the changed international context of the time. Indeed, the conflict had brought the principle of national self-determination to the forefront of international politics, compelling the main Allied

⁷¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XLII, 1912, col. 2089

⁷² *Ibid.*, col. 2090.

⁷³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXIV, 1912, col. 371. On Milner’s position over the Ulster crisis, see Smith, *Tories and Ireland*, pp. 134-5.

powers to adopt it in their official diplomatic position.⁷⁴ Thus, even if the Irish question was ignored at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the British political establishment was extremely conscious of the need of a new constitutional arrangement for Ireland, silencing international criticism toward Whitehall and calming the vicious popular unrest in the country. The ideal solution seemed a partial resurrection of the previous federal schemes, with the establishment of separate national parliaments for the various parts of the United Kingdom reunited under a common imperial assembly. One of the main proponents of this new devolutionary plan was Leo Amery, who gained the support of several Unionist MPs and drafted even a detailed bill on the issue for the Lloyd George government.⁷⁵

As Walter Long, who presented a legislative draft similar to that of Amery in late 1918, Mackinder now genuinely supported the federal approach to the Irish problem, influenced probably by his own activities with the New Europe in favour of an independent Yugoslavia during the war.⁷⁶ But he remained sceptical on the concrete feasibility of parliamentary devolution, due to the persistent territorial and demographic superiority of England in a federated United Kingdom, which risked creating a constitutional unbalance between the various parts of the country, with dangerous consequences for the peace and stability of the entire British Empire.⁷⁷ In this sense, the negative example of Germany, formally composed by equal constituent states but strictly dominated by Prussia until the military defeat of 1918, had to be avoided at all costs, providing instead a 'reasonable balance' which would keep all the members of the new British federation in line. Therefore the only solution to the problem was the division of the United Kingdom on a regional basis, subordinating its various nationalities to a 'greater union' strengthened by administrative devolution, following the successful model of Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.⁷⁸ In his long monograph on *The Rhine*, published in 1908, Mackinder had already showed a certain appreciation for the cantonal system developed by the Swiss, perceiving it as a solid bulwark against authoritarian rule and as a valid union between different religious groups. And the case of small Appenzell, divided in two different cantons after the Reformation but still capable to fight as 'one in spirit' against foreign enemies, could certainly represent a

⁷⁴ Karen Stanbridge, 'Nationalism, international factors and the "Irish question" in the era of the First World War', *Nations and Nationalism*, 11 (2005), pp. 32-7.

⁷⁵ Kettle, *Ireland*, pp. 195-9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-7. On the New Europe, see Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen, 1981).

⁷⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXVI, 1919, col. 1920.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, cols. 1925-6.

sound compromise for the confessional troubles of Ireland.⁷⁹ Therefore he suggested the adoption of a similar administrative structure for the British Isles, beginning with the repartition of England into three larger districts: Greater London, the agricultural South, and the industrial North. Such a division would also have beneficial effects for the economy, giving 'real power' in the hands of agriculturists and industrialists to realise the 'material needs' of their respective fields, without any interference from London.⁸⁰

It is easy to see in this scheme traces of the previous geographical work for the Halsbury Club, with the creation of numerous electoral constituencies for the balanced repartition of seats in both Houses of Parliament. As in that specific case, however, the proposal was unable to gain wider political attention, suffering instead the open mockery of other MPs, who accused Mackinder of 'slicing' England into anachronistic units like the Kingdom of Kent and other bygone realms of the Middle Ages.⁸¹ At the same time the Camlachie deputy seemed still unconvinced of the goodness of the federal argument, exposing his devolutionary scheme in extremely general terms and downplaying again the real features of the Irish political debate, dominated by explicit requests for independent nationhood. Thus the project ended up in the 'dustbin' of Westminster, together with all the other federal schemes of the early post-war years, superseded by the dramatic establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921. As many other of his political colleagues, Mackinder proved unable to transcend the ideological polarisation of the Home Rule crisis, simply reinforcing his exclusivist beliefs in reaction to those of his adversaries. Even when he recognized the need for institutional change, guaranteeing some form of self-government to Ireland, he remained overcautious on the federal alternative, producing an interesting but vague plan for the administrative reorganization of Britain. Thus the Irish question – burdened by precise strategic concerns – represented a serious setback for his geopolitical imagination, generally so powerful in relation to other territorial issues.

There were two other 'minor' issues which concerned Mackinder in the antebellum period: women's suffrage and temperance for Scotland. On the first one, he was definitely opposed to any extension of voting rights to the female electorate, claiming more idealistic than practical reasons for this exclusion:

I believe that if you do grant this vote it will do very great harm to men in their relations to women. I believe that the whole history of society has lain in this,

⁷⁹ Halford Mackinder, *The Rhine: Its Valley and History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), pp. 56-8.

⁸⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXVI, 1919, col. 1928.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, cols. 1929-31.

that woman has succeeded in placing the burdens upon the shoulders of man, and I think she ought to keep them there...I regard it as discreditable to us that a large number of our women should be earning their living instead of attending to their homes, and I shall do anything in my power to remove them from that position. In so far as European society has removed us from savage conditions, it is due to the fact that slowly and through the ages women have converted men from being the irresponsible creatures that they are by nature, and tied them down and made them the leaders of the home, the maintainers of the livelihood, and the protectors of their wives and children.⁸²

It is ironic that Mackinder defended in public such a traditional view of gender roles in Edwardian society, considering his progressive role as an educator at Oxford and at the London School of Economics. In 1908, for example, he had sponsored the creation of 'a course of post-graduate instruction in Household Economics' at the LSE, open to further training for women in educational, administrative, and philanthropic duties. The aim of the scheme was to introduce 'scientifically trained women' in all branches of society, contributing to the 'national and human interests and needs' of the country: 'Scientific principles must be applied in the creation of healthy homes and of institutions which for the less fortunate among us take the place of homes...The first step must be to provide education of an advanced type for those who will hereafter conduct the work in its more elementary stages.'⁸³ From these last words, it is clear that the course still considered women as subordinate actors of social reform, but it certainly favoured a relative degree of emancipation for them in the domestic sphere, providing even a precious intellectual opportunity for their further involvement in public affairs. At the same time Mackinder also acted in support of young female geographers like Alice Thistle Robinson and Hilda Ormsby, contributing to their later success in the academic world.⁸⁴ Then why did he deny to them political emancipation, participating to the activities of the Anti-Suffrage League led by Lord Curzon and Lord Cromer until the final approval of women's suffrage in 1918?

According to Gerry Kearns, this negative position was probably due to the failure of his marriage with Emilie Ginsburg, which revealed all the anxiety of his personal masculinity; wounded by the experience, Mackinder chose then to reaffirm his identity of loyal 'imperial subject' defending traditional gender roles in the public debate. For him, in fact, the Empire was an 'arena' for 'manly endeavours', where women were not enough 'vigorous' to contribute to its general prosperity.⁸⁵ This interpretation is quite plausible, but it assumes

⁸² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXV, 1911, col. 764.

⁸³ 'Women and Household Economics', *The Times*, 24 January 1908, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Wise and Estall, *Geography at LSE*, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 91-5.

an excessive correlation between imperialism and anti-suffragism, ignoring the role of other imperialist figures like Amery and Haldane in the movement for women's political emancipation.⁸⁶ At the same time Kearns also seems to downplay another central factor behind Mackinder's reasoning, namely his fear that women's political emancipation could serve only the interests of a sector of British society, paving the way to 'party government' and civil war. Indeed, he saw 'a large body of apathy' and 'distinct opposition' among women on the subject of voting rights, which could result in the 'advantage' of an organized minority over the rest of society, with obvious implications for the final stability of the British constitutional order.⁸⁷ It is possible that this consideration was also nurtured by his second electoral campaign of 1910, where he lost a small but relevant amount of votes to a suffragist candidate, W.J. Mirrlees. In that occasion he declared his genuine commitment to 'the better education of women', seen as 'one of the most important questions of the day', but he insisted that 'force was at the root of political life', permanently barring women from the direct government of the country. Thus they could participate to public activities in other ways, using their 'enormous powers of persuasion' for the general improvement of society; in this sense, Mackinder suggested even the creation of 'a women's national council' expressing the 'aggregate opinion' of British womanhood on several key issues of national politics. This measure could be much more effective than the vote, 'which was merely a reckoning with force', transforming women into a powerful and respected political minority.⁸⁸

At Westminster, Mackinder frequently repeated this last argument, dismissing the vote as 'a cross marked on a piece of paper' and praising 'influence' as the real power behind modern democracy, thanks to its superior impact on political institutions: 'Influence is a totally different thing. Influence is addressed to those who have the physical power...By giving the vote, you seek to obtain the acquiescence of those who have power in the government of the country; by addressing arguments to them you seek to influence them to allow their power to be used in the way you think right.' Therefore women could still exercise a considerable 'influence' over public affairs without having the vote, 'an inferior thing' apt for 'the lower side of humanity.'⁸⁹ This discourse was clearly elitist, and it betrayed a lot of distrust toward modern mass politics, seen as a dangerous threat for the

⁸⁶ Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, pp. 75-6.

⁸⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXV, 1911, cols. 756-7.

⁸⁸ 'Anti-Suffrage League: Address by Mr. Mackinder, MP', *The Glasgow Herald*, 21 January 1911, p. 11.

⁸⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXV, 1911, col. 763.

political stability of the country. However, it was also in accordance with the assumptions of many Edwardian women, who really believed in the possibility of being ‘better citizens’ without the vote, pursuing a sound path of emancipation outside the closed quarters of the political arena.⁹⁰ This idea was expressed in the manifesto of the Anti-Suffrage League, for example, which declared the creation of a ‘large and comprehensive league’ of men and women ‘equally represented’, determined to spare the country from an ‘ill-advised innovation.’⁹¹ Among the signatories there were several prominent women, including social reformers like Mary Augusta Ward and Violet Markham, who remained faithful to their position until the defeat of the anti-suffragist front in 1918. Thus, if Mackinder’s position may appear hypocritical or contradictory today, it was not so in his own time. He really believed to profess a reasonable point of view on the subject, respecting women in their traditional roles and acknowledging the need for a gradual improvement of their social condition.

On the issue of temperance, Mackinder’s ideological stance was definitely more libertarian: even if he personally loathed ‘the sight of a drunken man’, he opposed any legislative intervention on the matter, asking for ‘constructive experiments’ and not ‘merely repression’ against popular alcoholism.⁹² However, this did not mean that he was completely insensitive to the reasons of the temperance movement, presenting himself as ‘anything but a strong friend’ of its cause in an open letter sent to a general meeting of the Scottish Band of Hope Union in Glasgow: ‘I yield to no one in my strong anxiety to reduce the evils from which we suffer in consequence of the prevalence of drinking to excess; but I believe that you will set back the temperance cause instead of advancing it if you attempt to legislate tyrannously and unjustly.’⁹³ In this sense, he felt that he was simply defending the Liberal tradition of minimal government which had been at the core of his political beliefs before the sudden conversion to tariff reform in 1903. Indeed, his interventions against state interference over liquor licenses were full of classical liberal principles, including the constitutional guarantee of individual rights in face of government pretences: ‘The individual citizen in this country is supposed to have his rights secured even though he

⁹⁰ The famous novelist Mary Augusta Ward is a good example of this anti-suffragist tendency among British women. On her role in the Anti-Suffrage League, see Maroula Joannou, ‘Mary Augusta Ward (Mrs Humphry) and the Opposition to Women’s Suffrage’, *Women’s History Review*, 14 (2005), pp. 561-80.

⁹¹ ‘Anti-Woman Suffrage Appeal’, *The Times*, 21 July 1910, p. 9.

⁹² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXXVI, 1912, col. 895.

⁹³ ‘The Temperance Bill: Mr. Mackinder, MP, on the Measure’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 1 April 1912, p. 10.

is in the smallest minority. That is a pride which we usually have in our institutions.⁹⁴ What New Liberalism was trying to do, instead, was simply a return to the 'tyranny' of the Tudor sovereigns, infringing the freedom of private citizens 'in every corner of the land' and taking an authoritarian course contrary to the effective promotion of healthy drinking.⁹⁵ In opposition to such new Puritanism, Mackinder advocated instead a more versatile action against alcohol abuse, stopping useless repressive action and seeking 'constructively' an educational dialogue with the public on the problem.⁹⁶ Moreover, he also favoured the adoption of a 'limiting resolution' toward public houses in Glasgow, which would reduce effectively their excessive number without 'throwing the flood' of local drunkenness from one part of the city to the other.⁹⁷ His suggestions were ridiculed by Liberal backbenchers, but the failure to implement moral legislation in Scotland partially vindicated his judgement, showing all the limits of state reformism in Edwardian society.⁹⁸

Summing up, Mackinder's experience in the House of Commons before 1914 was far from the personal and intellectual failure depicted by modern biographers like Parker and Blouet. On the contrary, he learned a lot from his rhetorical clashes with the Liberal majority, advancing his convictions with skill and flexibility. At the same time his extra-parliamentary involvement with pressure groups like the Halsbury Club and the Anti-Suffrage League helped him to elaborate a varied position on several national issues, gaining a new political agenda after the partial dismissal of tariff reform in 1911. This agenda was based on the stubborn defence of the old British constitutional order, threatened by the progressive collectivism of the New Liberalism, and it was pursued with relentless energy throughout a short but extremely convulsed period of time. It was mainly a negative agenda, however, and it proved unable to present valid alternatives to the Liberal programme, suffering constant defeat in the parliamentary arena until the end of World War I. Indeed, by 1922, when Mackinder lost his seat at Camlachie, many of the reforms that he had opposed ten years earlier (Parliament Act, women's suffrage, Irish self-determination) were already part of the British political landscape, without any serious possibility of future reversal. Anyway it would be wrong to assume that Mackinder's battle had been a failure: the open confrontation with modern progressivism had partially compelled him to revise his original beliefs, updating them to the utter transformation of

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LIV, 1913, col. 698.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 703.

⁹⁶ *Hansard*, Commons, XXXVI, 1912, cols. 901-2.

⁹⁷ 'Temperance Bill', p. 10.

⁹⁸ On the limits of Liberal moral legislation, see Stefan Petrow, 'The Legal Enforcement of Morality in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England', *University of Tasmania Law Review*, 11 (1992), pp. 59-74.

British society. Defending the foundations of Empire at home he learned to develop a broader political perspective for the post-war years, using it successfully in support of the new Commonwealth of Nations in the late 1920s. Those at Westminster were definitely not 'Lost Years' and they represented a necessary precondition for the pursuit of future political achievements, including the effective direction of several imperial committees in the two interwar decades.

Moreover, Mackinder was quite far from the diehard despair of other Unionists like Milner or Page Croft, who saw in the violent intransigence of the anti-Home Rule movement the only positive result achieved by their party in those difficult times. Indeed, he never lost his faith in a complete reversal of the situation at the general election of 1915, which could also give another opportunity to the great constructive cause of tariff reform. As he openly declared to his constituents in April 1913, he had not given up his previous opinions, seeking another mandate 'from the country' on some parts of the imperial preference scheme at the next electoral turn.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, he followed loyally the line dictated by the Unionist leadership, recognising the importance of party discipline and respecting the decisions of his superiors. After all, he considered himself 'a practical man', who 'did not believe in crying for the moon if he could not get it at the moment', waiting for more promising times in the future.¹⁰⁰ Of course, he was quite disappointed by the current state of British political affairs, dominated by 'questions of mere constitutional machinery' and controlled by 'small bodies of extremists' favoured by an ill-planned electoral system, and he resented the absence of social reforms based on cool and careful 'scientific investigation', open to the full application of his intellectual talents.¹⁰¹ Despite some degree of personal frustration, however, he still maintained a moderate and relatively positive attitude toward British parliamentary institutions, insisting merely on the restoration of an adequate series of checks and balances 'which would make sure that it was the nation sober that legislated' and not that 'drunk' by the violent passions of party politics.¹⁰² From this point of view, his conservative outlook never entertained authoritarian designs or reactionary nostalgias, rejecting the 'politics of despair' of other Unionist representatives and praising instead the traditional 'responsible government' of the British people.

⁹⁹ 'Political News: Mr. Mackinder on Home Rule', *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 April 1913, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ 'Single-Chamber Dangers: Mr. Mackinder on Parliament's Mood', *The Glasgow Herald*, 4 April 1913, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ 'National Defence: Mr. Mackinder, MP, on the Situation', *The Glasgow Herald*, 4 March 1913, p. 8.

¹⁰² 'Single-Chamber Dangers', p. 10.

This was clearly visible, for example, in his moderate attitude toward the Marconi scandal, which suddenly enflamed the national political climate in 1912, providing useful polemical arguments to the extremist campaign led by Leopold Maxse and Hilaire Belloc against the 'corrupt' nature of the British parliamentary system.¹⁰³ However, Mackinder substantially rejected the virulent anti-democratic and anti-Semitic tones of this initiative, criticizing the partisan nature of the parliamentary inquiry on the Marconi case and asking other members of the House of Commons to be 'a little careful' in their public pronouncements on the affair.¹⁰⁴ Although he followed 'with much interest' the development of the case on the press, condemning some Liberal ministers for their inappropriate behaviour, he thought that it was important to 'refrain at any rate from any comment which had a note of bitterness in it', respecting the constitutional prerogatives of the British Parliament and waiting for more accurate reports on the case before any serious discussion both inside and outside the Westminster assembly.¹⁰⁵ This cautious and balanced position was completely at odds with the violent rhetoric of the Edwardian Radical Right, who hoped to replace the old parliamentary 'plutocracy' with more reliable 'patriotic' institutions, and it confirmed Mackinder's genuine attachment to the traditional liberties of the British constitution, seen as the best guarantee for a positive 'organic' evolution of the national community. He never felt a marginalised and hopeless 'Diehard', remaining instead well integrated in the mainstream conservatism of the Unionist party.

Therefore it is possible to conclude that, although his parliamentary experience was extremely disappointing at times, Mackinder did not consider it as an utter failure, using it quite effectively to defend his personal ideals and to refine his political skills. Needless to say, this harsh training showed its beneficial effects only during the World War, when the geopolitical storm over Europe finally created those great 'constructive opportunities' which Mackinder had vainly sought in his early years at Westminster, saving him from the narrow and poisonous atmosphere of British domestic politics.

¹⁰³ For a short summary of the Marconi affair, see Geoffrey Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 172-200. On Maxse's reaction to the scandal, see Hutcheson, *Maxse*, pp. 433-63.

¹⁰⁴ 'Mr. Mackinder on Home Rule', p. 10; 'Mr. Mackinder, MP: Careful Speech about Marconi Matter', *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1913, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ 'Mr. Mackinder on Home Rule', p. 10.

Chapter Four

Geography and War: The Origins and Influence of the Pivot Paper

Delivered to a small selected audience at the Royal Geographical Society, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, 'The Geographical Pivot of History' is generally considered as the main work which established Mackinder's reputation as a prominent geopolitical strategist in the twentieth century.¹ Indeed, even if the paper was largely ignored at the time, its later rediscovery by German and American political geographers during World War II transformed Mackinder into a respected 'authority' over modern international affairs, discussed or cited both by statesmen and academic theorists across the globe.² According to Colin Gray, for example, his ideas discerned an 'enduring pattern' of opposition between oceanic and continental powers, heavily influencing American foreign policy during the Cold War, while Gerry Kearns has recently claimed their substantial impact upon the political philosophies of Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Vladimir Putin.³ On the other hand, Mackinder's global views have been contested by Christopher Fettweis, who considers them 'as obsolete as major war itself', but exalted by Alexander Dugin, who manipulates them to justify his project of a vast anti-Western alliance between Russia and other Eurasian powers.⁴ And it was Mackinder's perceived importance for Western geopolitics that prompted Gearoid O Tuathail to launch a critical school of the field in the early 1990s, challenging the traditional power philosophy of International Relations Theory.⁵ Thus, after more than one hundred years from his speech in front of the RGS, Mackinder can be considered as a classical 'founding father' of modern strategic thought, receiving the constant attention of many sectors of international public life.

However, such a pervasive and contradictory interest toward the character has rarely encouraged an accurate evaluation of the Pivot Paper in its own historical context,

¹ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', pp. 421-37. The small audience of the event included Leo Amery, Spenser Wilkinson, D.G. Hogarth, and Thomas Holdich.

² For a general overview of Mackinder's influence over twentieth century international relations, see Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 176-212.

³ Colin S. Gray, 'Ocean and Continent in Global Strategy', *Comparative Strategy*, 7 (1988), p. 439; Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 6-9.

⁴ C.J. Fettweis, 'Revisiting Mackinder and Angell: The Obsolescence of Great Power Geopolitics', *Comparative Strategy*, 22 (2003), p. 110; Ingram, 'Dugin', pp. 1034-6.

⁵ Indeed, Mackinder is one of the main targets of O Tuathail's radical critique of the geopolitical field. See for example *Critical Geopolitics*, pp. 75-110.

favouring instead wide political and cultural generalizations on Mackinder's assumptions about the 'closed' internal spaces of Central Asia. Indeed, the same Mackinder seems to have become merely 'a cardboard figure' for any kind of security discourse toward those areas, neglecting the huge technological, military, and diplomatic changes of the last half century.⁶ Moreover, the deep geographical sensibility of his early writings is usually sacrificed to 'simplistic visions of containment and domino' which pay no attention to the extreme complexity of present international affairs, dominated by multiple regional processes and transnational actors.⁷ Thus the final result of all these intellectual manipulations is the persistent distortion of the man and his thought, detached from their original roots and adapted to the special needs of current geopolitical analysts. And unfortunately no modern biographer seems to have effectively rebuked this erroneous trend in favour of historical accuracy, perpetrating the myth of a monolithic Heartland theory unchanged from 1904 to the present. W.H. Parker, for example, defended the conventional interpretation of the Pivot Paper with fierce polemical strength, rejecting all the main geo-strategic objections of its critics, while Brian Blouet claimed that Mackinder had exactly foreseen 'the future of Britain' before and after the dramatic events of World War II.⁸ In more recent times, Gerry Kearns has criticized this anti-historical approach, but even his own analysis is far from being satisfactory: indeed, the Pivot Paper is merely seen as a sort of 'spatial fetish' designed to support British maritime hegemony against the rising land power of Russia, without any clear discussion of the strategic debate of the time, dominated by the sea power doctrines of Alfred Thayer Mahan.⁹ Only a small group of academic historians has devoted its attention to the topic, providing a first interesting glimpse of Mackinder as an Edwardian strategist, fully involved in the main defence controversies polarizing Britain before 1914.¹⁰ But there is still much work to do in support of this new interpretative direction.

Therefore this chapter will try to set the Pivot Paper in its original context of 1904, following also the further development of Mackinder's strategic views in the last decade before the outbreak of World War I. The analysis will attempt especially to clarify three

⁶ O Tuathail, 'Putting Mackinder', p. 102.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸ Parker, *Mackinder*, pp. 213-47; Blouet, *Mackinder*, p. 204.

⁹ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 151-9.

¹⁰ Pascal Venier, 'The Geographical Pivot of History and Early Twentieth Century Geopolitical Culture', *The Geographical Journal*, 170 (2004), pp. 330-6; Sarah O'Hara, Michael Heffernan, and Georgina Enfield, 'Halford Mackinder, the "Geographical Pivot", and British Perceptions of Central Asia', in Brian Blouet (ed.), *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 90-124.

aspects of the issue, generally misunderstood or misrepresented by previous scholars: the position of Germany in the Pivot Paper, the role of sea power in Mackinder's strategic vision, and the impact of the RGS address on the political establishment of early twentieth century Britain. In this sense, the 1904 lecture will not be seen in isolation, but put in direct relationship with other texts of the period, including parliamentary speeches and newspaper articles. At the same time Mackinder's arguments will be compared with those of other contemporary political and intellectual figures, placing them into a comprehensive picture of the strategic trends of the Edwardian era. The final aim of all this work is to present an accurate assessment of the Pivot Paper devoid of its preposterous characterizations, enlightening the merits and limits of Mackinder's big international vision. Indeed, far from being a 'strategist out of time' on the model of Sun Tzu and Thucydides, he was definitely a man of his time, sharing the needs and prejudices of a national elite faced by new unexpected problems at the turn of the century. And his geopolitical proposal was mainly designed in response to these peculiar circumstances, showing more the skills of a pragmatic academic entrepreneur than those of the 'Heartland prophet' depicted by his future German and American disciples.

But what did compel Mackinder to write such a complex and elaborate paper, described by Spenser Wilkinson as 'one of the most stimulating' ever presented at a meeting of the RGS?¹¹ The answer is not as simple as it might seem, presenting both cultural and instrumental aspects. First of all, the 1904 lecture was definitely the product of the 'geopolitical panic' of the early twentieth century, marked by the sudden crisis of the traditional European world order and the convulsive development of new revolutionary communication technologies across the globe.¹² Indeed, the rise of vast continental powers like Russia, Germany, and the United States – fostered by the remarkable creation of linked railway networks in every corner of the world – led to a dramatic acceleration of the colonial race and economic integration of the late nineteenth century, closing the era of great geographical discoveries and nurturing widespread fears of a 'closed-space' international system, devoid of any 'safety valve' against increasing social and political

¹¹ Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), p. 437.

¹² Michael Heffernan, 'Fin de Siècle, Fin du Monde?: On the Origins of European Geopolitics, 1890-1920', in Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 27-51; Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 1-24.

instability.¹³ This landmark transformation was perfectly caught by Frederick Jackson Turner, the famous American historian, who commented with genuine regret the disappearance of the Western frontier, focus of domestic and external energies for almost four centuries:

Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them...What the Mediterranean sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that, and more, the ever retreating frontier has been to the United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely. And now...the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.¹⁴

This mixture of sadness and alarm was also shared by other refined intellectuals like Brooks Adams, who warned about the risk of a possible 'reversion to barbarism', similar to that experienced by the late Roman Empire in the fifth century, suggesting a strong expansion of American commercial interest in Asia as the only way to repeal social and cultural decline.¹⁵ Four centuries after the discovery of the New World, then, the entire global system seemed on the verge of a crucial historical evolution, stimulating 'wistful reflection' on the past and the future of modern civilization.¹⁶

One brand of this widespread philosophical speculation, expressed often in prophetic terms, was the new discipline of geopolitics formulated by Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922) and Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), where a bold mixture of physical geography and evolutionary biology promised to formulate positive predictions on the imminent development of the international order, securing the survival of European nation-states in the incoming century.¹⁷ Indeed, Ratzel believed that the future global order would still be based on territorial communities, struggling for space and power against their neighbouring rivals:

¹³ Keith Neilson and T.G. Otte, ' "Railpolitik": An Introduction', in Id. (eds.), *Railways and International Politics: Paths of Empire, 1848-1945* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-20; Gerry Kearns, 'Closed space and political practice: Frederick Jackson Turner and Halford Mackinder', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1 (1984), pp. 23-34.

¹⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893)* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 38.

¹⁵ William Appleman Williams, 'Brooks Adams and American Expansion', *The New England Quarterly*, 25 (1952), pp. 217-32; Charles Hirschfeld, 'Brooks Adams and American Nationalism', *The American Historical Review*, 69 (1964), pp. 371-92.

¹⁶ Heffernan, 'Fin de siècle', p. 31.

¹⁷ Ola Tunander, 'Swedish-German geopolitics for a new century: Rudolf Kjellén's "The State as a Living Organism" ', *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), pp. 451-63; Mark Bassin, 'Imperialism and the nation state in Friedrich Ratzel's political geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 11 (1987), pp. 473-95.

romantic nationalism, however, was not enough to stand up in this fierce contest, requiring instead a 'geographical politics' concerned above all 'with land.'¹⁸ Thus geopolitics represented a form of scientific analysis designed to shape geographically the foreign policy of modern nations, preparing them to safeguard their political and economic position in the international arena. Mackinder never considered himself as a geopolitician, but he certainly followed this line of enquiry for the Pivot Paper, providing his personal interpretation of the current world crisis. According to his own geopolitical perspective, in fact, Europe had recently seen the end of the 'Columbian epoch', entering into a new era marked by a 'closed political system' of worldwide dimensions. The implications of such a new situation were quite obvious: 'Every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe, and weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence.'¹⁹ Inspired by the 'half-consciousness' of this fact, international statesmen should then divert their attention 'from territorial expansion to the struggle for relative efficiency', learning to correlate large geographical and historical events into a broader comprehensive synthesis: 'For the first time we can perceive something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world, and may seek a formula which shall express certain aspects, at any rate, of geographical causation in universal history.'²⁰ In this sense, the RGS address was an ambitious attempt to exhibit human history as 'part of the life of the world organism', partially rejecting the romantic and Eurocentric tradition of Victorian historians:

What I may describe as the literary conception of history, by concentrating attention upon ideas and upon the civilization which is their outcome, is apt to lose sight of the more elemental movements whose pressure is commonly the exciting cause of the efforts in which great ideas are nourished. A repellent personality performs a valuable social function in uniting his enemies, and it was under the pressure of external barbarism that Europe achieved her civilization. I ask you, therefore, for a moment to look upon Europe and European as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history, for European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion.²¹

Thus Mackinder offered to his audience a new great narrative of the Eurasian landmass from the late twelfth century, mainly centred on its long-term geographical features (marshes, steppes, river drainages) and developed along the great nomadic peoples

¹⁸ Bassin, 'Imperialism', p. 480.

¹⁹ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 422.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

(Mongols, Cossacks, Turks) who had used such unique features to their own advantage, compelling the nations of Western Europe to search for fortune and security on the Atlantic Ocean, with the great maritime expeditions of Columbus and Vasco da Gama. The final result of this epochal process – described sometimes with a certain confusion – was the creation of prosperous ‘New Europes’ across the globe, which had relegated the ‘geographical pivot of history’ in the steppes of Eurasia to a marginal role for the rest of the ‘Columbian age.’²² That legacy should now be preserved in the twentieth century, avoiding the gradual return of global power to the Pivot area.

Leo Amery was fascinated by such an elaborate exposition, comparing Mackinder to Herodotus for the skilful integration of history and politics under ‘one big comprehensive idea’, but the Pivot Paper was far from being exceptional in the cultural debate of the time.²³ Indeed, similar ideas of historical ‘longue durée’, later theorised by Fernand Braudel in his famous studies of the Mediterranean world, had already been discussed by Turner, Adams, and Mahan in their popular works of the 1890s, while J.R. Seeley had even applied them to the colonial expansion of England, providing British imperialists with solid arguments in support of their campaign for a united ‘Greater Britain.’²⁴ Mackinder was then following the main lines of reflection of his period, trying to use geography as a valid interpretative scheme for the anxious changes of the ‘post-Columbian age’, but it would be unfair to dismiss his attempt as a mere repetition of the previous work of other authors. On the contrary, his lecture blended successfully geographical and historical elements into a common synthesis of powerful appeal, where spatial imagination transformed conventional knowledge into a fascinating lens on the past, present, and future of global history. In this sense, it was a perfect example of that new fin-de-siècle geopolitics which aimed to understand the world in its entirety, highlighting the ‘fundamental historical discontinuity’ between the opening century and the previous ones.²⁵ After all, the railway revolution of the last decades had seriously modified the international balance of power in favour of the Pivot area, requiring a firm grasp of the new geographical realities upon the Eurasian landmass:

²² Mackinder, ‘Geographical Pivot’, pp. 423-33.

²³ Mackinder, ‘Geographical Pivot: Discussion’, pp. 439-40.

²⁴ Turner, *Significance of the Frontier*, op.cit.; Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (1895), with an Introduction by Charles A. Beard (New York: Vintage Books, 1959); Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1889); J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883). On Braudel, see Jacques Revel (ed.), *Fernand Braudel et l’Histoire* (Paris: Hachette, 1999).

²⁵ Heffernan, ‘Fin de Siècle’, p. 31.

A generation ago steam and the Suez canal appeared to have increased the mobility of sea-power relatively to land-power...But trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power, and nowhere can they have such effect as in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia, in vast areas of which neither timber nor accessible stone was available for road-making. Railways work the greater wonders in the steppe, because they directly replace horse and camel mobility, the road stage of development having here been omitted...There have been and are here the conditions of a mobility of military and economic power of a far-reaching and yet limited character. Russia replaces the Mongol Empire. Her pressure on Finland, on Scandinavia, on Poland, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China, replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen.²⁶

This last observation, however, also revealed the instrumental aspect of Mackinder's analysis, clearly designed to suggest a revised strategy for the defence of the British Empire in Central Asia, threatened by the constant expansion of Russian economic and military power in the region. Such aspect has generally been undervalued by modern scholars, who have instead devoted their main attention to the cultural dimension of the Pivot theory, ignoring its more immediate practical purposes. Indeed, when Mackinder presented his paper at the RGS, the long rivalry between Britain and Russia along the borders of India – generally known as the 'Great Game' – was reaching its dangerous climax, thanks also to the escalating Russo-Japanese conflict in the Far East. Worried about the unrelenting pressure of Russia over the buffer states of Persia and Afghanistan, British decision-makers tried to shape a valid defence of the Raj against any foreign invasion without the excessive financial and human costs proposed by Lord Kitchener, new Commander-in-Chief of India, who asked instead for the rapid deployment of more than 150,000 troops just to keep Afghanistan under British control.²⁷ Even Russian defeat in Manchuria did not stop public anxiety over India, resulting later in a diplomatic entente with the Tsarist government in August 1907.²⁸ Today British fears may appear wildly exaggerated, serving merely as a disguise for further colonial expansion in Central Asia, but at the time they represented the logical outcome of almost two decades of rising paranoia, ignited by the Pendjeh crisis of 1885 and nurtured by a flood of related popular literature from renowned 'experts' of Asian affairs.²⁹

²⁶ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', pp. 434-6.

²⁷ Philip Towle, 'The Russo-Japanese War and the Defence of India', *Military Affairs*, 44 (1980), pp. 111-7; Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 209-78.

²⁸ Beryl J. Williams, 'The Strategic Background to the Anglo-Russian Entente of August 1907', *The Historical Journal*, 9 (1966), pp. 360-73.

²⁹ O'Hara, Heffernan, and Enfield, 'Mackinder', pp. 92-6.

As a young member of the RGS, Mackinder had certainly been imbued by a considerable amount of such material, delivered especially by influential personalities like George Nathaniel Curzon and Thomas Holdich, directly involved in the public life both of the Society and of the British Raj. A former member of the Afghan Boundary Commission of 1884, in fact, Holdich gave often detailed lectures on Indian frontiers to his geographical peers, warning about the importance of modern railway connections for their defence: 'Mechanical science has advanced so far, that railways are now made to run where railways were previously impossible; and in the realms of what we may call strategical [sic] geography we have learnt very much lately that still requires to be straightened out into axiom and precept, all of which has a most important bearing on the approaches to India.'³⁰ On the other hand, Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, constantly emphasized the need for a correct appreciation of technological innovation in the Central Asian region, including the 'immense augmentation' of Russian prestige among local peoples: 'Already redoubtable for the endurance and bravery of her soldiers, she [Russia] has shown her superiority over those hostile forces of nature with which the fatalistic Oriental has never found spirit to cope. A railway in the deserts of Central Asia is a far more wonderful thing to the Eastern mind than one through the teeming territories of Hindostan: the passage of the sands more remarkable than the piercing of mountain ranges.'³¹ He also warned against the serious economic damages provoked by this 'revolution', transferring the control of local markets from Bombay and Manchester to Moscow: 'It is as impossible for England to enter into any independent commercial relation with the Amir of Bokhara as it would be for Russia to make a similar arrangement with the Maharajah of Kashmir...In Afghanistan, British commerce is not making the headway that might be expected in the south, and is suffering from Russian competition in the north...Lastly, in Persia...British trade is declining, and Russian trade is progressing.'³² As a consequence, any extension of Russian railways through Central Asia should be regarded as 'a crowning blow' to British colonial rule in India, compelling the Indian Exchequer to heavy military expenses for the preservation of peace and order.³³

³⁰ Thomas Holdich, 'Railway Connection with India', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 17 (1901), p. 226.

³¹ George N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), p. 276.

³² 'The British Association', *The Standard*, 14 September 1889, p. 2.

³³ Curzon, *Russia*, pp. 270-1.

But there was also another troubling aspect of the problem, something that struck deeply the imagination of people like Mackinder, who began to reflect on the argument since his first meeting with Curzon's ideas in the late 1880s:

The Russian Empire in Central Asia is impregnable. Every avenue of approach is in her own hands; there is no enemy at her gates. No Armada can threaten where there are no seas; no hostile army can operate at such a gigantic distance from its base. England can do her no positive injury. Her commerce is overland and cannot be touched; her communications are secure and cannot be severed...Russia is growing and spreading, is headstrong and young; and rash fingers are never wanting to beckon her on...The utmost we hope for is to arrest her before the Rubicon of our honour is reached; the least we desire is to provoke her to plunge into the stream.³⁴

This idea of geographical impregnability became the core of the Pivot Paper, where the great geo-historical analysis of the Eurasian landmass concealed a possible solution to the strategic dilemma faced by Britain in the steppes of Central Asia: the use of the many peninsulas (Italy, Egypt, Korea) around the pivot area as amphibious 'bridge heads' against Russia's continental power. And India played a crucial role in such an aggressive containment scheme, replicating on a larger scale the part played by Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. Thus, despite its great internal resources, the 'pivot state' remained a hostage to the dynamic force of the 'surrounding marginal and insular powers', proving the persistence of the geographical conditions of the 'Columbian age.' But the final outcome also depended upon the accurate estimate of the various factors involved in the struggle, with special reference to the physical ones, 'more measurable' and 'more nearly constant' than their human counterparts.³⁵ Hence the RGS lecture appeared as another parcel of the broader educational campaign conducted by Mackinder in support of the 'New Geography', seen as a powerful synthetic discipline capable to replace the ancient classics in the breeding of future British citizens. Indeed, the broader strategic implications of the Pivot theory could only be understood through a comprehensive geographical analysis of the global arena, as clearly grasped by Spenser Wilkinson in the discussion of the paper: 'We are very much too apt to look at our policy as though it were cut up into water-tight compartments...whereas it seems to me the great fact of to-day is that any movement which is made in one part of the world affects the whole of the international relations of the world – a fact which...is lamentably neglected both in British policy and in most of the popular discussion of it.'³⁶ And it was toward this 'popular discussion' of British

³⁴ Curzon, *Russia*, pp. 398-9. On the impact of Curzon on Mackinder, see Blouet, *Mackinder*, p. 114.

³⁵ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', pp. 436-7.

³⁶ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot: Discussion', p. 438.

international policy that Mackinder's lecture was aimed, showing the potential benefits of the geographical discipline to the arduous field of imperial defence.

