1920

Harmsworth had an operation on 17 January and spent several weeks recuperating.

5 March

To see Harold (Rothermere) at Savoy Court. He tells me that Lloyd-George is gravely uneasy about the way the bye-elections are going and is angling for his support in the Press. Broad hints have been thrown out by a trusted emissary of Ll.-G.'s that Harold can have the Colonial Secretaryship if he likes. He is to see Ll.-G. on Monday.

Afterwards to the F.O. where my unwelcome task is to inform O'Grady that he is not to return to Copenhagen to resume negociations with Litvinoff. Lord Curzon is persuaded that Litvinoff has enmeshed O'Grady and that there is serious danger in a continuance of their relations. O'Grady accepts the decision loyally and more cheerfully than I expected.

25 March

Lunch in honour of Auckland Geddes at 10 Downing Street. Ll.-G. in high spirits. He confirms the truth of a story about himself and Charles Masterman that I have heard before. Charles M. is a high Church Liberal of a somewhat oleaginous type. In the midst of one of Ll.-G.'s tearing and raging Radical campaigns the two met in one of the Lobbies of the House:

'Hallo, demagogue!' says Masterman.

'Hallo, acolyte!' retorts Ll.-G. He tells the story with great delight today.

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3rd Reading Consolidated Fund Bill today. Full dress debate on Foreign Affairs led off by Mr. Asquith followed by Clynes[1] and Ll.-G. I wind up on the debate about 9 o'clock.

31 March

Second Reading of Home Rule Bill. Fine dramatic speech by Carson in which he promises that Ulster will do her best to make her Parliament a success.

13 April

Harmsworth was staying with his children at the Haven Hotel, Sandbanks, Poole.

A message from the F.O. saying that Bonar Law (who is acting as Prime Minister in Ll.-G.'s absence at San Remo for, let us hope, the concluding stages of the Turkish etc. Peace Treaties) expects me to introduce the Austrian and Bulgarian Peace Treaties Bill in the H. of C. tomorrow. As my practice is, when important business relating to foreign affairs is before the House, I have made already considerable preparations and have a pretty full brief with me but I have to spend a good part of the day getting my notes into shape.

14 April

By early train and then straight to the F.O.

In the H. of C. immediately after Questions I move the Second Reading of the Treaties Bill. Mr. Asquith follows and is complimentary.

30 April

Em and I to the Opening of the Royal Academy – the function of the year that above all others we like going to together.

[1]John Robert Clynes (1869–1949): trades unionist and politician; Lab. MP Manchester North-East 1906–1918; Manchester Platting 1918–1931, 1935–1945; Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party 1921–1922.

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It is what you might call an Orpen[2] year, with his fine portraits and Peace Conference pictures. In the latter are life-like portraits of Clemenceau with his famous grey gloves and in one of them a beautiful caricature of Lloyd-George with a great mane of grey hair: Balfour and Bonar Law not so convincing. The scenes depicted are precisely like the one I witnessed at Neuilly.

5 May

Alfred (Northcliffe) comes for me this morning and we drive out to Totteridge. He is better in health than I have seen him for many a day and is full of interesting chat about his recent travels in Spain and Morocco.

11 May

This evening a Coalition Liberal meeting in the Lower Central Hall, Westminster. Rousing speeches by Gordon Hewart,[3] Macnamara, Addison, McCurdy and Kellaway.

31 May

Momentous meeting in the Cabinet room at 10 Downing Street: P.M., Bonar Law, Curzon, Sir Robt. Horne,[4] C.B.H., E.F. Wise,[5] and Krassin[6] and Klishko,[7] two of the Bolshevist emissaries who are to treat

[2]William Newenham Montague Orpen (1878–1931): artist; knighted 1918; later painted CBH's portrait.

[3]Gordon Hewart (1870–1943): called to the Bar 1902; KC 1912; Lib. (then Coalition Lib) MP for Leicester (East Leicester from 1918) 1913–1922; Solicitor General 1916–1919, Attorney General 1919–1922; Lord Chief Justice 1922–1940; knighted 1916; cr. Baron Hewart 1922.

[4]Robert Stevenson Horne (1871–1940): called to the Scottish Bar 1896; KC 1910; wartime civil servant; Con. candidate for Stirlingshire in both general elections of 1910; MP for Hillhead 1918–1937; Minister of Labour 1919 –1920; President of the Board of Trade 1920–1921; Chancellor of the Exchequer 1921–1922; knighted 1918; cr. Viscount Horne 1937.

[5]Edward Frank Wise (1885–1933): civil servant and left-wing intellectual; Lab. candidate for Bradford North 1924; MP for Leicester East 1929–1931.

[6]Leonid Borisovich Krasin (1870–1926): Soviet politician; People's Commissar for Foreign Trade 1920–1924.

