

NEUTRALITY

GERMAN-ITALIAN ASSURANCES

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

BERLIN, JUNE 24

An assurance of the Reich Government's "will to recognize and respect the neutrality of Switzerland," now that she has been released from all obligations under the sanctions paragraphs of the League Covenant, is contained in a Note which Herr von Ribbentrop, the Foreign Minister, sent on Tuesday to the Swiss Minister here. A similar Note has been sent to the Swiss Government by the Italian Government.

The relevant passage of Herr von Ribbentrop's Note reads:—

The German Government have noted with great interest that the Swiss Government have been successful in their efforts to release themselves from obligations which, in fact, were liable to endanger the neutrality of Switzerland. The German Government welcome this result, because they see in the unconditional maintenance of the neutrality of Switzerland an important element for securing the peace of Europe.

The Swiss Government can therefore be certain that the will to neutrality which they have once more declared will meet with a corresponding will to recognize and respect this neutrality on the part of the German Government. I need only refer to the statements known to the Swiss Government, in which the German Government have expressed with all clarity their standpoint in this connexion.

THE SWISS DECLARATION

The Swiss Government's Note, dated May 21, stated:—

As your Excellency is aware, Switzerland has always been animated by the efforts to continue the policy of neutrality which she has made for more than 400 years, and to adhere most strictly to the relevant obligations contained in the Treaties of 1815.

The Federal decision of March 5, 1920, regarding the adherence of Switzerland to the League of Nations, which was confirmed by a plebiscite on March 16 of the same year, was made only after the League Council in its declaration of London of February 13, 1920, had solemnly declared that the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland as an international obligation for the maintenance of peace was not inconsistent with any provision of the Covenant of the League.

The London declaration states expressly that Switzerland is not obliged to take part in military undertakings or to permit the passage of foreign troops or the preparation of military undertakings on her territory. As against that, the declaration contains nothing releasing Switzerland from participation in the economic and financial measures envisaged under Article 16 of the League Covenant.

As experience has shown how uncertain is the distinction which was thought to have been made in 1920 between the various measures envisaged in the article mentioned, the Federal Council sent to the League Council on April 29, 1938, a memorandum, of which the German Foreign Office was officially informed, and in which there was announced the intention of Switzerland, in view of her perpetual neutrality, no longer to take part in any way in the application of the sanctions provisions of the League Covenant. The League Council on May 14 adopted a resolution which took note of this intention and declared that Switzerland could not be invited to take part in sanctions.

The Swiss Confederation is thereby relieved of every obligation from which there could arise doubt as to its unshakable will to remain neutral in all circumstances.

GERMAN STIPULATION

It is noted with some interest that the formula used in the German Note is not "recognition and respect for the neutrality of Switzerland," but for "the Swiss will to neutrality." The distinction is of some importance, if, as semi-official comment seems to imply, the Reich's undertaking is dependent on the fulfilment by Switzerland of a conception of neutrality embracing Press and publicity in time of peace as well as military deportment in time of war. The German standpoint, applied for the first time in official dealing with a neighbouring State, is explained as follows:—

The fact that Swiss neutrality policy, both as regards the manner in which it was handled, as also through the inter-State influences exerted on it, was exposed, although its principles remained unchanged, to certain vacillations, is in itself enough to show that neutrality is no static condition which maintains itself, but one that must be constantly reinforced by effort of will and inclination. The principle of neutrality demands a mutual adjustment of both the countries concerned with the mutual frontier and a complete objectivity and lack of prejudice in their mutual relations.

That includes also reticence in the expression of opinions which might arise from the different form of the internal régime on the other side of the frontier. Neutrality must be mutual. This is not only a matter for the Governments concerned, but rather the political principle of neutrality must be reflected in the deportment of the two peoples who maintain or are expected to maintain the neutrality.

SOLEMN UNDERTAKING

The former German declarations mentioned in the Reich Note relate principally to a statement made by Herr Hitler to a member of the Swiss Federal Council in February, 1937, in which he said that "at all time, come what may, we will respect the inviolability and neutrality of Switzerland. . . . I have never had occasion to take up any other attitude." The present Note may be regarded as solemn written confirmation of that undertaking, and, as German commentators say, leaves no excuse for attempts to disturb international relations in the future by assertions that Germany has any intentions to the contrary. The Swiss decision to seek relief from the sanctions obligations is regarded as a natural and necessary consequence of Abyssinian experiences and of "the now one-sided constitution of the Geneva League."