Indeed, he returned again on the subject some months later, insisting on the value of spatial instruction for military operations across the Empire: 'An officer who is to rise in his profession should in these days learn to think not merely 'in shapes'...but to think spaciouly in shapes, or, in other words, geographically, and not merely topographically.'³⁷ Therefore the War Office should include geography in the pass examinations required for army commissions, preparing its candidate officers to their future service and contributing to the expansion of geographical departments within national universities.³⁸ Two years later this suggestion met partially the favour of the new Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane, who designed with Mackinder and Sidney Webb a training scheme for army staff officers at the London School of Economics, with special emphasis on geographical and statistical subjects. The main aim of the new course was in fact to reform armed forces along lines of economic and administrative efficiency, as the same Mackinder emphasized in his inaugural address of January 1907:

The Army is the greatest single business of this country...It is true, of course, that it is necessarily conducted on a different principle from ordinary city business. The Army is not conducted for profit, but to produce power. This power is used during peace time in order to maintain peace, and in war time to achieve victory. But although this distinction of profit and power is a real one, yet I do not think that it makes a very vital difference as regards methods. Your aim in the Army must be to produce the necessary amount of power at the least possible cost, and one of the main elements in a city business tending to produce profits is the saving of working expenses...If you are to spend and yet be economical, you must spend with knowledge, and in accordance with a policy, in other words, your expenditure must be efficient.³⁹

Thus it was extremely important that military officers learned to be efficient through technical education and 'a certain art connected with the imagination', which was also at the core of the modern 'realm of strategy', where the general used his special 'power of seeing' the surrounding situation 'in the fog of war' to change that situation 'by the simplest possible means.'⁴⁰ In this sense, geography could enable the army staff to grasp and reproduce in its official reports 'the supplies and communications of a given region',

³⁷ H.J. Mackinder, 'Geography and War', *The Times*, 22 November 1904, p. 10.

³⁸ H.J. Mackinder, 'Geography and War', *The Times*, 30 November, 1904, p. 8.

³⁹ *Army, Report of the Advisory Board, London School of Economics, on the First Course at the London School of Economics, January to July, 1907, for the Training of Officers for the Higher Appointments on the Administrative Staff of the Army and for the Charge of Departmental Services* (London: HMSO, 1907), p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

providing a broad and exhaustive perspective on the development of future British military operations.⁴¹ And the final examination papers of the course were openly designed to nurture this peculiar strategic talent, asking the candidates to sketch different supply and communication lines for the defence of Ireland, Canada, Belgium, and the Suez Canal.⁴²

Thanks to the help of brilliant lecturers like A.J. Sargent and W. Tetley Stephenson, who gave advanced lessons on economic geography and railway administration, Mackinder's direction of the training scheme was an astounding success, leading to the final graduation of around 30 students in the summer of 1907.⁴³ Labelled the 'Mackindergarten', in honour of the indefatigable Director of the LSE, the course continued then to instruct selected army officers from line commands and logistical departments until the early 1930s, improving considerably the general efficiency of army staff after the traumatic experience of the Boer War.⁴⁴ The positive results of this educational experiment pushed Mackinder to perorate again the cause of geographical knowledge in governmental services, this time directing his efforts toward the Foreign Office: 'The country requires men to meet the rapidly changing conditions of international competition who have not merely a general education but special information and specially trained attitudes...Surely geography is as necessary to the diplomat as to the soldier, and a knowledge of it might well be acquired before the age of 22.'⁴⁵ However, such academic advertisement did not find the favour of the diplomatic service, which continued to consider geography as a non mandatory subject for its examinations, and it was only the direct intervention of Sir George Goldie, the new President of the RGS, that reversed this decision in November 1907.⁴⁶ But the short incursion in the domain of international affairs had already paid its practical dividend, and Mackinder continued throughout his career to be focused on strategic issues, acknowledging the possible resonance of his writings on public authorities.

Of course, this does not mean that the 1904 lecture was merely designed to gain new recruits to the cause of geographical education; it also contained a serious strategic and philosophical ambition, providing a modern comprehensive perspective of international

⁴¹ *Army, Report*, p. 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ For a short history of the 'Mackindergarten', see Geoffrey Sloan, 'Haldane's Mackindergarten: A Radical Experiment in British Military Education?', *War in History*, 19 (2012), pp. 322-52.

⁴⁵ H.J. Mackinder, 'Diplomacy and Geography', *The Times*, 3 December 1906, p. 8.

⁴⁶ On the different responses of the War and Foreign Office to schemes of geographical reform, see D.R. Stoddart, 'Geography and War: The "New Geography" and the "New Army" in England, 1899-1914', *Political Geography*, 11 (1992), pp. 93-6.

changes through the analysis of their geographical and historical causation. But the paper had also a very concrete purpose, exploiting the political and military anxiety of the early twentieth century to promote the advance of geography in the British marketplace of ideas. As the same Mackinder openly recognized, geographical reformers should concentrate their efforts upon the door 'half open': 'Once geography is seriously taken up by the public schools, the Universities will experience a demand for teachers trained in the subject. They will in consequence have to strengthen their geographical departments, and...increased prestige will accrue to students of the subject who acquit themselves well.'⁴⁷ The success of the 'Mackindergarten' confirmed the soundness of this entrepreneurial attitude, giving even a huge boost to the position of the LSE in the Edwardian educational ranking. In the end, Mackinder was more a businessman than a prophet, and his geopolitical approach should also be considered in relation to the pragmatic objectives of his academic career.

On the other hand, his strategic outlook was daring and refined, gaining the overt praise of Spenser Wilkinson, an expert in the field of imperial defence, who genuinely regretted the absence of cabinet members among the audience of the RGS address. At the same time he also stated his belief that an 'island state' like Britain could maintain its naval power and hold the balance between the 'divided forces' working on the continental area, maybe cooperating with Japan in the containment of Russian land power.⁴⁸ Generally this faith in British sea power has been seen in complete opposition to Mackinder's strategic view, more concerned with the effects of increased land mobility on the Eurasian landmass: Paul Kennedy, for example, considered the Pivot Paper as a clear but isolated rebuttal of Mahan's popular doctrine of sea power, perceived as too weak and unstable to compete against the emerging continental power of the Russian heartland. In this sense, Mackinder's analysis correctly anticipated the dramatic decline of British influence in world affairs, deserving a serious 'rehabilitation' among military and naval thinkers in place of the overrated classical works of Mahan.⁴⁹ This interpretation, however, is based entirely on the hindsight of future international events and it largely neglects the reality of Mackinder's historical context, quite different from that simplistically sketched by Kennedy in his revisionist approach. Indeed, far from being a blind supporter of sea power, Mahan understood quite well the powerful physical advantages of continental states, fully

⁴⁷ H.J. Mackinder, 'Geography and War', *The Times*, 30 November 1904, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot: Discussion', pp. 437-8. On the influence of Wilkinson over Edwardian military affairs, see Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 253-90.

⁴⁹ Paul Kennedy, 'Mahan versus Mackinder: Two Interpretations of British Sea Power', in *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945: Eight Studies* (London: Fontana Press, 1984), pp. 43-85.

recognizing the peculiar strength of Russian geographical position in Eurasia.⁵⁰ Four years before Mackinder's own paper, he published a popular volume on the subject, where he identified a vast territorial belt from Suez to the Chinese coast vulnerable to the competing pressure of Russia from the north and Britain from the south. But it was Russia which was to have the upper hand in the contest, thanks to the 'vast, uninterrupted mass' of its territory, stretching without a break from western Asia Minor to Japan.⁵¹ This strong central position had been exploited in recent times to penetrate southward between Persia and Afghanistan, trying to reach an oceanic access on the Persian Gulf, but Mahan still believed that Britain could stop such bold expansion through the skilful use of India as the 'best fitted' base in defence of its imperial possessions in the Southern Hemisphere:

Protected on the land side and centre by the mountains of Afghanistan and the Himalayas, its flanks, thrown to the rear, are unassailable, so long as the navy remains predominant. They constitute also frontiers, from which, in the future as in the past, expeditions may make a refreshed and final start, for Egypt on the one hand, for China on the other; and...for any less distant destination in either directions. It is not intrinsically only that India possesses the value of a base to Great Britain. The central position which she holds relatively to China and to Egypt obtains also towards Australia and the Cape of Good Hope, assisting thus the concentration upon her of such support as either colony can extend to the general policy of an Imperial Federation.⁵²

And it was exactly a similar scheme of imperial defence that Mackinder advocated in his RGS lecture, probably inspired by Mahan's reflections on past and present historical events: 'On a smaller scale that was what Wellington accomplished from his sea-base at Torres Vedras in the Peninsular War. May not this in the end prove to be the strategical [sic] function of India in the British Imperial system?'⁵³ At the same time there was also another crucial element shared by Mahan and Mackinder in their analyses of the strategic landscape of Eurasia: the idea of a great international coalition designed to hamper the naval efforts of the Pivot state, avoiding its further projection on the oceanic world. Indeed, both men believed in a 'solidarity of interest' between Britain, the United States, and other maritime nations against the 'empire of the world' threatened by Russian expansionism.⁵⁴ Thus, far from being an anti-Mahanite obsessed by land power, Mackinder shared the same

⁵⁰ On Mahan's geopolitical ideas, see J.M. Robertson, 'Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Geopolitics of Asia', *Comparative Strategy*, 15 (1996), pp. 353-66, and Jon Sumida, 'Alfred Thayer Mahan, Geopolitician', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22 (1999), pp. 39-62.

⁵¹ A.T. Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1900), pp. 21-4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵³ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 436. Indeed, Mahan was one of the few contemporary authors directly cited in the RGS address – a clear sign of his influence over Mackinder's strategic ideas.

⁵⁴ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 436; Mahan, *Problem of Asia*, pp. 62-9.

faith of his American academic colleague in British sea power, seen as the main condition for the preservation of global peace. In this sense, the strengthening of the fleet became a common theme of his books and political speeches during the following years, contributing even to his parliamentary election in 1910. In *Money-Power and Man-Power*, for example, Mackinder remarked the importance of naval supremacy for the security and prosperity of the British Empire, enumerating its positive effects during the last decade:

Not once in these twelve years has the British fleet been engaged in battle, yet it has helped to win for us the friendship of America, of Japan, and of France; it has secured the efforts of our armies on the Nile and at the Cape, and by support of Japan has reduced the pressure on our Indian frontier and kept the door open for our trade in China. Nor have the benefits been confined to our own people. We have limited the field of two wars between foreign Powers, and it may prove that – again through our indispensable support of Japan – we have launched China on the road of Western civilisation, thus removing for good one of the chief risks to the world's peace.⁵⁵

But it was useless to compare current British sea power with that of the past, compelling the nation to search greater efficiency in the development of its naval forces as a guarantee for 'a fully independent place' among the leading nations of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ Indeed, Mackinder was fully aware of the remarkable development of German and American sea power since the turn of the century, recognizing even the future impact of new communication lines like the Panama Canal on the strategic balance of the Western Hemisphere:

The part of the United States which lies west of the hundredth meridian west has a very small rainfall except along the border adjacent to Canada, and California. The vast majority therefore of the American population must...live on the Atlantic slope. But the United States is deeply interested in Oriental markets, and she carries a great deal of traffic across the continent, therefore she is interested both in the Pacific and in the Pacific terminal of her railways...Her motives are thus those which induced Germany to make the Kiel canal. I submit that the construction of the Panama canal is not a bad investment for the United States, given the intention of being a naval power on both oceans.⁵⁷

Mahan, who was among the most influential supporters of the Canal initiative in the United States, would have approved such a perceptive analysis. Thus, during the electoral campaign for the Camlachie seat of 1910, Mackinder urged local voters to strengthen the

⁵⁵ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁷ Vaughan Cornish, 'The Panama Canal in 1908: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 33 (1909), pp. 179-80.

imperial fleet, reminding them that Germany was also building a naval force rivalling that of Britain, thanks especially to its protectionist fiscal policy. Therefore the cause of tariff reform and sea power were closely related: indeed, the adoption of imperial preference promised to maintain the Royal Navy at the same level of its German competitor.⁵⁸ Once elected to Westminster, Mackinder constantly pressed the issue on his parliamentary colleagues, heavily criticizing the Liberal government for its cautious attitude toward naval expenses:

It is what your Fleet does, and not what you say in regard to it, that compels other nations of the world to equip themselves: and unless we realise that, neither shall we do justice to our neighbours nor shall we realise the compulsions that are upon them; nor yet shall we realise the stern facts that are in front of us. During the last score of years Germany and other nations have been noting our use of our Fleet, and it is the use which we have made of that Fleet that has led to the present condition of affairs.⁵⁹

This rhetorical agitation for British sea power had often clear anti-German tones, suggesting to modern biographers an original hostility toward the German Empire. According to Brian Blouet, in fact, Mackinder was shocked by the Prussian victory at Sedan in 1870, developing an anxious awareness of the rise of German power in continental Europe, and the later suggestion of a possible Russo-German combination in the Pivot Paper corroborated the persistence of this theme in his strategic reflection. The same argument has been espoused by W.H. Parker, who presented Mackinder's view of international affairs as dominated by the German threat, perceived as an 'immediate danger' to the future of the British Empire. In this sense, the defence scheme of the Pivot Paper was designed to contain Germany, not Russia, from the successful exploitation of Eurasian land power.⁶⁰ This claim, however, seems highly preposterous, as recently remarked by Pascal Venier in his analysis of the geopolitical context of the early 1900s.

Indeed, at the time of the RGS lecture, the British government was mainly worried about Russia's advance in Asia, ignoring Germany from its strategic calculations or considering it as a minor threat to the general security of the empire. This was, for example, the influential outlook of Arthur Balfour, who kept a close control over British defence policies until the European conflagration of 1914.⁶¹ In spite of the constant growth of German naval

⁵⁸ 'Mr. Mackinder on Naval Rivalry', *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 January 1910, p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XLI, 1912, col. 920.

⁶⁰ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 115-9; Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 159.

⁶¹ Venier, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 331. On Balfour's role in the shaping of Edwardian imperial defence, see Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

power in the first decade of the twentieth century, he continued to perceive Russia as the most dangerous rival of Britain on the international stage, reminding often his parliamentary colleagues of the risks related to the extension of 'Russian strategic railways' toward the Indian border, seen as 'the heaviest blow' to the security of the British Empire in South Asia.⁶² On the other hand, he refused to consider Germany as a threat to national security, ridiculing any kind of 'invasion scare' and remaining quite friendly toward German authorities until the crucial Agadir crisis of 1911.⁶³ This non alarmist attitude was also shared by the majority of the Conservative Party, including tariff reformers like Amery and Mackinder, who considered Germany as a fiscal and social model for the declining economic conditions of Britain.⁶⁴ The Tariff Reform League, for example, promoted even regular collective trips to German cities for businessmen and workers, designed as a healthy instruction against the anti-German prejudices of the Liberal government.⁶⁵ It was only during the general elections of 1910 that the issue of German naval rivalry emerged as a powerful element of Conservative propaganda, but the tones still remained ambiguous, showing sympathy and respect toward the economic successes of the German Empire.⁶⁶

In this sense, Mackinder's speeches at Glasgow were quite moderate, insisting more on the imitation of German power rather than on its armed pre-emption. To the hecklers who labelled him as a 'warmonger', he remarked the peacefulness of his intentions, reserving his violent criticism for the Liberal government and suggesting the adoption of tariff reform as the best remedy against foreign competition. Considering his professional upbringing, shaped by the new geographical philosophy of the German school, he was probably sincere: in 1895, for example, he openly praised the organization of geography in Germany, setting it as an 'example' for the future development of the discipline in Britain, while eight years later he edited a refined work on Central Europe by Joseph Partsch in 'The Regions of the World' series, providing a detailed view of the European political landscape to the benefit of the British public.⁶⁷

⁶² Arthur Balfour, *Imperial Defence: A Speech Delivered in the House of Commons, May 11, 1905* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905), p. 30.

⁶³ Tomes, *Balfour*, pp. 130-50.

⁶⁴ Frank McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 69-84.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-104.

⁶⁷ Mackinder, 'Modern Geography', pp. 367-79; Joseph Partsch, *Central Europe* (London, Edinburgh and Glasgow: Henry Frowde, 1905).

At the same time he shared the general interest of the Edwardian intelligentsia toward German political culture, seen as a productive and organisational philosophy superior to the old Liberalism of the Victorian era.⁶⁸ His fellow Coefficient Haldane had already underlined this superiority in a series of educational addresses at the turn of the century, praising the advanced application of science to 'practical undertakings' in German industries and warning about the dangerous technical backwardness of their British competitors, especially in those vital manufacturing sectors which had made Britain 'the industrial centre [of the world]' in the previous decades.⁶⁹ From his part, Mackinder emphasized instead the strength of German protectionism, shaped by Bismarck along the economic doctrines of Friedrich List, and invited his fellow citizens to follow the example of the Wilhelmine Reich and other continental nations in rejecting the illusions of Liberal economic policies. After all, the new German navy could not have been paid without the remarkable development of 'new industries' where power and labour supported each other, valorising national wealth on the broader stage of world diplomacy.⁷⁰ Thus Britain should adapt itself to the new conditions of the twentieth century, reconciling the advanced inputs coming from Germany to its own national characteristics: 'The great States of the world have lately increased, are increasing, and, to all appearance, will continue to increase in power. Therefore, if Britain is to remain among them, a broader base of trade, wages, and labour must be found for her...I see no serious ground for the view that the average quality and education, or, in other words, the efficiency of our people, is markedly less that of the rest of the world.'⁷¹

Of course, this does not mean that Mackinder's view of Germany was solely positive. On the contrary, he appreciated the strategic power of German geographical position in Europe, recognizing its negative effects over British commercial fortunes:

Germany occupies a central position on the Continent of Europe. It is possible for Germany to send goods, without breaking bulk, from the factory to any market on the continent which is accessible by railway...There can be little question that in Italy, Hungary, and in the Near East, Germany must have an advantage over England, for the simple reason that we send our goods by rail down to the port, after which they have to be handled and placed on the ship. They are carried around to the port at the far end, and there they have to be

⁶⁸ Karl Rohe, 'The British Imperialist Intelligentsia and the Kaiserreich', in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*, ed. by Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (Oxford, 1981), pp. 130-42.

⁶⁹ Richard Burdon Haldane, *Education and Empire: Addresses on Certain Topics of the Day* (London: John Murray, 1902), p. 17.

⁷⁰ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, pp. 20-1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

handled again and placed on the railway, and only then carried to their destination; whereas, by a system of private sidings, it is possible for a factory in Germany to place the goods actually upon the truck within the factory gates...and to be sent from there...to Madrid, to Naples, or to Constantinople, and to be, in some cases, actually run into the yard of the wholesale dealer who is to distribute them within the town.⁷²

Later the perception of this economic threat, supported by the vast railway networks covering continental Europe, assumed even military implications, stimulated by the big 'naval scare' of 1909. Indeed, the defence of the Empire now passed across Europe, not along the borders of India as in the Pivot Paper, maintaining the traditional 'balance of power' of the continent through the skilful use of Britain as a flexible 'naval base' supported by the 'gradual increase' of Canadian military resources. After all, it was a vital interest of the maritime nations, including the United States, that no fleet of a 'united continental Europe' should ride the Atlantic Ocean, endangering the communication lines of their sea trade.⁷³ The reference to Germany was implicit but clear, underlined by the final recognition of Bismarck's prescience in the development of German military and naval power:

Germany looked forward a generation when Bismarck and von Roon forged that weapon, the German army, which made the German power of to-day. Bismarck looked forward a generation also when he annexed the territory through which the Kiel canal was to be constructed. In these matters, and in these days, foresight of a generation's length is not excessive where the vital questions of territorial productivity, national man power, strategical position, and imperial organization are under consideration.⁷⁴

The aggressive growth of the German fleet in the North Sea required the valorisation of Britain's position 'at the end of the land ways from the south-east and at the end of the ocean ways from the south-west', securing the 'rear' of imperial communications and defending national interests on a 'narrow front' with 'economy of man-power.'⁷⁵ At Westminster Mackinder reiterated again this crucial necessity, warning about the impending crisis of Anglo-German relations, accelerated by opposing strategic and economic interests:

Germany cannot appear anywhere in the world without running the gauntlet of our Fleet. It is quite true that if she seeks more than the defence of her own

⁷² Mackinder, 'Great Trade Routes', pp. 153-4.

⁷³ Halford Mackinder, 'Geographical Conditions Affecting the British Empire: I. The British Isles', *The Geographical Journal*, 33 (1909), p. 474.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

⁷⁵ H.J. Mackinder, 'Geographical Conditions Affecting the British Empire: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 33 (1909), p. 478.

shores, the expansion of her trade or the protection of her position elsewhere, she has always to have regard to the position of this country's Fleet, whether it be in Scotland, in the Shetlands, or in the Channel. I firmly believe without any sense of panic that the German nation is forced to contemplate the invasion of this country, because in no other way is it possible for her to remove the threat which would throttle her on her way to the oceans of the world.⁷⁶

This hard stance was also shared by Lord Roberts, the former Commander-in-Chief of India, who campaigned for the introduction of conscription in Britain to face the danger of foreign invasion. In February 1902, supported by Milner and Garvin, he had created the National Service League, an organization devoted to the education of the British public on the topic, but it was only after the fierce naval debate of 1909 that his speeches began to refer directly to the German threat, warning against the fragility of British defences toward continental Europe: 'Now, gentlemen, at the present day...war will take place the instant German forces by land and sea are, by their superiority at every point, as certain of victory as anything in human calculation can be made certain... That was the policy relentlessly pursued by Bismarck and Moltke in 1866 and 1870; it has been her[Germany's] policy decade by decade since that date; it is her policy at the present hour.'⁷⁷ Although not a member of Roberts' association, Mackinder also insisted on the crucial importance of military instruction in his geographical textbooks for young students, promoting the bellicose culture of the time. In *The Modern British State*, for example, he reminded his readers that the 'duties of citizenship' were not exhausted by 'obedience to the law' and the 'payment of taxes', but they also included the active defence of the homeland against foreign threats, because 'a nation' was definitely 'in a bad way' if the large majority of its 'able-bodied members' did not appear ready to fight for 'their hearts and homes.'⁷⁸ And this defence should be mainly exercised on the 'surrounding sea' of Britain, denying the approach of any 'hostile fleet' from the continent: 'Either we shall be in command of the sea, and able if we chose to land an Army on the hostile coast, or the enemy will be in command of the sea, and we shall be in danger of invasion by his Army.'⁷⁹ Here the reference to the German threat was pretty clear, considering the recent diplomatic entente with France, and Mackinder also began to talk badly about the Kaiser in his political speeches, presenting him alongside John Redmond and David Lloyd George as one of the 'three great speculators' threatening the general peace of the British Empire. Among this

⁷⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XLI, 1912, col. 921.

⁷⁷ R.J.Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 46.

⁷⁸ Mackinder, *British State*, p. 184.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

negative trio, however, the German Emperor was the most dangerous figure, because he was 'not in a hurry' in his devious plans against Britain, 'biding his time' and 'keeping the waters ruffled' on the international scene.⁸⁰ The rhetorical image was clearly inspired by the theatrical stereotypes on Wilhelm II appearing in the British press, and it showed that even Mackinder was now not immune from the rising anti-German hysteria, sharing the deep cultural prejudices of his compatriots toward the German Empire.⁸¹ Thus, on the eve of the Great War, he had become a committed 'Germanophobe', ready to fight for the preservation of Britain's imperial security against the Kaiser's aggressive foreign policy.

At the time of the Pivot Paper, however, he was not so, devoting his strategic focus mainly on Russia and warning even about the possible rise of a Chinese-Japanese combination powerful enough to conquer Russian territory, constituting that 'yellow peril' to the 'world's freedom' denounced by European and American intellectuals since the mid-1890s.⁸² References to Germany were only marginal, including a possible challenge to American hegemony in South America, and a Russo-German coalition against the British Empire – later popularized by Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) during the 1930s – was only a remote possibility among many others.⁸³ After all, even Curzon had remarked on the improbability of such an event in his popular writings over Central Asia, recognizing the persistent 'distrust' and 'detestation' of the Russian people toward their German neighbours, expressed often without any 'pretence of concealment' by all sections of Tsarist society.⁸⁴ The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 seemed to reinforce this judgement, revealing all the diffident hostility accumulated by the Russian autocracy toward the Austro-German alliance in Central Europe. Therefore the Pivot Paper was originally designed to face the problem of Russian expansion, more serious and present to British interests during the first decade of the twentieth century than any other factor on the international stage. It was only the intensification of the Anglo-German naval race after 1909, later culminated in the outbreak of the First World War, which finally compelled Mackinder to revise his previous analysis, placing Germany at the core of his geopolitical

⁸⁰ 'Mr. Mackinder on Current Politics', *The Glasgow Herald*, 20 October 1911, p. 12.

⁸¹ On the negative images of the Kaiser propagated by the British press, see Lothar Reinermann, 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser: British Public Opinion and Wilhelm II', *German History*, 26 (2008), pp. 469-85.

⁸² Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 437. The 'yellow peril' myth was also shared by Mahan, who reproached the British for their alliance with the Japanese. See Livezey, *Mahan*, p. 201.

⁸³ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot', p. 436. On Haushofer's life and geopolitical thought, see Herwig, 'Geopolitik', pp. 218-41.

⁸⁴ Curzon, *Russia*, p. 21.

vision. As an Edwardian strategist, he followed the main trends of his own time, modified only by the broader evolution of international affairs in the early twentieth century.

Thus, having ascertained this crucial fact, it is possible to assess the main influence of the Pivot Paper on British foreign policy before 1914, generally dismissed by modern biographers as 'irrelevant' or of 'little value.'⁸⁵ The judgement is probably correct, considering the persistent marginality of geography in British pre-war education and the exclusion of the Unionist party from government responsibilities after 1906, but it is often not adequately explained, stressing instead the 'prophetic' nature of Mackinder's view and claiming some minor impact on the most 'enlightened' members of the Edwardian intelligentsia. Brian Blouet, for example, suggested a possible effect upon Sir Eyre Crowe, the Senior Clerk of the Foreign Office whose memorandum of 1907 on Britain's relationship with France and Germany shaped the foreign policy of the Liberal government toward Europe, thanks to the presence of his brother-in-law Spenser Wilkinson at the RGS address.⁸⁶ Crowe would also have shared the same anti-German stance of Mackinder, putting in practice the great alliances against the 'pivot state' advanced in the 1904 lecture. However, no evidence is cited in support of this thesis, and a careful reading of Crowe's document seems to deny any significant input from Mackinder: indeed, Crowe defended free trade as an important asset of British international position, making foreign countries 'less apprehensive' of naval supremacy in the hands of England than in those of another 'predominant protectionist power', and advocated the preservation of the traditional balance of power in Europe with few references to the larger global dimension evoked in the Pivot Paper.⁸⁷ At the same time his attitude toward Germany was as moderate as that of Mackinder himself during those years, underlining the preposterous character of Blouet's interpretation: 'So long as Germany's action does not overstep the line of legitimate protection of existing rights she can always count upon the sympathy and goodwill, and even the moral support, of England.'⁸⁸

On the other hand, this obsession with Germany as the main 'enemy' of the Pivot Paper – nurtured by the events of the World Wars and by the senile statements of the same Mackinder – has not allowed the recognition of the validity of its main strategic concerns

⁸⁵ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 119-22; Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 159.

⁸⁶ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 120-1.

⁸⁷ Memorandum by Mr. Eyre Crowe on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany, 1 January 1907, in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, III: *The Testing of the Entente, 1904-6* (London: HMSO, 1928), p. 403.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

for all the pre-war period, remarking the limits of an Eurocentric evaluation of British foreign and defence policy in the early twentieth century. In this sense, Keith Wilson recently observed that the traditional vision of Edwardian international affairs as dominated by the Anglo-German naval race is quite anachronistic, neglecting the imperial dimension of British military and diplomatic strategy before 1914.⁸⁹ Far from becoming marginal after the agreement of 1907, in fact, Anglo-Russian rivalry over Central Asia continued well until the eve of the European war, generating serious concerns within the London government.⁹⁰ In a letter to the ambassador at St. Petersburg, for example, Sir Edward Grey confessed the impossibility of an enduring arrangement with Russia on the regions bordering India, due to the exclusive interests of Britain in those geographical areas:

You will see...that, as regards Persia, we wish to have practically the whole of the neutral sphere, and have nothing to concede there to Russia; as regards Afghanistan, we cannot concede anything to Russia, because we cannot get the Ameer's consent; as regards Tibet, the change that we wish to have, and to which Russia's consent is necessary, is very slight, but we have nothing to give in return. So, all along the line we want something, and we have nothing to give. It is therefore difficult to see how a good bargain is to be made.⁹¹

These apprehensive lines were written just four months before the outbreak of the Great War, confirming the persistence of the strategic picture described by Mackinder in 1904. Then why did his ideas not enjoy the earnest consideration of the British establishment?

The answer lies not in their 'futuristic' nature, but in the simple fact of being just another small addition in a constant flood of publications devoted to the same worn out issue. Indeed, the problem of imperial defence was widely debated in an impressive variety of books, lectures, and articles since the early 1890s, with special emphasis on the condition of India and the other eastern dependencies. Many of them were written by Curzon, who could boast a superior expertise on the matter than other authors, reaching even high institutional audiences like the India Office and the House of Lords.⁹² But the

⁸⁹ Keith Wilson, *The Limits of Eurocentricity: Imperial British Foreign and Defence Policy in the Early Twentieth Century* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2006), pp. 7-21.

⁹⁰ On the complexity of Anglo-Russian relations after 1907, see Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 289-340.

⁹¹ Sir Edward Grey to Sir George Buchanan, 18 March 1914, in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914, X: The Last Years of Peace* (London: HMSO, 1938), p. 777.

⁹² For a complete list of Curzon's writings on the Asian empire, see James G. Parker, *Lord Curzon, 1859-1925: A Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 37-51.

struggle for the control of the Far East was far from being the exclusive concern of British intellectuals and politicians, inspiring the reflection of journalists and public commentators all around the world. In the United States, for example, the issue attracted the interest of influential writers like Mahan, Brooks Adams, and Albert Beveridge, who saw the rise of Russian land power in the region as a direct threat to American economic interests in China, advocating a strategy of containment quite similar to that proposed by Mackinder in 1904.⁹³ In France, the implications of Anglo-Russian tensions in Asia were mainly explored by Alfred Nicolas Rambaud and Jacques Bardoux, reinforcing national suspicions toward British imperialism, while a famous Hungarian Orientalist like Armin Vambéry praised instead the positive effects of British colonial power in the East, warning against the tyrannical rule of Russia over Central Asian peoples.⁹⁴ And a large amount of this foreign material was often translated or imported in Britain, further engulfing the local section of the literary market devoted to imperial and international affairs. Thus, in such editorial conditions, even the brilliant style displayed by Mackinder in front of the RGS was not enough to gain the dispassionate attention of the political elite, regularly submerged by hundreds and hundreds of pages on the balance of power in Eurasia. The Pivot Paper was simply eclipsed by its too many competitors on the Edwardian marketplace of ideas.

At the same the abstract and elaborate character of the lecture played against its public success, generating doubts and perplexities over the soundness of Mackinder's argument. *The Spectator*, for example, was extremely critical of the Pivot theory, labelling it as 'an interesting dream' without any serious foundation in reality:

To begin with, we doubt the commercial value of Northern Asia. To make that vast region, with its usually rigorous climate and great intervals of desert, really worth having as a new source of national strength, and not a mere burden, such as Algeria is to France, it must be thickly populated with industrials; and where are they to come from? If China, with her teeming millions of the most industrious folk in the world, and her terrible pressure from over-population, could not in a thousand years populate and cultivate Northern Asia, how should the Russians, with their much greater tendency to perish of hardship, be able to accomplish the task?⁹⁵

⁹³ Mahan, *Problem of Asia*, op. cit.; Brooks Adams, *The New Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 1902); Albert J. Beveridge, *The Russian Advance* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1903).

⁹⁴ Alfred Nicolas Rambaud, *The Expansion of Russia: Problems of the East and Problems of the Far East* (Burlington, VT: The International Monthly, 1900); Jacques Bardoux, 'La Question Thibetaine et l'Opinion Britannique', *Revue Politique et Littéraire*, 2 (1904), pp. 388-93; Armin Vambéry, 'The Awakening of the Tartars', *The Nineteenth Century*, 57 (1905), pp. 217-27.

⁹⁵ 'Mr. Mackinder's Dream', *The Spectator*, 30 January 1904, p. 174.

And the London periodical also criticized the presumed superiority of railway power in the steppes, remarking instead its persistent weakness toward the sea communications of neighbouring regions: 'Water, which costs nothing, has always hitherto proved the cheapest method of carriage. Mr. Mackinder forgets that when long stretches have to be crossed no multiplication of railways can reduce the total distance, and that if transit by land improves, so does transit by sea. If the great cargo boats can ever be driven at fifty miles an hour, which is...entirely within the limits of the possible, the sea will be a vast railway, costing nothing to build.' Last but not least, the Pivot state could suffer from the resistance of European and Asian powers alike, compelling it to an extenuating struggle on multiple fronts. The current position of Russia represented a clear reminder of this geopolitical frailty of the Eurasian core, unable to increase the strength of its economic and military potential against external enemies: 'There are great military experts who believe that if she [Russia] wins the prospective conflict and seats herself on the North Pacific, the first consequence will be increased weakness, because she will, like Germany, have to defend herself on two frontiers at once, and will have roused as a permanent factor in the way of her progress the jealousy of the United States...Pivots suffer from attrition.' Therefore Mackinder's ambitious vision was merely a fantastic 'political prophecy' devoid of any practical value; it did not deserve more consideration than other popular speculations of the time, including the final amalgamation of all the English-speaking peoples into a close alliance 'too strong to be defied by the rulers of all Asia.'⁹⁶

Some remarks in the *Spectator's* review were quite unfair, considering that even Mackinder believed in the superiority of sea power over railway networks, suggesting its possible exploitation for the containment of the Pivot state. Others, however, were more in line with those expressed by the audience of the RGS, who contested sometimes the historical and geographical premises of the Pivot Paper. Leo Amery, for example, criticized the idea of Russia as the direct heir of the steppe peoples, reminding Mackinder that the Tsarist empire was instead 'a portion of the agricultural world', which had conquered the Siberian plains transforming them into 'a great agricultural industrial power', squeezing out the traditional inhabitants of the region. Therefore the power of the Pivot area was more the product of modern industrial technology than of long-term historical trends, prospecting even the future overtaking of the old opposition between land power and sea power of the Columbian epoch: 'Both the sea and the railway are going in the future...to be supplemented by the air as a means of locomotion, and when we come to that...a great

⁹⁶ 'Mr. Mackinder's Dream', p. 174.

deal of this geographical distribution must lose its importance, and the successful powers will be those who have the greatest industrial basis. It will not matter whether they are in the centre of a continent or on an island; those people who have the industrial power and the power of invention and of science will be able to defeat all others.⁹⁷ This original view, which was definitely more 'prophetic' than that proposed by Mackinder in his own paper, was fully developed by Amery twenty years later, supporting the use of the RAF for the defence and projection of British imperial power in Africa and the Middle East.⁹⁸ On the other hand, D.G. Hogarth doubted the imminent closure of the Eurasian core to world trade, considering the present advance of Russian power in the East as 'a stationary state of things', devoid of any lasting consequences to the peace and prosperity of the international system.⁹⁹

During the debate Mackinder partially acknowledged these theoretical weaknesses, but he defended the general soundness of his analysis of the railway revolution in Central Asia, reproaching Amery for his scepticism toward the ascendancy of continental land power: 'I do not think Mr. Amery has allowed sufficiently for the fact that the very largest armies cannot be moved by means of a navy. The Germans marched nearly a million men into France [in 1870]; they marched, and used the railways for supplies.'¹⁰⁰ At the same time he insisted on the autarchic development of the Eurasian central region, closed to any interference from external cosmopolitan influences: 'Russia, by her tariff system and in other ways, is steadily hastening the accomplishment of what I may call the non-oceanic economic system. Her whole policy, by her tariff system, by her break of gauge on her railways, is to separate herself from external oceanic competition...What I suggest is that great industrial wealth in Siberia and European Russia and a conquest of some of the marginal regions would give the basis for a fleet necessary to found the world empire.'¹⁰¹ His aim, however, was not to predict 'a great future for this or that country', but to make 'a geographical formula' valid for any kind of political balance. In this sense he thought to have been successful, impressing the RGS audience with the accurate and elegant tone of his geopolitical reflection.

⁹⁷ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot: Discussion', p. 441.

⁹⁸ Katherine C. Epstein, 'Imperial Airs: Leo Amery, Air Power and Empire, 1873-1945', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38 (2010), pp. 571-98.

⁹⁹ Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot: Discussion', pp. 441-2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-3.

Sir Clements Markham seemed to confirm this positive evaluation, closing the lecture with a lengthy panegyric of Mackinder's rhetorical ability, which had dealt with the 'old story' of the power struggle between Europe and Asia with 'a brilliancy of description and of illustration' rarely seen in other RGS' lectures.¹⁰² This enthusiastic appreciation was also shared by the *Manchester Guardian*, who described Mackinder's paper as 'striking', in spite of its broad and 'more or less scientific' generalisations: 'Mr. Mackinder is of course one of the most brilliant of the modern school of geographers, and the geographical factor in history, while its relative importance may doubtless be overdone, is yet coming to be acknowledged as one of the factors most worth ascertaining, because it is so stable, concrete, and ascertainable.' Indeed, the new scope of geography, at the end of the great explorations of the Columbian era, was to organize data and to apply them to the intricate field of international affairs, avoiding that global 'explosion of social forces' threatened in the Pivot theory: 'This consideration, traceable enough in all the larger diplomatic history of the last thirty years, is a new one in the history of the world. The nations are now first reaching that stage...when the grip of law, rule, and method necessarily tightens, because men cannot afford to lose what they cannot replace, and the condition of their relative success is no longer a buoyant expansiveness but a capacity to gauge the true lines of resistance.'¹⁰³ And from this point of view Mackinder's analysis of the potential future of the Eurasian steppes seemed quite realistic, due to the present advance of Russia in the Far East, while the skilful 'alliance of marine and continental resources' could still give hope to the peoples living in the marginal lands around the Pivot area.

This final aspect was also remarked on by the same Mackinder one year later, during a lecture to the Compatriots' Club presided by Sir Francis Younghusband, where he depicted the Dominions of the British Empire as 'reservoirs of white man-power for the defence of the Indies, and, therefore, incidentally for the restraint of the fleet-building power of Continental rivals.'¹⁰⁴ He also emphasized the importance of Egypt for the defence of imperial communications, stressing the developing menace of the Ottoman Empire to British India: 'Turkey, like Russia and Germany, is Continental, and by no means wanting in crude, fanatical man-power, which railways are in process of mobilising. You cannot send ironclads into Syria, but a Continental Power or Allied Powers in possession of the Suez

¹⁰² Mackinder, 'Geographical Pivot: Discussion', p. 444.