[7]Nicolas Klishko (1880–*c.*1937): secretary to the Russian trade delegation to Britain in 1920.

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for the resumption of trade and perhaps for a settlement of all our quarrels with Russia. Krassin states his case clearly in Russian and is interpreted on his own behalf by Klishko and for us by Mr. Peters.

3 June

Conference – virtually a Cabinet Meeting – in Bonar Law's room behind the Speaker's Chair on Krassin. P.M. presides.

16 June

This week I see a good deal of Dr. Nansen[8] who has been charged by the League of Nations with the difficult task of getting Austrian and Hungarian prisoners out of Russia and Russian prisoners out of Germany: one of the big and anxious after-the-war jobs. Shipping is wanted of course and when people need shipping they come to H.M.G. Nansen wants me to use influence with the Ministry of Shipping.

The L. of Nations, if they had ransacked Europe, couldn't have found as good an agent as Nansen. He is still a 'super-man' despite his thin grey hair, and is as wise as he is brave and modest. I notice particularly his fine blue eyes. He has a nearly complete knowledge of English but speaks with a strong foreign accent.

12 August

The House adjourns until Monday. The situation is this:

For a long time past we (that is H.M.G.) have been trying to come to some sort of terms with Bolshevik Russia. Mr. Krassin has been for many weeks in London conferring with the Supreme Economic Council with a view to the resumption of trade relations and latterly he has been joined by Mr. Kameneff[9] who has pretty full powers to treat for peace. These proceedings have been looked at askance by

[8]Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930): Norwegian explorer, scientist and diplomat; League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1921–1930; winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 1922.

[9]Lev Borisovich Kamenev (1883–1936): leading Soviet politician; executed following a show trial.

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the French who are not willing to have anything whatever to do with the Bolsheviks.

Meanwhile, the rash forward movement of the Poles against the Bolsheviks has resulted in disaster and the Red Armies are at this moment advancing on Warsaw. It was agreed at the Anglo-French Conference at Lympne to advise the Poles to make peace with the Bolsheviks on honourable terms but a difference has arisen between us and the French as to what these terms should be. The French have now taken the bit between their teeth and suddenly recognized Genl. Wrangel[10] leader of the last remaining Russian counter-revolutionary force and to accredit *[sic]* a High Commissioner.

The situation is, to say the least, highly strained and it is considered prudent that Parliament should meet again on Monday in the hope that by then we shall have had reassuring news from Minsk where Poles and Russians are meeting to discuss terms.

16 August

House rises soon after dinner. Nothing much new is reported of the Polish situation and the adjournment is agreed to subject to a rider that it may be summoned by Mr. Speaker in consultation with the Govt if necessary.

7 September

Extract from the Morning Post, 7 September, included in diary:

While every effort is being made by the Government to secure a just settlement of the crisis which has arisen in consequence of the miners' demands, steps are being taken to ascertain what will be the position in the country in the event of the threatened strike taking place.

We are informed in this connection that a number of the Civil Commissioners have this week commenced a tour of inspection of various areas for the purpose of reporting to the Government on the situation which would then arise, and as to the measures to be taken to reduce the inevitable loss and suffering to the general community [. . .] Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, is in the Eastern Counties.

[10] Baron Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel (1878–1928): commander of the anti-Bolshevik forces in Southern Russia during the latter stages of the civil war.

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[The Government's Anti-Strike Organization.

The statement in the *Morning Post* [. . .] gives a very colourless impression of a remarkable organization. It was in fact a fully matured plan for safeguarding public interests – in the case of a serious Strike affecting the welfare of the general community, and I have no doubt that it is still in being. It had regard to Strikes relating to essential services – food supplies, transport, fuel, communications and the like.

We Commissioners were not sent down in times of emergency to our several districts to make enquiries only and to report. We went there to take charge of the organization in our districts, to travel about and satisfy ourselves that the system was in working order, and to assume, if need be, far-reaching powers and responsibilities. It was for this reason that junior members of the Govt., responsible to the Govt., were told off to act as Commissioners.

My own district comprised the Counties of Cambridge, Bedford, Huntingdon, Suffolk and Norfolk, with Cambridge as headquarters. I acted twice as Commissioner, both Strikes ending however before I was called upon to exercise any of the plenary functions assigned to me. My Diaries give no account of my more serious activities on these occasions, I being afraid of their falling into the wrong hands.

When Howard-Smith[11] and I arrived at the Bull, Cambridge, on the 7th Septr. there was a message for me asking me to call without delay at a suburban address where I found Brig.-General? *[sic]* sitting in the midst of a veritable spider's web of organization. The walls of his official rooms were covered with great maps of his (and my) district, showing where supplies of food, fuel and other necessaries existed and the services – water-works, gas and electric works, sewage fans, hospitals – that were to have the first call on the available supplies of coal and in the case of hospitals of coal and flour. The Brigadier (who had distinguished himself in the A.S.C. during the War) had files and reports of all kinds relating to the 5 Counties.

