

Parliament

BRITISH AIMS IN EUROPE

LORDS AND LEAGUE REFORM

THE AUSTRO-GERMAN AGREEMENT

HOUSE OF LORDS

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 16

The LORD CHANCELLOR took his seat on the Woolsack at 3 o'clock.

LORD ROBOROUGH (formerly Sir Henry Yarde Buller Lopes) and LORD PERRY (formerly Sir Ival Leal, Dewhurst Perry) took the oath and subscribed the roll. Lord Roborough's sponsors were LORD MILDMAY and LORD CHURSTON, and Lord Perry's sponsors were LORD ILLINGWORTH and LORD HUTCHISON.

LORD ARNOLD called attention to British foreign policy and to the dangers inherent therein, particularly in regard to the League of Nations, and moved for papers. He said the two main features of British foreign policy were, first, that it was based on the League of Nations, which meant, so we were told, that we would be faithful to our obligations under the Covenant; and, secondly, that it was based on the commitments to defend France and Belgium if they were attacked.

The League was now less than half a League. For practical purposes the League consisted of Great Britain and France, and when we were told that British policy was based on the League it meant in practice that there was an Anglo-French Alliance. This was confirmed by the reciprocal obligation entered into by both those countries to go to each other's assistance if either of them was attacked.

This commitment was an exceedingly serious one for Great Britain, more especially in view of France's Eastern alliances. Probably those alliances constituted the greatest danger to Great Britain. As matters stood at present Great Britain might get involved in war if Germany took action in respect of the grievances from which Germans suffered in Czechoslovakia. In that event France might render assistance to Czechoslovakia and war would come, and France would then seek to draw Great Britain in. It might be that we should become involved in another great European war, although no real British interest was at stake.

"TRAGEDY OF THE LEAGUE"

But, leaving Czechoslovakia aside, many League supporters envisaged what apparently they regarded as a League war between Great Britain, France, and Russia on the one side and Germany, Italy, and Japan on the other. It was almost incredible that a combination of Great Britain, France, and Russia should call "collective security," though actually there could scarcely be a worse example of the balance of power.

The tragedy of the League was that it was largely responsible for recreating in a dangerous form the balance of power, which it was designed to prevent. Therefore when we were told that there was no alternative between the League and the pre-War condition of things the reply was that we had the pre-War condition of things now and worse, and that the League was largely responsible for that.

It was an astonishing circumstance that British foreign policy continued to be based on the present Covenant of the League having regard to the failures of the League in nearly everything which it had set out to do for the cause of peace. It was quite certain that if, in 1919, the failures of the League could

between the Governments of Great Britain and France and not between the two peoples. There should be complete freedom from all Continental entanglements. The sea was no longer the security to Great Britain it had been in the past, owing to the revolutionary changes in the air.

France would have made a settlement with Germany long ago if she had not, ever since the War, thought that she had Great Britain behind her. The chief difficulty in the way of a better understanding with Germany would disappear if the alliance with France was brought to an end.

If Great Britain stood aside in another war and should be attacked, the United States would not be likely to see this country and the British Empire go down. The risks to this country and the Empire of the policy he was advocating were small compared to those of the policy now being pursued, under which it seemed likely that sooner or later Great Britain would be drawn into another war although no British interests would be involved. The chief duty of British statesmanship was to keep this country out of war. The best way to do that was to end all her Continental commitments, after giving due notice.

THE CHIEF DIPLOMATIC ADVISER

LORD PONSONBY'S QUESTIONS

LORD PONSONBY said that the Government had an ingenious way of bringing in the League of Nations and saying that they supported it, but at the same time they were fully aware that collective security was quite impracticable. It was unfair to raise the hopes of small nations. With regard to the German Colonies, our Empire with its vast magnitude suggested that we should take the initiative in that matter and prevent what was at present a sore place from becoming a gaping wound which might be extremely difficult to heal.

Referring to the recent creation of the post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser, the noble lord said he wished to make it quite clear, in any criticisms he had to make, that they did not arise from any personal considerations. He knew well that Sir Robert Vansittart was not only a very popular but a very able official, but the creation of a new post connected with the extremely delicate and difficult matters concerning our foreign relations appeared to be a matter of such importance that some elucidation of the duties connected with it was a fit subject for questions and, if need be, criticisms in Parliament.