¹⁰³ 'No Title', *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 April 1904, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Halford Mackinder, 'Man-Power as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength', *National Review*, 45 (1905), p. 140.

canal would hold the most central naval base in the world.¹⁰⁵ Younghusband really appreciated Mackinder's statement on the human power of the Dominions, lamenting only the presence of too many 'lazy negroes' in South Africa, and advocated the maintenance of the 'high qualities' of the British race at home, keeping the national character 'pure and undiluted.'¹⁰⁶ Thus, through the indirect channel of 'national efficiency', the Pivot theory had caught the attention of some members of the imperialist intelligentsia, confirming the relative ability of Mackinder as a geopolitical strategist. In 1907 his ideas were also used by Curzon for the preparation of a famous lecture on imperial frontiers, where the former Viceroy of India insisted on the preservation of solid buffer states around India, criticizing the main features of the recent Anglo-Russian convention in Asia.¹⁰⁷

Despite these prestigious recognitions, however, the Pivot Paper failed to reach a considerable audience throughout the Edwardian period, remaining merely a secondary addition to the ever-growing debate on the defence of the Empire in Central Asia. The causes of this marginalization were manifold: first of all, the paper was not original, but widely based on the previous writings of Mahan and Curzon, partially re-elaborated along broader geographical lines; its geopolitical analysis seemed often detached from reality, especially regarding the economic and military conditions of Russia in Siberia; its style was also too philosophical and general to impress the practical mentality of political and military officers, more interested in concrete case studies rather than vague historical generalizations. At the same time Mackinder's ill-fated militancy in the Tariff Reform League played against his possible influence on British foreign affairs, relegating him into a minor position of the political arena quite far from the main decision-making centres of the time. Even if he later won a seat in Parliament, presenting regularly his ideas in the House of Commons, it was not enough to receive the full attention of the Liberal government or of the Conservative opposition. Indeed, the only circles where Mackinder's argument found some consideration were the imperialist ones related to Milner and Curzon, but these groups were never able to implement their national and international agenda during the Edwardian era, suffering constant political defeat for more than a decade. And even here people like Amery or Hogarth contested Mackinder's geopolitical conclusions, advancing sound objections to their theoretical strength. Therefore the Pivot Paper remained temporarily closed in the strict environment of academic literature, never reaching the

¹⁰⁵ Mackinder, 'Man-Power', p. 140.

¹⁰⁶ 'Man-Power and National Strength', *The Times*, 4 February 1905, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ A.S. Goudie, 'George Nathaniel Curzon: Superior Geographer', *The Geographical Journal*, 146 (1980), p. 207; George N. Curzon, *Frontiers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

same popularity and influence of Mahan's books on sea power, translated all around the world and adopted by powerful statesmen like Theodore Roosevelt and Wilhelm II.¹⁰⁸ When the situation changed in the early 1940s, thanks to the emergence of German *Geopolitik* and its relationship with Nazi foreign policy, the geopolitical vision proposed by Mackinder was very different from that of the original 1904 lecture. Indeed, Germany, not Russia, represented now the main threat to the stability of the international order, while sea and land forces had both suffered a dramatic decline in front of air power, as carefully predicted by Amery thirty years earlier. These changes have generally been downplayed by modern biographers, who have instead presented Mackinder's strategic thought as a long unbroken continuum, without any serious variation of form and content. In reality, the first Pivot Paper and its following successors were all products of their respective time, and it is essential to put them in historical context to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of their theoretical argument.

Finally, it would be wrong to consider the Pivot Paper as an intellectual failure, because it allowed Mackinder to advance his geographical cause in the strategic field, gaining partially the attention of military and diplomatic analysts. Culminating in the positive experience of the 'Mackindergarten', this bold initiative allowed the gradual integration of the 'New Geography' into the British army, improving its administrative efficiency and increasing the public relevance of the modern education proposed by the LSE Director. Some of the strategic proposals of the RGS address were even quite interesting, deserving the open praise of defence experts like Spenser Wilkinson and explaining their following success among the military professionals of the Cold War.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, Mackinder's brilliant lecture was also one of the first attempts to think international relations outside a narrow Eurocentric perspective, presenting the world as a vast and interconnected human network.¹¹⁰ This approach is now regularly used by scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, Terence Hopkins, and Peter J. Taylor to analyze the current process of globalization, linking all its different technological and human elements into a single general picture, which recognizes the reciprocal influences of various geographical regions

¹⁰⁸ Peter Karsten, 'The Nature of "Influence": Roosevelt, Mahan and the Concept of Sea Power', *American Quarterly*, 23 (1971), pp. 585-600; James Holmes, 'Mahan, a "Place in the Sun", and Germany's Quest for Sea Power', *Comparative Strategy*, 23 (2004), pp. 27-61.

¹⁰⁹ For a direct appreciation of such popularity, see David Hooson, 'Encounters with Mackinder: A Personal Memoir', *The Geographical Journal*, 170 (2004), pp. 377-9.

¹¹⁰ Pascal Venier, 'Penser le Monde: Halford Mackinder et l'Invention de la Géopolitique', in *Penser l'Espace Politique*, ed. by Stéphane Rosière, Kevin Cox, Céline Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, and Carl Dahlman (Paris: Ellipses, 2009), pp. 273-87.

on the development of the modern economic world-system.¹¹¹ In this sense, the 1904 paper was well ahead of its times, suggesting a more comprehensive way of understanding political and economic events in their complex interaction. And its early sketch of long-term historical processes, involving huge timelines and regional spaces, inspired also other macro-histories of the Eurasian continent, providing an original and powerful panoramic view of the past still used to these days. Indeed, the geographical features of the Pivot Paper have recently been employed by John P. LeDonne and Dominic Lieven to explain the rise of Russia as a great international power, while John Darwin has instead remarked the crucial importance of Central Asia for the development of vast continental empires, following some of the suggestions advanced by Mackinder in his famous RGS address.¹¹² Thus, more than one hundred years after that fateful lecture in London, Mackinder's geopolitical legacy is still the subject of reflections and debates around the world, shaping with its multiple qualities and contradictions the vision of the past and the strategy of the future.

¹¹¹ Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: Theory and Methodology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982); Peter J. Taylor, *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹¹² John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (London: Pimlico, 2003); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

Chapter Five

‘Pour la Victoire Intégrale’: The World War and the New Europe

In 1935, British cinemas were invaded by the *Royal Cavalcade*, a long documentary on the life and times of King George V, who was then celebrating the Silver Jubilee of his ascent to the throne in 1910. Mixing re-enactment and original newsreel, the movie presented all the various phases of the King’s reign, including the Great War and the recent economic depression, and depicted an intense, dramatic picture of Britain’s national life in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹ The press was generally sympathetic toward the operation, praising the bold and cheerful reconstruction of ‘events that no camera recorded’, but not all members of the public were convinced by such a colourful interpretation of the recent national past.² Sir Albion Richardson, for example, lamented the inaccurate depiction of the World War, finding especially disturbing the scenes of ‘wild enthusiasm’ in the House of Commons representing the official declaration of war with Germany in August 1914: ‘No one who, like myself, was present on that afternoon is ever likely to forget what happened. Sir Edward Grey’s statement was listened with tense emotion, and in silence...There were no cheers in the House of Commons as the curtain rose upon the most poignant tragedy in history.’³ This sad recollection was also shared by Margot Asquith, the widow of the former Prime Minister, who remarked the ‘sepulchral silence’ which met Grey’s memorable speeches at Westminster.⁴ On his part, Halford Mackinder supported these critiques, remarking on even the religious atmosphere of the occasion: ‘As the House rose on August 4 [1914] we all stood, and, led by a much-liked member of the Labour Party, we sang the National Anthem. It was sung in the same solemn spirit which had characterized all our proceedings on these two historic days: a great hymn, certainly not of hate, but of submission to fate and of national unity.’⁵

This austere memory of the war may appear as a temporary outburst of academic formality, designed to justify the fateful decisions taken by the British Parliament in the

¹ For a short analysis of the movie, see Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 269-71.

² ‘Silver Jubilee Film’, *The Times*, 5 April 1935, p. 14.

³ Albion H. Richardson, ‘The House of Commons on August 3, 1914’, *The Times*, 18 April 1935, p. 13.

⁴ Margot Oxford, ‘The House of Commons on August 3, 1914’, *The Times*, 20 April 1935, p. 13.

⁵ H.J. Mackinder, ‘The House of Commons on August 3, 1914’, *The Times*, 22 April 1935, p. 11.

summer of 1914. However, its emphasis on the grave and solemn aspects of the war was also rooted in the direct experience of those turbulent years, marked by high levels of intellectual and emotional stress. Indeed, Mackinder witnessed the sudden destruction of that young generation of new geographers which he had carefully prepared at Oxford and at the LSE during the early years of the twentieth century, suffering the worst possible loss for any genuine educational reformer. In 1916, speaking at the annual meeting of the Geographical Association, he gloomily recognized this sad state of things:

It is obvious that in the tremendous stirring of souls which is the result of this world contest, traditions and convictions have inevitably been broken as never since the time of the Civil War...At Oxford and Cambridge we have had very nearly a complete break in undergraduate tradition. If the war continues over the beginning of one more academic year, we shall have to register the fact that for the first time since the days when the King kept Court at Oxford, undergraduate tradition will have been completely broken at Oxford and Cambridge. How far that tradition can be refounded is a moot point.⁶

Therefore, even if the war had opened new opportunities to the development of the geographical discipline in higher education, he believed that the huge human cost of the conflict required new responsibilities to be taken up by British academics in the post-war era, carrying forward the 'old traditions' of 'the happier times of peace' into the new world created by the catastrophe of 1914.⁷ And it was with this clear objective in mind that Mackinder threw himself into a remarkable series of public activities during the war years, designed to maintain the 'national sanity and justified optimism' deemed essential to the survival of the British Empire in such an unprecedented international crisis.⁸ In this sense, the European conflict represented the most vibrant phase of his political and intellectual career, strengthening his previous beliefs in support of economic reform and imperial unity. Indeed, the moment was crucial for the future of Britain and its colonies, requiring substantial changes in the constitution of the imperial structure: 'At this time there is one subject which we cannot safely leave without continuous and careful thought, and that is not the settlement at the end of the War, whether within the Empire or outside, but the machinery by which we are going to bring in with us after the War the daughter States of this Empire, when it comes, as we all hope it will come, to the reaping of the harvest which is the result of the victory which they have won no less than we.'⁹

⁶ Halford Mackinder, 'Presidential Address to the Geographical Association', *The Geographical Teacher*, 8 (1916), p. 272.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXIII, 1915, col. 1525.

At the same time, however, Mackinder's patriotic vision knew a critical reassessment, thanks mainly to the involvement with the New Europe group, the Serbian Society, and the Allied Parliaments: the democratic spirit of these organizations – firmly committed to the emancipation of European peoples from the authoritarian rule of the Central Powers – partially influenced his geopolitical reflection of the time, reviving some aspect of his young Liberal upbringing. When the unprecedented struggle ended in 1918, leaving the world irretrievably shaken, Mackinder was then quite different from the nationalist agitator of the pre-war years, showing a more moderate stance both on domestic and international issues. As he plainly declared in the late 1920s, the world had completely changed since the dramatic summer of 1914, compelling people to put away 'the ideas of the day before yesterday' and try to see things merely in the present, following the natural trend of a new 'marvellous age' of global communications.¹⁰

Unfortunately modern biographers do not seem to have paid enough attention to this interesting evolution, relegating instead Mackinder's experience in the war to the footnotes of their historical analyses. Gerry Kearns, for example, treats the subject in less than half a page, and in his monograph there are no references to the Serbian Society or to the international activities of the British Parliamentary Committee. Even Mackinder's involvement with the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) for the exploitation of West African resources in support of the war effort is absent from the general picture, representing a curious omission in the strong critical tone of Kearns' examination.¹¹ At the same time Brian Blouet has shown more or less the same limits, in spite of a better appreciation of Mackinder's relationship with Robert Seton-Watson and other members of the New Europe group. Indeed, the ERDC is never mentioned in his exposition, while original speeches and writings are only marginally cited in the text, without any proper scrutiny of their content.¹² Therefore this chapter will try to chart new ground on the topic, using undervalued published sources like newspaper articles and parliamentary debates to present a broader account of Mackinder's war commitments, showing their gradual impact upon his imperial and international thought. There will also be space for a close examination of Mackinder's lectures and speeches during the conflict, analyzing in detail the development of his intellectual position before the appearance of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* in 1919. This crucial text, later studied and quoted by the geopolitical analysts of the Cold War era, was in fact heavily shaped by the events of the

¹⁰ Leo Amery, 'The Empire in the New Era', *United Empire*, 19 (1928), p. 261.

¹¹ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, p. 58.

¹² Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 159-63.

1914-1918 struggle, presenting a considerable revision of the original Pivot Paper of 1904. Such theoretical change has not escaped the discernment of modern scholars, but its evaluation is still far from providing a complete and satisfactory interpretation of Mackinder's geopolitical ideas in their own historical context.¹³ Thus these pages will also try to assess the roots of Mackinder's post-war corrections of his master thesis, putting them into the wide maelstrom of geographical and philosophical transformations produced by the war. Of course, this analysis does not pretend to be exhaustive, due to the evident space limits of this dissertation, but at least it hopes to furnish new solid hints for future researches on the topic, going beyond the sketchy generalizations offered by the present literature.

Initially Mackinder's involvement in the war was rather unexceptional, mainly focused on the recruitment of Scottish volunteers for the New Army raised by Lord Kitchener in the autumn of 1914.¹⁴ The recruiting campaign, however, seemed to fulfil that resurgence of national 'man-power' previously advocated during the tariff reform debate, discarding the old free trade complacency of Liberal England in favour of a new mixture of economic frugality and imperial solidarity. In Scotland, for example, recruitment was extremely successful, providing more than 200 000 volunteers prior to the Military Services Act of 1916, and popular patriotism allowed the Conservative Party to regain internal unity and electoral appeal with the business community.¹⁵ Thus the first years of the conflict gave fresh impetus to Mackinder's economic ideals, putting them in service of a major national emergency. By the end of 1915 he was fully aware of the urgency of a drastic change in public economic attitudes as a solution to the increasing shortage of men and materials provoked by the attrition struggle on the Western Front: 'Now we are suddenly faced with the greater problem of total production and total consumption of the nation, because it is the difference between consumption and production that gives what I call your War Fund. The more you can reduce consumption, the more you can increase production; the more you can practice these inverse processes, the wider will become the margin.'¹⁶ This was the only way to stay on the same path of Germany, thinking no more 'in pounds, shillings, and

¹³ Sloan, 'Heartland Theory', pp. 23-7; Venier, 'Penser le Monde', pp. 279-85.

¹⁴ Blouet, Mackinder, p. 153. On the genesis of the New Army, see Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 31-48.

¹⁵ I.G.C. Hutchinson, 'The Impact of the First World War on Scottish Politics', in *Scotland and the Great War*, ed. by Catriona M.M. MacDonald and E.W. McFarland (Phantassie: Tuckwell Press, 1999), pp. 45-7.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXV, 1915, col. 1235.

pence' but instead 'in actual human service to the nation', maintaining the delicate balance of power between the 'fighting section' and the 'producing section' of the country:

The whole problem is how large can you venture to make the fighting section. There is a limit...at which you might go on fighting indefinitely, because the producing section which is left can produce enough to maintain itself in efficiency and to maintain the whole fighting section of the country. The problem before us...is, Are we exceeding that limit? Are we getting into an unstable position because we are putting too much in the fighting section of the nation and making it top-heavy? However you think on that matter, you must control consumption and you may increase production.¹⁷

Speaking after the inconclusive bloodshed of the first two battles of Ypres, which had virtually annihilated the pre-war regular army and thousands of Kitchener's young volunteers, Mackinder knew that the old voluntary system was unable to cope with the exuberant requests of the War Office without endangering the entire economic structure of the United Kingdom.¹⁸ Indeed, the only solution to the paucity of new recruits was conscription, something destined to provoke serious fractures in British society, dismantling the original patriotic union of August 1914. At the same time the introduction of coercive measures by the government could also infringe the democratic rights of all the citizens, pushing the country toward 'Prussianism' or other forms of continental authoritarianism. Therefore he proposed to involve directly the population in the war effort through education and public confidence, marshalling the massive resources of the Empire in an effective and unrestrained way:

You must appeal to the democracy. Our democracy is intelligent, and if a thing is put before them, with sufficient authority, clearness, and with power, such as possessed by the Minister of Munitions; if the matter is seriously taken up by one of our great leaders, and it is done by way of campaign, you may possibly produce some understanding of this question in the country, because it is not intelligence which is wanted among the people, but a clear statement of facts...Recruiting and munition work are important, but a third work of equal importance is to imbue the community with a clear perception of the necessity for economy... If you are not to resort to rationing or dragooning, or Prussian methods, you can only have recourse to the pure democratic method of government, namely education.¹⁹

On the surface, this suggestion appeared simply to restate the previous tones of Chamberlain's fiscal campaign, asking for a conscious 'sacrifice' in the name of the Empire,

¹⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXV, 1915, cols. 1235-6.

¹⁸ On the crisis of voluntary recruiting at the end of 1915, see Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, pp. 138-62, and Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 19-39.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXV, 1915, cols. 1237-9.

but its key preoccupation with democracy represented a new note in Mackinder's political reflection, aimed to reconcile his old Liberal values with the unrelenting pursuit of national efficiency. To be true, such democratic instinct had never disappeared from his intellectual horizon in the antebellum era: in the spring of 1914, for example, he proudly described Britain as 'an industrial democracy' increasingly based on 'education', seen as 'essential for rule, and especially for the rule of an Empire.'²⁰ But it remained more or less obscured by other economic and social concerns, which stressed the importance of 'power' and 'organization' over 'freedom' and 'civil liberties.' In this sense, the German political model, with its constant call for national unity and social organicism, represented a positive counterpoint to the decrepitude of Liberal England, showing the huge potentialities of a modern industrial state in the twentieth century:

Continental nations can never forget the relation of power to trade. The whole aim of their economic policy has been to build up the basis of their power. For them trade produces the wages upon which the men are reared who recruit the armies...In the case of Germany and the United States, the home market, greater than the British home market, has sufficed for the development of industries large enough to produce cheaply, and now in excess of home requirements. Hence the rise of an export trade of manufactured articles, a demand for foreign markets, and the need of a strong fleet to give support in world-diplomacy...Thus power and labour alternately support one another.²¹

Now however that model was embarrassing at best or barbaric at worst, submerged by the hatred and indignation generated by the war. As other British intellectuals of the time, in fact, Mackinder had to face the feeling of betrayal and broken fellowship toward German culture caused by the invasion of Belgium and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which contributed to nurture violent anti-German feelings across the British Empire.²² Even his old friend Michael Sadler, who had praised the modernity of German higher education in 1906, rejected his previous beliefs on the matter, claiming that the long and admirable 'mental discipline' of German scholars had been perverted into blind and destructive 'partisanship', neglecting that 'duty of disinterested reflection' at the core of true 'scientific progress' in the world.²³ The same opinion was also held by another of Mackinder's academic colleagues, William Hewins, who remarked the dangerous similarity of German wartime

²⁰ Mackinder, *British State*, p. 252.

²¹ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, p. 20.

²² On the impact of the *Lusitania* tragedy on British public opinion, see Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Providence, RI, and Oxford: Berg, 1991), pp. 229-53.

²³ Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1988), p. 39.

resolutions, designed to create a self-sufficient empire in Central Europe, with those entertained by the tariff reform movement before the conflict: 'I may say that...Germany has done us the honour, if I may say so, the very great honour, of adopting *in toto* what is ordinarily understood as the preferential policy of the people of this country.'²⁴ Previously admired, this closed economic system appeared now as completely opposed to 'the genius of the British Empire', made by the peaceful coexistence of different states and societies around the world, and it needed to be resisted jointly by Britain and its Allies, building up a balanced commercial network centred on the resources of the British colonies.²⁵ Thus what was admirable in the pre-war era, including the refined protectionist theories of Friedrich List or the philosophical notions of German geographers, now represented instead an evil and perverse threat to international peace and national prosperity, requiring an alternative proposal to its plans of 'conquest' and 'despotism.' And Mackinder struggled in search of this alternative throughout the war, trying to find a new synthesis for his divergent political ideals.

This effort concerned both domestic and international issues, revealing often persistent tensions or contradictions in his evolving thought. On the domestic side, he continued to see 'businesslike machinery' as essential for the efficiency of a democratic society, dealing promptly with the needs of the nation.²⁶ But he distrusted the new coalition government led by Asquith, fearing the erosion of parliamentary rights and the loss of contact with popular feelings: 'I think that when the Coalition Government has been in power for a time it will grow increasingly out of touch with the nation, unless somehow or other we in this House [of Commons] evolve something in the nature of a representative group of men who will be able to voice not merely the views, very important views, of this and that section, but also give utterance to the general pervading opinion of the House in criticism of the Government.'²⁷ In this sense, the legislative power at Westminster required a proper and thorough reform, avoiding the partisan clashes of the pre-war period, especially on the crucial role of the House of Lords: 'It appears to me vital that our reformed Second Chamber should be the outcome of a settlement by agreement, for it can only be useful and effective if it is regarded with general consent and respect, and this condition is not likely to be fulfilled if its constitution is the outcome of a victory at the polls.'²⁸ After all, a

²⁴ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXVII, 1916, col. 1307.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 1304-7.

²⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXV, 1915, col. 1238.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 1230.

²⁸ H.J. Mackinder, 'The Reform of Parliament', *The Times*, 22 May 1917, p. 3.

'sufficiently strong Second Chamber', founded upon 'a sufficiently democratic basis', represented a fundamental part of 'any enduring freedom' in the difficult times of reconstruction following the end of the war.²⁹ However, Mackinder continued to refuse the inclusion of women in this renovated parliamentary system, remaining loyal to his previous convictions and signing another public appeal against any further extension of suffrage to the female community:

A large number of those who before the war were opposed to female suffrage, whilst fully recognizing the very valuable services rendered by women during the present national crisis, are unable to admit that recent circumstances are of a nature to justify any serious modification of the conclusions at which they have previously arrived. They intend, therefore, when the proper time comes, to offer, by all legitimate means, the most strenuous opposition to the extension of electoral rights to women, and they cannot be parties to any attempt at a premature and unauthorized solution [of the issue].³⁰

This document provoked the firm response of a wide group of suffragists, including old members of the Halsbury Club like Selborne and Willoughby de Broke, who condemned the position of Mackinder and company, warning that if the British voting system had to be remodelled at the end of the conflict it would have been 'a very grave injustice to women' their possible exclusion from the reformed political life of the nation.³¹ Some days later Beatrice Webb, Margaret Ashton, and other female reformers reiterated this call for equity, underlining the long-lasting consequences of women's role in the British war effort and asking for a general reappraisal of their political position 'not only in the country, but also in Parliament' through some adequate extension of the electoral franchise.³² In reality, Mackinder recognized the importance of women for the maintenance of economic efficiency during the conflict, providing an excellent replacement to the men enrolled for the front: 'Not merely have you women employed, not merely have you boys employed, but you have overtime, and you have time better kept. I believe that at the present time you have gone a long way to replace by the production of the country the loss which you have experienced by withdrawing a large number of men.'³³ But this transformation failed to impress a significant change to his masculine view of political activities, which continued to devise 'separate spheres' of action for the two sexes in British public life. As the other

²⁹ Mackinder, 'Reform of Parliament', p. 3.

³⁰ 'Woman Suffrage: A Plea for Mature Consideration', *The Times*, 17 November 1916, p. 3. The appeal was also signed by Curzon, Cromer, Kipling, and other prominent members of the Anti-Suffrage League.

³¹ 'Woman Suffrage', *The Times*, 22 November 1916, p. 11.

³² 'Woman Suffrage', *The Times*, 24 November 1916, p. 10.

³³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXV, 1915, col. 1236.

members of the Anti-Suffrage League, he was ready to submit the thorny question of women's suffrage to a referendum, but only after a clear warning given by 'responsible statesmen' to the electors on the matter.³⁴ This certainly represented a curious contradiction to his idea of a British 'intelligent democracy' opposed to the autocratic methods of the Central Powers.

On the economic side, Mackinder remained substantially loyal to his pre-war ideas, insisting on the primacy of industrial capital over financial resources for the conduct of the war: 'To-day the power of manufacturing, the power of production, is something quite unparalleled, not merely in the past history of the world, but in the very recent past history of the world...You had such a revolution in man's power over the material resources of this world as is probably hardly appreciated by the immense mass of even the educated people of our country.'³⁵ Thus the laissez-faire attitude of the last years of peace should definitely be reversed after the conflict, preserving the economic strength of the British Empire from the destructive competition of Germany: 'Scientific Germany...damaged or destroyed your small key industries necessary to open our great industries. We are attempting a great task at this moment in all portions of the Empire to re-erect those key industries, and there must be no question about it, by whatever method we do it, in one way or another the key industries which are necessary to the great industries must never again be lost to this country and Empire.'³⁶ In this sense, a 'scientific tariff' could still represent the best way to deal with the Germans in the post-war era, forcing them to pay a financial indemnity 'in raw materials' and sparing British labour from the power of their exporting industries.³⁷ However, Mackinder also began to recognize the crucial importance of financial capital for the war effort, accepting the sale of war obligations on the New York stock market and campaigning in favour of lower taxes toward the business community. Indeed, the ability of its members to make money in difficult circumstances represented an asset of 'inestimable value' for the post-war reconstruction of the country, restoring 'with wisdom and enterprise' the numerous industries damaged by the necessities of the conflict.³⁸

Of course, this new attitude did not mean a complete revaluation of the cosmopolitan 'money-power' of the City of London, excessively open to the dangerous fluctuations of foreign international trade: on the contrary, bankers' pressures to obtain further public

³⁴ 'Woman Suffrage: A Plea for Mature Consideration', p. 3.

³⁵ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXVII, 1916, col. 1338.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1342.

³⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXV, 1916, col. 450.

³⁸ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXII, 1916, col. 1728.

resources after the war should be seriously resisted, reserving them instead to the full restoration of the 'industrial capital' of the nation.³⁹ At the same time Mackinder also distrusted the honesty and transparency of American financial investors, warning the government to remain in 'close communication' with British tradesmen for its New York operations and to take 'additional precautions' against local speculators.⁴⁰ Nevertheless he acknowledged the need of proper national finances for a victorious prosecution of the war, involving the entire population in the task and creating a new kind of solidarity between the different classes of British society:

This is the golden opportunity of realizing a true democracy in this country...By saving and lending to the State the relatively poor may win a new degree of independence, and as a class may count for more than otherwise in the social reconstruction after the war...The obliteration to some extent of the deplorable sharpness of line between labour and capital is a splendid ideal, which may well lighten the often sordid duty of saving. It is the counterpart of our fighting ideal which aims at the destruction of militarism. Let us build our nation anew in the environment which will ensue from the war.⁴¹

Indeed, the war was 'a great social teacher', clearing away old conventions and forcing people down to the 'main facts of existence.'⁴² It cancelled, for example, the previous division between tariff reformers and free traders, pushing the country toward a new comprehensive economic policy:

Economic thought, cleared of fallacy, can be seen now in its simplicity as never in peace time. Such thought is one of the roots of national policy; but you cannot teach it broadcast in time of peace, because contending parties are ever befogging the issues...Now or never, when all are united in an effort which suppresses minor contentions, have we the chance of clarifying the national mind, so that Protectionists and Free Traders, Individualists and Socialists will all alike in the future have to appeal to a public from whose eyes the scales have fallen.⁴³

Thus it was according to this ideal spirit of unity and solidarity that Mackinder partially modified his previous economic convictions, acquiescing to the preservation of some measures of classical Liberalism. After all, victory over 'Prussian methods' was the first aim of Britain at the present time, leaving the final settlement of previous 'contentions' to the new conditions produced by the war. But 'in certain respects' it was necessary to reshape

³⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXII, 1916, cols. 1726-8.

⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXVI, 1915, cols. 1825-6. On British financial activities in America during the war, see Kathleen Burk, 'The Diplomacy of Finance: British Financial Missions to the United States, 1914-1918', *The Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 351-72.

⁴¹ H.J. Mackinder, 'Half the National Income', *The Times*, 15 October 1915, p. 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ H.J. Mackinder, 'National Economy: A Practical Suggestion', *The Times*, 16 November 1915, p. 6.

the foundations of the British national structure, preparing them to meet ‘the tremendous difficulties and crises’ coming at the end of the European hostilities.⁴⁴ This was especially crucial in the imperial context, where the persistence of old orthodoxies did not allow the full valorisation of human and natural resources for the war effort. Referring to the Dominions, for example, Mackinder asked for a ‘more organic’ relationship between them and the mother country, recognising their sacrifices in the common fight against the Central Powers and building up a united front for the future peace settlement. This was not mere wishful thinking, but the best way to deal with the future results of the conflict, destined to produce a unique ‘psychological moment’ in the life of the British imperial system: ‘Hearts will be stirred, as they are not commonly stirred, and they will be impressionable to a degree to which they are not commonly impressionable, and it will be possible to achieve things in that moment, if you do not let the opportunity pass, which it may never be possible to achieve subsequently... It is essential at the end of this War that we should not be tactless, however right we may wish to be, in our dealings with the other portions of the Empire.’⁴⁵ But he remained quite vague on the means to reach such objective, remarking only the importance of the constitutional work done by the Round Table in South Africa before the war: ‘That Union [of South Africa] was the product of careful thought on the part of constitutional students for months beforehand, gathered together without any publicity of reporters...From that forethought there emerged the Government which has stood the test of the present difficulty.’⁴⁶

This reference to the ideas of the group led by Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr is quite surprising, considering Mackinder’s previous doubts on the feasibility of any federal union of the British Empire, and it clearly shows the adjustment of his political views to the general trends of the time, which were pushing all the warring states toward the construction of wide imperial and national autarkic spaces. However, the influence of Milner’s former pupils remained quite superficial: indeed, Mackinder read Curtis’ *Problem of the Commonwealth*, comparing it to Friedrich Naumann’s *Central Europe* as a perfect example of the ‘world tendency’ shaped by the war, but his attention to the book was relatively marginal, directing more his critical energies toward its German counterpart.⁴⁷ At the same time his references to the Round Table’s ideas were also extremely generic, without any detailed discussion of their constitutional proposals for South Africa and for

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXII, 1916, cols. 1730-1.

⁴⁵ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXIII, 1915, col. 1526.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1527.

⁴⁷ H.J. Mackinder, ‘The Problem of Central Europe’, *The Observer*, 27 August 1916, p. 4.

the Empire: in this sense, Mackinder appeared even confused on the real extension and nature of the group's activities, citing unspecified 'large volumes' in his parliamentary intervention and believing somewhat uncertainly that these writings were discussed in secret meetings. Therefore these enunciations were probably designed to gain some political attention and invite the Colonial Office 'to do something, to think out something' in support of closer ties between Britain and its settler colonies.⁴⁸ But the same Mackinder was convinced that the time was not propitious for similar initiatives, allowing merely 'suggestions' for the solution of the enduring problem of inter-imperial relations.

Indeed, as he plainly recognized in a public lecture at Glasgow University, the future territorial and political settlement of Europe was of more urgent and practical importance than any other issues, requiring a decisive British commitment to guarantee peace among the reshaped national states of the continent. The imperial isolation pursued after the Napoleonic Wars had not paid off, paving the way to the present international catastrophe: 'Let us never forget that a century ago a terrible war, of longer duration than we hope this war will be, came to an end; that the strongest powers, the conquerors in that war, were this country and Russia; yet the brains which made the new map of Europe were neither Russian nor British, but the brains of the Frenchman Talleyrand and the Austrian Metternich. Let us beware that a like thing does not happen again.'⁴⁹ Thus Britain had to take its share of responsibilities in the reconstruction of Europe after the conflict, providing that international stability necessary to the safety of the Empire in the wider world. This was quite different from the convictions of other imperialists like Amery and Curtis, who remained sceptical or suspicious toward European affairs, preferring to build a self-referential British world isolated from the 'danger' of continental troubles. Arnold Toynbee, for example, observed that Curtis considered only 'the overseas world' as redeemable by his democratic ideas, thanks to the precious medium of the English language, while the European continent was 'invincibly ignorant of both these means of salvation', deserving simply the sheer indifference of British statesmen and intellectuals.⁵⁰ In spite of his own imperialist faith, Mackinder did not share such a narrow view of Britain's global power, cooperating extensively with various political organizations for the creation of a more democratic and stable European order.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXIII, 1915, cols. 1527-8.

⁴⁹ Halford Mackinder, 'Some Geographical Aspects of International Reconstruction', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 33 (1917), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Erik Goldstein, 'The Round Table and the New Europe', *The Round Table*, 87 (1998), p. 184.

However, this new interest toward Europe does not mean that Mackinder completely forgot imperial affairs during the war years. On the contrary, he shifted mainly his intellectual and political focus on the role of the West African dependencies for the development of the British economy after the conflict, urging the government to reject 'ordinary Free Trade theories' and to adopt strong protectionist measures in those areas:

Those regions ought to be treated as an asset of the Empire...Our duty is to develop those vast regions, and a portion of the results we are entitled to take for ourselves and for civilised mankind, for that civilised mankind which in the course of some generations probably the people who inhabit those regions will be able to join. We are entitled to take it, because we have fought and spent that which cannot be estimated in cash and that ought to be taken into your economics. It has cost us the lives of our men, and we have spent millions on our Fleet and on those great forces which in various portions of the Empire are called upon to defend our possessions.⁵¹

Indeed, those 'uncivilised' territories – peopled by 'savage and barbarous inhabitants' - were literally 'Imperial estates', ready to be exploited for the good of British citizens, who had fought and died on the European fronts to maintain 'the peace and administration' of the Niger basin. Therefore they were 'entitled' to a 'considerable proportion' of the prosperity of that land, using it to cover the cost of the benefits brought by the *pax Britannica* to the local population.⁵² Mackinder insisted that this claim did not represent a form of abuse against the natives, but it was instead completely justified as a long-term investment toward their future welfare, developing the rich economic resources of their territories for the advantage of the entire world. However, this was clearly a mere lip service to the humanitarian sensitivity of British public opinion, designed to conceal the real purpose of this economic scheme: the exploitation of West African resources for the successful continuation of the war effort and for the cleaning up of the massive national debt generated by the conflict. Indeed, Mackinder's parliamentary statement was part of the informal campaign led by the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) to widen the economic base of the Empire in order to protect British living standards from domestic taxation and financial instability.

Inspired by the 'economics of siege' provoked by the war and nurtured by the imperialist ideals of Cecil Rhodes, the group was an adaptation of the old tariff reform movement to the new international circumstances, including with Mackinder other prominent antebellum protectionists like Selborne, Milner, Henry Wilson Fox, Alfred

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXV, 1916, col. 573.

⁵² *Ibid.*, cols. 572-4.

Bigland, and Moreton Frewen.⁵³ As declared to the press, the main objectives of the ERDC were the conservation ‘for the benefit of the Empire’ of all the natural resources under ‘the ownership or control’ of imperial institutions, the development of these resources in favour of the British state, and the appointment ‘in due time’ of a ‘Board for the Conservation and Development of the Resources of the Empire’ for the common good of all British subjects.⁵⁴ On his part, Henry Wilson Fox – the leader of the group since its foundation in October 1916 – remarked the positive social purpose of the Committee, which aimed to reduce ‘class animosities’ and prepare Britain to the future ‘in a new spirit of co-operation and endeavour’: ‘We want to make the Empire a better place to live in. We want to give to as many of its citizens as possible the opportunity of living their lives in security under constantly improving conditions of health and material comfort, of cultivating their minds and training their aptitudes, and to offer to each successive generation wider horizons of life and outlook...We want, and must have, a new and clearly defined State policy in relation to social, economic and Imperial matters.’⁵⁵

Of course, this could be achieved only through the replacement of the old ‘pernicious doctrine of laissez-faire’ with ‘a Higher command in the field of production’, able to encourage and protect national economic activities from external competition.⁵⁶ At the same time the Empire should be united through ‘a system of tariff and export duties’ supported by common diplomatic authorities and improved communications. In this broad scheme of imperial development, native peoples in the tropical dependencies should then be trained and employed at their highest capacity for the full benefit of the new British economic system, subjected to the constant rise of the European population both in Britain and in the Dominions: ‘We shall do well to remember that the future of our Empire...will tend to depend increasingly upon our capacity to elevate and employ the teeming millions of natives for whose welfare we are responsible.’⁵⁷ Thus ‘new men and new leaders’ were needed on the political and economic stage, with ‘new conceptions’ of British imperial responsibilities and with ‘the courage and determination required to discharge them.’⁵⁸

⁵³ Killingray, ‘Empire Resources’, pp. 206-7, note 8. Milner presided the first meetings of the Committee, but he later left it after his entry in the Lloyd George coalition government in December 1916.

⁵⁴ ‘Empire Resources’, *The Observer*, 28 January 1917, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Henry Wilson Fox, ‘A Platform for an Imperial Party’, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 80 (1916), pp. 893-4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 896-900.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 903-6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 906-7.

It was probably this 'call to arms', together with a certain echo of old 'national efficiency' ideas, that attracted Mackinder to the group, participating to its first meetings in the autumn of 1916. He also shared the same constructive imperialism of Wilson Fox, believing that the nationalization of economic activities in the Empire could help Britain to win the war and to reshape its vast global colonies into a more effective and integrated system. However, his choice did not pay in the long-term: indeed, the ERDC became quickly involved in a violent controversy with the Colonial Office and the Anti-Slavery Society over the control of the Nigerian palm oil industry, suffering an indelible damage of credibility in the eyes of the press and of the political establishment.⁵⁹ Supported by West African merchants, who feared to lose their trade to some form of governmental monopoly, the Anti-Slavery Society waged a relentless public campaign against the group's proposals for a state regulation of the business, denouncing loudly the 'conflict of interests' of several members of the Committee, more or less involved with private firms active in the Niger region.⁶⁰ At the same time John H. Harris, the powerful spokesman of the Society, remarked all the dangerous contradictions of the ERDC's programme, ventilating even the reintroduction of forced labour 'with all its attendant horrors' in British African colonies.⁶¹ On the other hand, colonial officials were sceptical or hostile toward the 'constructive policy' advocated by the ERDC, fearing the further destabilization of Nigeria and the Gold Coast, suffering already violent forms of internal unrest since the beginning of the war.⁶² Some of them also doubted the economic feasibility of the Committee's proposals, remembering the disastrous results of the monopoly established by the British South Africa Company in Rhodesia.⁶³

All the attempts made by Wilson Fox to dispel these woes failed to convince his opponents, while they certainly embarrassed the ministerial supporters of the group, exposing the complete lack of coordination between imperial visionaries and public authorities. Lord Selborne, for example, issued a statement to the press in which he

⁵⁹ Killingray, 'Empire Resources', pp. 201-6.

⁶⁰ Alfred Bigland, for example, was the director of a Liverpool company specialized in the trade of palm kernel with West Africa, and his open desire to gain the monopoly of the Nigerian glycerine market earned him the unenviable nickname of 'Vulture for Glycerine.' For a short profile, see Peter Yearwood and Cameron Hazlehurst, ' "The Affairs of a Distant Dependency": The Nigeria Debate and the Premiership, 1916', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12 (2001), pp. 409-10.