The hint is not lacking that other States—presumably the Scandinavian are in mind—might follow the Swiss example, but as the sanctions paragraph is regarded here as dead the question is probably not held to be urgent.

By the Treaties of Peace in 1815 the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland and the inviolability of her territory were guaranteed by Austria, Great Britain, Portugal, Prussia, and Russia. These provisions were confirmed by the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles, in 1919 (Article 435).

The policy of neutrality has been pursued with varying success, ever since the conclusion of peace between Switzerland and France in 1516.

THE ITALIAN NOTE

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

ROME, JUNE 24

The Italian Government in their Note to the Swiss Government, say that they are convinced that the maintenance of Swiss neutrality is an important factor in the peace of Europe and that Italy can always be counted on to respect it.

The function of a Society of Nations would thus be that of cultivating a similar relationship between the races, kindreds, and peoples scattered over the face of the earth or, to begin with, over some portion of it—in other words, the gradual creation of an International Society as the needed preliminary to the acceptance by the nations of a common rule of law. This it will never do as a political League of potential enemies, an arrangement which clearly puts the cart before the horse, and can never be other than the "entangling alliance" which the League has recently shown itself to be. What will continue to happen so long as we persist in that attempt is well illustrated by a sentence in your foreign news summary for February 4: "Opinion in Berlin is suspicious of the British overture for a limitation of air warfare." This is the characteristically unsocial attitude of armed political States in their relationships one with another—the attitude of potential enemies. Society on these terms is impossible.

To those who hold these views it is encouraging to note that the League has been eminently successful in its social activities. It has set on foot a number of beneficent enterprises of a kind which, if multiplied and extended, might well result in the emergence of an International Society. On the other hand, as a political and military alliance it has been "entangling" and a complete failure. From which it would seem to follow that the problem of world appeasement is not likely to be solved by politicians, nor even by experts in political science, unless they happen to be (which is not impossible) humanists in the first place and politicians or experts in the second. At all events there can be little doubt that the peoples of the world, as distinct from the Foreign Offices, are not only ready but eager for the change from League to Society.

Yours, &c.,

Oxford. L. P. JACKS.

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Letters to the Editor

THE SOCIETY OF NATIONS

A NEW NAME FOR THE LEAGUE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—A minor change in the usage of English-speaking nations, small in itself, but possibly attended by beneficial consequences, would consist in abandoning the term "League" and substituting "Society"—the Society of Nations (La Société des Nations) in place of the League of Nations. One possible consequence may be named at once. American policy is averse from membership of a League ("an entangling alliance"), but I am not aware of its being averse from membership of an international society. The change of name is fully as desirable in the United States as in the British Empire, perhaps more so. It might lead to a more promising approach, by the statesmen and peoples of both countries, to the whole international problem and to the discussion of it in a less provocative atmosphere. Indeed the reform of the League desired by many of its friends, among whom your present correspondent would like to be counted, may be summed up in the desire for its dissolution in the form of a League and its rebirth in the form of a Society, the best name for which, were it not already appropriated by those who have nobly justified their possession of it, would be the Society of Friends. Meanwhile let us be content with the Society of Nations.

The two things, League and Society, are widely different, and different lines of operation will open out, and be pursued in a different spirit, according as one or the other model is kept in view. The one is predominantly political: the other predominantly human. As the League now stands it conforms to the first type, in which the human element is subordinate to the political, the reform of it, which many of us desire, consisting precisely in the reversal of this order. As now constituted, it is a political League of armed and sovereign States, "bristling with armaments," to borrow Lord Allen of Hurtwood's phrase, a League therefore of potential enemies, whose chief preoccupation naturally takes the form of keeping the fighting proclivities of its members, and the armed forces which implement them, under restraint—a most unfortunate preoccupation, concentrated, as it needs must be, on the negative restraint of enmity to the neglect of the positive promotion of friendship.

The members of a Society, on the other hand, are not thus preoccupied. Their mutual relations are not dominated by the need of guarding against each other's violence or treachery; nor are they in the habit of conducting their common business armed to the teeth. When an Englishman meets an Englishman hitherto a stranger to him it does not normally occur to either of them to draw a six-shooter nor to look round for a policeman to restrain the other from assaulting him or stealing his watch. Nor have they or their ancestors (whatever Rousseau may have said to the contrary) signed a covenant or social contract, to abstain from either thing. Their approach to one another is that of potential friends, potential at least, the assumption of each being that the other is not an enemy and probably not a blackguard, and that intercourse may proceed accordingly. The bond of union between them is primarily social and human, the political bond, as subjects of the same Government, being, historically, an outgrowth from that.