He was not very clear what the title of this official was to be, or was, and what exactly were his duties. The position of Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs was one of enormous responsibility. Hitherto this official had been the chief diplomatic adviser to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, although no such title had been added to his name. A series of extremely able and eminent men had filled that important position. What was going to be the relationship of the Chief Diplomatic Adviser with the Permanent Under-Secretary? Was he to be in the Foreign Office or in some other building, how would he be aware of the latest information, and was he going to divide his responsibility with the Permanent Under-Secretary? If so, there must be some confusion, which would be very unhelpful to the Foreign Secretary.

Nobody realized more than did he (Lord Ponsonby) how the work of the Foreign Office had increased in the last 40 years, and nothing would be more fatal than to duplicate senior officials, to divide the responsibility and to confuse the mind of the Foreign Secretary, and to have an adviser flitting in from he did not know where, with imperfect knowledge, making suggestions with which the Permanent Under-Secretary might not agree.

"DUPLICATE FOREIGN OFFICE"

If the Chief Diplomatic Adviser was going to be the adviser to the Government or the Prime Minister or the Cabinet that might involve his having an office elsewhere, perhaps on the other side of the street in Downing Street. Then we should have a repetition of what occurred between 1918 and 1922, when there was a sort of duplicate Foreign Office set up in the Prime Minister's house with continued friction going on with

should be said to Germany: "You have a perfect right to have a considerable portion of the British Empire handed over to you because it will make for greater equality between all." Lord Arnold and Lord Ponsonby had said that considerable concessions ought to be made. He (Lord Cecil) could conceive of no more mischievous doctrine to preach than that. It was an invitation to Germany; and they needed no encouragement in that direction to put forward demands of an altogether extravagant character knowing that their demands would be unacceptable and leading, as Lord Arnold stated, to the possibility of war between Germany and ourselves. That form of peace keeping did not appeal to him.

EVENTS IN AUSTRIA

The situation in Austria was disquieting. It looked as if something in the nature of an ultimatum was given by Germany to Austria that either they must put their police and the administration of what we should call home affairs under the control of Ministers who were known to be favourable to the Nazi system or steps would be taken by Germany against Austria. There seemed to be growing up a new technique in aggression consisting of direct invasion of the territory involved, but of assisting some elements in that territory which were hostile to the Government of that territory, so that one got in fact invasion while pretending that nothing was being done except letting some citizens take part in local or national disturbances.

Whether it was the fault of the Government or not—in many respects it was not—British policy had failed almost completely in the last few years. No doubt that policy had been always, to use a very unfortunate phrase, "to keep out of war," but that was an imperfect statement of what should be the object of our policy, to promote peace. War everywhere was a danger and disadvantage to us, and it was our bounden duty to keep the peace of the world as far as possible. The situation was worse than it was six years ago. In present circumstances he agreed with the Government in increasing armaments, and he agreed with the Prime Minister and his predecessor that the increase of armaments was a waste of money and a delay and obstruction of social progress. But if other countries of Europe insisted on increasing their armaments this country could not remain the only unarmed or partially unarmed State in Europe. He urged the need for returning to the old League practice of promoting open discussion.

PRIMATE AND THE LEAGUE

FAILURE OF ARTICLE XVI

The ARCHBISHOP of CANTERBURY said that there were many as unswerving in their allegiance to the principles of the League as Lord Cecil who were being driven by the pressure of hard facts to the conclusion that it was not really possible for the League at the present time to fulfil all the purposes for which it was designed. Facts were facts, and their consequences would be what they would be; and there were some facts which were very difficult to resist. He did not speak of the patent fact of the greatly altered position of the League through the defection of the United States, and, more recently, of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Since 1931 the defections from the League had altered its character and inevitably its power.

Of three facts which had impressed him most, the first was that it had come to pass, through circumstances for which we had no responsibility, that the League had the appearance of an alliance of one set of great Powers in contrast to another, and it seemed, at least, to embody that very principle of a system of rival alliances which it was intended to supplant.