⁶¹ J.H. Harris, 'The Development of Imperial Resources', *The Spectator*, 3 March 1917, p. 269.

⁶² On the condition of the West African colonies in the war years, see Akinjide Osuntokun, 'Disaffection and Revolts in Nigeria during the First World War', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, 5 (1971), pp. 171-92, and David Killingray, 'Repercussions of World War I in the Gold Coast', *The Journal of African History*, 19 (1978), pp. 39-59.

⁶³ Killingray, 'Empire Resources', pp. 201-2. The presence of Sir Leonard Starr Jameson and other former executives of the Company in the ERDC reinforced these concerns.

defended his sympathy for the Committee's programme, denying any intent to reintroduce the 'plantation system' in the African colonies: 'What is proposed is that in any fresh development of trade, where the native has anything to sell, he should sell it to the State and not to the individual...This proposal may be wise or unwise, but it has not about it the slightest savour of exploitation; and I entirely disagree with anyone who asserts that the native would not get as good a price from the State as from the private merchant.'⁶⁴ Unfortunately for him, this balanced commercial argument was completely blown up by Wilson Fox two days later, with an open proposal in the *Spectator* to use mainly native labour in cattle ranches and fruit plantations, on the model of Rhodesia. Harris was delighted by these blatant contradictions, labelling the economic theories of the ERDC as 'supremely ludicrous.'⁶⁵ Thus, with this poor reputation behind them, none of the Committee's proposals were able to impress the British government, apart that for the establishment of an Imperial Development Board at the end of the conflict. But this was certainly not what they had hoped to achieve through their lobbyist action. Instead, as well remarked by Stephen Constantine, the 'elephantine labours' of these imperial enthusiasts during the war gave birth to a 'mouse', showing the resistance of old Liberal attitudes against the protectionist pressures of the time.⁶⁶ The constructive policies of tariff reform had failed a second time, and they were not destined to regain the political spotlight until the economic depression of the late 1920s.

On his part, Mackinder had already estranged himself from the group, at least unofficially, since the Nigerian parliamentary debate of November 1916. This tense confrontation in the Commons on the future disposal of German properties in the Niger region, confiscated by British authorities at the start of the war, represented the apex of the rising conflict between the different segments of the Asquith coalition government, nurtured by the gloomy military perspective on the European fronts: some weeks later, in fact, Asquith resigned in favour of a new coalition cabinet led by Lloyd George, giving way to a new phase of British political life during the conflict.⁶⁷ At the same time the discussion on these African properties also became a dramatic clash between Andrew Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson for the leadership of the Conservative Party, revealing the persistence of

⁶⁴ 'Development of Empire Resources: Lord Selborne's Statement', *The Times*, 5 July 1917, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Henry Wilson Fox, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee', *The Spectator*, 7 July 1917, p. 11; J.H. Harris, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee', *The Spectator*, 21 July 1917, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914-1940* (London and Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass, 1984), pp. 51-2.

⁶⁷ For a complete survey of the debate, see Yearwood and Hazlehurst, ' "Distant Dependency" ', pp. 397-431.

pre-war political and economic fractures within Tory ranks: indeed, Carson appealed to Milnerites and tariff reformers to give these enemy resources to British companies, creating a *de facto* monopoly in the region sustaining the national war effort, while Bonar Law advocated instead their sale to neutral buyers, providing liquidity for the exhausted reserves of the Treasury. Surprisingly, Mackinder, Steel-Maitland, and other tariff reformers agreed with his laissez-faire position, contributing to the final rejection of Carson's proposal at Westminster.⁶⁸ In his parliamentary speech, Mackinder illustrated the rationale of his position, defending it from the outraged attacks of other Conservative colleagues:

What will be the great want of this country and this Empire at the end of this War? Capital! Where are you going to get that capital? Not from the enemy countries...I am afraid not within the British Empire and the friendly countries, within the countries of our Allies. You will find they are as hungry for capital as we are ourselves...Where is the great reservoir of capital? Surely in those very neutral countries, the United States, Holland, Norway, Denmark, which have not been fighting in this War, and which have been amassing profits. Are you going to say you will refuse to allow them to invest within your Empire, and with the security which comes from the power of purchasing property? Are you going to say you deny that, when the result will be to give the very employment which is essential to the future of this country?⁶⁹

Thus the partial adoption of free trade measures in the tropical dependencies was not a betrayal of tariff reform principles, but instead a better application of them, using foreign capital to develop imperial resources. After all, Britain had not the financial strength to control the Nigerian palm oil industry at the moment, due to the heavy economic burden of the war, leaving that vital task to rich foreign investors capable of cultivating the West African market in favour of British power: 'The result of this sale will be either, on the one hand, that these firms out of their great profits will be compelled to give an adequate price, or, on the other hand, the property will be bought by the Dutch, possibly by Americans, but under your policy you will compel those Dutch and Americans to come and manufacture here. What does it matter whether it is Dutch or American capital if that is the case?'⁷⁰

Wilson Fox was appalled by such an argument, denouncing it as 'deplorable' and insisting on the need of direct government action in Nigeria, taking charge of enemy properties for the 'great benefit' of 'Imperial interests.' But Mackinder restated his previous decision, arguing with a certain note of irritation that it would have been 'superfluous' to

⁶⁸ However, German properties in Nigeria were later sold to British companies, due to the absence of 'safe' foreign buyers without German capital. See again Yearwood and Hazlehurst, ' "Distant Dependency" ', pp. 424-5.

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXVII, 1916, cols. 282-3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 284.

discuss the matter further.⁷¹ He had already exposed his reasons both in Parliament and on the press, showing even the limited and particular nature of German properties in the region, made up by pure business facilities and not 'very suitable' for direct government control. And he had also remarked that British colonial authorities should not be a 'retail competitor' in West Africa, leaving enough space to private initiative. Indeed, that measure could provide valuable 'funds' for the 'indemnification' of British interests in the region, restoring the old economic balance disrupted by the war.⁷² This practical attitude, based on caution and flexibility, was almost heresy for imperial patriots like F.H. Booth, who accused Mackinder of being 'a past Tariff Reformer', having betrayed the protectionist beliefs of his previous political career.⁷³ It certainly estranged him from the other members of the ERDC, but he was now probably less interested in their activities than before, due to the constant controversy surrounding the group's proposals. This does not mean, however, that he dismissed completely their ideas after the war: in the late 1920s, for example, he still dreamed of implanting 'a row of white aristocracies' amid the native populations of Africa, upholding 'a standard for the civilization' of those lands and securing their rich natural resources for the benefit of the British economy.⁷⁴

Mackinder, however, thought that the war had temporarily put imperial questions in the background, leaving instead the main stage to the situation of Europe, torn apart by the extreme violence of the conflict. Indeed, it was there that the great military struggle was compelling Britain and the Dominions to their utmost physical and economic effort, wasting energies and resources in a dramatic 'battle of materials.' And it was again there that the future world order would have been rebuilt at the end of the conflict, creating new nations and redrawing secular borders through modern geographical methods. But Mackinder was sceptical on the preparedness of British statesmen to deal with such tremendous tasks, due to their 'insular' and 'more or less detached' point of view: 'No doubt there is a feeling in our country that we would like to remake the map of Europe according to certain principles which we think will make for peace in the future. If that is to be achieved, there will have to be sacrifices on the part of some far-seeing foreign statesmen...Then we might have some

⁷¹ H. Wilson Fox, 'The Nigerian Sales', *The Times*, 11 November 1916, p. 9; H.J. Mackinder, 'The Nigerian Sales', *The Times*, 13 November 1916, p. 10.

⁷² H.J. Mackinder, 'The Nigerian Sales', *The Times*, 10 November 1916, p. 9.

⁷³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXVII, 1916, col. 282.

⁷⁴ C. Gillman, 'South-West Tanganyika Territory: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 69 (1927), pp. 129-30.

hope of a European settlement of frontiers which would be stable.⁷⁵ And the general state of geography in the country was still 'deplorable', made up of 'scientific generalization' without any respect for the real complexity of 'human geography'; on the contrary, it was necessary to give people 'a sense of proportion and perspective' in time and space, giving them a useful help in the 'practical conduct' of international affairs.⁷⁶ Therefore the struggle for Europe presented the most interesting and valuable opportunities for his political and intellectual skills, ready to serve the 'democratic crusade' of the Allies against the autocratic ambitions of the Central Powers.

These skills were mainly employed in the activities of three different groups, all connected by a similar Liberal and internationalist afflatus: the New Europe, the Serbian Society, and the British Parliamentary Committee. The first two groups were the product of the organizational talent of Robert Seton-Watson, a journalist and historian expert in south-central European affairs, who began to campaign since the outbreak of the war for the emancipation of Slavic peoples from the control of Austria-Hungary. Educated in Britain, France, and Germany, Seton-Watson had been a great supporter of the Habsburg Empire before the conflict, believing that 'an Austria rejuvenated by universal suffrage' could become one of the strongest and most democratic states of the continent, balancing the conflicting interests of Germany and Russia.⁷⁷ But the growing authoritarian methods used by Austro-Hungarian authorities toward Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes convinced him of the necessity of dismantling the old Dual Monarchy, creating a free 'Great Serbian State' in the Balkans capable to resist the advance of Germany toward the Near East. Indeed, he saw the war as the product of the German desire for an autocratic empire in Central Europe, supported by the open connivance of Turks and Hungarians:

This war has been made by a combination of Budapest and Berlin over the half inanimate body of Vienna, by an alliance of Germany and Hungary, or, to be accurate, between Prussian militarism and Magyar racial tyranny. It is no accident that the Entente has to fight against the triple league of the German, the Magyar, and the Turk, for to-day their unholy alliance represents the claim of Brute Force to ride roughshod over the smaller nationalities, just as the Entente represents the Principle of Nationality and the rights of every nation, great or small, to its own freedom and individuality.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ L.W. Lyde, 'Types of Political Frontiers in Europe: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 45 (1915), p. 143.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷⁷ Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, p. 40.

⁷⁸ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Balkans, Italy, and the Adriatic* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1916), p. 30.

Therefore it was imperative to support Serbia and the other Balkan peoples in their fight for independence, recognizing the democratic nature of their cause: 'Serbia's aim is not conquest or annexation; it is the liberation and unification of all Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in a single state, the new Yugoslavia. She asks nothing better than that her kinsmen should be free to make their own decision, for she knows that on their part there will be no hesitation.'⁷⁹ This strong Liberal idealism, reminiscent of Gladstone's fierce campaign against Turkish despotism in the 1870s, was also mixed with a clear geopolitical perception of the importance of Eastern Europe for the security of the British Empire: indeed, Seton-Watson remarked that a powerful mid-European bloc led by Germany could become a terrible menace for Britain's strategic position in the Near East, putting even the security of Egypt and India at risk. Therefore, both for moral and pragmatic reasons, the freedom of the Slavs was 'a cardinal requirement of British policy', establishing a strong line of defence before Constantinople, the traditional 'gate' to the East, and securing the final triumph of the principle of nationality across the entire European continent.⁸⁰ To realize this crucial agenda, Seton-Watson gave life to a vast and well orchestrated propaganda campaign in favour of East European nationalities, helped by prominent Austro-Hungarian dissidents like Thomas Masaryk, the future President of Czechoslovakia, with whom he founded the School of Slavonic Studies at the University of London in 1915.⁸¹

The acme of this campaign was the creation of *The New Europe*, a weekly review of international affairs edited in collaboration with a vast group of influential intellectuals coming from all the countries of the Entente, including Belgium, Romania, and Japan.⁸² United under the slogan 'Pour la Victoire Intégrale', this large gathering of political and academic talents subscribed to the official programme exposed by Seton-Watson in the first editorial of the magazine, aimed to help 'towards the formation of a sane and well-informed body of public opinion' over European affairs and to provide 'a rallying ground' for all those involved in the reconstruction of the international system upon 'a basis of nationality' and 'the rights of minorities', the sole guarantees against the repetition of 'the horrors' of the present conflict. Indeed, only this kind of democratic approach could achieve 'an 'integral' victory' over the 'Pangerman project of 'Central Europe' and 'Berlin Baghdad'', securing to Europe 'permanent peace' and the full 'vindication' of the natural

⁷⁹ Seton-Watson, *Balkans*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

⁸¹ On the life and ideas of Masaryk, see R.W. Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943) and *The Spirit of Thomas G. Masaryk (1857-1930): An Anthology*, ed. by George J. Kovtun (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

⁸² For a complete list of these collaborators, see Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, pp. 439-41.

rights of smaller nationalities.⁸³ These revolutionary plans were mainly considered as weird ‘fantasies’ by the British government, who tried instead to negotiate a separate peace with Austria-Hungary for the most part of the conflict, accepting its dismemberment only after the sudden collapse of the Eastern Front in 1917.⁸⁴ But the genuine devotion of Seton-Watson and his collaborators played an important role in the development of that international idealism later animating the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, with the birth of the League of Nations and the establishment of the mandates’ system in Africa and the Middle East.

On his part, Mackinder wrote only a couple of articles for the *New Europe*, but his participation to the spirit of the journal was strong and sincere, expressed mainly in parliamentary and press interventions. He had already shown a certain interest toward the Balkans in 1908, at the time of the Bosnian Crisis, considering them as the ‘central region’ between Europe and Asia, destined to be in the future ‘the seat of conflict’ of the entire European continent, due to its general condition of ‘unstable equilibrium’ with ‘warring intermixed people and no dominant nationality.’ The only way to prevent its violent conflagration was then to develop it ‘commercially’, using the railways to build up ‘a centre of force’ neutralizing both internal and external tensions.⁸⁵ Of course, with the outbreak of war six years later, this peaceful option became almost impossible, and Mackinder began to rethink the problem of South-East Europe in other terms, underlining the ‘very small significance’ of ‘present political frontiers’ in the region: ‘The only whole nationality contained within the Hapsburg monarchy is the Magyar or Hungarian...There is nothing more artificial on the map of Europe than the frontiers of this strange, composite monarchy, and that fact, if you consider not immediate incitements but underlying causes, has produced the present great war.’⁸⁶ At the same time the Austrian desire for a port on the Aegean Sea had met the ‘rising brilliance of Serbian nationality’ on its route, putting the entire survival of the Dual Monarchy at risk: ‘Either Vienna must at once strike to secure an outlet for her Balkan ambition or she must herself suffer dismemberment... If she does not carry the war forward into the enemy country the map of her own broad lands will speedily be rolled up to the foot of the German Alps themselves.’ Therefore the Allies should support the creation of ‘a new federal Great Power’ in Eastern Europe, reuniting all the

⁸³ R.W. Seton-Watson, ‘The New Europe’, *The New Europe*, 1 (1916), p. 1.

⁸⁴ On the complexity of Anglo-Austrian relations during the war, see Wilfried Fest, *Peace or Partition: The Habsburg Monarchy and British Policy, 1914-1918* (London: Prior, 1978).

⁸⁵ Noel Buxton, ‘Balkan Geography and Balkan Railways: Discussion’, *The Geographical Journal*, 32 (1908), pp. 236-7.

⁸⁶ H.J. Mackinder, ‘The New Map’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 30 January 1915, p. 11.

different nationalities of the region into a single bloc capable to resist the hegemonic ambitions of the Austro-German alliance.⁸⁷

Mackinder hoped with this ambitious scheme to counter the Central European project of Friedrich Naumann, designed to unite Germany and Austria-Hungary in a single continental 'super-state', creating a vast and powerful 'Balkan Federation' organized along the American and Australian model, both based on the formal equality of the various members of their constitutional structure.⁸⁸ In this sense, he also conceived a successful federation of Eastern Europe as a positive response to the bitter criticism of stout Austrophiles like Noel Buxton, who accused the New Europe of putting British strategic interests at risk, sacrificing the reasonable security of a separate peace with the Habsburg Monarchy for an unattractive 'congeries' of small Balkan independent states.⁸⁹ This was also the opinion of Milner, who remarked in a public interview that Britain did not go to war 'for Czechoslovakia, Jugoslavia, or Rumanians', demanding only 'some arrangements for their autonomy' within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁹⁰ This appeared to be the best and cheapest way to defend British imperial interests in the Near East, maintaining a solid barrier against any future German or Russian advance toward the Mediterranean. Mackinder, however, was 'not quite satisfied' by these arguments, remarking on the extreme instability of the political and military situation in the East: 'What we may have to accept...is a peace which is neither German nor non-German, but something between. In that case it may be essential, both for the permanent settlement of Europe and for the maintenance of the British Empire, that the Balkan peoples should be helped by us to achieve a certain stability and independence.'⁹¹ Thus Britain's real interest was to express 'a human note of sympathy and of association' toward its Slavic allies, supporting their ideals who had 'incidentally' served its cause 'so valiantly' against German expansionism, preventing the 'domination' of the European continent by a single 'central Power' near the shores of the English Channel.⁹² This did not mean, however, the partisan favour of one Allied nation against the others, maintaining instead a careful balance of power in the Balkan region, especially along the contested Adriatic coast:

⁸⁷ Mackinder, 'New Map', p. 11.

⁸⁸ Mackinder, 'Problem of Central Europe', p. 4. On Naumann and his project of a united Central Europe, misinterpreted and distorted by Allied propaganda during the war, see Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), pp. 194-217.

⁸⁹ On Buxton's critique of the New Europe, see Fest, *Peace or Partition*, pp. 93-115.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81.

⁹¹ Halford Mackinder, 'Mr. Balfour's Speech', *The New Europe*, 4 (1917), p. 117.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

Even in our enthusiasm for the Serbs...we must recognise the position of Italy, with a coastline towards the Adriatic without a single port that can harbour a modern fleet...We have therefore to balance the legitimate needs...of our Italian Ally in this matter not merely with our generous impulse to create a great Serbia, but with the vital European necessity of creating a great Serbia, having a main exit to the Aegean, although no doubt also minor exits to the Adriatic, and compatibly with this we must put the minimum possible Slav population under Italian rule.⁹³

And the same was true for the control of the Aegean Sea, which was at the core of Greek intervention in the war on the side of the Entente, after several months of ambiguous neutrality: 'We have to remember that however hard things we may feel inclined to say about the Greek just now, we pledged ourselves to M. Venizelos a few months ago, and M. Venizelos, with the eye of a geographer and a statesman, has established himself at Salonica.'⁹⁴ Mackinder attached great importance to this intervention, which closed the road of the Near East to the Central Powers, and he insisted on the necessity of keeping British troops 'in the malarious hills of Macedonia', fending any threat against precious Greek harbours and rendering a vital service both 'to the Empire and to the freedom of Europe.'⁹⁵ These strategic and diplomatic considerations found a certain resonance in the writings and activities of the Serbian Society, the group created by Seton-Watson in support of Serbia in the autumn of 1916. Some months later, for example, the Society – composed by influential personalities like Cromer, Bryce, and H.M. Hyndman – sent a short memorandum to the Lloyd George government where it suggested putting more military resources on the Balkan front, so exploiting the opportunities offered by the Greek intervention:

Honour and interest alike...demand that the British Government should take in hand without delay the work of succouring the Serbian Army and, as far as possible, the Serbian people. The Society is convinced that, to this end, the reorganization of the Allied Army based on Salonika should be put in hand forthwith, full advantage being taken of the exceptional knowledge which the Serbian General Staff possesses of the conditions of Balkan fighting. Recent events in Greece have cleared the way. There is strong reason to believe, that were the British Government now to show whole-hearted interest in the Balkan Campaign most of the difficulties hitherto existing would be overcome.⁹⁶

⁹³ Mackinder, 'International Reconstruction', p. 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁵ H.J. Mackinder, 'Adriatic Question', *The Glasgow Herald*, 3 December 1917, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Kew, The National Archives (TNA), CAB/24/19/56, The Serbian Society of Great Britain to David Lloyd George, 25 June 1917, p. 2.

After the final exit of Russia from the war in 1918, these ideas were reiterated again in another letter to the Prime Minister, stressing the pivotal importance of a stronger effort of the Allies in favour of ‘the friendly subject peoples’ of Austria-Hungary, without any further diplomatic approach toward the Austrian government: ‘Such encouragement tends to prolong the war by recreating the broken cohesion of Austria-Hungary. Further, it is not a tenable proposition to argue that the promise ‘not to dismember Austria-Hungary’ will detach her from Germany. The War Cabinet has recently had convincing proof of the ultimate solidarity of Vienna and Berlin.’⁹⁷ Meanwhile the group created a joint committee with other similar associations (British-Italian League, Anglo-Roumanian Society, Anglo-Hellenic Society) to concert their common efforts in favour of a more stable and democratic organization of the Balkan region after the conflict. Mackinder was elected Chairman of the new organisation, and he met at regular intervals with other distinct academics like Ronald Burrows and Arthur Evans to elaborate a viable compromise between the various competing nationalities of South-East Europe.⁹⁸

His interest toward the cause of those peoples was not only dictated by geopolitical or strategic reasons. At the same time he also felt that the old popular philosophy of vast transcontinental empires, so influential in the antebellum era, had been seriously challenged by the events of the war: ‘Has the day of great Kaiserdoms passed? May it be that when the war comes to be measured in historical perspective its chief “decision” will be held to have been as between imperial centralisation and clustered nationalities? In other words, will the terrestrial globe in the future reflect the celestial globe and exhibit only constellations of minor nationalities?’⁹⁹ Indeed, the heroic resistance of Belgium and Serbia against the pretensions of the German Empires, the internal disintegration of Russia after the February Revolution, the entry of the United States into the conflict with its ideas of national self-determination, the continuous grievances of India and the Dominions toward the conduct of the British war effort represented together a clear rejection of the cultural mindset of the pre-war period, based on ideas of ‘organic unity’ and on the ‘struggle for existence’ between closed political systems, requiring instead a new pluralistic approach to the future reconstruction of the international order torn apart by the conflict.

⁹⁷ The Serbian Society of Great Britain to David Lloyd George, 25 January 1918, in *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906-1941*, I: 1906-1918 (London and Zagreb: British Academy and University of Zagreb, 1976), p. 311.

⁹⁸ Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: a Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 201-2.

⁹⁹ Mackinder, ‘New Map’, p. 11.

Might was no more right, as well put by Thomas Masaryk in his inaugural address at the London School of Slavonic Studies:

Physical greatness and strength...is no warrant, no foundation of right and of prerogatives; seventy is certainly far more than ten, but have the seventy the right to deprive the ten of their bread? Have they the right to use force?...Centralised absolutism is everywhere checked by freedom, the centralising tendencies of aristocracies are weakened by the individualistic tendencies of democracy...History is in favour not only of big, but also of medium-sized and small national states...Mankind strives for unity, but it does not strive for uniformity. World-federation, not world-power. *Consensus gentium* – not slavery of nations and races...No *Herrenvolk*, but national equality and parity: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* among nations as among individuals.¹⁰⁰

And these democratic notions were no mere pipe dreams, because ‘the spiritual and moral forces in society’ were not less real than the German intellectuals who had converted ‘anthropology into zoology’, justifying their aggressive ambitions under the cover of Darwin’s natural theories.¹⁰¹ Even an ardent Social Darwinist like Benjamin Kidd now shared such a kind of political idealism, denouncing his previous association with the ‘science of power’ that glorified war, nationalism, and eugenics in Edwardian Britain.¹⁰² Still involved in imperialist initiatives like those of the ERDC, Mackinder remained instead quite sceptical of the possibility of a post-war reorganization of international relations around Liberal principles, expressing later his doubts on the matter in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, written as a sort of response to the democratic doctrines presented by Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Indeed, he warned that the dream of an ‘unceasing peace’ as championed by the supporters of the American President was an illusion, because ‘international tension’ was destined to accumulate again, due to the natural ‘unequal growth’ of nations: ‘There is in nature no such thing as equality of opportunity for the nations...I would go further, and say that the grouping of lands and seas, and of fertility and natural pathways, is such as to lend itself to the growth of empires, and in the end of a single world-empire.’¹⁰³

But the influence of Masaryk and Seton-Watson, coupled with the devastating prolongation of the conflict in Europe, detached him from the previous ‘blood and money’ philosophy of the antebellum years, leaving space to a renovated hope in the constructive

¹⁰⁰ Seton-Watson, *Masaryk*, pp. 142-5. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁰² Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 41-2.

¹⁰³ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 1-2.

and positive power of human beings: 'If we are to realize our ideal of a League of Nations which shall prevent war in the future, we must recognize these geographical realities and take steps to counter their influence. Last century, under the spell of the Darwinian theory, men came to think that those forms of organization should survive which adapted themselves best to their natural environment. To-day we realize, as we emerge from our fiery trial, that human victory consists in our rising superior to such mere fatalism.'¹⁰⁴ Therefore it was necessary to establish a 'world power' sufficiently able to 'keep the law between small and great states' without growing into 'a world-tyranny', based on the violent conquest of other countries or on the perversion of international laws.¹⁰⁵ And Mackinder thought that such a power did not reside in the abstract legalism of the League of Nations, but instead in the commonality of interests and values between the Allied Powers, united into a single democratic Western bloc.

He matured this original idea during his activities with the British Parliamentary Committee, a selected group of MPs who remained in close contact with the parliamentary institutions of other Allied countries, organizing periodical foreign visits and public meetings to support a better political coordination between the Entente Powers. As the Secretary of the association, Mackinder visited both France and Italy during the conflict, directly experiencing the terrible destruction of the local war fronts and acquiring a precious knowledge of the necessities of these countries in the post-war era. In France, for example, he was shocked by the systematic destruction brought by the German Army in the northern districts of the country, including the deportation of local civilians and the purposeful ravage of agricultural resources. The case of the small town of Ham was emblematic of such barbaric practices:

Last February...700 men and women, between the ages of 15 and 60, were suddenly removed to an unknown destination, and nothing has been heard of them since, except in the case of one woman. Two sick persons, who were practically dying, were included in the number, because their ages fell within the limits stated...To-day the remnant of the people of Ham are a pathetic little crowd of grandparents and small children...Next in point of wickedness, in my estimation, stands the cutting down of fruit trees...After careful consideration on the spot...I say that tens of thousands of these trees have been felled. When you look from a hill top they lie across the fields ranged in ranks like men lying in the extended order, not a branch having been lopped away, and each stump having a white newly cut top to it...As I travelled back through Kent, and looked up from my newspaper and saw an orchard, I found myself exclaiming, 'Why there is an orchard standing!' When you have

¹⁰⁴ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

traversed mile after mile of that vast ruined orchard in France even a townsman feels as in a nightmare.¹⁰⁶

In spite of this deliberate destruction, however, Mackinder was struck by the 'silent' and 'self-possessed' spirit of French soldiers, ready to fight until the final defeat of the cruel 'Hun.'¹⁰⁷ Some months later, visiting the trenches along the Isonzo River, he also had similar expressions of admiration for the Italian Army, fighting the Austrians in terrible environmental conditions: 'No one who has seen what we then saw but must salute the soldiers of the main Italian Armies as heroes...I can only affirm my conviction, as firm as before the disaster [of Caporetto], that the young soldiery of Italy...is the material of great nation in every way worthy of the Allies beside which it stands in this war.'¹⁰⁸ This heroism was even more remarkable considering the peculiar conditions of the country, relying mainly on its 'magnificent, industrious man-power' and depending to 'some extent' on the economic assistance of its Allies.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, considering all these sacrifices in the name of the Allied cause, Britain should approach its European neighbours with a different attitude after the war, establishing closer political ties with them and giving even some preferential treatment to their commercial enterprises.

Speaking in front of the Allied Parliaments at the Sorbonne, Mackinder elaborated in more detail his thoughts on the argument, remarking on the need of a common 'Institution' allowing the continuation of inter-allied cooperation in the future 'times of peace.'¹¹⁰ Indeed, the war had impressed a dramatic transformation to the historical development of the world, symbolized by the capital events of the Russian Revolution and of the American intervention into the conflict, which represented 'the certain victory of human democracy' over the last autocratic regimes of the previous century.¹¹¹ Thus, united by the main consequences of these facts, Britain, Italy, and France had become 'sisters' living 'in the same house', guarding the same Western oceans and facing the same enemy 'from the Orient.' They should not separate after the war, completing each other into a vast 'defensive unit' from Scotland to Sicily, connected through big futuristic tunnels under the Channel and the Alps. At the same time, on the model of the ancient Republic of Venice, they represented the 'impregnable citadel of Liberty', based and regulated by those unique parliamentary institutions created by all three countries into a common historical effort:

¹⁰⁶ H.J. Mackinder, 'The Devastation in France', *The Times*, 21 April 1917, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ H.J. Mackinder, 'The Testing of Italy', *The Observer*, 4 November 1917, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Halford Mackinder, 'Western Europe', *The New Europe*, 2 (1917), p. 151. Translated from French.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

'We owe the ideas and words to the Italians and to the French; the contribution of England is that of things and mechanisms.'¹¹² Therefore these democratic customs, united into a single political and economic space, represented the best response to the 'barbaric and autocratic idea of *Mittel-Europa*', giving a long lasting 'roman peace' to all the peoples of Europe.¹¹³

Mackinder's geopolitical proposal was sincerely appreciated at the time: the *New Europe*, for example, defined the Sorbonne speech as 'admirable', while some of its main statements were meshed up in an official declaration of the Allied Parliaments, where the various delegates of the three countries expressed with 'absolute unanimity' the desire to implement the unification of the Allies in the diplomatic and military sphere, refusing any sort of peace without 'the triumph of liberty and law in the world.'¹¹⁴ However, colonial rivalries and economic competition were destined to destroy later this strong pan-European sentiment at the peace table, preparing the ground for another bloody and violent world war. Nevertheless, with his inter-parliamentary activity across Western Europe, Mackinder had partially forecasted those multinational institutions like NATO and the European Economic Community which would provide safety and stability to the European continent in the second half of the twentieth century, upholding even those very democratic ideals championed by the Serbian Society and the New Europe during the Great War.

In this sense, it is possible to conclude that the war represented an important turning point for his political thought, pushing away old notions of competing national empires and restating in their place a certain faith in international goodwill and cooperation. Of course, this change of mind was not without limits or contradictions: regarding the colonial dependencies of Africa, for example, Mackinder continued to think according to the general wisdom of the previous decades, requesting even a stronger exploitation of their natural and human resources in support of the British war effort. It is true that his collaboration with the ERDC was quite inconclusive, but it certainly represented a powerful contradiction to his democratic commitment toward Europe, showing the persistence of the crude imperialist mindset of the antebellum era. At the same time he also continued to talk of the need of 'efficiency' for the good of the Empire, maintaining some of the protectionist accents of Chamberlain's fiscal campaign, while his interest in Balkan affairs was often

¹¹² Mackinder, 'Western Europe', pp. 151-2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 153. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁴ Mackinder, 'Western Europe', p. 150; 'Le Parlement Interallié', *Le Temps*, 9 May 1917, p. 2.

inspired by mere reasons of imperial defence, hoping to establish a valid strategic bulwark against any Austro-German threat to the British paramount position in the Near East.

However, he partially recognized the importance of 'money-power' and free trade for the survival of Britain in the struggle, accepting their cautious employment both on the American stock market and in the West African colonies. And the activity of the New Europe and the Allied Parliaments allowed him to see international reality beyond a strict national point of view, acknowledging the interdependence of continental Europe and the British world, united by the common development of civil liberties and democratic institutions. In this sense, Mackinder ended up seeing the war as a partial rebuke of his previous political philosophy, based on mere facts of force and power, showing instead the need to reevaluate the ideal and moral values of people against the destructive mechanisms of modern warfare, shamefully espoused by the autocratic rulers of the Central Powers: 'To-day is the chance of civilisation... The world is larger than it ever was, for the 'resources of civilisation' now reach into his remotest corners, and into its heights and into its depths. But it is also smaller than it ever was, for the will of one Kaiser can afflict it everywhere at once...The next great advance of man must be moral and spiritual in command over himself rather than over Nature.'¹¹⁵ It was for this reason that he championed the cause of a free and united Europe, based on strong and clear democratic bonds: after all, it was 'a great idea, a consoling idea' to think that British and Allied soldiers had not died only to 'preserve their own country', but also to 'organize for the first time a whole democratic world, really civilized and, hopefully, happy.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ H.J. Mackinder, 'This Unprecedented War', *The Glasgow Herald*, 4 August 1917, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Mackinder, 'Western Europe', p. 150.

Chapter Six

Democratic Ideals and Strategic Realities: The Diplomatic Mission to South Russia, 1919-20

The public life of Halford Mackinder did not end with the great Allied victory of November 1918. On the contrary, he remained active as a career politician for some years, losing his Scottish parliamentary constituency only after the fall of the Lloyd George coalition in 1922. At the same time he presided over various advisory committees created by the British government to face the industrial and commercial difficulties of the post-war era, maintaining such a prestigious role for more than a decade. Finally, he continued to teach geography at the London School of Economics until 1925, contributing to the formation of a new generation of scholars and to the lasting success of the educational institution created by Sidney Webb in the last years of the nineteenth century. However, few of these activities have been properly covered by modern historians, leaving a serious vacuum in the professional and intellectual biography of the character.¹ Indeed, it will be argued in the last two chapters of this thesis that Mackinder showed a certain change of mind toward imperial and international affairs, partially rejecting his old assumptions of the pre-war era and seeking instead a constructive adaptation to the new internationalist environment of the mid-1920s. This complex 'metamorphosis' has recently been noticed by Lucian Ashworth, who found Mackinder's post-war international attitudes – expressed mainly in the pages of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* – not immune from the democratic spirit of 1919, marked by the birth of the League of Nations and by an optimistic view of human relationships.² Nevertheless, it remains quite difficult to assess the real extent of such transformation, due the persistence in Mackinder's discourses of the time of several intellectual traces from the pre-war years.

His colonial paternalism toward Asian and African peoples, for example, did not see any serious revision, apart for some general note of sympathy in favour of their political grievances. However, he clearly began to perceive the loose and cooperative structure of

¹ The best account is probably in Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 155-205. But the entire analysis is quite scattered and disorganized, constantly shifting from the single events of Mackinder's life to the general discussion of his main geopolitical theories.

² Lucian M. Ashworth, 'Realism and the Spirit of 1919: Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Reality of the League of Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20 (2010), pp. 1-23.

the British Empire, which he had vainly tried to modify in a more organic sense before the war, as the best political system able to prevent future tragic deflagrations as that of August 1914. Thus, rejecting the most sanguine notes of his previous patriotic imperialism, he embraced wholeheartedly the new progressive ideal of the Commonwealth of Nations, guaranteeing unity and diversity through balanced authority and common values:

The vital need of to-day is to find new methods which will enable our several nations to act independently in their several local spheres...yet shall enable them to act so flexibly together with such a common front that they are never absorbed into those local spheres and drawn apart...Nothing that is coercive...is compatible with the freedom of initiative and decision demanded by each of our British Nations in order to cope with the problems of its own neighbourhood...The only alternative is that we must act together from motives of common conviction. We must believe in the same things and pursue the same objects because we see eye to eye.³

The following pages represent then an attempt to understand this important evolution in its historical context, finally providing a complete picture of Mackinder's intellectual life beyond any conventional stereotype of the past and of the present. Indeed, far from being a mono-dimensional 'democrat' or 'imperialist', Mackinder embodied all the main contradictions of his own age, torn apart by global conflicts and economic anxieties, showing the limits and potentialities of a closed, interconnected world not very different from our own. In this sense, his experience could still offer useful lessons to modern historians and geopolitical analysts, starting from the intricate and frustrating relationship between intellectuals and policymakers in the aftermath of a great international crisis. Therefore this chapter will be mainly devoted to his controversial diplomatic mission to South Russia in late 1919, emphasizing the numerous strengths and weaknesses of his geopolitical views on the reconstruction of Europe after the Great War, while the next one will focus instead on his successful direction of several imperial committees in the 1920s, which represented the most significant part of a long and quiet public career in the interwar years. This seems the best way to look at this complex and too often neglected period of his political biography, highlighting in detail both its European and imperial dimension, which were often intertwined in Mackinder's intellectual reflection after the World War, contributing to a rich and variegated series of non-academic activities in the early 1920s.

The first of these activities were originally directed toward the European continent, substantially ravaged after four years of total warfare and geopolitical disintegration.

³ Mackinder, 'English Tradition', p. 729.

Indeed, the final defeat of Germany in 1918 reinforced Mackinder's previous interest toward the complex problems of international reconstruction, initially discussed on the pages of the periodical press, and he tried later to present his ideas on the subject in a more rigorous and systematic way, maybe hoping to gain the attention of the British delegation sent to the Paris Peace Conference in the early weeks of 1919. Feeling that British geographers were losing a valuable opportunity to defend the strategic interests of their country at the peace table, leaving instead the field open to the activities of their French and American colleagues, he wrote a long and ambitious volume on the past, present, and future of European affairs, enriched by various diagrams and maps on the main geographical characteristics of the modern world.⁴ Significantly entitled *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, in direct reference to the internationalist doctrines of Woodrow Wilson, the book appeared in Britain in February 1919, presenting a fascinating long-term view of international events designed to 'adjust' new ideals of democracy with the 'lasting realities' of the physical earth.⁵ Taking the French Revolution as an example of failed political idealism, in fact, Mackinder stressed the constant collapse of 'generous visions' of liberty and equality in favour of the ruthless 'materialism' of 'the organiser', able to pervert progressive ideas for the benefit of his own personal ambitions: 'French Idealism lost its hold on Reality, and drifted into the grip of Fate, in the person of Napoleon. With his military efficiency Napoleon...organised a French Power the very law of whose being was a denial of Liberty. The story of the great French Revolution and Empire has influenced all subsequent political thought; it has seemed a tragedy in the old Greek sense of a disaster predestined in the very character of Revolutionary Idealism.'⁶ The failure of German democratic nationalism after 1848 – replaced by the authoritarian 'Kultur' of Bismarck and his political successors - had dramatically confirmed such historical reality, posing a vital threat to the safety of modern democracies in the twentieth century, and the recent victory of the Allied powers over the Kaiser had not completely dispelled this threat to the future of the world, requiring a better understanding of international realities to avoid the bloody mistakes of the past: 'In this War German anticipations have proved wrong in many regards, but that has been because we have made them so by a few wise principles of government, and by strenuous effort, notwithstanding our mistakes in policy. Our harder

⁴ On the marginal role played by British geographers at the Paris Peace Conference, see Michael Heffernan, 'Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (1996), pp. 520-1.