It was possible to gather from his maps and records, almost at a glance, what our resources would be in the event of the Strike dislocating the railway services. We had, too, details of the available motor transport in the different areas and I had power to commandeer every motor vehicle in the 5 Counties.

When I travelled round my province my time was very little occupied with sight-seeing (as might be inferred from my Diary) but in Conference with Mayors of Boroughs, Chairmen of Councils and local govt. officials of all kinds. One day I invaded the town hall of Luton, to

[11] Charles Howard-Smith (1888–1942): civil servant; private secretary to CBH 1920–1922; British Minister in Denmark 1939–1940; British Minister in Iceland 1940–1942.

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find the Mayor and excellent Mr. Smith, the Town Clerk, cheerfully prepared, as far as Luton was concerned, for any emergency.

I was a little disappointed when the two Strikes that threatened during my reign as Commissioner ended in smoke. I have never had any other chance of playing the autocrat!

The worst of it was that I could only enjoy these country jaunts 'with a trembling'. My F.O. red boxes were piling up against me all the time.

C.H. 28th Jany, 1934.]

Harmsworth returned to London on 15 September.

22 October

The strike situation serious today. C. Howard-Smith [My F.O. Secy.] and I by road to Cambridge where we are to 'stand by' pending developments.

24 October

A telegram from town saying that we may return.

28 October

Announcement by Sir Robert Horne in the House today that the Strike has been settled subject to a further ballot of the miners.

I have a talk with Ll.-G. in his room behind the Speaker's Chair. I find him with Lady Astor and his pretty daughter Megan – the apple of his eye. He stretches himself luxuriously in a deep armchair after the almost endless fatigues of the Strike negotiations and puffs away at a big cigar. His hair hasn't been cut for weeks and his face is a little pallid but his wonderful eyes are as keen and bright as ever.

When he was expected back from the Spa Conference and I had to go off to the Eastern Counties (early in Septr.) in connection with the threatened Strike of the miners I left a letter for him in which I urged strongly that Terence McSwiney,[12] the Lord Mayor of Cork,

[12]Terence James MacSwiney (1879–1920): Sinn Féin MP Mid-Cork 1918–1920 but did not take his seat; Lord Mayor of Cork and commandant of the Cork brigade of the

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should not be allowed to starve himself to death in Brixton Gaol. I said I felt it my duty as one of his Ministers to let him know that I dissented altogether from the Govt. policy in this case. McSwiney had not been convicted of murder or of incitement to murder and was in fact a political prisoner: I feared the worst results in Ireland if he was permitted to die. Why make the Irish the gift of another 'martyr'? Why not release McSwiney under the so-called 'Cat & Mouse' Act?[13] Well, McSwiney had died and on this very day his body was being taken in procession from Brixton to Euston on its way to Cork. I thought that as a dissentient from an important point of his policy I ought to see the P.M. and place myself unreservedly in his hands.

Ll.-G. listened to my story with sympathy and treated me with every kindness. He had read my letter but had not replied to it because, as I knew, he was a bad hand at writing letters. He had welcomed my representations [and] was always glad to receive the opinions of his Ministers on points of policy. How otherwise was he to know what was in their minds? I had acted quite correctly and he hoped I would always treat him with the same confidence.

I thanked him warmly and withdrew. I had looked forward to the interview with some discomfort and left him in a more cheerful frame of mind than when I broke in on him and drove Lady Astor and Megan from his room.

26 November

The memorial service in Westminster Abbey to six of the officers murdered in Dublin on Sunday last by the Sinn Feiners. The coffins are carried into the Choir one after the other by soldiers or policemen of the various services to which they belonged – the troops marching with slow heavy step and with their reversed arms held behind their backs. It is the most affecting and terrible public ceremony I have ever witnessed.

IRA1920; imprisoned for sedition August 1920 and died as a result of his hunger strike on 25 October.

[13] i.e. the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913, which had been used to free suffragettes who were on hunger strike until such time as they recovered physically.

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29 November

The rumours that the Sinn Feiners are transferring their attentions to England and have criminal designs on the Houses of Parliament result in the closing of both Houses to visitors. We have policemen in uniform and plain clothes everywhere and visitors can get no nearer to us than St. Stephen's Hall.

Again, all the approaches to Downing Street are barricaded.

News in the papers this morning that the Sinn Feiners have set fire to 15 warehouses in Liverpool.

Strange that these things should be going on at a time when the Lords are discussing the most generous measure of Home Rule ever presented to Parliament!

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