In the second place, partly as a result of this, it was beyond doubt that many States members of the League found themselves increasingly unwilling to undertake obligations which might mean the risk of war in places and for purposes far removed from their vital or obvious interests. The third fact was that he was afraid that even he, with all his zeal for the League, must admit that the efforts of the League to restrain aggression by the use of collective force in the way of sanctions under Article XVI, whether economic or military, had not succeeded. In those circumstances he felt that it was difficult to expect the League to proceed, at least upon the basis of Article XVI, to fulfil the purposes for which

re-examination of the provisions of the Covenant would not involve any material change in its structure.

LORD NOEL-BUXTON said the danger that impressed itself on his mind was that arising from friction between this country and Germany. The Government definitely wished to come to terms with Germany, and he was glad to be able to support its policy in that respect. Germany had by past events been led to hate the League and all its works, and even believed us to be hostile. There had been a change in our policy since 1935, but that change must be proved to the German mind. Lord Halifax's visit was a good beginning. The French Government had come to a definite change of front; it was now for us to cooperate with France in making a definite and vigorous attempt to come to terms.

LORD PLYMOUTH'S REPLY

REFORM OF THE LEAGUE

The EARL of PLYMOUTH, Under Secretary, Foreign Office, said that he asked himself whether this country was prepared now, because the League had not worked as effectively as they would like, and as a result of its partial failure, to abandon all that the League stood for and the principles of international cooperation which were the very core of the Covenant. That would not be the view of the great mass of people in this country, nor elsewhere.

Everybody, even the members of the committee, most anxious with regard to their position in relation to Article XVI, agreed that this was not the time to start tinkering with the Covenant. The position revealed at the last meeting of the Committee was not a discouraging one. On all sides there was evidence of continued attachment to the principles of the League and to the vital importance of preserving the collective system.

Referring to the reform of the League, the noble earl said that the committee set up to examine the question of the application to the principles of the Covenant had adjourned pending directions from the Assembly.

The Covenant certainly did not impose on us any automatic obligation to take up arms on behalf of others. In this matter we retained our complete sovereignty. Risks clearly existed in any situation, but the Government's view was that the risks of the present situation were greatly outweighed by the advantage afforded by the existence of a system of cooperation between nations which the League provided. It was unlikely in the highest degree that any Government would allow itself to be drawn into a war such as Lord Arnold had in mind by allowing itself to adopt a policy which had not the overwhelming support of the people of this country.

ISOLATION IMPRACTICABLE

All these and all cognate questions were now being examined by the Committee of 21 and he was therefore unable to say anything further on that point. But all wise people would agree that it would be an act of supreme folly seriously to impair, or indeed, as some people suggested, to sweep away the structure of the League without the fullest thought and the most careful and responsible consideration. We still believed in the principles of the League. We believed that that organization, or an organization modelled on the lines of the League, could provide the best instrument for international cooperation and for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Therefore we ought to think, not once but many times before we destroyed what we should find very difficult and perhaps entirely impossible to rebuild.

It was not a fair way of putting the position to suggest that British foreign policy was moving away from collective security. The policy of the Government was still based on the principles of the Covenant, but in the matter we were realists as well as idealists, and we realized that limitations had been forced upon us and on the League by the present situation. Consequently in any practical application in future of these principles past experience must be taken into consideration, and must naturally influence us in our actions. But that was no reason why we should abandon the principles of international cooperation, and we did not intend to abandon them.

A policy of isolation was quite impractical in these days. This country throughout

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have been foreseen by British statesmen now-
ever reckless. Stifelsen morsk Okklugsheds-
country to the obligations of the Covenant
under Article XVI. The position was unsatis-
factory, vague, and dangerous, and it became
more and more clear that the League, with
Article XVI of the Covenant, would not work.
If there were to be a pooling of forces in
defence of collective security Great Britain
would have to adopt conscription. How many
of those who signed the so-called peace ballot
would have done so if they had realized that?
The principles on which the League was
founded had never been sufficiently thought
out. The analogy sometimes drawn between
the police and the League had no real basis.
None of the smaller nations contiguous to
or near Germany would be willing to go to
war with Germany because they knew that
their country would be devastated. There
was no guarantee that the League would keep
the peace against Germany or against any
other powerful nation.