⁵ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

test has yet to come. What degree of International Reconstruction is necessary if the world is long to remain a safe place for democracies?’⁷

For Mackinder, the answer to this momentous question resided in the skilful utilization of that modern industrial technology which had recently made mankind so powerful over nature: ‘Human riches and comparative security are based to-day on the division and co-ordination of labor[sic], and on the constant repair of the complicated plant which has replaced the simple tools of primitive society. In other words, the output of modern wealth is conditional on the maintenance of our social organization and capital. Society is a Going Concern, and no small part of our well-being may be compared with the intangible “goodwill” of a business.’⁸ Thus it was necessary to keep up the original ‘social discipline’ of the national economic structure, avoiding its sudden paralysis and disintegration, as lately seen in revolutionary Russia: ‘A nation does not die when so smitten, but the whole mechanism of its society must be reconstituted, and that quickly, if the men and women who survive its impoverishment are not to forget the habits and lose the aptitudes on which their civilization depends. History shows no remedy but force upon which to found a fresh nucleus of discipline in such circumstances; but the organiser who rests upon force tends inevitably to treat the recovery of mere efficiency as his end. Idealism does not flourish under his rule.’⁹ Indeed, the thought of ‘the organiser’ was essentially ‘strategical’, based on the authoritarian control of the social machine and completely unsympathetic to the ethical pledges of the democratic state, leading often the nation to the disaster of war:

The organiser begins innocently enough; his executive mind revolts from the disorder, and above all from the indiscipline around him. Soldierly efficiency undoubtedly saved Revolutionary France. But such is the impetus of the Going Concern, that it sweeps forward even its own creator. To improve the efficiency of his man-power he must in the end seek to control all its activities...Therefore Napoleon added to his Grand Army and his Code Civil, also his Concordat with the Papacy, whereby the priest was to become his servant. He might have enjoyed lasting peace after Amiens, but must needs continue to prepare war. Finally he was impelled to Moscow, just as a great money-maker will overreach himself and end in bankruptcy.¹⁰

To avoid this catastrophic course of events, recently repeated by Germany in the World War, Mackinder suggested then that democracies had to learn to think ‘strategically’, using geography as a valid check against the excesses of their moralistic reasoning: ‘We must see

⁷ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to the housing problems of our coming League of Nations. We must reckon presciently with the realities of space and time, and not be content merely to lay down on paper good principles of conduct.¹¹ Therefore he went on to describe the complex 'geographical perspective' of the previous centuries, comparing the point of view of maritime nations with that of continental nations, in a long geo-historical exercise reminiscent of the pre-war Pivot Paper: 'The physical facts of geography have remained substantially the same during the fifty and sixty centuries of recorded human history. Forests have been cut down, marshes have been drained, and deserts may have broadened, but the outlines of land and water, and the lie of mountains and rivers have not altered except in detail.'¹² In this sense, Mackinder perceived Europe, Asia, and Africa as fused together into a common continental unit called 'World-Island', surrounded by external satellites like America or Australia and dominated by a closed 'Heartland' placed in the plain steppes of Central Asia, ready to be opened up by 'railways' and 'aeroplane routes' in the 'near future', changing forever the old 'relations of men' with the 'larger geographical realities' of the world.¹³ However, the borders of this crucial strategic area – described already in the RGS address of 1904 - had now moved considerably to the West, including the new states of the Danube region sort out by the traumatic conclusion of the recent European conflict: 'East Europe has not consisted, like West Europe, of a group of peoples independent of one another, and...without serious frontier questions between them; East Europe has been a triple organization of German domination over a mainly Slavonic population, though the extent of the German power...varied in different parts.'¹⁴ Partially checked by Russia before 1917, this German power could now reassert itself in the geopolitical void provoked by the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, using Eastern Europe as an advanced base for the future conquest of the neighbouring Heartland:

Unless you would lay up troubles for the future, you cannot now accept any outcome of the war which does not finally dispose of the issue between German and Slav in East Europe. You must have a balance as between German and Slav, and true independence of each. You cannot afford to leave such a condition of affairs in East Europe and the Heartland, as would offer scope for ambition in the future...When our statesmen are in conversation with the defeated enemy, some airy cherub should whisper to them from time to time this saying: *Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the*

¹¹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

*Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World.*¹⁵

The final solution to such danger seemed then a ‘territorial rearrangement’ of the entire region into a three state-systems, using the independent states between Russia and Germany as a valid shield against any resurgence of German expansionism toward the East: ‘The Russians are, and for one, if not two, generations must remain, hopelessly incapable of resisting German penetration on any basis but that of a military autocracy...The Slav and kindred nations which inhabit the borderland between the Germans and the Russians are, however, of a very different caliber...They at any rate will not lack the will to order and independence.’¹⁶ Thus Western nations should continue to support these countries, preserving the balance of power in Europe and giving a solid foundation to the new idea of collective security championed by the League of Nations.

This constant emphasis on Eastern Europe clearly expressed the influence of the New Europe group on Mackinder’s thought, championing the self-determination of Slav peoples against the tyrannical rule of German empires, but it also betrayed the personal ambition of its author to become part of the great boundary-making process at the Paris Peace Conference, providing his brilliant professional expertise to the peculiar needs of British post-war diplomacy. Indeed, Mackinder’s views were clearly inspired by current international debates on the future of Russia, monopolized by projects of federation between the various political entities generated by the collapse of the Tsarist regime.¹⁷ Far from being original, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was then an attempt to reunite prevailing attitudes toward Eastern Europe into a dynamic synthesis, substantiated by larger geographical, historical, and philosophical trends. In this sense, however, the book appeared excessively focused on the internal problems of the ‘Old World’, ignoring all the other main geopolitical transformations provoked by the war, especially the definite rise of the United States as a great political and economic power of global scale. This biased attitude was deeply resented by American geographers like Charles Redway Dyer, who accused his British colleague of missing ‘the real geographical significance’ of the Western Hemisphere, reducing it to a mere appendix of the ‘World-Island’ and denying its prominent role in the future defence of Western democratic nations:

¹⁵ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 194. Emphasis in the original text.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

¹⁷ Charlotte Alston, ‘“The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic”: Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919’, *History*, 91 (2006), pp. 24-44.

America is not an island in any such sense as Australia is. It forms an unbroken bar of land extending from one polar ocean to the other and lying between the European Coastland and the Monsoon Coastland [South Asia] of the World Island...Whether a ship sails from the World Island in a westerly or an easterly direction, it will come up against the bar, as Columbus did. Thus in effect America, with the Arctic ice fields and the Antarctic land and ice, forms a ring which almost surrounds and encloses the World-Island...America may protect the European Coastland from attack in the rear and may provide an open road for the transfer of reinforcements between it and the Monsoon Coastland...If and when the real Armageddon comes, even if the forces of the Old World Heartland are organized from Germany to Japan, the children of light may find themselves backed by an outer line of defense[sic] which the powers of darkness will be unable to break.¹⁸

According to Dryer, Mackinder had then wasted his 'brilliant powers' of imagination to create a useless map of the past, disregarding the basic geographical features of the future. This harsh judgement was not shared by Frederick J. Teggart, a prestigious sociologist at the University of California, who really appreciated Mackinder's attempt to 'put science to work in the field of politics', enlisting 'erudition' as a strong 'guide' to public action.¹⁹ But he also complained that the British author had not fulfilled the promise of his former address of 1904, making no 'permanent contribution' to modern geography and employing his talents in support of a political philosophy 'out of harmony' with the 'most hopeful tendencies' of the post-war era.²⁰ Therefore the book failed to convince the academic public, while its complex and often chaotic prose disappointed the general press, partially compromising its chances of commercial success.

The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, found interesting only the main geographical part of the work, dismissing the rest as 'a political head and tail that could pretty easily be taken off.'²¹ On the other hand, the *Spectator* praised Mackinder's insightful remarks on the international situation, although it continued to doubt the soundness of his chief economic ideas: 'Mr. Mackinder attaches equal importance to a reasonable [international] balance of trade...He means that each nation ought to have its share of the higher industries, while no nation should virtually monopolize any one trade. This of course involves the use of tariffs; the author, with a confidence we cannot possibly share, recommends it as a way of

¹⁸ Charles Redway Drier, 'Mackinder's "World Island" and Its American "Satellite" ', *Geographical Review*, 9 (1920), pp. 205-7.

¹⁹ F.J. Teggart, 'Geography as an Aid to Statecraft: an Appreciation of Mackinder's "Democratic Ideals and Reality" ', *Geographical Review*, 8 (1919), p. 228.

²⁰ 'Democratic Ideals and Reality' (review by F.J. Teggart), *The American Historical Review*, 25 (1920), p. 259.

²¹ 'New Books: The "World Island" ', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1919, p. 5.

peace.²² Considering this lukewarm reception, it is then not surprising that the book proved unable to compete with other important works on post-war reconstruction like those of John Maynard Keynes and Isaiah Bowman, remaining confined in the closed field of academic geography.²³ Even close friends like Leo Amery did not notice Mackinder's great geo-historical synthesis, rediscovering it only in 1943 and through the ideological prism of World War II: 'Finished Mackinder's "Democratic Ideals and Realism" [sic]. Though I knew of its main ideas, i.e. the "Heartland" danger to the "World Island" etc. I had never read it though it was written in 1918...Amusing to think that via General Haushofer and Hess it largely influenced Hitler in Mein Kampf!'²⁴

Nevertheless, Mackinder was still able to secure an official position in British post-war diplomacy, being selected as High Commissioner to South Russia in late October 1919. This prestigious appointment was mainly due to the direct intervention of his old friend and patron George Nathaniel Curzon, who had replaced Balfour at the Foreign Office at the end of the Paris Peace Conference, trying to balance the traditional imperial interests of Britain with the new democratic spirit which had emerged during the last phases of the war.²⁵ Indeed, despite his 'reactionary' fame, Curzon genuinely supported the League of Nations, rejecting the old balance of power theory championed by his predecessors and favouring the adoption of federalist schemes for the newborn states of Eastern Europe. In this sense, for example, he promoted the conciliatory activities of James Young Simpson in support of a negotiated settlement of the Latvian-Lithuanian border, reached successfully by an international commission in March 1921.²⁶ It is true, however, that his diplomatic agenda was also dominated by the desire to defend Britain's strategic interests in Persia and the Middle East from the spread of Russian Bolshevism, seen as a dangerous military and 'ideological' threat to British rule in India. Therefore he constantly pressured the Lloyd George cabinet to prosecute the war against Lenin's government, campaigning actively for the creation of a strong *cordon sanitaire* in the East composed by all the national and

²² 'Democratic Ideals and Reality', *The Spectator*, 27 September 1919, p. 408.

²³ J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919); Isaiah Bowman, *The New World: Problems in Political Geography* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1928).

²⁴ *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, ed. by John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p. 874.

²⁵ On Curzon's troubled years at the Foreign Office, see G.H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919-1924* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) and Peter Yearwood, ' "A Genuine and Energetic League of Nations": Lord Curzon and the New Diplomacy, 1918-25', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 21 (2010), pp. 159-74.

²⁶ Charlotte Alston, 'James Young Simpson and the Latvian-Lithuanian Border Settlement, 1920-1921: the Papers in the Archive of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 118 (2002), pp. 87-100.

political forces of the former Tsarist Empire.²⁷ This powerful strategic scheme failed to impress Lloyd George, who wished to reopen Russia's agricultural resources to the fluxes of international trade, while the War Office considered it as entirely 'impracticable', due to the financial and political constraints of the post-war era. But Curzon proved still able to obtain vital military supplies for the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin, mainly active against the Bolsheviks in the Kuban region, and in the summer of 1919 he also sent Oliver Wardrop as British Chief Commissioner in Georgia, hoping to negotiate a firm strategic alliance between the Transcaucasian republics and Denikin's forces.²⁸ It was as part of such an ambitious diplomatic initiative that Mackinder was sent to South Russia as High Commissioner in the following autumn, mainly selected for his peculiar strategic and geographical views so similar to those of the acting Foreign Secretary.²⁹

On the other hand, Mackinder also shared with Curzon a deep genuine hostility toward Bolshevism, which had originally developed during the 'Coupon Election' of December 1918 in the Camlachie constituency. At that time his main rival for the local parliamentary seat had in fact been the Labour candidate, Hugh B. Guthrie, who displayed clear pro-Bolshevik sympathies in his electoral speeches, advocating even some radical form of industrial nationalisation and land redistribution to the war-weary British working class: 'I am out to substitute for the capitalist system of production for profit the system of nationalised industries, with full democratic control by the workers either by hand or brain...I would by Act of Parliament restore the land to the people, and I would grant to such and only such, as could produce genuine legal titles for holding that land far more generous terms than were given to soldiers when they conscripted their lives.'³⁰ Although Mackinder was not entirely insensitive to popular calls for social reform, claiming that all British political parties had become 'Socialists' after the fiery trial of the war, he could not accept Guthrie's revolutionary programme, fearing its disruptive effects on the social and economic health of the nation: 'I believe the nationalisation of ordinary industries would result in the stoppage of all enterprise and progress...Where I differ from these Bolsheviks is that they

²⁷ Bennett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 60-75. On Curzon's strategic policy in the East, see also John D. Rose, 'Batum as Domino, 1919-1920: The Defence of India in Transcaucasia', *The International History Review*, 2 (1980), pp. 266-87.

²⁸ Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 32-8; George A. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921: A Study in the Politics and Diplomacy of the Russian Civil War* (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), pp. 175-6.

²⁹ Blouet, 'British High Commissioner', pp. 231-2.

³⁰ 'Glasgow Candidates: Camlachie Division: Mr. H.B. Guthrie', *The Glasgow Herald*, 13 December 1918, pp. 8-9.

would begin with confiscation. The recent history of Russia shows that at the end of that pathway, under the conditions of to-day, lies hell on earth.³¹ Moreover, he accused Guthrie and his followers to support 'the organised system of wholesale murder by a small minority' put in place by Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, threatening to plunge Britain into the horrors of civil war. What the country really needed was instead both domestic and international peace, which would have provided economic reconstruction and social protection for those who had suffered during the war years, reinforcing even the influence of British democratic values around the world:

The electorate is asked to give a national mandate to our spokesmen at the Peace Conference. We have borne the leading part in the war, and the States of Continental Europe...are looking to us for a strong lead in reconstructing the world. In foreign capitals the votes cast in our election will be closely scrutinised, and a decisive result will send a message of confidence through all Europe and Asia, making for orderly freedom. We have a tremendous responsibility at this moment towards mankind at large. By the punishment of those guilty of causing the war and of crimes in the war, by the exaction of indemnities for the purposes of reparation, and by the abolition of the system of arming whole nations, we must see to it that the school books of the next generation are able to record the great fact that militarism does not pay. In regard to those who have suffered in the war, whether soldiers and sailors themselves or their dependants, there can be no sort of doubt as to the national will, it is that they shall be generously and gratefully treated.³²

Needless to say, the complete opposition between Guthrie's and Mackinder's ideals led to violent rhetorical exchanges between the two men, making the electoral campaign for the Camlachie seat one of the most regularly reported by the Glasgow press. Guthrie, for example, rejected the charges of Bolshevism made by his Tory opponent, stressing the constitutional and legal nature of his proposals 'to nationalise the land first and to consider the landlords' titles and terms [of property] afterwards.'³³ At the same time he attacked the Lloyd George government for its unfair treatment of 'discharged soldiers and sailors', with huge state pensions provided to high officers' widows at the expense of more destitute women in the same condition.³⁴ This argument proved quite popular among the local electorate, who subjected Mackinder as the Coalition candidate to several questions about this disparity of compensation toward rich and poor war-torn families. Genuinely embarrassed by the situation, the Conservative MP was compelled to justify the

³¹ 'Glasgow Candidates: Camlachie Division: Mr H.J. Mackinder', *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 December 1918, p. 8.

³² Ibid.

³³ 'The General Election: Political Bargain-Making', *The Glasgow Herald*, 6 December 1918, p. 6.

³⁴ 'The General Election: The Lady Maude Grant', *The Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1918, p. 6.

government's policy on 'patriotic' grounds, suggesting that the higher pensions delivered to generals' widows were not entirely unfair due to the 'wonderful service' rendered to the Empire by British military commanders during the war, while he also emphasized the importance of 'generosity and justice in regard to soldiers and their dependants.'³⁵

However, this was the only point that he conceded to his Labour opponent, showing that the difficult pre-war years at Westminster had not been without positive effects for the refinement of his political skills: indeed, his electoral campaign – played always on the need for moderate social reform against the 'Bolshevik threat' – proved extremely successful, winning even the confidence of new women voters, who did not seem particularly concerned by the anti-suffragist past of the Tory candidate. On his part, Mackinder showed a considerable brazenness on the matter, praising the democratic importance of women's suffrage and using it as another weapon in his rhetorical war against Bolshevism: 'I do not believe that women voters at any rate are going to vote for men whose undisguised advocacy of confiscation would lead inevitably to civil bloodshed, and would reduce to nothing woman's new influence in the State.'³⁶ He also retrieved with success some anti-temperance arguments of the pre-war years, promising to maintain the moderate Scottish Temperance Act of 1913, but underlining his complete dissent from the violent prohibitionist attitude of Guthrie, who wanted to ban any 'liquor traffic' in the country as the first 'essential condition' of his ambitious radical programme.³⁷ In the end, all these electoral expedients – sign of an ever-growing political maturity on the side of Mackinder – led to a solid victory over the Labour candidate, confirming at a local level the general success of the Liberal-Conservative coalition government in the first post-war national election.³⁸

Nevertheless, Mackinder was not completely satisfied by the consistent victory of his political side, fearing the persistent influence of pro-Bolshevik elements among the British working class. As he later remarked in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, he was really impressed by the 'burning faith' in revolutionary ideals displayed by young Labour activists, who were often 'boldly defensive' of Bolshevik Russia 'without the full power of expressing their argument': 'There are two sides to Bolshevism; there is the mere violence and tyranny of the Jacobin, upthrown[sic] at a certain stage of most great revolutions; and there is the

³⁵ 'The Lady Maude Grant', p. 6.

³⁶ 'Camlachie Division: Mr. H.J. Mackinder', p. 8.

³⁷ 'Camlachie Division: Mr. H.J. Mackinder', p. 8; 'Camlachie Division: Mr. H.B. Guthrie', p. 9.

³⁸ *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949*, edited by F.W.S. Craig (Glasgow: Political Reference Publication, 1969), p. 586.

“Syndicalist” idealism. To do them justice, it is the latter aspect of Bolshevism which really attracts and holds my young Scottish antagonists.³⁹ But he thought that such idealism was completely misplaced, because the Bolshevik ‘revolt’ against ‘the Western “bourgeois” model’ led only to ‘the Marxian War of international classes, of Proletariat against Bourgeoisie, and finally of one section of the Proletariat against the other sections’, resulting in anarchy or tyranny on a world scale.⁴⁰ In January 1919, these gloomy predictions seemed to become reality during a massive industrial agitation which shook the entire Glasgow area, culminating in violent clashes between workers and policemen in George Square, near the City Chambers. The press and local authorities talked more or less openly of ‘Bolshevism’, while Scottish trade unions quarrelled between themselves over the true responsibility of the incidents.⁴¹ Even if the Bolshevik charge was later disproved by a judicial enquiry, Mackinder saw in the Glasgow riot the proof of his own worst fears about the rise of ‘materialistic organisers’ in the post-war world, ready to lead Britain along the same tragic road taken by Russia after the revolutionary events of 1917. It was then necessary to reaffirm the democratic values of the West against the tyrannical despotism of the East, symbolized by the double threat of German militarism and Russian Jacobinism:

Our old English conception of the House of Commons or Communities, the American conception of the Federation of States and Provinces, and the new ideal of the League of Nations are all of them opposed to the policies cast in the tyrannical moulds of East Europe and the Heartland, whether Dynastic or Bolshevik. It may be the case that Bolshevik tyranny is an extreme reaction from Dynastic tyranny, but it is none the less true that the Russian, Prussian, and Hungarian plains, with their widespread uniformity of social conditions, are favourable alike to the march of militarism and to the propaganda of syndicalism. Against this two-headed Eagle of land-power the Westerners and Islanders must struggle.⁴²

Thus he accepted without hesitation the diplomatic mission to Denikin’s headquarters, moved both by strategic and ideological reasons. Three years later, having definitely lost his parliamentary seat to Labour in Glasgow, he still defended his political beliefs with extreme vigour, lamenting the constant indoctrination of young British generations to the main dogmas of the Communist faith: ‘The children of the “Proletarian” upbringing have now grown to be young men and young women. The Marxian catchwords have, for them, taken

³⁹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 263-4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 264-5.

⁴¹ Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1983), pp. 121-38.

⁴² Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 265.

the place of Biblical texts. Only experience of life will win them to saner views; no argument will penetrate their ingrained doctrines.⁴³

Curzon certainly appreciated such a counterrevolutionary zeal, but he remarked on all the difficulties of Mackinder's foreign assignment, due to the dramatic decline of Denikin's military fortunes in the recent past: 'You will be proceeding to an area where at the present moment the prospects of the armies in conflict with the Soviet power are not the most favourable...It will be one of your first duties to explain the attitude of His Majesty's Government as regards the extent and the limits of support that it has been possible for them to give.'⁴⁴ At the same time Mackinder had to insist with Denikin on the close 'observance' of the official 'line of demarcation' between his own territory and that of Georgia, guaranteeing the respect of the right of national self-determination in the region: 'You will observe therefore from this sketch that while His Majesty's Government are unable at this stage to formulate a definite policy as regards the ex-Russian States, they are anxious to meet as far as possible their desire for a separate national existence to the extent that interests more comprehensive than those of any individual State or community permit.' In this sense, the High Commissioner should also observe carefully 'the political developments' in the region, referring them immediately to the Foreign Secretary if they appeared of primary importance for the future of British policy toward South Russia.⁴⁵ Last but not least, Mackinder's mission contained an important humanitarian duty, devoted mainly to the protection of the Jewish community in the Ukraine from the 'alleged pogroms' regularly committed by the Volunteer Army: 'The military mission at Taganrog [near Rostov] has already been instructed to exercise a restraining influence on the councils of the volunteer army where any question concerning Jews may arise. You should, however, do all in your power to protect Jews and to prevent excesses, and you should explain that incidents of this nature created the worst possible impression in Western countries.' Summing up, Mackinder should persuade Denikin to adopt 'a policy consonant with the trend of Western democratic opinion', renouncing to 'certain deep-rooted theories and cherished traditions' particularly harmful to the cause of anti-Bolshevik Russia and the democratic world.⁴⁶ Indeed, the future continuation of foreign military aid to the Volunteer Army depended on its clear adherence to the values of the Western Allies and of

⁴³ 'New Incentive to Thrift: Sir H. Mackinder on a "Ruinous Socialism" ', *The Times*, 23 November 1922, p. 15.

⁴⁴ TNA, CAB/24/94/26, Draft Instructions for Mr. Mackinder on the Mission to South Russia, November 1919, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the League of Nations, showing the moral superiority of the counter-revolutionary movement over its Bolshevik enemies and silencing the arguments of Communist propaganda in the West.

These long instructions were not a mere bureaucratic exercise. By the end of 1919 Curzon knew that his containment strategy in Russia was running out of time, due to the growing distaste of Western governments toward their anti-Soviet military intervention, seen as an expensive and unacceptable 'interference' in the internal affairs of another nation. Moreover, both Italy and the United States had recently refused to accept international mandates over the Transcaucasian republics, further weakening their status as an independent bulwark against Bolshevik expansion.⁴⁷ Thus the Foreign Secretary had assigned to Mackinder an extremely complex and delicate task, aimed at reviving his previous Russian policy in front of the widespread scepticism of British public opinion. In this sense, the direct reference to the Jewish pogroms in the Ukraine – with the open suggestion of a preventive diplomatic action against them – represented an interesting concession to the constant appeals of the Anglo-Jewish community in defence of its coreligionists and to the democratic spirit of the new minority rights formally signed at the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁸

Initially, the Foreign Office had seriously underestimated the extent of Jewish massacres in South Russia, partially accepting the anti-Semitic identification of Jews with Bolsheviks presented by the popular press.⁴⁹ Even a sincere internationalist like Robert Cecil, the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, believed that every 'dangerous revolutionary movement' in Europe had 'a Jew' at its back, 'driven into enmity of the whole existing order of things' by 'the injustice and outrage' suffered at the hands of old authoritarian governments, while Thomas Holdich saw Bolshevism as 'chiefly organised and engineered by Jews at German instigation', threatening Britain's strategic interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁵⁰ This hostile, paranoid attitude outraged British Jews, who campaigned relentlessly in support of their Ukrainian coreligionists, especially through the diplomatic efforts of Lucien Wolf and the passionate articles of Leopold Greenberg on the London

⁴⁷ Brinkley, *Volunteer Army*, pp. 177-81.

⁴⁸ On the post-war minority treaties, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133-264.

⁴⁹ Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 22-38.

⁵⁰ Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p. 14; Thomas Holdich, 'The Influence of Bolshevism in Afghanistan', *The New Europe*, 13 (1919), p. 234.

Jewish press. Finally, all these pressures compelled Curzon to organize an official inquiry on Denikin's behaviour, trusting Mackinder with the difficult role of reconciling the exigencies of the anti-Bolshevik crusade with those of religious tolerance. Thus the appointment of the new High Commissioner to South Russia was widely publicized to the Jewish community, underlining the institutional character of his humanitarian survey: 'His Majesty's High Commissioner has been instructed to examine and report on the whole problem of Jewish pogroms, as soon as he has had time to study the question.'⁵¹ In this sense, a large number of original documents sent by the Anglo-Jewish Association to the Foreign Office was directly 'placed' in Mackinder's hands for a complete and effective appraisal of the Ukrainian situation, while Jewish organizations were also formally invited to supply 'any further information' on the subject to the British government.⁵²

Needless to say, all this preliminary preparation sensibly delayed Mackinder's departure for South Russia, resulting even in a minor row with Curzon over the real extent and nature of his diplomatic powers: 'In regard to the definition of my duties as against those of other persons, I have found that it is not felt sufficient that they should be merely implied in my title of High Commissioner...I am asked to co-ordinate British [diplomatic] activities which in some cases have hitherto been contradictory. What is my ultimate power should I be set at defiance, say by some British trading firm [in the region]?'⁵³ The Foreign Secretary did not offer any kind of clarification on such a delicate matter, and the newly appointed British High Commissioner finally left Britain in early December 1919, making his first stop in Poland, where he discussed with General Pilsudski the need of a closer military cooperation with Denikin and the Baltic states against Bolshevik forces. Mackinder, however, also remarked on the importance for Poland of respecting the rights of its neighbouring countries, even if he recognized that 'their independence' could be 'subject to limitation' in respect of the 'superior interests' of the anti-Bolshevik coalition.⁵⁴ Then he talked at length with Baron Ropp, the exiled Roman Catholic Archbishop of Petrograd, about the current state of Russian affairs. The conversation was not very encouraging: according to Ropp, in fact, the Russian people were gradually losing faith in the Western nations, placing instead 'their hopes' in the Germans, thanks to the ineffectual national boundaries between Soviet Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe. He also accused the Jews of controlling the entire

⁵¹ 'Pogroms in the Ukraine', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 January 1920, p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ TNA, FO/800/251, Mackinder to Curzon, 4 November 1919, ff. 39-41.

⁵⁴ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report on the Situation in South Russia by Sir H. Mackinder, MP, 21 January 1920, p. 15.

political life of the nation, allowing the presence of non-Jewish Bolshevik leaders only in Petrograd and Moscow.⁵⁵

It is difficult to measure how much these anti-Semitic prejudices penetrated into Mackinder's mindset, influencing his perception of the tragic issue of the Ukrainian pogroms. In his final report, for example, he considered Ropp's statements as 'the most recent and authentic description' of Russian events, giving some credit to the popular stereotype of the German-Jewish conspiracy behind the Bolshevik Revolution: 'It has often been asserted that the Germans are behind the Bolshevik policy...It may well be that there are subterranean German agencies, probably through Jewish channels, and there is now much more definite evidence than before that German soldiers of fortune are obtaining scope in the Bolshevik army, but I can obtain no mass evidence that the German Government is at present directing Bolshevik policy.'⁵⁶ At the same time he believed that Christians had 'no right to be surprised' by this subversive activity, due to the many forms of discrimination unfairly suffered by the Jews in the recent past. Thus he advocated the creation of a Jewish 'National Home' in Palestine as the best way to resolve the enduring problem of the 'homeless, brainful Jew' giving him a proper nation-state 'at the physical and historical centre of the world.'⁵⁷ However, there were no direct references to this particular theme in his South Russian report, while even the ordeal of the Ukrainian Jews was ignored in favour of broader strategic, political, and economic considerations on the future of the former Russian Empire. The Foreign Office justified this documentary neglect of the pogroms' issue as the product of 'the changed military situation' in the region, which had compelled Mackinder to leave Denikin's headquarters before fully investigating the condition of religious minorities in the Black Sea area.⁵⁸ The Anglo-Jewish Association was deeply disappointed by such result, while Leopold Greenberg accused explicitly the British government of moral complicity with South Russian authorities: 'How terrible it is to think that a great and free country like England has been feeding the fire of hatred and malice, of murder and loot, by the assistance it has given to Denikin's [anti-Soviet] campaign.'⁵⁹

In reality, Mackinder was not entirely insensitive to the suffering of the local population, publicly denouncing the violent behaviour of the Volunteer Army in his final report: 'It was

⁵⁵ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁷ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 226.

⁵⁸ 'The Peace Conference: Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 13 February 1920, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Mentor [Leopold Greenberg], 'A "Damnable" Document', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 6 February 1920, p. 9.

welcomed with flowers when it first advanced [in the Ukraine], but gradually it came to be hated by the people hardly less than the Bolsheviks, because of its excesses. The Cossacks were undoubtedly the chief offenders, for they not only made levies on the country without paying for them, but also looted on a large scale.⁶⁰ However, he believed that such ruthless behaviour could only be solved through a 'constructive' reorganization of local anti-Bolshevik forces, made self-sufficient by sound economic policies and reunited into a broader international coalition supported by Western democracies. Arriving at Denikin's headquarters in early January 1920, after a long diplomatic tour of the Balkan Peninsula, he tried then to persuade the White General to establish 'a modern Government' in his territories, capable to gain effectively the favour of Russian peasants and to secure the military cooperation of the neighbouring countries, especially Poland: 'General Denikin alone could not now defeat the Bolsheviks; he must have allies...The Finns, the Estonians, the Letts, the Poles, the Georgians, and perhaps the Roumanians were the allies to be sought, with the British and French giving support by economic methods and organising brain. The Poles were essential. They were themselves in danger. Their terms [of alliance] would not be hard.'⁶¹ Thus Denikin should 'take political responsibility', renouncing to his original plans of Tsarist political restoration and acknowledging the rights of the various 'border peoples' now independent under the aegis of the Allied powers.⁶² It was the only way to save Russia from Bolshevism, regaining the political friendship and respect of Britain, Poland, and other great European nations.

Initially Denikin demurred to these requests, pretending to not have the full authority to take such momentous steps, but some days later – facing the imminent collapse of his military front – he accepted all the main points presented by the British High Commissioner, including the future settlement of the Polish-Russian border on 'ethnographical principles.' On his part, Mackinder promised to continue Britain's logistical assistance to the Volunteer Army, while Bulgarian and Serbian troops would directly intervene in the future in support of the South Russian government.⁶³ Last but not least, he also assured Denikin that his officers and their families would have soon been evacuated by the Royal Navy, avoiding the violent retaliation of the approaching Bolshevik troops: 'Under the circumstances I felt that I was justified...in promising on behalf of His Majesty's Government that the wives and families of [Denikin's] officers would be removed by us, if

⁶⁰ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

and when the necessity arose, and that the British Military Mission would be their rearguard. This was done to arrest the panic, for most certainly all these women would be murdered if they fell in to the hands of the Bolsheviks. I felt that it was unthinkable that we should abandon them after having encouraged their husbands to fight.⁶⁴ In the end, this was the only part of the agreement which was effectively implemented: the rest was swept away by the catastrophic and irreversible defeat of the Volunteer Army some weeks later.⁶⁵

Back in Britain, Mackinder tried to persuade the Lloyd George cabinet to revise its entire Russian policy, reuniting Denikin and all the other anti-Bolshevik leaders of Eastern Europe into a great military alliance externally supported by the Western powers: 'It is now obvious that the Denikin Government alone cannot defeat Bolshevism, and that the method of mere military adventure associated with the names of Koltchak, Yudenitch and Denikin must be abandoned. There must be substituted a system of alliances and of steady organisation *pari passu* with limited military advances.'⁶⁶ Therefore it was necessary to 'keep in being the only Russian Government in Europe outside the Bolshevik area', waiting for a direct intervention of Poland in the Ukraine and for a gradual return of local communities 'around the Denikinite flag.' In this sense, Britain could help South Russian authorities in building 'some regular financial system' able to sustain the military operations of the Volunteer Army without any violent infringement of peasants' rights:

The only plan that I can think of is to form a temporary monopoly for the control of credit and imported goods...If the resources of a whole group of existing British agencies were syndicated, a very powerful instrument might be forged which would operate as the [Elizabethan] Merchant Adventurers used to operate – by imposing a certain discipline on the British importers into Russia...If such a temporary monopoly could be established, and if the proposed syndicate were to agree to work in harmony with the High Commissioner for South Russia, then the High Commissioner would have in his hands a very powerful weapon wherewith to exact reasonable practice in regard to export licenses and similar matters. Such an arrangement would, in fact, go right past graft and speculators, and place manufactured goods at an honest price for barter against the rich supplies of food which the country produces for export...With graft and speculation eliminated the goods would be cheaper, even though taxed. This would enable Denikin to set a real Government going.⁶⁷

This elaborate scheme, however, failed to impress Lloyd George and his cabinet ministers, who dismissed Mackinder's report as completely 'absurd', preferring a definite

⁶⁴ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 2.

⁶⁵ On the final collapse of Denikin's forces, see Brinkley, *Volunteer Army*, pp. 224-40.

⁶⁶ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 7. Emphasis in the original text.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

withdrawal from the expensive and embarrassing Russian adventure.⁶⁸ The general feeling of the government was perfectly expressed by Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who remarked the practical impossibility of a protracted diplomatic isolation of the Soviet regime and the crucial importance of 'Russian wheat & flax & butter &c.' for any future European economic recovery. Thus it was time to take note of the relevant changes which had happened on the terrain and to follow 'a different policy' from the past.⁶⁹ Even Curzon openly recognized the failure of his old containment scheme, starting informal contacts with Soviet authorities and stopping all the previous forms of military assistance to Denikin's forces in South Russia: 'Failure of General Denikin's administration has been so complete that it is idle to hope for any substantial recovery...The food situation of Europe in general makes it imperative that by some means or another surplus supplies in Russia should be made available as soon as possible. This is obviously impossible if [anti-Bolshevik] military operations on a large scale are to continue for an indefinite period.'⁷⁰ Disillusioned by this unexpected volte-face, Mackinder resigned his official diplomatic status some weeks later, expressing all his anger and frustration in a private letter to Charles Hardinge, then Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office: 'It was up to me to propose and defend a policy. But events and opinion had marched while I was isolated in Russia. On a larger view...the Cabinet appears to have rejected my plan.'⁷¹ He was never again to cover a governmental position for the rest of his life.

After almost ninety years the final meaning of Mackinder's South Russian adventure is still debated by modern biographers, who have offered different perspectives on the reasons behind its failure. According to Gerry Kearns, for example, Mackinder was a 'victim' of the ideological triumph of 'Liberal Imperialism' within the Lloyd George cabinet, due to the financial and territorial exhaustion of British expansionism in the post-war era.⁷² In this sense, traditional military and diplomatic intervention in regions strategically important for Britain were replaced by aerial bombings and trade negotiations, strengthening in other ways the authority of the London government over foreign peoples. On the other hand, Brian Blouet considered Mackinder's scheme for a wide European coalition against the

⁶⁸ Blouet, 'British High Commissioner', pp. 234-5.

⁶⁹ Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 28 February 1920, in *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters: The Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with His Sisters Hilda and Ida, 1916-1937*, ed. by Robert C. Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1995), pp. 129-30.

⁷⁰ Curzon to General Keyes, 9 February 1920, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-39*, edited by E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, 1st series, vol. III (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 814.

⁷¹ Mackinder to Hardinge, 4 February 1920, in *Documents*, III, p. 822, note 1.

⁷² Kearns, *Geopolitics*, pp. 213-24.

Bolshevik 'Heartland' as 'not incorrect' for the closed world order of the Cold War era, but completely out of touch with the reality of his own time, dominated by 'practical politicians' concerned only by their next election and by the extreme confusion of the Russian situation.⁷³ Thus he paid again the price of his highly visionary talents, more focused on long-term geopolitical developments than on the short-term landscape of regular political affairs. Both perspectives have their own merits, and shed light on a different aspect of Mackinder's involvement with post-war international reconstruction: indeed, Mackinder's mission to South Russia had a clear imperial goal, designed to strengthen the external defences of new British colonial possessions in the Middle East, while his 'constructive plans' for Denikin's territories and Eastern Europe were quite similar to those developed later by American strategists after World War II, envisaging a wide and solid *cordon sanitaire* around the continental borders of the Soviet Union. However, Kearns and Blouet seem to undervalue another crucial dimension of Mackinder's brief diplomatic experience, namely the defence of small independent nations against the threat of modern organized empires. Indeed, this was a theme explicitly discussed in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, urging the Allied statesmen to create a more balanced world system, avoiding any tragic repetition of 1914: 'No stable League of Nations appears to me possible if any nation is allowed to practise commercial "penetration", for the object of that penetration is to deprive other nations of their fair share of the more skilled forms of employment, and it is inevitable that a general soreness should ensue in so far as it succeeds.'⁷⁴

As an old tariff reformer, in fact, Mackinder continued to believe that a system of 'unrestricted Cobdenism' was destined to upset the 'economic balance' of different nations, depriving them of 'essential' manufacturing industries and pushing them 'from one expedient to another' in defence of their general economic independence. Now, however, he was also quite sceptical toward the various protectionist solutions advocated before the war, due to their key role in the exasperation of international tensions leading to the outbreak of the recent European catastrophe:

The Cobdenite believes that international trade is good in itself, and that specialisation as between country and country, provided that it arises blindly under the guidance of natural causes, should not be thwarted. The Berliner, on the other hand, has also encouraged economic specialisation among the nations, but he operates scientifically, accumulating in his own country those industries which give most, and most highly-skilled, employment. The result is the same in each case; a Going Concern of Industry grips the nation and

⁷³ Blouet, 'British High Commissioner', pp. 235-6.

