It was in 1943/44, with the prospect that the war in Europe might come to a successful conclusion in the not-too-distant future, that opinion-formers in Britain turned their minds to the problem of peacemaking. Inevitably, what was uppermost in their minds was the Treaty of Versailles and the foreign policy subsequently pursued by British governments in the 1930s. It became a commonplace that there were ‘lessons to be learned’ from such reflection but not altogether evident what precisely these were. A consensus developed among many writers, perhaps not surprisingly, that peacemaking was undoubtedly a very difficult business. Hence the need, it was felt, to start writing about the issues involved as early as was realistically possible so that, as far as possible, the ‘mistakes’ of 1919 would not be repeated. As the historians David Thomson, E. Meyer and Asa Briggs put it in their volume on patterns of peacemaking, begun in 1943, ‘the last peace and this will be distinctive in their assumption that public opinion should play its part in the framing of the settlement’.¹ So far as the aftermath of war was concerned, there was little reason to expect that the mood would be substantially different. The proportion of the population affected by the strain of war might even be greater. So, looking back on 1919, there was ‘little likelihood that a fundamentally different opinion will prevail next time’.² Indeed, the atrocities committed by the enemy had been on a vaster and more terrible scale than before. It would be folly, therefore, to suppose that the psychological and physical damage war brought with it could be dismissed as irrelevant. There was no prospect of a tabula rasa. E.H. Carr echoed that view and used what
he referred to as the ‘rushed settlement’ of 1919 as a reason for arguing in favour of delay in creating a political settlement. An enduring peace, he thought, could not be made by people who were still the victims of war-time psychosis.3

In August 1944, P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) produced its book *Building Peace out of War*. It enthused about the new type of man which it believed was coming to the fore in every modern community: that is to say, the administrator, the organiser, the highly skilled technician. Their emergence reflected the fact that ‘the technical conditions which made possible the co-existence of a patchwork of scores of completely independent, and theoretically equal, sovereign national states or “Powers” of varying size and strength’ had passed once and for all. ‘The attempt of the Versailles peacemakers’, it was further argued, ‘to give life to that system was in many respects a retrograde step which made its ultimate over-throw by violence inevitable. In sweeping it away, Hitler’s armies were in a sense no more than the unconscious agents of the revolutionary forces; and any attempt to rebuild it a second time in its old form could only lead to the same result’.4 To the degree that this point of view carried conviction, it followed in the view of P.E.P. that it was pointless to linger over this or that detail of the Versailles settlement or consciously to seek to avoid this or that mistake again. A whole new world was dawning which demanded the consideration of quite different issues. P.E.P. thought that it was scarcely worth thinking about the old world of Versailles at all. That view was echoed to an extent by E.H. Carr in his 1942 *Conditions of Peace* when he wrote ‘The first moral for the victors in the present war is…not to look backwards in search of principles to guide the post-war settlement’. It was a precept which should be less difficult than it was in 1919 because, he claimed ‘we are no longer blinded, as we were then, by the “old ways” of the pre-war world which we thought of as good ways’. There was a general conviction, he believed, especially among the younger generation, that ‘the world of the past decade has been a bad and mad world, and that almost everything in it needs to be uprooted and replanted’.5

However, such enthusiasm for the bright new world of international executive agencies for specific purposes and of the primacy of economic reconstruction was by no means universal. A substantial body of Second World War writing still firmly believed that there