We were living in an era of dictators, and
a dictator might decide upon war, however
great the forces against him, as the only way
out of insuperable internal difficulties. When
the Covenant of the League was signed in
1919 the statesmen of the time did not appear
to have thought of the advent of the dictators.
Article XVI ought to be taken out of the
Covenant. If it were taken out, League sup-
porters asked "What is to happen to the
rule of law?"

THE RULE OF LAW

"LITTLE RELATION TO REALITY"

In those strange days many people appeared
to think that there was some definite rule of
law between nations which, if upheld, would
make all well. In reality there was no such
rule. The Treaty of Versailles was signed
under duress, and many people thought that
apart from that it was unjust and indefensible.
Treaties would only be kept if they were just
and right, and if the conditions which obtained
when they were made remained the same.
Article VIII of the Covenant had never been
implemented.

The gross inequality in the ownership of
wealth and territory had more than anything
else to do with international unrest. What
had the rule of law got to do with that?
The talk about the rule of law was mostly
rhetoric and had little relation to reality. Was
it not reckless and perilous to commit this
country to a policy which might oblige us to
take part in a series of wars in which no real
British interest was at stake?

In the maze and tangle of European
affairs, the one thing certain was that
there would be no permanent peace in
Europe without a better understanding between
Germany and Great Britain. Unfortunately
there seemed little recognition of that fact on
the part of France. It would be interesting to
know how far Great Britain was consulted by
France when the Franco-Soviet Pact was
entered into; danger existed for Great Britain
because of that pact.

A settlement of the German colonies question
was essential if there was to be a better
understanding between this country and Ger-
many. If we were in Germany's position we
should feel exactly as she did about it. It must
be intolerable to be told that she was not fit
to have colonies; he doubted whether the
treatment of natives by France, Belgium, and
Portugal had been better than that of Germany.
Great Britain should take the initiative in the
matter since she had got most of the German
colonies. He hoped that the expectations of
three months ago following Lord Halifax's
visit were not to be once again wrecked by
procrastination, the vice which allowed things
to drift and drift. Prospects of peace in Europe
would be vastly improved by the settlement of
the question.

FRANCO-BRITISH ALLIANCE

No material help could be expected from
France in the defence of Great Britain and the
British Empire, due to the obvious fact that
if this country was at war France would also
be at war and would need all her resources for
the defence of her own Empire. The alliance
with France and the commitments Belgium
should be reviewed afresh in view of the
dangers involved. The alliance had never
been sanctioned by the British people; it was

the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office
Secretary was most undesirable.
He wanted to know what particular quali-
fications as adviser Sir Robert Vansittart
possessed. He knew of his abilities, but
advice on foreign affairs in these days was a
matter of such acute importance that Sir
Robert Vansittart's qualifications should be
made known to the House. He (Lord
Ponsonby) remembered the crisis of the Hoare-
Laval proposals, which ended in the Foreign
Secretary himself having to be scrapped.
Whatever they might think of the Hoare-Laval
proposals—and he thought some of them
might think it was rather a pity they were not
adopted—they were all agreed that they were
badly mismanaged, clumsily launched, and
very ineptly handled. Whether the Permanent
Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs of those
days was responsible for this or not he did
not know, but no doubt it would not seem
that it was checked sufficiently to prevent the
lamentable consequences that ensued.

He noticed that the Chief Diplomatic Ad-
viser, to whatever Department he was attached,
had been made chairman of a Coordinating
Committee for the world broadcasting of, he
believed, information with regard to the policy
of his Majesty's Government. That looked
to him rather as if the Government were
conscripting the Civil Service to make propa-
ganda for their own support, which was rather
undesirable. He was not in a position to
deprecate the use of broadcasting, but this
was an extremely delicate weapon to use in
international affairs if the Government were
going to be responsible for what was broad-
cast. Was the Chief Diplomatic Adviser
going to draft these bits of information for
distribution abroad, was he going to be solely
responsible for that? Was it going to pass
through the Cabinet, was the Foreign Secre-
tary to have some voice in it, and was the
Permanent Under-Secretary to have his
former function of adviser obliterated alto-
gether?