⁷⁴ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 229.

deprives it, as well as other nations, of true independence. The resulting differences accumulate to the point of quarrel and collision.⁷⁵

In this sense, 'both Free Trade of the *Laissez-faire* type and Predatory Protection of the German type' were 'principles of Empire' making for new destructive wars in the future.⁷⁶ To avoid their negative influence on international affairs, it was then necessary to promote a new kind of nation, 'the nation of balanced economic development', as the 'ideal State-unit' of the League of Nations, establishing an interlocked world trade system which allowed some form of equal economic development between nations: 'In ordinary society it is notoriously difficult for people of very unequal fortune to be friends in the true sense; that beautiful relationship is not compatible with patronage and dependence. Civilisation, no doubt, consists in the exchange of services, but it should be an equal exchange...For the contentment of nations we must contrive to secure some equality of opportunity for national development.'⁷⁷ And this 'equality of opportunity' should also be extended to the political sphere, shaping both domestic and international institutions on the fundamental respect of local communities:

Without balanced development nations are sure to acquire special hungers, whether neglectfully or criminally, which can only be satisfied at the expense of other nations. In other words, we can only permanently secure equality among the nations by control from within as well as from without. But this involves the statement that home politics must be conducted with an eye to their effect on foreign politics, a truism in the superficial sense, but carrying deeper implications that are commonly admitted. It carries, I believe, this implication among others, that, since nations are local societies, their organization *must*, if they are to last, be based dominantly on local communities within them, and not on nation-wide 'interests.' That is the old English idea of the House of Commons.⁷⁸

This concept was the extension of Mackinder's old parliamentary battle in favour of constitutional balance and local autonomy, translated outside British borders to the special needs of the post-war world. Rejecting centralization as 'only one form' of a more general process of historical development, he tried instead to envisage a wide federal system based on provincial life, which could balance freedom and efficiency in a sustainable way, avoiding the technocratic temptation of empire: 'The federal authority, whether of the League [of Nations] or the Nation, is constituted of communities of complete growth, and cannot, from its nature, aspire to Empire, since it consists everywhere of balanced

⁷⁵ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 229-31.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228. Emphasis in the original text.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238. Emphasis in the original text.

humanity. But great specialist organizations, guided by experts, will inevitably contend for the upper hand, and the contest must end in the rule of one or other type of expert. This is Empire, for it is unbalanced.' Thus international reconstruction should be guided in favour of the 'balanced nation', creating a new peaceful environment of 'fraternal nations' and 'fraternal provinces' instead of the previous one dominated by 'warring, organized interests ever striving to extend their limits to the international field' which had plunged the world into the horrors of the Great War.⁷⁹

Such conclusions were quite amazing, considering Mackinder's previous faith in an international arena dominated by few great imperial states, where the strongest or best organized was naturally destined to crush its weak or inefficient neighbours, following a quasi-Darwinistic set of geo-historical laws. Indeed, as recently noticed by Lucian Ashworth, Mackinder probably tried to adapt his worldview to the new conditions generated by the war, marked by the rise of a powerful democratic counter-trend against the competitive imperialism of the previous era. Now he preferred a balanced international order that would partially hamper the egoistic tendencies of the various states, making territorial annexations and wars of conquest no more possible.⁸⁰ Acknowledging the rebellion of minor nationalities against great imperial states, propped up by the idealistic energies created by the recent conflict, he criticized the persistence of old diplomatic attitudes at the Paris Peace Conference, suggesting to the small countries of Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, and South America to federate themselves into larger political entities, able to counterbalance the excessive power of great nations like France, Britain, and the United States.⁸¹ In this sense, the South Russian mission was an attempt to put such a new personal attitude into practice, gradually transforming Denikin's territory into a federal state and reuniting it with other local national groups into a powerful 'League of Governments' opposed to the Bolshevik regime.⁸² According to Mackinder, this was also the best way to guarantee the general safety of British imperial borders in Asia, keeping Lenin's forces far from India and paving the way for future negotiations with the Soviet authorities on a basis of strength: 'If some barrier were not opposed to the march of Bolshevism, it would go forward like a prairie fire in Turkey and Central Asia...He [Mackinder] would range up all the anti-Bolshevist States, from Finland to the Caucasus, giving them a certain amount of support...Once an alliance such as he contemplated had

⁷⁹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 260-1.

⁸⁰ Ashworth, 'Realism', pp. 14-5.

⁸¹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, p. 269.

⁸² TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 13.

been created, and the moral of the anti-Bolshevist States had been re-established, we should be in a much better position to obtain a Peace with a Soviet Russia not triumphant.⁸³ Therefore democratic ideals and imperial interests mixed together into a complex and ambitious geopolitical scheme, which promised to preserve international peace from the threat of revolutionary 'organisers' and to reconstruct Europe around more 'balanced' and 'stable' political institutions.

However, this great project was flawed by a serious misperception both of British and Russian strategic realities, which in the end proved fatal to Mackinder's position on international affairs, relegating it to the margins of contemporary political debates. First of all, he did not understand that by early 1920 Denikin's military situation was clearly hopeless, without any real possibility of recovery from the terrible losses of the previous months. This was officially recognized, for example, by Vice-Admiral Sir John de Robeck, British High Commissioner at Constantinople, who – after meeting Mackinder on the Black Sea in mid-January 1920 – sent a very long and detailed critical report on the prospects of a successful anti-Bolshevik alliance in the region. Although de Robeck believed that Mackinder had rendered 'a most notable service' to the country, providing useful information on the 'general military situation on the Don front', he considered the geopolitical proposals of his colleague as completely unrealistic without some form of 'active' British intervention, due to the constant deterioration of Denikin's position:

Odessa. Situation not satisfactory...The Senior Naval Officer at Odessa considered the preliminary arrangements should be made for the evacuation of 30,000 of the inhabitants. Crimea. General Slaschov's [one of Denikin's lieutenants] troops were withdrawing to the line of the Perekop defences, which it was reported were being strengthened...Don Kuban Front. Rostov lost, but enemy so far had failed to cross the Don...North Caucasus. Bolsheviks occupied Kisliar...There was danger of North Caucasus becoming Bolshevik thus cutting off the Caspian flotilla...and Denikin's oil supply. Trans-Caspia. The Bolsheviks have captured Merv, and were attacking Krasnodovsk.⁸⁴

Moreover, such a gloomy military situation was accompanied by increasing political unrest in the South Russian government, which was gradually splitting into two opposed 'parties' squandered by 'interminable petty quarrels and jealousies': 'There are definitely a pro-ally anti-German party lead[sic] by Denikin and an anti-ally pro-German party, at present without a leader...Officers of pro-German tendencies...are increasing in numbers

⁸³ TNA, CAB/23/20/6, Conclusion of a Cabinet Meeting and Supplementary Notes to Mackinder's Report, 29 January 1920, p. 4.

⁸⁴ TNA, CAB/24/98/89, Report of Vice-Admiral Sir John de Robeck on the General Military Situation in South Russia, 29 February 1920, p. 1.

because there are many Russian Officers hitherto undoubtedly pro-British who have been disillusioned by [British] political statements, and...now turn toward Germany for the assistance which they must have to restore peace and order in Russia.⁸⁵

Despite the constant reference to the 'German bogey', ready to take control of Russia after Britain's withdrawal from the country, de Robeck's analysis represented a strong and lucid rebuke of Mackinder's optimistic hopes of a complete reorganization of Denikin's economic, political and military forces along more efficient lines, revealing instead the gradual and inevitable disintegration of the Volunteer Army in front of relentless Bolshevik pressure. The only way to rescue the situation was a direct military intervention of Britain in the Black Sea region, but the British cabinet was absolutely opposed to that proposal, considering the anti-Bolshevik 'crusade' irremediably lost and acknowledging the disruptive effect of a similar decision on domestic public opinion, still coping with the enormous economic and human losses of the World War. In this sense, the popular campaign 'Hands off Russia' launched against any direct involvement in the Russo-Polish War of the following spring was a clear warning about the pacifist and pro-Soviet tendencies of a large section of the British working class, while the persistent challenge of the trade unions to the government's economic policies restrained the political options of Lloyd George, compelling him to adopt a more cautious line in foreign affairs.⁸⁶ Last but not least, there were not enough troops and money to support any new initiative in Russia, due to the further extension of Britain's imperial commitments in Africa and the Middle East. This was a point constantly remarked by the Imperial General Staff, who also reminded the government of the unprecedented 'question of internal security' created by the spread of 'revolutionary forces' across British society.⁸⁷ In these difficult circumstances, it was then impossible to follow Mackinder's geopolitical suggestions, leaving Denikin's battered forces to their fate and looking for some sort of diplomatic accommodation with the new Soviet regime in Moscow.

On his part, Mackinder recognized some of the internal and international constraints to Britain's action against the Bolsheviks, warning Denikin that the British would not have 'put an Army into Russia, however great their desire to suppress Bolshevism.'⁸⁸ However, he

⁸⁵ TNA, CAB/24/98/89, Report de Robeck, p. 8.

⁸⁶ L.J. Macfarlane, 'Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920', *Past & Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 126-52; Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour: The Post-War Coalition, 1918-1922* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

⁸⁷ Jeffery, *British Army*, p. 30.

⁸⁸ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 16.

continued to believe that his country could still play an active containment role in the region, holding 'the Baku-Batum line' and taking control of 'Denikin's fleet in the Caspian.'⁸⁹ At the same time he observed that Britain could obtain some form of compensation for its anti-Bolshevik effort in local 'wheat, sugar, oil, etc.', re-opening the Black Sea to international commerce and building up a more efficient Volunteer Army 'on the basis of the wealth of the country itself.' All that he required was 'a few individuals to supervise administration and regulate traffic on the railways', boosting up the morale of anti-Bolshevik Russians before the creation of a more solid *cordon sanitaire* in Eastern Europe.⁹⁰ But this was clearly too much for the Lloyd George government, who did not want other 'imperial responsibilities' abroad, especially in the troublesome area of the former Tsarist Empire: Mackinder's suggestions did not meet 'with any support' in the cabinet, while the possibility of his return to South Russia was even 'kept in suspense pending further developments of, and decisions regarding, the policy of the Allies in Russia.'⁹¹ Furious for this rejection and obsessed by his own anti-Bolshevik sentiments, Mackinder raised again the question of a stronger British political and military commitment in the East at Westminster, accusing explicitly the government of having thrown away a pivotal occasion in the fight against revolutionary 'organisers': 'In the middle of last winter, I was sent on a confidential mission to Poland and South Russia...The policy which might have been possible a year ago, and perhaps was just possible at that time, is now certainly impossible...The events which are now happening [the Russo-Polish War] confirm me in the conclusions which I drew on the spot [at the time].'⁹² He insisted on the importance of London's 'moderating influence' in the 'confused politics' of Eastern Europe, due to the 'detached point of view' kept by the British Empire over local disputes, and he accused the House of Commons of being too much 'anti-Polish' in its discussion of the present conflict between Warsaw and Moscow, forgetting the constant bad faith showed by the Bolsheviks toward the Polish government:

The Poles have formed the opinion that it is exceedingly difficult, not so much to make peace with the Bolsheviks, but to make a peace that the Bolsheviks will keep, and as a consequence they prefer that, if there is to be war, they should have their troops far outside of the Polish area. They prefer to have peace made, if peace is to be made, with their Army in that position rather than that the Army should be upon Polish territory. We have no right to

⁸⁹ TNA, CAB/23/20/6, Conclusion, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁹² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXXIX, 1920, col. 1711.

criticise that. We have our Army on the Rhine in order that, in the event of renewed warfare, the fighting should not take place upon our own ground.⁹³

Finally, he emphasized his personal faith in the League of Nations, seen as 'a very valuable force' in international affairs, but he warned that it could not perform 'a task utterly beyond its capacity to fulfil', restoring peace and democracy in Eastern Europe.⁹⁴ That was a responsibility of the Western nations, who should never forget the danger of the rise of 'a centralised and military power' in Russia, ready to impose its 'despotism' on the neighbouring countries:

Our Government...has supported the policy of raising autonomous border States in the case of Russia. It has been our policy to secure an autonomous Esthonia[sic], Lithuania, Lettland[sic], Georgia, Azerbaijan, and so forth. Whichever despotism you get in Russia, whether it be a Bolshevist despotism free from war, free to prepare for future war, or whether it be a despotism of Generals who take the place of fallen Bolshevism, they will be out to reconquer the old Russia... If you, not being yourself prepared to throw armies in...are going to leave to the peoples on the spot the responsibility of achieving some sort of stable and orderly government in those vast regions, then at least you must recognise that there are only two courses open to you. You must not do anything to prevent Poland from supporting the remaining border States, or you must face the fact that you will see restored in Russia, bent on the reconquest of the border States, a new Czardom, whether coming from the proletariat or not, and that that Czardom will be a very uncomfortable neighbour for the democracies of the world. Therefore...it is essential that in Poland they should feel...that in this country there is as much goodwill towards Poland as there is amongst some classes towards the Bolsheviks.⁹⁵

This final argument was clearly based on the main concepts expressed in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, with special emphasis on the defence of small independent communities from the threat of large authoritarian states, but it failed to convince the indifferent audience of the House of Commons, who reproached Mackinder even for discussing too much 'Polish affairs', stealing precious time to more important debates on 'British policy.'⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the Labour MP for Govan, Neil MacLean, attacked the government for its logistical support to the Poles, stressing the opposition of the British working class to any military commitment abroad and asking for a simple submission of the Russo-Polish quarrels to the League of Nations: 'The working classes of this country will not continue to be the cannon fodder for a class of people in this country who makes millions out of their sacrifice...We demand that these things [in Eastern Europe] be submitted to the League of

⁹³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXXIX, 1920, cols. 1712-4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 1716.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 1717-8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1715.

Nations, and that so far as this Government is concerned...they shall give an assurance that they are ending any participation in these European adventures.⁹⁷ Faced with such a widespread opposition, Mackinder was then compelled to abandon his great geopolitical design on Eastern Europe, promoting other forms of international security during the early interwar years.

Indeed, his intellectual attention shifted now toward Western Europe, where he advocated the maintenance of the old wartime alliance between Britain, France, and Italy, seen as a valid safeguard against the ruin of the 'whole structure' of European civilisation.⁹⁸ However, Mackinder recognized that British and French economic interests were 'not identical', especially in relation to the complex issue of German reparations: indeed, while Britain wanted 'a maximum of export trade', establishing a friendly market in the lands of the former Reich, France wanted instead 'a maximum of import trade', exacting to the utmost the large economic compensations gained at the Paris Peace Conference. Thus it was necessary to reach a 'compromise' between the two countries, exercising the 'practical statesmanship' of their respective governments.⁹⁹ Initially, these hopes were mainly disappointed, due to French financial intransigence on German reparations' payments and to British political unwillingness to act as a balancing influence into continental affairs. These two opposed tendencies came directly to blows in 1923, when the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr seriously infringed the old 'entente cordiale' between London and Paris, provoking even a steady upsurge of anti-French sentiments in British public opinion.¹⁰⁰ In that occasion, Mackinder invoked again a pragmatic understanding between the two countries, asking his countrymen to 'never lose their poise' in such a dramatic situation: 'A great world drama is now proceeding which the newspapers speak of as the 'Ruhr'- a great conflict of prejudices and interests, involving very deep-laid physical human factors. We have not only to know our own position, but we must be able to sympathise both with the French and with the Germans – that is the only way in which stability can be obtained.'¹⁰¹ Moreover, he emphasized the desire by Germany to 're-enter Western

⁹⁷ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXXIX, 1920, cols. 1710-1.

⁹⁸ 'Glasgow Central: Support for Mr Bonar Law', *The Glasgow Herald*, 10 November 1922, p. 11.

⁹⁹ 'Glasgow Central Contest: Sir Halford Mackinder's Appeal', *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1922, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ On British reactions to the Ruhr crisis, see Bennett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 33-40.

¹⁰¹ 'Men and Mountains: Europe's Boundaries: Sir Halford Mackinder on True Education', *The Glasgow Herald*, 1 August 1923, p. 5.

civilisation', warning that a harsh rebuttal of such a promising attitude could hurl back Berlin to Russia, 'with all the possibilities of military despotism' spreading across Europe.¹⁰²

This call for patience and moderation was also shared by Robert Cecil and other prominent members of the Conservative government, who recognised as 'just' French desires for security and economic compensations, but condemned wholeheartedly their aggressive implementation, suggesting a general settlement of the Franco-German problem based on the 'demilitarisation' of 'the left bank of the Rhine under German sovereignty' guaranteed by the League of Nations. Cecil stressed especially the need that this conciliatory measure should not be the product of another 'Anglo-French pact', but instead of 'a general treaty open to all European nations', involving even 'American co-operation' in financial and economic matters.¹⁰³ Two years later, thanks to the skilful diplomacy of Austen Chamberlain and to the formal adoption of the Dawes Plan on German reparations, the long-sought stabilisation of the post-war European order was finally reached with the signature of the Treaty of Locarno, which guaranteed the Franco-German frontier under the aegis of Britain and Italy, while the disputed borders of Eastern Europe were instead secured by a series of local agreements between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia sanctioned by the League of Nations.¹⁰⁴

Despite the relative weakness of these latter adjustments in the East, which were basically left open to further revisions in favour of Germany, Mackinder considered Locarno a 'great event', at which 'all good Europeans' should rejoice. He praised Chamberlain for his diplomatic ability, seen as the best demonstration of British traditional political virtues, and he also believed that with the successful agreement on the Franco-German frontier Britain had promoted 'the building of the Rhine bridge' between Paris and Berlin, supporting actively 'the Unity of the Continent' around the democratic principles championed by the League of Nations: 'It is our hope that these regional compacts will rebuild Europe with Geneva and The Hague as rallying centres. And we have made Britain, as Co-Guarantor of the Rhine frontier, an essential element in the new European system.'¹⁰⁵ Thus he looked again with some confidence to the future of international affairs, although permanent

¹⁰² 'Men and Mountains', p. 5.

¹⁰³ 'Our London Correspondence: Lord Robert Cecil's Plan for the Rhine', *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1923, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ On the genesis of the Treaty of Locarno, see Richard S. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924-29* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 31-75. On the Dawes Plan, see instead Anne Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction after the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 245-65.

¹⁰⁵ Mackinder, 'English Tradition', p. 727.

peace in Europe could only be achieved when the frontiers of Russia appeared definitely 'secure', and this could not happen until the former Russian Empire was 'once more quietly buying and selling with the outer world', thanks to 'the restoration of freedom to men and security to property' within its vast territories.¹⁰⁶ In the end, the spectre of the 'Bolshevik Heartland' never left Mackinder's geopolitical imagination, even during the peaceful and optimistic years after the Locarno settlement.

According to Brian Blouet, this strong perception of the Russian threat was later justified by the dramatic events of the 1930s and 1940s, which saw the violent absorption of the states of Eastern Europe by Germany and the Soviet Union, followed by the definite emergence of the latter as the 'new strongest power' on the Eurasian landmass. Mackinder had literally 'foreseen' this outcome, accelerating 'the eclipse of Britain as a major force in the world', but the success of his intellectual and diplomatic efforts against it had been 'limited', due to the adverse circumstances of the time.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the British cabinet had 'no stomach' for the kind of anti-Bolshevik policies that he advocated in the early 1920s, which might have given to the 'oceanic world' more time to react to the emergence of Soviet power in the Heartland area.¹⁰⁸ This interpretation, generally shared by modern geopolitical strategists, is quite preposterous and it fails to understand that Mackinder's international outlook after the Great War was dominated more by passionate idealistic notions than by cold-minded calculations on the European balance of power, expressing the contradictory ideological frenzies of the moment. Far from being 'practical' or 'foreseeing', in fact, the ambitious proposals advanced during the diplomatic mission to South Russia were completely unrealistic and heavily influenced by the anti-Bolshevik attitudes developed during the electoral campaign of 1918. Shocked by the rise of a combative Labour movement in Glasgow, even involved in violent clashes with police forces in early 1919, Mackinder hoped to prevent the spread of revolution in Britain through an elaborate containment scheme in the former Russian Empire, which could become a stabilising element in the turbulent geopolitical landscape of post-war Europe and re-open vital foreign markets to the sluggish British economy. In this sense, his position was not too different from that of several members of the Lloyd George cabinet, who wanted a successful constructive foreign policy as a remedy to domestic unemployment and low levels of international trade.¹⁰⁹ But this genuine quest for peace abroad and prosperity at

¹⁰⁶ Mackinder, *World War*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁷ Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 203-4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 187-8.

home was hampered by an irrational hatred of Bolshevism, quite similar to that displayed by prominent ministers like Curzon and Churchill, which refused any peaceful accommodation with Soviet Russia, pushing instead for a continuation of military hostilities against Lenin's regime from the Baltic coast to India's borders.

From this point of view, Mackinder did not want to concede victory to the Bolsheviks, despite their clear political and military superiority over Denikin's forces, claiming that peace with them risked only to encourage further revolutionary propaganda from the Kremlin, strengthening 'all the forces of disorder around the world.'¹¹⁰ And he believed that anti-revolutionary armies could still reverse the situation, thanks to British direct intervention: 'Denikin's men have learned their lesson, though it has taken a bitter schooling to teach it. I believe that they are now in a mood to accept our guidance.'¹¹¹ He did not understand that a similar measure could have been resented by many officers of the Volunteer Army, who were certainly not enthusiastic about the presence of foreign troops in their own country, while his attitude toward the British working class – openly hostile to any military or political involvement in Russia – was extremely paternalistic, ignoring the sincere anti-war sentiments held by such a large section of Britain's society: 'I feel that the time has come when the truth should be carried home to them [the British workers]. They must be made to realise that, whatever the communistic ideals originally characteristic of Bolshevism, there is to-day a growing threat from Moscow of a state of affairs which will render this world a very unsafe place for democracies.'¹¹²

Last but not least, Mackinder's bellicose stance on Russia was based on the false assumption that Britain had come out stronger after the war, acquiring further colonial territories in the Middle East and expanding its political and military influence across the entire world. In reality, this growth of global power was mainly illusory, due to the considerable erosion of British pre-war prosperity during the conflict and to the emergence of new ideological forces like 'nationalism, Bolshevism, pacifism, and protectionism' which were challenging the old international status quo controlled by few European imperial states.¹¹³ What was possible in 1914 had become almost impossible in 1920, compelling the British government to adjust to ever-changing circumstances and to adopt often inconsistent policies in defence of its different strategic interests. As many of his contemporaries, Mackinder did not fully realise this fact, promoting a vision of his country

¹¹⁰ TNA, CAB/24/97/17, Report, p. 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹³ Bennett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 199.

as a great and 'detached' international power which was completely at odds with the precarious reality of Britain's post-war conditions. At the same time, despite the critical tones displayed in his writings, he was also inspired by the general democratic idealism of the time, supporting the rights of small nations and asking for some sort of collective recognition of their independence. This independence could then be organized along provincial lines, decentralising 'different social functions to the same local units' and developing a balanced federal system immune from social or political tensions: 'If every unit of society – the Nation, the Province, the locality – were entitled, nay, were desired, to take appropriate steps to maintain the completeness and balance of its life, the need for the wide-spreading organisation of *any* class or interest, save for formative purposes, would gradually cease to be urgent.'¹¹⁴ But these prospects were completely unrealistic, due to the massive new waves of industrialization and urbanization generated by the war, as later recognized by Isaiah Bowman in his main geographical writings: 'We sigh for a return to the primitive life as the weight of great cities presses upon us, but the world population will increase, not diminish, and we shall have more great cities, not fewer...Statesmanship requires harmony, and this in a crowded world comes through organization, not a return to primitive conditions – not alone for the strong, but for the weak, and for the black and the yellow as for the white.'¹¹⁵

This large global trend toward industrial centralization was something that Mackinder deplored in very strong and 'unscientific' terms, betraying the whole romantic nature of his ideas on post-war international reconstruction:

There was a time when a man addressed his 'friends and neighbours.' We still have our friends, but too often they are scattered over the land and belong to our own caste in society. Or, if they happen to be near us, is it not because our caste has gathered apart into its own quarter of the town?...With too many of us, in our urban and suburban civilisation, that grand old word Neighbour has fallen almost into desuetude. It is for Neighbourliness that the world to-day calls aloud, and for a refusal to gad ever about – merely because of modern opportunities of communication. Let us recover possession of ourselves, lest we become the mere slaves of the world's geography, exploited by materialistic organisers. Neighbourliness or fraternal duty to those who are our fellow-dwellers, is the only sure foundation of a happy citizenship...It is the

¹¹⁴ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 254-5. Emphasis in the original text.

¹¹⁵ Bowman, *New World*, pp. 8-9. On Bowman and his influence on American geography, see Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

cure alike of the slumdom of the poor and of the boredom of the rich, and of war between classes and war between nations.¹¹⁶

This was a very noble enunciation of moral principles, asking for a positive re-evaluation of communal values and local solidarity against the alienating features of modern industrial life. However, it was definitely not a solid basis for a viable political programme, especially in the tumultuous years after the World War, while its utopian tones were not too dissimilar from those evoked by the most radical supporters of Wilson's liberal international ideas at the Paris Peace Conference. Thus, far from following the crude 'reality' of historical and geographical facts, Mackinder ended up prisoner of his own democratic idealism, promoting a geopolitical reorganization of post-war European affairs which was clearly chimerical and unrealizable.

Needless to say, all the contradictions of such a visionary attitude came to the forefront during the ill-fated mission to South Russia, revealing the serious inconsistency of Mackinder's international thought and condemning him permanently to a marginal position in British diplomatic circles. However, the Oxford geographer never lost his faith in a 'balanced' and 'ordered' reconstruction of the European continent, finding some relief in the establishment of the Locarno system in 1925. At the same time he also found new motives of personal satisfaction in the activities of the imperial committees, set up to reorganize the relationship of Britain with its overseas colonies after the war, and it is now time to look more closely at this particular kind of work, analyzing another important aspect of Mackinder's public career in the interwar years.

¹¹⁶ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, pp. 266-7.

Chapter Seven

The Empire in a New World: The Experience of the Imperial Committees

Despite the stronger emphasis on European security and international reconstruction, expressed mainly in the elaborate prose of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, imperial affairs continued to be a crucial concern of Mackinder's public career in the early post-war years, presenting small but significant changes from the antebellum decades. Initially, however, these changes seemed quite imperceptible, suggesting a character irremediably prisoner of his juvenile ideals. Indeed, Mackinder remained loyal to the protectionist agenda of the pre-war era, insisting on the sudden adoption of imperial preference as a way to deal effectively with the new economic conditions produced by the recent European turmoil. As the new Chairman of the Tariff Reform League, for example, he contributed to the organization of a massive exhibition in London on British key industries, underlining the threat posed by foreign competition to these vital sectors of national economic life. The event was opened by a long letter of Austen Chamberlain, who remarked the importance of similar initiatives for the future of Britain's commercial prosperity, freeing the public mind from the 'fool's paradise' of the pre-war years: 'The exhibition...is one which I would gladly see multiplied throughout the country by any association which has the knowledge and the will to provide so instructive a lesson. It is designed to show in a limited but carefully chosen field what we can do to prevent our being again found dependent on foreign and hostile sources of supply for certain articles which are vital to our existence as a nation.'¹

For his part, Mackinder directly brought this particular concern in Parliament, asking for a coordinated action of all political parties in favour of fiscal reform: 'I make the appeal to Members of all parties, Liberal and Labour, as well as Unionist, Free Trade Unionist as well as old Tariff Reform Unionist, to recognise the fact that we stand in a new position...Let us face this question anew in the circumstances that hold to-day. We are no longer a creditor nation.'² Indeed, he thought that Britain had definitely lost the great financial 'Protection' of the past century, symbolized by the huge foreign investments patronised by the City of

¹ 'Tariff Reform: Mr A. Chamberlain and "Political Activity"', *The Glasgow Herald*, 8 October 1918, p. 4.

² *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXIV, 1919, cols. 330-2.

London, and it had now to cede part of its previous global influence to the United States, the real economic victors of the World War: 'We stand in relation to America, financially, as Germany stood in relation to us before the War...We owe America money, and will you not settle many of your accounts by a series of transactions ending in the transferring to America of not a few of your South American investments? Given a free market I cannot help feeling that this is bound to take place. The net effect will be that this industrial country will lose one form of Protection, which under the former régime we claim it has had in a very powerful manner.'³ The only alternative to this dramatic loss of international status, destined to transform Britain into a 'small *bourgeois* nation' not dissimilar from Belgium or Holland, was then to relaunch the British economy along the main conditions of 'modern industry' based on large-scale manufacturing: 'You meet the conditions of the market because you can produce a greater number of varieties, you have a greater shop front. From every point of view – cheapness, efficiency, marketing, the necessity of the organisation of industry is that you should manufacture on a great scale.'⁴ But this productive choice required the substantial abandonment of free trade, cutting out foreign competitors from imperial markets and creating a solid system of preferential exchange between London and its overseas colonies: 'We can make the great engines and great mechanisms which are required to equip the world once more in machinery. We can do it if you are going...to equip yourselves completely from end to end with the necessaries of production. But then you must recognise the fact that you have got to face the Empire ownership of raw material, the protection of your key industries, and the prohibition of dumping.'⁵

Needless to say, Mackinder's suggestion did not convince prominent Liberal politicians like Sir Donald MacLean, Leader of the Opposition between 1918 and 1920, who underlined the practical impossibility of his colleague's economic proposals, due to the changed international circumstances created by the war: 'If you are going to have a ring fence of duties around the Empire, what about those friendly countries who have been fighting and losing with us? The whole situation...has in many respects fundamentally been changed in this War...We have to deal with trading Allies, America, France, and Belgium, so far as the latter can trade, Italy, and also others...I would ask my hon. Friends to bring the matter down to a close business calculation of how we are to carry on our trade.'⁶ Outside

³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXIV, 1919, col. 332.

⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 333.

⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 334-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 342.

Parliament, the *Economist* was even more explicit in its rejection of imperial preference, dubbing Mackinder's argument as 'the old wearisome tune of the "dying industries"' and using various statistical data to disprove the catastrophic assertions of tariff reformers about the future of Britain's economy. It was only necessary to 'return to sanity' and raise again the 'long-forgotten' watchwords of 'Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform', allowing the country to repay its war debts without infringing the financial resources of the state.⁷ In the end, this orthodox analysis gained the favour of the national public, who rejected *en masse* the protectionist calls of Stanley Baldwin during the general election of 1923, compelling even the most determined Conservatives to give up the issue of tariff reform until the outbreak of the Great Depression in the early 1930s.⁸ By that time, however, Mackinder was out of Parliament since a decade, while his personal interest for fiscal reform had become more evanescent in tone and substance. Indeed, he had found other constructive ways to reconcile his old imperial patriotism with the new conditions of the post-war world, exercising his brilliant intellectual talents without the constraining limits of a formal political position.

One of his main commitments during the interwar years, for example, was the chairmanship of the Imperial Shipping Committee, brought into existence by the Lloyd George government in 1920 as an advisory body concerned about the maritime communications of the British Empire. Composed by members nominated by the various Dominions' governments, including India, the Committee had in fact the task to enquire and report on ocean freights and harbour facilities across imperial territories, encouraging commercial exchanges between the different parts of the Empire and improving the general conditions of British sea trade. Originally it should have been a permanent board, with direct influence on the decisions of the imperial government, but the persistent opposition of Canada to this measure – displayed especially at the Imperial Economic Conference of 1923 – did allow its existence only on a short temporary basis, renewed each time during the official imperial meetings of the interwar era.⁹ The successful Canadian veto represented clearly the rise of the Dominions as mature political actors on the imperial and international scene, able to defend their own national interests against the hegemonic

⁷ 'The Policy of the Strong', *The Economist*, 29 March 1919, pp. 507-8.

⁸ On the general weakness of the protectionist cause during the 1920s, see W.R. Garside, 'Party Politics, Political Economy and British Protectionism, 1919-1932', *History*, 83 (1998), pp. 47-65.

⁹ Kevin Burley, 'The Imperial Shipping Committee', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2 (1974), pp. 208-10. On the stormy relationship between Canada and the new Committee, see also Burley, 'Canada and the Imperial Shipping Committee', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 3 (1975), pp. 349-68.

pretences of the British metropolis. Nurtured by the tragic events of the war, which had seen the white settler colonies paying a huge tribute in human lives for the defence of the Empire, such a proud attitude compelled these British imperialists to partially revise their old idea of a united 'Greater Britain', faithfully assembled around the old English heartland, accepting the growing autonomy of the overseas territories.

This proved particularly difficult for old imperial enthusiasts like Milner, who still believed that Britain was the main 'centre' of the imperial structure, ready to develop the 'latent wealth' of its 'Dominions and Dependencies' to compensate the permanent loss of foreign markets provoked by the World War.¹⁰ In his view, the Empire remained a great 'undeveloped estate', whose economic progress could be 'immensely more profitable' to Britain than traditional financial investments into foreign countries, requiring only 'a policy of vigorous development' on the part of the imperial government.¹¹ Apart for Amery, however, no other imperial activists of the pre-war era wanted to follow up completely such kind of stiff reasoning, seeing instead the British imperial system as a loose 'motley' of different nations tied together by common values of 'freedom and unity.'¹² Indeed, they felt that the aggressive 'Britannic nationalism' championed by Chamberlain and Milner in South Africa at the turn of the century was no more feasible or affordable, due to the general exhaustion of British military resources after the war and to the rapid progress of assertive nationalist movements across the non-European dependencies. Therefore they supported the creation of a new 'Commonwealth of Nations' based on progressive ideals of autonomy and cooperation, although the cultural or racial superiority of Britain over its colonies was never seriously questioned in the development of their ambitious political proposal.¹³ The aims and principles of the post-war imperial structure were mainly summed up by Alfred Zimmern in 1925: 'The British Empire survived the war because it had in it a principle of vitality which the other empires lacked. And that principle, that seed of continuing life, is the spirit of liberty. The British Empire lives to-day because its institutions are free institutions. It survives as one of the world's guardians of liberty.'¹⁴ No longer

¹⁰ Viscount Milner, *Questions of the Hour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), pp. 33-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

¹² Reginald Coupland, *The Study of the British Commonwealth: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford, on 19 November 1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp. 9-10.

¹³ On the dilemmas and ambiguities of the Commonwealth project, see John Darwin, 'A Third British Empire?: The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 64-87.

¹⁴ Alfred Zimmern, *The Third British Empire: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Columbia University, New York* (London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 1-2.

'gloriously isolated and proudly self-sufficient', the British Empire was then called to cooperate with other nations in support of international peace, putting its unique 'multi-national association of peoples' behind the moral authority of the League of Nations: 'The British Empire is the surest bulwark against war in the present-day world...If the League [of Nations] can keep the peace to-day, it is because the British Empire provides the chief of its guardians and executants.'¹⁵

On his part, Mackinder openly subscribed to this programme and he used his chairmanship of the Imperial Shipping Committee to promote cooperative ties between Britain, India, and the Dominions, supporting the development of a stronger economic union within the British Empire. In this sense, he sought to solve the various controversies related to the imperial shipping industry through friendly conciliation, looking for negotiated agreements between all the parties involved in any kind of commercial dispute. To a certain extent he was quite successful in such endeavour, directing firmly the work of the Committee for almost twenty years and leaving behind him a long list of official reports approved unanimously by the different members of the board. This remarkable performance is testified, for example, by one of the first documents produced by the new board, relating to the rates of freight in the New Zealand trade and officially presented to the British Parliament in 1921. Directly solicited by the High Commissioner for New Zealand in London, the Committee had investigated if the freight rates charged by commercial naval lines toward New Zealand were reasonable or not, conducting oral interviews with representatives of local farmers and receiving ample financial evidence from British ship-owners.¹⁶ The final conclusion of the report, drafted under the direct supervision of Mackinder, was that freight rates toward New Zealand were undoubtedly 'a heavier burden' upon the Dominion's producers, but not 'unreasonable' when compared with those charged during the pre-war era. As a temporary remedy to the problem, the board recommended then to reduce the costs of transport for Australasia through some practical arrangements between the shippers and the naval companies, hoping that a 'further decline' of oceanic shipping costs would soon have allowed 'substantial economies' for New Zealand's farmers.¹⁷ The tone of the document was extremely conciliating and the collected data were skilfully used to reinforce the negotiated solution proposed by the Committee.

¹⁵ Zimmern, *Third British Empire*, pp. 66-7.

¹⁶ Imperial Shipping Committee, *Report of the Imperial Shipping Committee on the Rates of Freight in the New Zealand Trade* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

Two years later, Mackinder and his colleagues returned on the complex issue of inter-imperial communications, enquiring at the instance of the Australian government on the possibility of increasing the average speed of vessels trading between British and Australian ports. The final report of the Committee emphasized the crucial role of the Suez Canal for the maintenance of quick sea connections with Australasia, due to key geographical characteristics: 'From the point of view of speed...the Suez Route offers particular advantages over other routes, not only because the aggregate transit is the shortest, but also because so large a proportion of the journey is on land. A further feature of importance, so long as coal is the fuel, is that whereas the longest sea section between bunkering ports on the Suez Route is 3,390 miles, the longest by the Cape is 6,480 miles, by Panama 7,692 miles and by Canada 4,417 miles.'¹⁸ At the same time the document suggested the development of air services for the acceleration of mail deliveries to Australia, which could prove even more practical and economic than the building of new expensive oceanic steamers: 'Estimates laid before the Imperial Conference in 1921 put the total time of transit to Australia by airship at some 12 days, and this would obviously mean a saving of quite a different order from any that could be effected by accelerating the existing land and ocean services. To build a fleet of new steamers capable of 18 or 20 knots, would probably require at least three years...and at no very distant date all calculations might be upset...by developments in air navigation.'¹⁹ On his part, Mackinder repeated this suggestion at the Imperial Economic Conference of 1923, where he proposed the adoption of a flexible 'combination' of air, sea, and land transports between Britain and the Pacific region, saving almost a week in the regular carriage of letters and first-class passengers from London to Melbourne and Sydney:

You are to save four days by airship from this country to Egypt; two days on the Indian Ocean by speeding up a little the steamships on that ocean, and one day by saving a certain amount of time which at present is lost at Fremantle before the train starts, and perhaps a little on the trans-Continental journey [across Australia]...The [Imperial Shipping] Committee hope it will be considered that we have done a more practical thing in trying to save a week in that way than by suggesting...that you should pay a subsidy sufficient to give you a service of steamers comparable with the service of steamers which you find on the North Atlantic.²⁰

¹⁸ Imperial Shipping Committee, *Report on the Economic Size and Speed of Vessels Trading between the United Kingdom and Australia and on the Subsidies Necessary to Maintain Speeds in Excess of the Economic Speed* (London: HMSO, 1923), p. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁰ 'Shipping of the Empire: Sir H. Mackinder's Statement', *The Times*, 18 October 1923, p. 7.

The innovative scheme was officially endorsed by the British government, and the Dominion premiers had also strong words of praise for the work of Mackinder's Committee, starting with those pronounced by Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce during the same imperial meeting: 'I think we must come to the conclusion that this [Imperial Shipping] Committee has rendered very great service to Britain and all the Dominions. As far as Australia is concerned, I desire to express our very great appreciation of the work they have done and the manner in which they have carried out the duties that were allotted to them.'²¹

However, such a general appreciation was not enough to overcome Canada's resistance to the establishment of the organisation on a more permanent basis, depriving Mackinder of a substantial source of income for his public career. As a temporary imperial body, in fact, the Committee did not receive any kind of official subsidy from the British cabinet, suffering serious constraints in its research activities. This was openly denounced, for example, in the first general report on the organisation's achievements, published shortly before the Imperial Economic Conference of 1923: 'All the meetings of the Committee have been held in London... Considerations of expense have precluded what we recognise might otherwise have been desirable, that some of our members should have proceeded as a Sub-Committee or Delegation to the overseas portions of the Empire, there to take evidence on certain of the complaints which we have investigated and otherwise to increase their familiarity with overseas views and requirements.'²² At the same time the Chairman did not receive any regular salary, exercising his important functions simply for the sake of the imperial cause. Of course, Mackinder could not afford a similar situation, due to his long-lasting exclusion from parliamentary office and to his near retirement from academic activities in the early 1920s. Thus he was not entirely insensitive to repeated calls from Scottish Conservatives asking him to run against Winston Churchill for the parliamentary seat of Central Glasgow, left vacant by the death of Andrew Bonar Law in November 1923. Indeed, his past services as MP for Camlachie were highly 'appreciated by the local leaders of the party', while 'his ability as an exponent of Imperial politics' – with 'special reference' to fiscal and commercial questions - represented another positive asset with the local electorate, mainly concerned about issues of unemployment and international economic competition.²³ Nevertheless, Mackinder finally decided to remain in

²¹ 'Empire Shipping Services: Dominion Views', *The Times*, 20 October 1923, p. 9.

²² *Report on the Work of the Imperial Shipping Committee, 1920 to 1922* (London: HMSO, 1923), p. 6.

²³ 'Glasgow By-Election: Awaiting Mr. Churchill's Answer', *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1923, p. 8.

his place as Chairman of the Imperial Shipping Committee, feeling that fate 'at last' seemed to have put him in a position 'in complete harmony' with his previous imperialist beliefs, contributing in a constructive way to the general evolution of the British Empire in the post-war era.²⁴ He was probably tired of party politics, and he felt some genuine gratification in the specialized work of the Committee, which allowed him to exercise his intellectual talents without the permanent sense of frustration involved in an ordinary parliamentary career. Moreover, he hoped to win Canadian objections through some direct demonstration of the Committee's negotiating skills, which had already met the unequivocal appreciation of exigent Dominions like Australia and New Zealand.

The opportunity for this demonstration arose in the spring of 1924, when the Canadian Minister for Trade and Commerce officially requested an enquiry of the Committee on the freight rates over Canadian flour shipped from North Atlantic ports, claiming some sort of discrimination in favour of American ports. As usual, the investigative work of the Committee began in London, with several meetings with British and Canadian commercial representatives, but the need to collect more information on freight rates in Montreal and New York was skilfully used by Mackinder and his colleagues to win an official invitation of the Dominion government to visit Eastern Canada, obtaining 'evidence on the spot' by local millers and ship-owners.²⁵ Accompanied by the Australian delegate H.G.B. Larkin and by the Secretary R.D. Fennelly, the Chairman proceeded then to Quebec and Ontario, where he met numerous political and commercial authorities, including official representatives of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways.²⁶ The most important meetings were held in Montreal, leading to a tentative arrangement between ship-owners and millers 'by which a recurrence of conditions which might lead to discrepancy between freight rates on Canadian and American flour from United States ports to the United Kingdom would be obviated.'²⁷ Satisfied by this initial result, Mackinder and Larkin moved to the West, where they visited Winnipeg, hearing local grievances in regard to freight rates on 'rolled oats' and other important agricultural products. As noticed in the final report of the Committee, both men were quite distressed by the popular misconceptions entertained by Canadian traders on their organisation, seen mainly as a powerful 'Committee of the British Government', and they tried constantly to explain its real 'constitution and functions' to the public,

²⁴ Kearns, *Geopolitics*, p. 60.

²⁵ Imperial Shipping Committee, *Interim Report on Rates of Freight on Canadian Flour in the North Atlantic* (London: HMSO, 1924), pp. 6-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13

²⁷ 'Imperial Freights: North American Flour Rates', *The Glasgow Herald*, 21 April 1924, p. 10.

underlining the dependence on Dominion governments' requests as the main precondition for any successful enquiry on imperial trade problems.²⁸ Even more distressful was the general belief that Canadian shippers were victim of 'a combination of shipowners in Great Britain', which constantly denied them 'fair play' in the vital field of oceanic trade. Again, Mackinder and Larkin tried their best to explain the complex matter of international shipping organisation to Manitoba farmers and merchants, remarking at the same time their commitment to 'the removal of grievances where well founded.'²⁹ In the end, the Canadian trip proved a great public success for the Committee, reinforced by further assurances from British shipping lines 'engaged in the North Atlantic trade' to use the same rates on Canadian flour shipped from Canadian and American ports: 'These assurances are of considerable importance in that they definitely remove the risk of any recurrence of similar discrimination in this form and we therefore feel that the fact that they have been given should become generally known at once.'³⁰

However, all this positive work was later disrupted by the following enquiry of the Committee on Canadian shipping issues, relating this time to the presumed discrimination against Canadian ports in marine insurance rates on cargoes and other commercial vessels. Indeed, Mackinder and his colleagues proved unable to reconcile the different interests of British insurance companies and Canadian authorities, despite some positive amendment adopted by the London Underwriters' Institute toward the port of Halifax or the extension of the summer navigation season to October, with the consequent reduction of premium rates paid in winter over oceanic routes to Canada.³¹ The Canadian government was completely unsatisfied by these results, and it promoted another report on the issue of marine insurances, which resulted in a powerful indictment both of British shipping companies and of the Imperial Shipping Committee. The new document accused in fact a nebulous 'North Atlantic steamship combine' of curbing 'the natural development of the export trade of the Dominion', preventing 'competition in ocean freight rates' and causing 'incalculable injury' to the economic prosperity of the Canadian people. Moreover, the report claimed that 'British steamship interests' were the leading party of this worldwide 'plot' against Canada's rightful interest, exerting 'every possible influence' to isolate

²⁸ Imperial Shipping Committee, *Interim Report on Rates of Freight*, p. 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

³¹ Imperial Shipping Committee, *Interim Report on Canadian Marine Insurance Rates* (London: HMSO, 1924), p. 8.

Canadian ports from the rest of the world.³² And the Imperial Shipping Committee was absolutely inadequate to deal with such an unfair situation, representing merely an easy cover for the general misbehaviour of British shipping interests:

The Imperial Shipping Board is simply an advisory committee appointed by the British Government to inquire into and report on all matters connected with ocean freight rates...Unfortunately, the recommendation of the Dominions' Royal Commission for the appointment of a Board with 'authority...to order the abolition of differential rates which were found inimical to Imperial trade' was not adopted. The Imperial Shipping Board acts only in an advisory capacity, and has no authority whatever to deal with 'intolerable' practices so frankly condemned by the Royal Commission. The Board is helpless in relation to minor as well as major offences that may be and are committed by this monopolistic combine. Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that no possible relief in the Canadian situation can be looked for from that source.³³

The Canadian press went even further in their allegations against the Committee, considering it as an integral part of the anti-Canadian 'conspiracy' in maritime affairs. The *Winnipeg Free Press*, for example, directly accused Mackinder of 'undisguised hostility' toward Canadian shipping interests, expressed mainly in his patronising attitude toward local complaints during the recent visit to Manitoba: 'While the Imperial Shipping Committee may be useful in minor ways, its policy on the great and overshadowing matter of freight rates is distinctly pro-combine. Judging by the attitude of its chairman, it exists chiefly for the purpose of discouraging the Dominions from entering upon rate wars with the entrenched shipping monopoly. The Canadian Government is going to fight, and the Canadian people, we think, are going to stand solidly behind the Government.'³⁴ Of course, British shipping companies denied any validity to these wild accusations, claiming that they were 'not in any sense a combine' and that they had 'no intention of restricting competition' on the North Atlantic routes, especially in the delicate field of 'emigration traffic.'³⁵ On his part, Mackinder firmly defended the professional integrity of the Imperial Shipping Committee, criticizing implicitly the Canadians for their obstructive attitude toward the enlargement of its limited arbitration powers: 'It has been stated that the Imperial Shipping Committee have largely failed to combat combines and conferences on the ocean. It seems, therefore, well that it should be made generally known that the committee owe their present authority as an advisory body to a unanimous vote of the

³² 'Canada and Ocean Freight Rates: Attack on Atlantic Combine', *The Times*, 10 February 1925, p. 14.

³³ 'North Atlantic Shipping: Alleged "Combine"', *The Times*, 24 February 1925, p. 17.

³⁴ "'Not a Combine": Steamship Lines and Canadian Charges', *The Glasgow Herald*, 16 February 1925, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Imperial Economic Conference of 1923.³⁶ Moreover, he lamented that ‘no complaints’ on several of the matters brought up by the Canadian report had been ‘lodged with the committee from any competent and recognized person or body within the Empire’ in the last few months. Thus it was not his fault if the Dominion government felt now deluded or betrayed by the work of the Committee, considering even the relevant services rendered by it to Canadian producers in recent times: ‘In the past year the Canadian Government put certain complaints before the committee, and on these two reports, both favourable to Canada, have already been presented, and two more reports to the same Government are on the stocks and will be presented shortly.’³⁷

It was doubtful whether this spirited defence of the Committee’s record could persuade the Canadian government to withdraw its weighty allegations, although Montreal newspapers were quite sympathetic to the British position, accusing the government report on marine insurances of being merely ‘a political tract, not a commercial statement worth of consideration.’³⁸ Needless to say, the entire affair seriously undermined the already precarious relationship between Mackinder’s advisory body and Canadian authorities, resulting in constant vociferous complaints from Ottawa against the Committee’s resolutions for all the 1920s. As a result of this poisonous legacy, Mackinder and his colleagues renounced to any possibility of a more permanent basis for their work, asking simply to confirm the present status of the Committee during the following Imperial Conferences:

At the Imperial Economic Conference of 1923, there was a suggestion made that our powers should be increased and that we should be given the right of compelling the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents. We have now had further experience and we think it well to endorse the opinion... that it would be a mistake to endow the Committee with such powers under present condition... At present we enjoy the most cordial relations with all the parties who have come before us and we should be sorry to see any step taken which would tend to impede the work of conciliation which has proved to be so important a feature of our operations.³⁹

Fortunately for the Chairman, however, the improved economic conditions of the mid-1920s allowed the first Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald to devote a certain amount of regular money to the activities of the Committee, including an annual salary of

³⁶ H.J. Mackinder, ‘Canada and Freight Rates’, *The Times*, 16 February 1925, p. 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ ‘“Not a Combine”’, p. 11.

³⁹ *Report on the Work of the Imperial Shipping Committee, January, 1923 to May, 1926* (London: HMSO, 1926), pp. 13-4.

£2,000 for the exhausted former Director of the LSE. Indeed, it was his old friend Sidney Webb, now President of the Board of Trade, who promoted the measure, presenting it in Parliament as the right compensation for the 'very admirable service' rendered by Mackinder in the previous years.⁴⁰ Ironically, the same Labour party which the former Camlachie MP had defined as 'lunatic' in one of his late electoral speeches proved then his unexpected financial saviour, securing the successful existence of the Imperial Shipping Committee for more than another decade.⁴¹ Mackinder's reaction to the measure is not known, but it should have been a curious mixture of relief and uneasiness, due to his persistent distrust of Socialist organisations.

Why was Canada so hostile to the activities of Mackinder's Committee? The problem was not related to practical issues of freight rates and marine insurances. What Mackinder and other British imperialists had clearly misunderstood was the determination of the Canadian government to preserve its own national autonomy at all costs, rejecting any kind of formal or informal supervision from the imperial centre in London. This strong nationalist tendency, which was already visible under the Conservative government of Arthur Meighen during the early post-war years, became particularly prominent with the new Liberal cabinet of William Lyon Mackenzie King, who adopted a very obstructive and abrasive style at the Imperial Economic Conference of 1923, designed to maintain Canada's freedom of action in both political and economic affairs.⁴² In that occasion, for example, the Canadian premier arrived even to reproach an old arch-imperialist like Curzon for his definition of the Conference as a 'Cabinet', which implied of course some sort of political union between Britain and the overseas Dominions: 'I look upon this gathering as a Conference of Governments. We are here as representatives of Governments, I cannot feel that I come with any right or power to be a member of an Imperial Cabinet, using the word Cabinet in the sense in which we understand it as a body necessarily responsible to Parliament and through Parliament to the people.'⁴³ The same uncompromising attitude was also displayed

⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CLXXIV, 1924, col. 2362.

⁴¹ 'Glasgow Central Contest: Sir Halford Mackinder's Appeal', *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1922, p. 11.

⁴² On Meighen's imperial policy, see Philip G. Wigley, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth: British-Canadian Relations, 1917-1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 96-141. For an analysis of Mackenzie King's behaviour at the Imperial Conference of 1923, see instead John M. Carland, 'Shadow and Substance: Mackenzie King's Perceptions of British Intentions at the 1923 Imperial Conference', in *British Imperial History: Essays in Honour of A.P. Thornton*, ed. by Gordon Martel (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 178-200.

⁴³ Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings of Imperial Conference, 1923, in *Documents Relatifs aux Relations Extérieures du Canada/Documents on Canadian External Relations*, III: 1919-1925, ed. by

by George P. Graham, the Canadian Minister of Railways and Canals, who opposed any placing of the Imperial Shipping Committee 'on a permanent basis', believing that the organisation was not representative of the real productive interests of the Empire: 'The personnel of the Board consists of five members of shipping firms out of fourteen, - more than 33 1/3 are men directly interested in shipping; and, without reflecting at all upon the personnel, because I do not know one of them, to give the Empire wide producers fuller confidence in the work of the Imperial Shipping Committee, it would seem to me that the preponderance of gentlemen directly interested in one side of any controversy that came up, perhaps is not in the best interests of the Committee itself.'⁴⁴ Two years later, despite Mackinder's successful mission to Canada over the issue of freight rates for flour, the Canadian cabinet had definitely not changed its negative opinion on the matter, as well exemplified by a short letter of the economist O.D. Skelton, one of the most trusted advisors of Mackenzie King in international affairs: 'The Imperial Shipping Committee is an able and in a very large degree an impartial body, but it might be questioned, without disregarding its ability and its services, whether a body constituted as under is best devised for the immediate inquiry [on the North Atlantic rates] under consideration: 14 members: 1 Canadian and 5 other Dominions and India representatives: 3 representatives of British Government: 3 representatives of British shipping and commercial interests.'⁴⁵ Thus Canadian authorities always tended to bypass the Committee for the resolution of their merchant marine problems, adopting even some extreme steps like the attempted creation of an independent national shipping service in 1925.⁴⁶

With these unpromising precedents, it was no wonder then that Canada would also prove a thorn in the side for Mackinder's other major imperial commitment of the time, namely the chairmanship of the Imperial Economic Committee born out of the final resolutions of the 1923 Imperial Conference. Indeed, the Canadian government opposed the constitution of the new advisory board on the ground that it involved the establishment of 'permanent centralized machinery' in London, while the practical services of the Committee appeared at least doubtful in Skelton's sceptical view: 'No one committee could deal effectively with all these [economic] issues, particularly as they concerned quite

Lowell C. Clark (Ottawa: Ministère des Affaires Extérieures/Department of External Affairs, 1970), p. 225.

⁴⁴ University of Leeds Library, Mackenzie King Papers [microfilm], MG26/J4/85/653, Speech by G.P. Graham to the Imperial Shipping Committee, 23 October 1923.

⁴⁵ University of Leeds Library, Mackenzie King Papers [microfilm], MG26/J4/89/668, O.D. Skelton to Mackenzie King, 24 February 1925.

⁴⁶ Burley, 'Canada', pp. 356-7.

different parts of the Empire. It would be much more practical to appoint special ad hoc committees with appropriate personnel for each question as it arises.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Committee was officially put in place thanks to the intervention of Australia, who wanted an official imperial organisation sympathetic to the rising commercial needs of its stock-breeders and fruit growers. Indeed, two of the most influential delegates on the Committee were Sir Mark Sheldon, former vice-president of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, and the economist F.L. McDougall, a leading member of the Australian Dried Fruits Association. Both men hoped to use the board as a powerful promoting agency for Australian economic products, and they often contested the style of Mackinder's chairmanship, judged too 'hesitant' or 'detached' for the pursuit of their scope. In this sense, McDougall's regular correspondence with Prime Minister Bruce in the mid-1920s represents a valuable source of information on the proceedings of the Committee, revealing all the difficulties faced by Mackinder in the direction of such a composite body of different personalities and national interests.⁴⁸ Problems started already during the first meeting of March 1925, due to Mackinder's involvement with the Imperial Shipping Committee and other organisations directly funded by the British government:

On the question of the frequency of sittings, a rather difficult position was disclosed so far as the immediate future is concerned. Sir Halford Mackinder is on the Royal Commission on Food and, owing to the illness of Sir Auckland Geddes, is acting as Chairman. He is also tied to the Imperial Shipping Committee one day a week. He was, therefore, only able to arrange for meetings of one day a week. Sir Mark Sheldon protested that, with the enormous volume of work ahead of the Committee, this would protract discussion in a most serious way.⁴⁹

Three weeks later, the fact that a general survey of imperial trade was still 'not completed' seriously alarmed both Australian delegates, who lamented the complete apathy of the other members of the Committee, quite happy to fit the meetings of the board 'with their other duties' and firmly opposed to any idea of 'more frequent meetings'

⁴⁷ Leeds University Library, Mackenzie King Papers [microfilm], MG26/J4/85/652, Memorandum by O.D. Skelton on the Imperial Economic Committee, 8 March 1926, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Letters from a "Secret Service Agent": F.L. McDougall to S.M. Bruce, 1924-1929*, ed. by W.J. Hudson and Wendy Way (Canberra: Australian Government Publication Services, 1986). The following footnotes will refer to the digital version of this collection, freely accessible on the website of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

<www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/index.html>

⁴⁹ McDougall to Bruce, 19 March 1925, in *Letters* <www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/historical-document-19-14.html> [accessed: 12 September 2012]

in the future.⁵⁰ However, Mackinder was undeterred by their informal protests, insisting that the discussed issues 'should not be rushed' and that the Committee's proceedings were destined to know 'a very great acceleration' in the following months, due to the appointment of various Sub-Committees focused on highly specialized fields of enquiry.⁵¹

This promise became reality in late April 1925, when the Committee was divided among three different panels concerned respectively about 'General Purposes', 'Meat', and 'Fruit.' McDougall was assigned to the first panel at the express request of Mackinder, who wanted to use his 'special economic knowledge' in support of a general survey of inter-imperial commercial relations.⁵² Thanks to this skilful organisation, the work of the Committee made considerable progress, although McDougall continued to lament the professorial attitude of the Chairman, who seemed to waste 'an enormous amount of time' by going over 'every point' of the discussions 'in the choicest language and at very great length.' Moreover, he feared that Mackinder's 'passion for compromise and indirect methods' could result in a first final report without 'sufficient directness', limiting the possible impact of the Committee's reflections on imperial economic policies.⁵³ In the end, however, these concerns proved mainly unfounded: the first general report of the Committee on the marketing of imperial products in the United Kingdom showed in fact a great degree of clarity and inventiveness, receiving public praise both in Britain and the Dominions. Stanley Baldwin, for example, sent an official letter of appreciation to Mackinder for having produced 'so full a report by the close of the present [parliamentary] session', successfully undertaking the 'heavy strain' of a similar task, while a leading representative of the Australian meat industry expressed his sincere 'pleasure' for the work of the Committee, welcoming all its final recommendations on the ways to improve 'the production, grading, and packing' of imperial products for the British market.⁵⁴ Last but not least, Prime Minister Bruce defined the report as an 'authoritative endorsement of the policy supported by all the Dominions', hoping that it would finally awake 'the Imperial Government and the

⁵⁰ McDougall to Bruce, 2 April 1925, in *Letters* <www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/historical-document-19-15.html> [accessed: 12 September 2012]

⁵¹ McDougall to Bruce, 23 April 1925, in *Letters* <www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/historical-document-19-16.html> [accessed: 13 September 2012]

⁵² McDougall to Bruce, 30 April 1925, in *Letters* <www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/historical-document-19-17.html> [accessed: 13 September 2012]

⁵³ McDougall to Bruce, 2 July 1925, in *Letters* <www.dfat.gov.au/publications/historical/volume-19/historical-document-19-24.html> [accessed: 14 September 2012]

⁵⁴ 'Market for Empire Food: Premier's Letter to Sir Halford Mackinder', *The Glasgow Herald*, 11 August 1925, p. 8; 'Empire Food Scheme: Australian View of the Report', *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 August 1925, p. 10.

people of Great Britain' to the 'necessities' and 'feeling' of the present time.⁵⁵ These statements were no mere flattery. Although drafted in very general terms, the report was based on 23 general meetings of the Committee and 28 special meetings of its various Sub-Committees, shaped by 'the views and information' of several delegates and witnesses coming from all the parts of the British Empire.⁵⁶ Among its many suggestions on the improvement of imperial trade, it contained a very interesting reflection on the role of intellectual exchange and scientific research, which was probably the result of the Chairman's past activities as an educational reformer:

We are impressed by the paramount importance of research in solving the problems of the food supplies of the Empire. Much has already been done by pioneers in the work, but the field is so vast that what has already been achieved is small indeed in comparison with that which has still to be undertaken...The resources and money at present available are small as compared with the extent of the problems awaiting investigation. We are convinced that money devoted to research will bring to producer and consumer alike benefits out of all proportion to the sums expended. We have therefore included in our recommendations to the British Government the allocation out of the annual grant of a substantial sum for research.⁵⁷

Indeed, the tones of this appeal seemed quite reminiscent of Mackinder's previous campaign in favour of geography, full of constant references to the public benefits of the discipline and the need of more funding opportunities in its support, while the following remark on the importance of 'close co-operation' between Britain and the Dominions in scientific initiatives and 'experimental work' was not too far from similar 'internationalist' statements at the London Geographical Congress of 1895 or from the regular collaboration with French educational authorities at Reading or at LSE.⁵⁸ And the same could be said about the final emphasis given to the 'applicability' of research to business practices, which appeared as the natural evolution of the old ideal of 'applied geography' championed in the pre-war era:

We are convinced that in this vast Empire men are available who are prepared to devote their lives to patient and often apparently fruitless inquiry if a competence and the chance of a career is offered to them. It must be in the industries themselves that careers will be provided. Men trained in the sciences which underlie the commercial operations are needed not only for

⁵⁵ 'Empire Food Scheme: Australian Premier's Statement', *The Glasgow Herald*, 12 August 1925, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Imperial Economic Committee, *First Report (General) of the Imperial Economic Committee on Marketing and Preparing for Market of Foodstuffs Produced in the Overseas Parts of the Empire* (London: HMSO, 1925), p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

research but as the interpreters of the research of others, just as in the profession of medicine there are general practitioners as well as specialists. There should be no hard and fast line between those who do research and those who 'practise.'

All this part on the 'intellectual cross-fertilization' of the Empire was the most appreciated by external commentators, thanks to its original and authoritative clarity, and there is no doubt that it was mainly the product of Mackinder's personal influence, although other academic delegates like McDougall certainly contributed to its final presentation on paper.⁵⁹ This was also confirmed by certain 'colourful' passages inserted in the discussion of marketing problems, which seemed often taken out of Mackinder's popular geographical books for young students: 'The British Empire is vast and it includes many territories. The housewife cannot be expected to have her school book always in mind when she is engaged in shopping. To be effective the Empire appeal should be direct and simple.'⁶⁰ But if such an elaborate promotion of cultural and economic ties across the Empire represented an open continuity between the Chairman and his late Victorian past, the rest of the report showed instead a marked change from the imperialist aspirations of that past, confirming the substantial change of Mackinder's convictions during the war years. Indeed, the document fully rejected the old idea of tariffs as a viable scheme for imperial development, recognizing the anti-protectionist atmosphere of the early post-war era: 'Though many of us represent portions of the Empire in which substantial tariff preferences are given to British imports, and though new preferences have been established in the United Kingdom itself during the present year, we recognize that we are precluded from putting forward recommendations involving preference through the operation of tariffs. Subsidies, we think, should be adopted only in special cases.'⁶¹ And this refusal of customs preferences assumed even moral tones, insisting on the crucial importance of individual freedom for a closer cooperation between the different parts of Britain's overseas empire:

There is arising in the United Kingdom a widespread recognition of the economic benefits to be derived from buying within the Empire. Our plan seeks to translate this latent feeling into a practical scheme under State guidance and on a scale commensurate with the productive facilities of the Empire. *The scheme rests on the free will of the individual citizen as consumer.* In proportion as he is convinced of the wisdom of the underlying policy will the movement be effectual. But there is freedom also on the side of the producer, be he British or foreign, and there is nothing in the plan to destroy individual

⁵⁹ Imperial Economic Committee, *First Report (General)*, pp. 18-9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

enterprise or competition. On the contrary, an ever-increasing efficiency is postulated if the producers within the Empire are to hold their own with the producers outside. *In providing facilities to enable a voluntary discrimination to be exercised by its citizens, the Government of the United Kingdom would be attempting to achieve by methods of freedom no more than other countries seek to compass by their customs tariffs.*⁶²

This was definitely a different approach to imperial problems than the ambitious 'constructive' programme promoted by Milner and Chamberlain in the early 1900s, and it represented to a large extent the successful adaptation of British imperialist thought to the changed international circumstances of the interwar years, dominated by democratic idealism, anti-colonial nationalism, and the quest for a more stable global order. Indeed, Mackinder and his associates were trying to provide through their report a viable answer to the commercial difficulties of the Empire without sacrificing the autonomy of the different colonial governments, supporting a cooperative vision of imperial unity rather than a centralistic one. As Archibald Hurd observed in a later commentary of the document, this was the best way to base Britain's economic policy 'on the Imperial ideal' without departing from its traditional political principles: 'If the Governments of the Empire accept, as they will unquestionably accept, the recommendations of this committee, a great movement will be inaugurated of economic co-operation to the advantage of every section of the Empire...They will have to organise and work to the common end of winning through merit.'⁶³ And if this 'will for co-operation' continued 'active among the British peoples throughout the world' the future appeared 'bright with promise': 'We may even evolve, in time, without any interference with the political and economic freedom of the units of the Empire, which is the distinguishing feature of the British Commonwealth, a league of nations as united in the economic and social spheres as the war proved it to be united in the larger tasks of civilization.'⁶⁴

How much did Mackinder share this new vision of the Empire after the war? Indeed, considering his previous militancy in the tariff reform movement, one could easily suspect that the cooperative proposals of the Imperial Economic Committee were only accepted by him under the pressure of the other delegates, merely paying lip service to the ideals of the new era. The suspect is understandable, but completely unfounded. Commemorating the death of Milner at the Royal Colonial Institute in November 1925, Mackinder showed in fact

⁶² Imperial Economic Committee, *First Report (General)*, p. 16. Emphasis added.

⁶³ Archibald Hurd, 'A Matter of Money, Markets and Men', *The Fortnightly Review*, 118 (1925), p. 381.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

a series of relevant departures from his previous imperialist faith, joining Lionel Curtis and other imperialist veterans in their conversion to the 'progressive principles' of the new British Commonwealth.⁶⁵ First of all, he contested Milner's racial vision of the Empire, insisting on the inclusive and universal character of British colonial rule: 'There is something English which is slowly transferable [to other peoples], and that is the English tradition as embodied in our Common Law, our Parliamentary system, our methods of business...In my belief this English tradition is vital to civilization as it has now developed...The Empire is valuable to the world because it encloses certain areas within which the transfer has already been effected in greater degree than elsewhere.'⁶⁶ Thus 'no superiority' was implied in the 'British blood' apart for those transferable 'characteristics' which constituted 'England's chief contribution' to human civilization, partially accepting the call for inclusion advanced by the Aga Khan and other non-European nationalists at the end of the war. At the same time Britain and its overseas Dominions could not ignore the situation of Europe in their future political development, maintaining the balance of power on the continent and supporting the League of Nations in its peacekeeping efforts. In this sense, the recent signature of the Locarno Treaty represented a watershed for the position of Britain in the world, requiring careful consideration on the part of its statesmen.⁶⁷ But British power had also responsibilities in other parts of the world, requiring a coordinated effort of its dispersed imperial parts for the effective pursuit of peace and stability around the globe. Thus, contrary to his main beliefs of the pre-war era, Mackinder now thought that such coordination could be achieved only through non-coercive and decentralized methods of government, respecting the different local interests of the overseas colonies:

The British Empire, as long as it is true to itself and to its duty, can never have the symmetry which is demanded by a French or a German mind. We are not on the road to an Imperial system, because I think we shall always remain on the road, but we have certain principles from which we have learnt, in the course of our long history, that we deviate at our peril...Let me say that my reading of recent history is that the Nations of the Empire have been engaged during the last two generations in breaking down the wrong links of Empire in order to clear the ground for new methods which shall be more in harmony both with our fundamental principles and with the needs of the twentieth-century world. We have expressed the one tendency by substituting the idea of the Commonwealth of Nations for the older idea of Empire.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ On the Round Table and the Commonwealth ideal, see Andrea Bosco and Alex May, 'Introduction', in *The Round Table*, pp. xxxi-xli.

⁶⁶ Mackinder, 'English Tradition', p. 726.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 727.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 728-9.

Indeed, the activities of the Imperial Shipping Committee perfectly represented this pivotal change, uprooting the 'original sin' of intolerance from the various colonial governments and using a 'well-informed public opinion' for the pursuit of the common imperial good. After some time similar institutional 'experiments' should then give way to 'new tendencies of Imperial loyalty', preparing definitely the British world for the new challenges of the future decades: 'Where the smaller difficulties have failed to rouse us, perhaps the greater will develop the best that is in us. So it was when we made war; so let it be now that we are making peace.'⁶⁹

Even if the tones of the speech were sometimes ambiguous, trying to reconcile Milner's original creed with that of the post-war era, they were so dissimilar from the traditional imperialist faith of the deceased South African proconsul as to provoke the negative reaction of some members of the audience, somehow unconvinced by the core of the speaker's argument. William Arthur Holman, for example, defended the idea of the Empire as primarily a matter concerning the 'British race', drawing a neat line between the 'self-governing Dominions with a British population' and the non-European dependencies, while Sir Frederick Dutton remarked that there was 'no such thing as absolute equality' among the various members of the imperial community, insisting on the 'preponderating responsibility' of metropolitan Britain in the direction of Commonwealth affairs.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the *Economist* was pleasantly surprised by the moderate tones of Mackinder's address, which defended the Empire 'with a breadth of view' quite far from the 'crude and narrow thinking' displayed by 'British Imperialists of the past':

In the course of his long argument for the maintenance of Imperial unity...he [Mackinder] yet gives full recognition to Canada's special problems arising from her position in North America, and of the peculiar local problems of Australia and New Zealand. Gone, we repeat, and we hope gone for ever, is the old crude idea of British Britain, British Canada, British Australasia, to be bound together just because they are all British, by material bonds which assume an absurdly exaggerated degree of community of material interests.⁷¹

These considerations were also shared by Arthur Balfour, the old 'scourge' of tariff reformers, who expressed the warmest appreciation for Mackinder's analysis, maintaining that the future preservation of 'British blood and character' required the proper valorisation of national political principles, directed to 'a well-informed public opinion.' This

⁶⁹ Mackinder, 'English Tradition', p. 730-1.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 731-3.

⁷¹ 'Imperialism and Cosmopolitanism', *The Economist*, 21 November 1925, p. 832.

was the only way to 'stand together' for the defence of the Empire, avoiding the sudden disintegration of such a 'privileged' international position.⁷²

On his part, Mackinder partially replied to his critics insisting on the need of finding new 'working methods' for the problems of the post-war era, because 'propaganda' was not enough to keep together the Empire in the next future, requiring instead a more practical solution of the 'fundamental difficulties' currently faced by Britain and its different colonial territories.⁷³ Some years later he restated again this conviction in front of the Royal United Services Institute, echoing the wider concerns of the British government toward the constant growth of French and American economic power on the international scene:

I believe...that the most important thing for us at the present time...is to create the necessary machinery for Imperial economic co-operation...We taught the world how to use a monarchy and what a Parliament could be. We taught what the law courts could be, making the common law; we taught what a cabinet should be, and now we have an opportunity of teaching the world what should be the institutions of co-operation between nations. It would be in harmony with our whole tradition if we did that.⁷⁴

However, these collaborative ideals were not extended to all the members of the 'imperial family', exposing a certain degree of continuity between Mackinder's pre-war and post-war political views. Although he learned successfully to work with Indian delegates on the Imperial Committees, in fact, his general attitude toward 'coloured' people did not differ particularly from that of the antebellum decades, displaying persistent signs of racism and cultural arrogance throughout the 1920s. For example, Mackinder still believed that black Africans needed the direct control or supervision of white men to develop their huge natural resources, transforming equatorial Africa into a 'vital spot' of the newly reorganized British Empire: 'It is of vast importance, if it be possible, to settle a series of white communities, in relation to the surrounding native populations – they can only be aristocracies, but complete white communities, men, women and children – on this chain of uplands from Kenya, through Tanganyika, into Northern Rhodesia. They will uphold a standard for the civilization slowly growing in the districts around, and will secure British

⁷² Mackinder, 'English Tradition', p. 734.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 734-5.

⁷⁴ Halford Mackinder, 'Recent Economic Developments in the Dominions, Colonies and Mandated Territories', *The RUSI Journal*, 75 (1930), p. 265. On British concerns toward America and other economic competitors in the late 1920s, see Robert W.D. Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads, 1919-1932: A Study in Politics, Economics and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 176-85.

communications in this all-important region.⁷⁵ Of course, these regions could not become 'a new Australia' or 'a New Canada', but they could always evolve into a relevant 'focus' of imperial communications, uniting British territorial possessions from the Middle East to South Africa and the Indian Ocean.⁷⁶ He restated this belief during a long lecture by Sir Frederick Lugard on the problems of tropical Africa, considering it as a place 'with ample opportunity for the foundation of white colonies', but the former Governor of Nigeria remained quite sceptical toward such kinds of imperial enthusiasm, warning that white farmers in Kenya and other dependencies should have a 'clear vision' of their future position among African natives before embarking into any serious settlement scheme. Nevertheless, he seemed to appreciate Mackinder's 'developmental' approach toward black people, remarking that in the absence of a proper 'Native State' in those latitudes it was a specific duty of the 'British officer' to guide the various African chiefs toward a modern system of self-government.⁷⁷

Of course, both men did not appear concerned about the possible exploitation or destruction of local peoples through their modernization ambitions, even if Mackinder showed some sort of 'scientific' preoccupation for the future of the Nderobbo, an isolated group of hunter-gatherers in Kenya, who were threatened by the rapid advance of European civilization into their land: 'Somebody should ingratiate himself with the Nderobbo...If some one with adequate anthropological knowledge could become intimate with them, it is possible we might get down to linguistic and cultural conditions of immense interest...It must be done before they lose their timidity and their forest habits and are, from the anthropological point of view, spoiled.'⁷⁸ The model of this 'cultural' intervention should be the famous enquiries of Walter Baldwin Spencer on the Australian aborigines, mainly shaped along strict evolutionist assumptions, and it certainly did not put native welfare at the top of its priorities.⁷⁹ Thus, despite his official commitment to the new 'democratic' ideals of the Commonwealth, Mackinder remained somehow embedded in the crude racialist and authoritarian beliefs of the pre-war era, perceiving imperial territories merely as strategic or economic assets in support of British world power. Indeed, as he explained to the audience of the Royal United Services Institute, the British Empire was 'a

⁷⁵ Gillman, 'South-West Tanganyika Territory: Discussion', p. 129.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

⁷⁷ Sir Frederick Lugard, 'Problems of Equatorial Africa', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 6 (1927), pp. 229-32.

⁷⁸ L.S.B. Leakey, 'East African Lakes: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 77 (1931), p. 512.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 512. As undergraduate students, Spencer and Mackinder were close friends at Oxford, following both the Darwinist teachings of H.N. Moseley. See Blouet, *Mackinder*, pp. 23-7.

great business partnership' that should be led 'by ordinary business methods', putting 'academic ideals' and 'democratic cries' at the bottom of governmental considerations: 'We have entered an age in which you have to think not only in continents and in hundreds of millions, but also in tendencies. Just as in the Great War, Commanders-in-Chief no longer thought and guided with the old precision, but directed the movement of "masses", so it has come to be in commerce...My trouble is that in the political world under democratic conditions we are too limited in outlook; the great captains of commerce have a wider horizon.'⁸⁰ Needless to say, such a technocratic vision was definitely at odds with the Liberal idealism of Alfred Zimmern, who thought that 'liberty and self-government' were good 'for all men', and it marked the limits of Mackinder's adaptation to the new environment of the post-war world, betraying his constant reference to the previous imperialist ideologies of the Edwardian era.⁸¹

This intellectual ambiguity was probably inevitable, considering the old age of the character and his persistent romantic vision of imperial realities. As a man who had grown up in late Victorian Britain, Mackinder continued in fact to refer to the main values and principles of that bygone age, ignoring or neglecting the important cultural and political changes introduced by the World War. As well pointed out by Gill Bennett, the conflict had completely altered 'the perceptions of both the ruled and the rulers' in the colonial world, undermining previous beliefs in the racial superiority of European nations and promoting a wide range of 'liberal humanist, Christian and socialist philosophies' at odds with the imperialist faith of the early twentieth century. Despite its serious limits, the mandate idea applied by the Paris Peace Conference to African and Middle Eastern territories was a clear sign of this new spirit of the times, exercising a deep 'psychological effect' on non-European peoples and compelling colonial powers to act under precise international obligations.⁸² At the same time the principle of national self-determination played against the old vision of great unified empires, on the model of Tsarist Russia, supporting instead the growing political autonomy and cultural self-awareness of colonial territories.

In the case of the British Empire, this trend was perfectly exemplified by the aggressive attitude of the Dominions, especially Canada, ready to defend their own freedom of action from London's interference even on small practical issues like freight rates or marine insurances. Indeed, young colonial statesmen like Mackenzie King did not see the Empire as

⁸⁰ Mackinder, 'Recent Economic Developments', pp. 264-5.

⁸¹ Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 63.

⁸² Bennett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 7.

the united 'imperial family' of Chamberlain's fiscal campaign, but instead as a flexible league of governments based on the fundamental principle of 'self-government' in both domestic and foreign affairs, 'tested in fire' and 'not found wanting' during the tragic years of the World War.⁸³ Thus any reversion to previous forms of imperial unity or control was absolutely unacceptable to them. Moreover, the emergence of popular anti-colonial movements in India and Africa represented another serious obstacle to the creation of a united imperial structure, together with the presence of the League of Nations as the main forum of international justice and arbitration. As the *Economist* observed in 1925, the present state of the British Empire was then full of anxious questions for the future, intensified by the persistent instability of global economic conditions: 'Are the League of Nations and a united British Empire compatible? Can we combine a League policy and an Imperial policy? Can we maintain indefinitely a system under which Britain, representing the Empire, signs a European Treaty and leaves the Dominions free to adhere or stand aside, while Canada signs a treaty with America concerning a domestic matter between the two nations?' The periodical had no definite solutions for these uneasy problems, but it firmly believed that it was time to find new methods of imperial development replacing the 'old, narrow, and crudely material views' held by Milner, Chamberlain, and their disciples in the pre-war era, combining effectively 'Imperialism and Cosmopolitanism' into a new political synthesis apt to the complex challenges of the post-war years.⁸⁴

To be honest, Mackinder was not entirely insensitive to these reflections, using his successful chairmanship of the Imperial Committees to promote measures of goodwill and cooperation between the different parts of the British Empire. Indeed, both organisations tried to solve various local controversies through peaceful negotiation, supporting the expansion of inter-imperial trade and reconciling different national interests into constructive economic proposals. Despite Canadian hostility, for example, the Imperial Shipping Committee generally provided viable solutions to the shipping problems of the Dominions, mediating successfully between opposed administrative and commercial bodies. According to Mackinder, these positive achievements were the direct product of the informal nature of the Committee, which could inspire the confidence both of shipping companies and agricultural producers, leading to a free exchange of information absolutely vital for the positive resolution of their mutual controversies:

⁸³ Speech by Mackenzie King at the Imperial Conference, 1923, in *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, III, p. 242.