AN UNSTABLE ELEMENT

It seemed that the new appointment was
going to be embarrassing; he rather thought
it would be a nuisance in the Foreign Office.
He hoped that the Government were not to
take the further step of appointing an
Ambassador-at-large who was one having an
airplane at his disposal and was never to be
found when he was wanted. (Laughter.)
If the opinion of those responsible for foreign
affairs were taken it would be found that they
looked askance at the unstable, unexplained
element that had been introduced.

War was very unlikely, and the general
horizon was better than it had been. He had
already expressed his appreciation of the
conduct of foreign affairs by the present
Secretary of State in extremely difficult,
puzzling, and intricate circumstances. The
Government ought to take full advantage of
the present situation to go forward with a
constructive initiative. There were questions
on which the world looked to Great Britain for
initiative: the vindictive Treaty of Versailles
on the subject of colonies was certainly one
on which the Government ought to go forward
first.

He regretted that the Government had
followed others in rearming, and had thus
vitiating their policy. If they had turned in
the opposite direction and said that they would
completely abandon the barbarity of attempt-
ing to settle international disputes by weapons
of war the effect would have been very great,
and he profoundly believed that others would
have followed our example.

LORD CECIL'S VIEWS

VISCOUNT CECIL said he agreed that
some fuller explanation should be given of
the appointment of a Chief Diplomatic
Adviser. He (Lord Cecil) would commend to
Lord Arnold a recent speech by the Foreign
Secretary in which he said that it was a great
pity that people concentrated on the few
failures of the League of Nations and forgot
its many successes.

It was our duty—and it was quite certain it
was our interest—to do our utmost to establish
a new rule of law in international affairs which
would preclude the use of violence in order
to secure political objects, to make, in fact,
the provisions of the Kellogg Pact a reality that
war should not be used in the pursuit of
national policy.

He did not understand some of the argu-
ments that noble lords had used unless it

THE MAIN STRUCTURE

All this did not seem to him any reason
why the main structure of the Covenant should
be changed, or even that Article XVI should
be scrapped. That would be a formal, public,
deliberate abandonment of the ideals for which
the League of Nations stood, and of the pur-
poses for which it was brought into being.
Our interest was not merely to keep the peace
for ourselves but to keep the peace for the
world; and in order that that should be done
we ought to keep it as a principle that all those
concerned in the preservation of the peace of
the world should be ready to combine when-
ever that peace was threatened.

He would say, and here he agreed with Lord
Allen of Hurtwood's recent letter to *The
Times*, rather let us keep for the present,
because of these difficulties, Article XVI in the
background, and bring Article XI into the
foreground. Article XI declared any war or
threat of war, whether immediately affecting
any member of the League or not, to be a
matter of concern to the whole League and
that the League should take any action that
might be deemed to be wise and effectual to
safeguard the peace of nations.

There would still be opportunities for
declarations of world opinion which, if they
could not be complete, might yet be very
weighty and effective. There would be
opportunities of making early and prompt
efforts at conciliation, of dealing with causes
of dispute expressly referred to the League,
and of promoting arbitration, and there would
still be an opportunity of carrying on all the
work of the League.

If the League continued to make the utmost
of Article XI it might gradually reassert its
position and the time might come when it
would be able to fulfil all the principles that
were involved in Article XVI. He still pro-
fessed himself to be heart and soul a League
of Nations man, even though he thought that
in some respects it was not capable at present
of fulfilling all its purposes. The League had
obviously encountered very rough weather. To
take in some of its sail might be its best chance
of getting through and of resuming its course
under clearer skies.

THE EX-GERMAN COLONIES

CASE FOR INQUIRY

The MARQUESS of CREWE said he
wished to know what would be the precise re-
lations of the new Chief Diplomatic Adviser
to the Permanent Under-Secretary to the
Foreign Office. It was obvious that their
advice on particular subjects might not be
identical and the position of the unhappy
Minister, instead of being eased by the new
appointment, might become somewhat
confused.

In one sense Lord Arnold had over-proved
his case. If it were true that there was no
objection whatever to the union of the
80,000,000 of Germans, presumably they
would have considerable control over some
of their neighbours, and what would be
the lot of Poland would not be easy
to foresee. Why was there no objection
to the precisely similar schemes of
Germany in 1914? Surely if it were then
undesirable from our point of view that
Germany should obtain complete control over
Central Europe, and presumably in a consider-
able degree over Belgium and Holland, it
would appear to be not less undesirable now.

He had never concealed his view that the
complete taking over of the German colonies
by Great Britain, and to some extent by others,
was a radical error of judgment. It was an
injustice for the reason that the arguments
that the German colonies were misgoverned
were greatly exaggerated. He had better
means than many people of knowing what the
government of some of the colonies was.
Although it was conducted on lines different
from those which we favoured it would be
gross exaggeration to speak of it as having
been altogether bad.

Obviously no one was proposing the hand-
ing back of those colonies to Germany
en bloc, but there was a strong case for
looking into the question to see whether it was
not possible to give some satisfaction to
Germany. He concurred with practically
everything that the Archbishop of Canterbury
had said about the retention of Article XVI of
the League Covenant; that was to say, that any

itself from events on the part of the Cor-
opposite our own shores, and to suggest
we should do so now would not only
revolution in policy but quite unsound-
illogical. The Government held that
the existence of the Franco-Soviet Pact ha-
in any way increased our legal obligati-
France.

APPEASEMENT IN EUROPE

No one could fail to sympathize with
objects which Lord Arnold had in mind
he asked that there should be a settle-
ment with Germany. The Secretary of Sta-
Foreign Affairs, in his speech at Birm-
on Saturday, said: "We offer friends
all, but on equal terms." What the Go-
ment had in mind was the desirability of
ing a discussion on the possible contrib-
which all parties concerned might be a-
make towards a general appeasement
Europe. They felt that all must help,
was quite clear that it was only in a sp-
reasonable and in an atmosphere of
conciliation that they could hope for suc-
It had been suggested that the solution
colonial question would make a valuable
tribution towards that appeasement. He
said frankly that he was not in a posi-
discuss that question in detail, and he
only refer to the words of the *commu-
issued in November after the visit o-
French Ministers to London. It stated
a preliminary examination had been ma-
the colonial question in all its aspect
that it was recognized that that ques-
not one that could be considered in iso-
and moreover that it would involve a n-
of other countries. It was agreed that
subject would require much more exte-
study.*

He wished to make it clear that on
general question of an understanding
Germany there was of course no ques-
our ceasing in our efforts to reach an u-
standing. We were pursuing those efforts
he could say no more than repeat the a-
which the Prime Minister gave to a qu-
in the House of Commons on Februar-
"The question is under active consid-
by his Majesty's Government, but I ha-
statement to make at present." The eff-
which the Secretary of State referred at
mingham applied also of course to Italy
it was made to all countries; The Govern-
felt that any agreement which they might
with Italy must be a complete and co-
hensive one. (Hear, hear.) Effort
approach the matter piecemeal were not
to be of much avail. He did not want
anything further except that he was ho-
that it would be possible to eliminate any
culities at present standing in the way as a
of good will on both sides.

He wished to make it clear that on

general question of an understanding

Germany there was of course no ques-

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART DUTIES

The reasons for the appointment of
Robert Vansittart as Chief Diplomatic Ad-
were fully set out in the *communiqué* i-
to the Press on January 1. He (L-
Plymouth) should have thought that it
obvious that the rapidly growing pressu-
work on the officials of the Foreign O-
had seriously reduced the time availabl-
the prolonged and careful consideratio-
questions of broad policy. If that were s-
need for some official who would have
to devote to the consideration of policy
place the result of his reflections befor-
man bearing the greatest responsibility o-
the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
at once apparent.

He should have thought that there w-
be general agreement that no better p-
could have been found to perform
technical and highly responsible task than
Robert Vansittart. His career and his q-
fications spoke for themselves and need-
emphasizing. There was no question o-
advising any other person than the Sec-
of State, still less of his advising the Gov-
ment as a whole. He had a room in
Foreign Office. Like any other Civil ser-
he would be subordinate to his political
and the responsibility for his advice, if it
adopted, would be assumed by the Secre-
State. There was no reason to fear that
of the complications which had been sugg-
would take place. The necessary arrang-
had been made within the office and they

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presented no difficulty whatsoever and were working very smoothly indeed.

LORD PONSONBY asked whether the new Adviser would be subordinate to the Permanent Under-Secretary or be placed above him.