⁸⁴ 'Imperialism and Cosmopolitanism', pp. 832-3.

A company has held out on principle against its accounts been seen. On one very important occasion I, as Chairman, was allowed to see those accounts with skilled assistance, though the accounts were not shown to the full Committee, and the Committee was good enough to accept my report with regard to them. Well now, that is a confidential relation which obviously could not exist if I were Chairman of a Committee equipped with powers suddenly to turn round and say: 'You are not doing what I want; now I am going to exercise my powers.'⁸⁵

At the same time he thought that 'publicity' was the best way to foster imperial interests, persuading the British and Dominions' governments to act without any infringement of their respective national rights: 'It is in our power to make a report, and if the Governments of the Empire consent to the publication of that report...then the persons involved [in it] are seriously implicated. I do feel that the fact that we are an Imperial Committee, that we have acquired...a certain prestige, and that our printed word carries some weight, gives us in reality a very great power, and as long as people feel they are treated equitably they are likely to treat us with confidence.'⁸⁶ Although less successful in its final results, due to the broader character of its commercial enquiries, the Imperial Economic Committee followed more or less the same principles, gaining the sincere appreciation of governments and businessmen across the Empire. The *Canberra Times*, for example, produced a very positive evaluation of the organisation's first three years of work in 1928, emphasising the extension of its terms of reference at the Imperial Conference of 1926 and underlining its leading role in the recent creation of the Empire Marketing Board to 'foster the increased consumption of Empire produce' in Great Britain.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the New Zealand press also commented favourably on the activities of the Committee, stressing the success of its campaign 'to inculcate the ideal of voluntary preference' for imperial goods 'in the mind of British consumers.'⁸⁸

Thus, toward the end of his public career in the late 1920s, Mackinder felt to have finally provided a valuable service to both Britain and the Dominions, adjusting positively his previous imperial enthusiasm to the new circumstances of the time. Basing his actions on

⁸⁵ *Imperial Economic Conference of Representatives of Great Britain, the Dominions, India, and the Colonies and Protectorates, Held in October and November, 1923: Record of Proceedings and Documents* (London: HMSO, 1924), p. 330.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁸⁷ 'Three Years' Work: Imperial Economic Committee', *The Canberra Times*, 9 May 1928, p. 4. On the activities of the Empire Marketing Board, see Stephen Constantine, 'Bringing the Empire Alive: The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. Mackenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 192-231.

⁸⁸ 'British Ideal: Empire Preference: Success of Imperial Economics Campaign', *Auckland Star*, 17 March 1928, p. 9.

cooperative and pluralistic principles, he believed to have secured important advantages to the Empire in the challenging environment of the post-war world, reconciling the vital need of economic unity with the genuine respect of private initiative, political freedom, and local autonomy. From this point of view, he thought that there was no real contradiction between Britain's imperial structure and the new democratic spirit of the post-war era coming from the United States, because Britain always used its overwhelming power 'in support of the underdog', preserving international peace from the threat of another global conflict: 'If the British Empire did not exist the United States would have to invent it. The United States in the end entered the European War because if Britain had been overthrown it would only have meant some generations...before the New World and the Old World were locked in the most terrific struggle ever known. America is behind the British Empire.'⁸⁹ Thus, so long as the British Empire remained a free 'group of units scattered in every continent', so long it would contribute to the positive development of humanity, acting as an extinguishing 'spray' against the dangerous 'fire' of worldwide economic and political competition.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, this idealistic vision of British imperial power was seriously undermined by the persistence of pre-war racial and cultural attitudes, deeply embedded in Mackinder's personal mindset. In his eyes, tropical dependencies and non-European territories were still on a lower level of civilization than the white self-governing Dominions, remaining completely subject to the 'benevolent' paternalism of the imperial metropolis. Commenting on a violent hurricane devastating British Honduras in 1931, for example, Mackinder offered his 'practical sympathy' to the hundreds of local inhabitants killed by the storm, and he pleaded for direct imperial assistance for the economic reconstruction of the area. However, this appeal was more aimed at the 'businesslike development' of that fertile 'estate' than at the humanitarian rescue of the beleaguered indigenous population, betraying a crude attitude of 'efficiency' not dissimilar from that displayed on the slopes of Mount Kenya thirty-two years earlier.⁹¹ Indeed, the memories of that fateful expedition in East Africa remained extremely vivid in the old geographer's mind, transporting him again under the bright tropical sky, leading a large group of 'stark naked' natives amid 'suspicious and dangerous' tribes, on the model of Livingstone, Stanley, and the other great explorers

⁸⁹ 'Britain's World Position: America Backing the Empire: Sir Halford Mackinder's Review', *The Glasgow Herald*, 24 July 1934, p. 11.

⁹⁰ 'The Empire as a Fire Extinguisher: Sir H. Mackinder on the Marketing Board', *The Times*, 25 October 1930, p. 7.

⁹¹ H.J. Mackinder, 'Hurricane in British Honduras', *The Times*, 15 September 1931, p. 8.

of the late nineteenth century.⁹² During a discussion at the RGS in honour of the late Duke of the Abruzzi, one of the most respected members of that 'heroic age of African travel', Mackinder publicly exalted that bygone phase of his life, describing the lands and peoples below the Sahara Desert in very romantic and stereotypical terms:

The map of the world was then like a rose-bud just spreading into full bloom; in the newly seen hollow of each petal there still hung an aroma of mystery. Mystery and not ignorance is the right term to apply, especially to the African petal. The old tag was that there is always something new coming out of Africa, but would it not be equally true that there has been nothing really new out of that land of rumour? Were not the Greeks aware of the Pygmies, and did not Aristotle write of the Mountain of Silver at the source of the Nile? It was inevitably so of a continent where every chieftain who comes into *shauri* [council] with you is ready to illustrate his argument by drawing a map on the ground with his stick; he has a far better topographical sense than had most of the schoolmasters of my youth.⁹³

No wonder then that he was unable to understand the new nationalist and democratic movements spreading up across the 'Dark Continent' after the Great War, ignoring or neglecting them in his official activities as Chairman of the Imperial Committees. Burdened by deep-grained prejudices, his vision of black peoples was still that of the early years of the twentieth century, perceiving them as mere passive 'subjects' of white colonial rule. He did not understand that the world of his youth – made of racial patriotism and cultural romanticism – was gone forever, replaced by very different political circumstances and popular ideals.

From this point of view, Mackinder's transition to the new intellectual environment of the post-war era remained substantially incomplete, partially hampering the positive achievements of his public career during the 1920s. Indeed, by the time of his death in 1947 the system of imperial cooperation which he had so carefully promoted in the previous decades was quickly disintegrating, overwhelmed by the general movement toward national self-determination generated by the two World Wars. The Imperial Shipping Committee, for example, was 'a pale reflection' of its pre-1939 predecessor, focusing only on Canadian affairs and ceasing all its major operations after 1955. According to Kevin Burley, this was a clear testament to 'Mackinder's tireless energy' and 'visionary dedication', which had kept the Committee at the forefront of Commonwealth activities for almost twenty years, producing 'thirty-nine unanimous published reports' on 'seventy-

⁹² Halford Mackinder, 'Mount Kenya in 1899', *The Geographical Journal*, 76 (1930), p. 530.

⁹³ Giotto Dainelli, 'The Geographical Work of H.R.H. The Late Duke of the Abruzzi: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 82 (1933), pp. 11. Emphasis in the original text.

seven requests or complaints' investigated. With the departure of such a charismatic figure on the eve of World War II, the general decline of the organisation was probably inevitable, accelerated even by the deep crisis of the international shipping scene in the late 1950s.⁹⁴ However, the eclipse of the Imperial Shipping Committee after 1945 could also be seen as the definitive failure of Mackinder's imperial ideals, matured during the late Victorian era and then successfully adapted to the new challenging environment of the interwar years: the world was simply no more fit for great imperial structures like that of the British Empire, consigning them to the complex proceedings and dynamic interpretations of historical analysis.

⁹⁴ Burley, 'Imperial Shipping Committee', pp. 212-3.

Conclusion

The Many Faces of an Edwardian Intellectual

After Mackinder's death in March 1947, the intellectual and political world in which he had lived for more than sixty years gradually disappeared, overthrown by the great shock waves of World War II. Some months later, in fact, India became an independent republic, ending *de facto* the long Anglo-Russian rivalry for the control of Central Asia at the core of the Pivot Paper of 1904, while Ireland also followed the same path in 1948, breaking the last vestiges of that Union fiercely defended by the Unionist party during the Edwardian era. Thus, in no more than a year since his death, two of the great causes championed by Mackinder in the early twentieth century had definitely waned, with others destined to experience the same fate in the near future. British geography, for example, knew a massive 'quantitative revolution' in the 1960s, rejecting the deterministic and organic approaches of the previous half-century in favour of a more systematic analysis of regional landscapes based on mathematical models.¹ And today, after the cultural turn of the liberal arts in the 1990s, it certainly appears quite different from that great disciplinary 'bridge' between humanities and natural sciences dreamed by Mackinder in his first geographical addresses of the late 1880s, displaying instead a strong specialized focus over complex human and environmental issues.²

Therefore Mackinder seems to have left a very marginal legacy to our current world, suffering a partial oblivion even in his own disciplinary field, where his name is rarely mentioned in contemporary academic studies. Ironically, it is only the imaginative vision of the Heartland that has saved him from complete public obscurity, provoking the lavish praise of military strategists and political analysts all over the globe. According to Francis Sempa, for example, US foreign policy in the twenty-first century 'will continue to be shaped' by this great geopolitical idea, opposing any 'specific power constellation' emerging from the Heartland area, while Russian nationalist intellectuals consider instead Mackinder as the chief inspirer of their projects of a united Eurasian bloc opposed to the hegemonic

¹ On the rise of 'quantitative geography' in Britain, see S. Gregory, 'Quantitative geography: the British Experience and the Role of the Institute', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 8 (1983), pp. 80-9.

² On the complexity of contemporary geography, see for example Nigel Clark, Doreen Massey, and Philip Sarre (eds.), *Material Geographies: A World in the Making* (London: Sage Publications, 2008).

ambitions of the American superpower.³ These claims are often exaggerated and they reflect more the independent intellectual elaboration of their authors than the real contours of Mackinder's strategic views. As recently observed by James Sidaway, in fact, the translation and adaptation of the original Pivot Paper in such different places like Brazil, Turkey, Portugal, and Japan shows the remarkable 'malleability' of its main geo-historical concepts to the ever-changing reality of international relations, overwriting the 'contextual knowledge' related to its own genesis.⁴ And even critical scholars like Kearns and O Tuathail are not immune from this trend, reducing the Heartland theory to a simple intellectual blueprint for imperialism and using it as a key polemical target for the promotion of their own progressive geopolitical ideals.⁵ Needless to say, the final result of such a gross simplification is to present again Mackinder as a 'cardboard figure' without personal and historical depth, ready to be exploited for the benefit of different political interests and ideological perspectives.

On the contrary, this dissertation has tried to emphasise the relative complexity and flexibility of Mackinder's geopolitical views, rejecting both the 'imperialist' and 'strategic' stereotype in favour of a more realistic appreciation of his lifetime experience. At the same time it has exposed the amazing richness of a unique public career developed along forty years of tumultuous British and international history, constantly reshaped by the need to remain connected with the broader political and cultural transformations of the time. As a sort of 'chameleon', in fact, Mackinder tried always to find a solid niche in the fluid 'marketplace of ideas' of the Edwardian era, moving across different political and intellectual positions in the hope of keeping up with the most popular trends of early twentieth century British society. He never remained confined into a static role, adapting his own convictions to the ever-changing circumstances of the moment. Of course, this makes the reconstruction and analysis of his life extremely difficult, compelling the hapless biographer to look at the entire picture of his subject's career in order to appreciate correctly its historical value. Indeed, it is impossible to assess Mackinder's legacy without

³ Francis Sempa, *Geopolitics: From the Cold War to the 21st Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p. 21. On the influence of Mackinder on modern Russian geopolitics, see Mark Bassin and Konstantin E. Aksenov, 'Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse', *Geopolitics*, 11 (2006), pp. 99-118.

⁴ James D. Sidaway, 'Overwriting Geography: Mackinder's Presences, a Dialogue with David Hooson', *Geopolitics*, 14 (2009), pp. 163-5.

⁵ Kearns' last biography of Mackinder, for example, is much more interesting for its final sketch of a new cooperative geopolitics based on democratic ideas rather than for its main historical analysis, which often overstates the imperialist dimension of the character's life. On this point, see also Nick Megoran, 'Forging Space, Forcing Space: Mackinder in Tashkent, London, and Washington', *Geopolitics*, 16 (2011), p. 737.

looking seriously at the dynamic interaction between his intellectual personality and the surrounding historical context, which gives us back the image of a man totally involved in the conflicting passions of his own time.

This is clearly visible, for example, in the long economic debate that absorbed his public attention for more than two decades. A genuine late Victorian Liberal, in fact, Mackinder rejected his faith in free trade for tariff reform after Chamberlain's 'call to arms' of 1903, devoting a large amount of his intellectual energies to the promotion of a new fiscal policy in support of imperial unity, but by the time of the Great War his protectionist commitment seemed less clear and defined than before, betraying instead a partial re-evaluation of unrestrained financial capitalism for the survival of Britain during the conflict. And this new attitude was also pushed against official imperialist campaigns like that about the disposal of German properties in West Africa, defending the right to sell those crucial estates to neutral countries according to the peacetime rationale of a market economy: 'What we shall be face to face with at the end of this War will be to repair our man-power...and in order to do that...what we shall require will be [foreign] capital...Are you going to say you deny that, when the result will be to give the very employment which is essential to the future of this country?'⁶ These tones were quite different from those expressed ten years earlier in *Money-Power and Man-Power*, where 'a great and efficient population' was only to be retained through the restrictive instruments of 'Preference' and 'Retaliation', retrenching Britain into the 'broader base' of its overseas Empire.⁷ And they certainly testified a certain degree of scepticism and delusion accumulated by Mackinder toward the imperial ideologies of his own generation, unable to change the basic structure of Britain's economy and to spare the country from the tragic catastrophe of the World War.

Of course, this did not mean that he came back to free trade after the end of international hostilities in 1918: his negative judgment of *laissez-faire* principles remained in fact virtually unchanged in the early post-war years, while the idea of imperial preference appeared still as a valuable solution to the gradual decline of British economic power across the world. However, tariff reform continued to prove unpalatable to the British electorate and Mackinder decided then to abandon his previous fiscal faith for another constructive approach toward trade issues, expressed mainly in the specialized activities of the Imperial Shipping Committee. Indeed, cooperation and equanimity were now the key elements of his work, reconciling the divergent interests of the overseas colonies and supporting the

⁶ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXVII, 1916, col. 283.

⁷ Mackinder, *Money-Power*, pp. 14-5.

creation of extended airlines as a viable solution to the traditional problems of inter-imperial communications. At the same time Mackinder also recognized the importance of a balanced relationship between the Empire and the rest of the world, stressing the interdependent nature of global trade and rejecting as unrealistic any idea of British retrenchment into a self-sufficient imperial system: 'The Empire, as a unity, does a trade with the rest of the world, which is between two and three times as great as the domestic trade between the different parts of the Empire. That is a fact that we have to reckon with.'⁸ Given the impossibility of a protectionist solution, it was then necessary to reorganize the Empire on cooperative bases, making equal bargains with the rest of the world. Thus it is possible to conclude that Mackinder's economic outlook knew a significant evolution throughout time, reaching a more moderate stance in the second half of the 1920s.

A similar development was also visible on such a sensitive issue like Ireland, where Mackinder had shown a remarkable degree of intransigence in the years before 1914. Indeed, while other imperialists like Garvin or Amery supported federalism as a viable alternative to Home Rule, he opposed instead any form of administrative devolution to Irish authorities, defending the main tenets of the old Union with uncommon pugnacity. This harsh standpoint was partially the product of strong anti-Catholic prejudices, rooted in the main cultural trends of Victorian England, but it also reflected Mackinder's geopolitical concern for the security of the British Isles, vulnerable to the naval power of continental nations like France and Germany, ready to exploit the 'weakness' of a semi-autonomous Ireland to threaten the core of the British imperial system.⁹ After the Easter Rising of 1916, however, Mackinder began to acknowledge the need of some change to the old structure of Anglo-Irish relations after the end of the World War, recognizing the growing importance of national self-determination in modern international relations. In this sense, he was clearly influenced by his work with the New Europe in favour of the subject nationalities of the Habsburg Empire, and he supported a balanced reorganization of the United Kingdom along federal lines, suggesting even a regional scheme of devolution similar to those previously adopted in Canada and Australia.

Nevertheless, his public proposals were still flawed by serious personal doubts about the feasibility of a new federal Britain, fearing the disruptive effects of local nationalism on the

⁸ Mackinder, 'Recent Economic Developments', p. 260.

⁹ On Victorian anti-Catholicism, see E.R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968) and D.G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

centre of the British imperial structure: 'For international purposes we are a unit, and surely it is the full determination...of our citizens that we shall remain a unit when acting with other countries...Our object is...not to reverse the swing of history and go back to the condition of things when we had separate states...in Scotland and England...and separate nationalities in Wales and Ireland...We want greater union and not less union as the result of our devolution.'¹⁰ Needless to say, the situation had so much changed from the pre-war era that similar half-hearted solutions were no more applicable to the Irish question, and the final establishment of the Irish Free State as a self-governing Dominion in 1921 solved the issue in a very different way from that fancied by Mackinder, marking a serious defeat for his geopolitical ideas. But he accepted the new state of affairs as a 'great experiment' in modern history, showing that the present political generation had understood better the lessons of 'statesmanship' than that responsible for the loss of the American colonies in the eighteenth century and providing lasting 'moral strength' to the internal structure of the British Empire.¹¹ This was no easy admission, considering the violent passions aroused by the Home Rule crisis in the antebellum years, and it had also negative consequences for Mackinder's political career, contributing to his final ejection from the Camlachie seat in November 1922.¹² Certainly, it stresses again the extreme adaptability of Mackinder's intellect to the changing circumstances of the time, infringing the conventional view of an immutable character dominated by permanent imperialist or strategic beliefs.

Therefore the two examples of economic policy and Ireland show us a different picture of Mackinder from that offered by his modern biographers, underlining the complexity and flexibility of his political views throughout the Edwardian era. This personal dynamism was not an exceptional characteristic at the time: indeed, other contemporary figures knew similar intellectual variations in those years, modifying their original ideals according to the unrelenting pressure of external events. The case of Alfred Mond, Mackinder's old parliamentary nemesis in 1910, is a perfect example of this ideological instability: initially a staunch Liberal free trader, constantly fulminating tariff reformers for their 'ridiculous' proposals, he began to change his mind during the Great War, acknowledging the inadequacy of the old Victorian economic creed toward the new international context generated by the conflict. A right-wing critic of the Asquith coalition government, he supported then the adoption of monopolistic policies in colonial dependencies, attacking

¹⁰ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, CXVI, 1919, col. 1926.

¹¹ 'Unionist Conference: Irish Treaty Debate: A Great Experiment', *The Glasgow Herald*, 20 January 1922, p. 10.

¹² Blouet, *Mackinder*, p. 157.

even Mackinder for his 'unpatriotic' attitude on the issue of German properties in West Africa.¹³ At the end of European hostilities in 1918, his new protectionist attitude became even stronger, contesting the return to *laissez-faire* promoted by the Treasury and joining the ranks of the Conservative Party in 1926.¹⁴ As a prominent industrial leader, he also tried to negotiate with Labour a strong producers' alliance against the invasive 'money-power' of the City, but he failed due to the orthodox economic internationalism of the Left.¹⁵ Thus, while Mackinder partially replaced his protectionist faith with cooperative ideals in the interwar years, Mond moved instead in the opposite direction, passing from traditional Liberalism to economic nationalism at the same time. By the end of the 1920s both men were again pursuing different solutions to the problems of Britain's economy, but in almost reversed roles, representing ironically the twists of British political life in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As noticed by Jonathan Rose, this 'volatility' of the Edwardian generation was the product of a complex set of circumstances, including the dramatic decline of those stern religious values which had contributed to the imperial expansion of Britain during the Victorian era.¹⁶ Faced by the crisis of their traditional society, disrupted by complex cultural trends and threatened by new international rivals, British intellectuals tried then to elaborate an organic vision of their country which could reunite different classes and individuals into a more efficient national synthesis, capable to resist the increased economic and political competition of the early twentieth century.¹⁷ And this was also the main ideal pursued by Mackinder in the first phase of his public career, dominated by the parallel concerns of educational reform and imperial consolidation: indeed, his brilliant mind conceived geography as the best replacement for the classics tradition in British universities, satisfying 'at once' the different requirements of statesmen, merchants, scientists, and school teachers.¹⁸ At the same time geography provided to the British people that vital 'power of thinking in space' necessary to defend the Empire in the 'closed-space' international system of the new century, promoting the creation of a solid and effective union between Britain and the Dominions capable to resist successfully the pressure of large continental rivals like Russia and the United States.

¹³ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, LXXXVII, 1916, cols. 287-8.

¹⁴ Boyce, *British Capitalism*, pp. 45-9, 112-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-8.

¹⁶ Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 1-39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-66. On this broader intellectual phenomenon, see also Semmel, *Imperialism*, pp. 1-17.

¹⁸ Mackinder, 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography', p. 159.

This reinvigorating union should also be pursued in the economic field, rejecting the previous orthodoxy of free trade and building up a protected space valorising the immense resources of the British nation, located now outside the imperial metropolis of the United Kingdom: 'Free Trade is the policy of the strong...Competition and the scale of production is no longer in our favour, and the aim is to build for the future by adding to the productive basis of our power. The broad acres necessary are to be found in our great Colonies.'¹⁹ However, Mackinder's ambitious schemes were destined to be quickly thwarted by the extraordinary resilience of traditional political attitudes, hostile to any sort of drastic change in British imperial organisation, while even geography advanced with extreme difficulty in schools and universities, suffering the persistent indifference of educational authorities. Thus, apart for the sustained expansion of the LSE in the early years of his Directorship, all the main public initiatives pursued by Mackinder during the antebellum era failed to impress a relevant mark on the Edwardian political and intellectual scene, confining him into a relatively marginal position.

This fact should not be overemphasized, portraying Mackinder as a complete 'failure', because he was still able to enter into Parliament during the troubled general elections of 1910, defending valiantly his economic and imperial projects in the House of Commons for more than a decade. At the same time his academic career remained quite successful, shaping an entire generation of new British geographers through the brilliant display of his great educational talent. In this sense, Hilda Ormsby paid a genuine tribute to her former master in March 1947, describing him to the press as an outstanding 'great teacher' able to influence thousands of 'eager and impatient students' through the powerful tone of 'his sonorous voice.'²⁰ Finally, Mackinder also frequented regularly the social and political elite of his time, establishing close friendships or temporary partnerships with people like Milner, Curzon, Selborne, Haldane, and many others. And this was certainly not an easy task for a man devoid of aristocratic titles and family fortunes, continuously struggling to gain his living as a professional academic.

However, all these positive achievements cannot hide the fact that by 1914 this respected Oxford geographer had seen all his main political ideas dismissed or rejected by the British electorate, including his fierce defence of England's 'rooted provincialism' against the collectivist trends of the new century. In part, this was the result of circumstances outside of his control: the great national efficiency movement dreamed by

¹⁹ *Hansard*, 5th s., Commons, XXI, 1911, cols. 324-5.

²⁰ 'Sir Halford Mackinder', *The Times*, 17 March 1947, p. 7.

the Coefficients never materialized in British society, hampered both by class conflicts and political animosities, while Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign failed to grasp the complexity of modern economic relationships, expressing only a genuine but erratic form of 'imperial patriotism' generated by the bitter experience of the South African conflict. Of course, this was not enough to shake the traditional British attachment to free trade, and it only served to jeopardize the Tories around the tricky issue of 'food taxes', paving the way to the sweeping Liberal electoral success of 1906. Indeed, tariff reformers seemed even unable to present persuasively their case to the 'critical mass' of the Unionist party, suffering continuously the opposite propaganda of free traders and confirming implicitly the idea that British self-interest was always stronger than any passionate plea for imperial unity.²¹ Needless to say, Mackinder was among the main victims of this failed 'imperial strategy', remaining excluded from Parliament for several years after his conversion to tariff reform and sacrificing a lot of his intellectual energies in favour of a hopeless fiscal case. And, to add insult to injury, he had also to cope with the gradual eclipse of the tariff question from the political debate in the last years of the antebellum era, submerged by broader concerns over the House of Lords, Anglo-German naval relations, and Irish Home Rule. In that occasion, he was quite able to adapt to the new situation, shifting mainly his intellectual focus to the Irish problem, but the final impression is that of a man partially estranged from the political reality of the moment, responding simply to the pressing initiatives of his political opponents. His genuine constructive talent, exercised with brilliant results at Oxford and other academic institutions, was less successfully transferred to the Edwardian political scene, and he was never able to change this unpleasant state of things, losing definitely any parliamentary position after the general election of 1922.

On the other hand, Mackinder's public misfortune was also the product of his own personal weaknesses, including an excessive intellectual eclecticism which seriously limited the appeal of his political or educational proposals. W.H. Parker may be exaggerating when he presents Mackinder as 'a first-class brain' with the full 'power to visualize the unfolding of historical processes within their geographical constraints', but there is no doubt that the kind of great geopolitical pictures displayed in the Pivot Paper were absolutely incomprehensible for many politicians and electors of the time, concerned mainly about narrow practical issues.²² At the same time his public speeches were often long, dull, and tiresome, leaving the impression in the audience to have assisted more to cryptic academic

²¹ Thompson, 'Tariff Reform', pp. 1053-4.

²² Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 57.

lectures than popular political statements. In Parliament, this characteristic – expressed sometimes with a certain degree of arrogance – provoked the scorn and ridicule of Liberal MPs, who had often an easy way in demolishing or frustrating his arguments during ordinary debates. Thus, in all the major phases of his political career, Mackinder proved unable to exercise his brainy talents in an effective way, suffering a constant lack of pragmatic realism which could have been extremely useful in the pursuit of his larger geopolitical ideals.

On the contrary, he remained stuck in an abstract and imaginary vision of reality, dominated by strong beliefs of historical destiny, which seriously limited the impact of his work on the political establishment of the Edwardian era, betraying even the ‘unscientific’ note of his educational proposals. Indeed, as noticed by Gearoid O Tuathail, his ‘New Geography’ was mainly ‘holistic’, designed to counter modern ‘academic specialization’ and to produce acculturated ‘generalists’ in support of British imperial interests around the globe.²³ Apart from the desire to experiment new theoretical ways, reshaping the subject along the most updated lines coming from continental Europe, there was then no clear scientific goal behind this ambitious pedagogical scheme, which remained a direct expression of that kind of ‘cultural organicism’ developed by the Edwardian intelligentsia in the early years of the twentieth century. Mackinder’s great ability, however, was to understand the serious need of innovation claimed by the British geographical world in the late nineteenth century and to develop from there a brilliant campaign of educational reform that contributed to the final establishment of geography as an independent academic subject in the interwar years. Of course, he was not solely responsible for such a remarkable achievement, receiving the crucial assistance of Michael Sadler and the RGS, but there is no doubt that it was Mackinder’s outstanding talent as a teacher and school administrator that allowed the final emergence of geography in Britain as an autonomous field of enquiry, free from the interfering patronage of other academic subjects. Ironically, this excellent organizational ability was unable to migrate successfully in the political sphere, relegating the Oxford don to the marginal role of ‘geopolitical prophet’, rediscovered only by ‘enlightened’ American strategists during the early phases of the Cold War.

However, this role had ended up reducing Mackinder’s figure to the classical stereotype of the ‘strategic genius’ ignored by his contemporaries, neglecting the second dynamic

²³ O Tuathail, ‘Mackinder’, p. 114.

phase of his life after the outbreak of First World War in 1914. Indeed, that great international tragedy partially shook his previous convictions, compelling him to readjust his political position to the new circumstances generated by the conflict. Even if fostered by concerns about imperial security in the East, for example, his cooperation with the New Europe in favour of the Slavic nationalities of the Habsburg Empire was substantially genuine and it betrayed a consistent intellectual re-evaluation of small nations, seen as a moral and strategic bulwark against the hegemonic pretensions of great continental empires. At the same time Mackinder also sympathized with France and Italy, moving away from his previous exclusivist focus on the 'imperial family' and hoping instead to create a united Western European bloc at the end of the war. This was the real meaning of his activity with the Allied Parliaments, which represented an interesting anticipation of the pan-European movement of the late 1920s.²⁴

By that time, however, Mackinder had come back to his original imperial concerns, deluded by the lukewarm reception of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* and burned out by the dramatic failure of his diplomatic mission to South Russia in January 1920. The Russian adventure was especially humiliating for him, despite being the inevitable product of the contradictory policy of the Lloyd George government toward the Bolshevik regime, and it revealed again his excessive reliance upon ambitious geopolitical visions with few solid bases in reality. Indeed, his daring plan of a broad coalition between all the anti-Bolshevik forces of Eastern Europe was generally dismissed not only by Whitehall, but also by respected naval officers like Sir John de Robeck, who pointed out that such great diplomatic projects were practically impossible under present military conditions, requiring a permanent and unpopular intervention of the Western Allies in Soviet Russia. Needless to say, this blunt rejection of his visionary schemes for Eastern Europe marked the breaking point of Mackinder's political career, leading to the final loss of the Camlachie seat in November 1922. Indeed, thanks to his stiff anti-Bolshevik posture, the Oxford geographer had managed to alienate a considerable part of the working-class electorate of the Clydeside, while his gloomy predictions on the commercial future of Glasgow certainly did not please the proud businessmen of the same area.²⁵ In the end, he carried the main responsibility for his own parliamentary demise.

²⁴ On the genesis and development of the pan-European movement, see Carl H. Pegg, *Evolution of the European Idea, 1914-1932* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

²⁵ Halford Mackinder, 'L'Envoi', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 37 (1921), pp. 77-9.

After 1922, however, Mackinder seemed finally to have learned his lesson, putting aside great geopolitical visions for the day-to-day work of the Imperial Shipping Committee, focused on practical issues of freight rates and harbour facilities across the British Empire. Indeed, this choice proved quite fruitful, reconciling divergent international interests along basic principles of common sense and providing a vital space to those remarkable organizational talents displayed by the old geographer in his previous university career. Directing the Committee until the late 1930s, Mackinder was generally able to draft unanimous reports on behalf of the main members of the 'imperial family', while his persuasive skills gained the open admiration of several Dominions' statesmen, contributing to the general *rapprochement* between Britain and its self-governing colonies after the difficult times of the early post-war era. Moreover, he championed now a quiet, cooperative approach to the problems of inter-imperial relations, partially rejecting the stern and pugnacious tones of his previous militancy in the tariff reform movement. Visiting Canada in 1924, for example, he restrained himself from any polemical or compromising comment on the proceedings of his foreign mission, maintaining instead a cautious and balanced 'judicial position' deemed necessary for an imperial advisory board without political or legal constraining powers.²⁶

Of course, this diplomatic style was very different from the rough interventions of Mackinder at Westminster during the antebellum years, and it showed a certain 'political maturity' of the character, finally able to promote his ideas in an elaborate and persuasive way. Thanks to these renewed public skills, he also got another prestigious position as chairman of the Imperial Economic Committee in 1925, discussing the best ways to support imperial trade outside the narrow issue of tariff policy. But the Committee was less successful than the other inter-imperial working groups of the time, due to the chairman's financial difficulties and to the gradual decline of global trade in the second half of the 1920s. Nevertheless, Mackinder led it along the same cooperative lines used for the shipping board, producing several reports on the condition of food trade across the Empire and suggesting the adoption of a more efficient system of marketing for imperial products. This suggestion was positively received by the British government, who used it to create a new Empire Marketing Board in support of inter-imperial trade, but the adverse economic climate did not allow the further implementation of such constructive proposals, putting serious limits to the Committee's political effectiveness. Mackinder, however, could still look with pride at the achievements of his chairmanship on the eve of the Great

²⁶ H.J. Mackinder, 'Canadian Ports and Insurance', *The Times*, 18 August 1924, p. 18.

Depression, underlining the importance of 'orderly marketing' for the future of British imperial commerce: 'We recognize that the conditions of the United Kingdom market, where the irregular arrival of supplies leads to fluctuations in prices, have justified special steps on the part of Overseas producers to safeguard their interests...The remedy is the regularization of supply, and...the stimulation of demand. Organized bodies, with the object of regulating quantity and improving quality, have now come into existence.'²⁷ He resigned from the board in 1931.

Therefore, drawing up a conclusion from this final analysis of Mackinder's life, it is possible to remark that his current geopolitical fame obscures a considerable part of his historical activity, reducing him to opposed mono-dimensional images of 'strategic visionary' and 'imperial propagandist.' In reality, he tended to elude both stereotypes, betraying a flexible, eclectic, and dynamic mindset in perfect line with the tumultuous cultural climate of the Edwardian era. At the same time geopolitics occupied only a relative part of his public activity, relating openly to the ideas of other thinkers and limiting sometimes the full display of his intellectual qualities. Indeed, obsessed by great imaginary pictures relating to the Heartland or to the Empire, Mackinder often forgot the basic reality of his time, supporting unpopular causes like tariff reform or claiming political measures which were clearly inapplicable in the broader international context of those years, as well exemplified by his 'fantastic' anti-Bolshevik scheme of 1920. Ironically, it was only the partial resurrection of his pragmatic abilities in the interwar years that saved him from complete political bankruptcy, exercising at last a moderate and constructive influence over imperial affairs. Anyway, other factors played against his public success, generating wider waves which continue to bleak our understanding of the character today. His romantic temperament, for example, pushed him to defend traditional gender roles against women's suffrage or to reject any possible accommodation on the Irish question, drawing him close to the desperate intransigence of Maxse and Page Croft before 1914. Moreover, his crude racial attitudes, dramatically expressed during the Mount Kenya expedition of 1899, prevented him from understanding the growing importance of anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa after the Great War, maintaining a paternalistic and exploitative vision of Britain's tropical dependencies during the entire 1920s. It is then easy to understand the growing indifference or hostility toward his figure in modern academia, explicitly stated in the works of Gerry Kearns and Gearoid O Tuathail, who have constantly criticized the

²⁷ Mackinder, 'Recent Economic Developments', p. 261.

character in their scholarly analyses, depicting him mainly as a staunch supporter of aggressive racist and imperialist ideologies.

However, this dissertation has shown that such a negative evaluation of Mackinder's life is quite reductive, because it ignores other key aspects of his intellectual biography, including some small but significant reflections on the development of democracy and international relations in the long twentieth century. Mackinder's constant concern for local communities, for example, militated strongly against the authoritarian and centralizing tendencies of his time, supporting instead those federalist and devolutionary principles which are still at the core of present European political debates. In this sense, his distrust of 'organizers' in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* cannot be simply dismissed as a dated product of anti-Bolshevik propaganda, but it represents instead a perceptive warning on the inner fragility of modern democratic systems, threatened by the double danger of technocratic rule and social polarization. At the same time, despite its various limitations, the Pivot Paper is still a good strategic picture of the Eurasian landmass, underlining the importance of peculiar geographical factors for the development of a safe international environment in the complex territory extending from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Recently, it has also been used effectively by modern historians to reconstruct the rise and fall of modern empires in the Eastern Hemisphere, connecting physical and human elements into fascinating syntheses of the past.

Of course, all these aspects of Mackinder's intellectual reflection are often inconsistent or contradictory, and they need to be firmly discussed and understood through the comprehensive prism of historical analysis, avoiding any sort of uncritical appreciation of the subject. As an intellectual of the Edwardian era, Mackinder certainly did not escape from the restraining influences of his social and cultural upbringing, following a tangled and ever-changing set of beliefs throughout his entire public career. But, from this point of view, he was no different from other prominent figures of the time, including progressive thinkers like Alfred Zimmern and J.A. Hobson, who often showed the same practical and theoretical contradictions in front of the huge political dilemmas of the early twentieth century. In 1914, for example, Zimmern partially rejected his early radical beliefs to join the imperialist crusade of the Round Table group, perceiving the British Empire as a powerful 'moral force' in international relations, and he moved away from this position only in the

mid-1920s, becoming a respected internationalist member of the Labour Party.²⁸ At the same time Hobson abandoned his original anti-imperialist tones during the late Edwardian era, accepting the unpleasant reality of European imperial expansion in the tropical world as an inevitable 'stage' in the development of a healthy and prosperous global economic system.²⁹ It was only the unprecedented catastrophe of the Great War, followed by the dramatic political eclipse of British Liberalism, which pushed him back to his previous critical reflection, supporting the gradual political emancipation of all colonial territories in Africa and Asia.³⁰

Thus, far from being an exceptional 'hero' or 'villain', according to the different perspectives of modern geopolitical scholars, Mackinder embodied all the main flaws and virtues of a dynamic British generation, facing an unprecedented era of violent international conflicts and struggling to redefine its old political ideals in a new unstable global environment. In discussing the permanent legacy of the Pivot Paper and its creator, we should then avoid easy ideological generalizations, looking instead for the complex historical reality behind Mackinder's geopolitical vision. This is probably the best way to go beyond the popular stereotypes invented by Cold War strategists, providing even some useful guidelines for the analysis of our current globalized world, not so different from that sketched by the Oxford geographer in his main writings of one hundred years ago.

²⁸ D.J. Markwell, 'Sir Alfred Zimmern Revisited: Fifty Years On', *Review of International Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 279-92; Paul Rich, 'Reinventing Peace: David Davies, Alfred Zimmern and Liberal Internationalism in Interwar Britain', *International Relations*, 16 (2002), pp. 117-33.

²⁹ P.J. Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism: Radicalism, New Liberalism, and Finance, 1887-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 165-99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-19. For an interesting comparison between Hobson and Zimmern, see G.K. Peatling, 'Globalism, Hegemonism and British Power: J.A. Hobson and Alfred Zimmern Reconsidered', *History*, 89 (2004), pp. 381-98.

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