The EARL of PLYMOUTH said that there was no question of his being superior or subordinate. They worked on parallel lines rather than on the same track one in front of the other.

PUBLICITY ABROAD

It had been announced recently by the Prime Minister that Sir Robert Vansittart was to preside over a committee whose function would be to coordinate and advise on the work being done by various bodies engaged in British publicity abroad. Many misconceptions appeared to exist with regard to the committee, which had not yet met. It would not have any executive functions and it would limit its activities to advice. Experience alone would show how wide the scope of the committee would be and no one would wish to tie down its activities. But he could say what it would not do. The chairman would not in any sense be a propaganda dictator wielding mysterious powers, nor would the committee exercise any kind of control over the Press.

The Chief Diplomatic Adviser would, if the Secretary of State so desired, represent the Foreign Office at conferences abroad, and it was well that a man of his international reputation should be available for that purpose. There was no intention of transforming him into a kind of Ambassador-at-large or conferring any special mission upon him. Sir Alexander Cadogan would be the Permanent Under-Secretary of State in as full a sense as any of his predecessors.

LORD PONSONBY asked whether the new Adviser would not retain his room, which was to be given to the Chief Adviser.

The EARL of PLYMOUTH said that Lord Ponsonby appeared to have some information which he (Lord Plymouth) had not got. (Laughter.)

Turning to the situation in Austria, the noble earl made a statement in similar terms to that made by Mr. Eden in the House of Commons.

On the motion of the MARQUESS of LOYNES, the debate was adjourned.

The lords rose at 13 minutes to 7 o'clock.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 16

The SPEAKER took the Chair at a quarter to 3 o'clock.

GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

MR. EDEN'S STATEMENT

Mr. EDEN, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Warwick and Leamington, U.), replying to Mr. BELLENGER (Bassettlaw, Lab.), said:—I understand that the working of the Austro-German agreement of July, 1936, has for some time past been under consideration by the German and Austrian Governments. A meeting was eventually held at Berchtesgaden on Saturday last between the Austrian and German Chancellors, and as a result of this agreement has been reached between the Austrian and German Governments. This new agreement has not yet been published, but a communiqué was issued early this morning outlining what passed; and the reorganization of the Austrian Government has been announced in accordance, so I understand, with the undertakings of the Berchtesgaden. There is reason to believe that other provisions of the agreement contain undertakings which both Governments on a variety of subjects until the actual text of the agreement is published I am not in a position to make any further statement. His Majesty's Government are meanwhile closely following developments.

Mr. BELLENGER.—Can the Foreign Secretary give an assurance that his Majesty's Government's policy in relation to the integrity and independence of Austria remains the same as he stated on the last occasion the matter was brought in this House?

Mr. EDEN.—My recollection is that what I stated was that his Majesty's Government desired Central Europe to be at peace, and good understanding, and that certainly is our policy. (Cheers.)

Mr. A. HENDERSON (Kingswinford, Lab.).—Does his Majesty's Government still stand by the joint declaration of February, 1934, to the effect that they reaffirmed the interest of this country in the integrity and independence of Austria?

Mr. EDEN.—I take it that the hon. member is referring to the Stresa Declaration. That is quite true, but that was a declaration of three Governments—Great Britain, France, and Italy—and Italy has not yet consulted his Majesty's Government on the matter.

ITALY AND A LOAN

Mr. M. JONES (Caerphilly, Lab.) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether, in reopening discussions with a view to improving the relationship between Britain and Italy, the question of the issue of a loan to Italy would form part of those discussions.

Mr. EDEN.—No, Sir.

AIRPORT FOR LONDON

In reply to Mr. LYONS (Leicester, E., Lab.), who asked if his attention had been called to the steps taken by the Court of Common Council to provide financial assistance for the airport at Fairlop, Essex,

LIEUT.-COL. MUIRHEAD, Under-Secretary for Air (Wells, U.), said that he had seen a report in the Press on the method which, it was stated, was being adopted to finance the airport scheme at Fairlop. He understood that the completion of the acquisition of land was now imminent, and that as soon as purchase was completed the City Corporation would proceed with their plans for the development of this airport, which was intended to be a terminal one to help to meet the needs of the increasing volume of air traffic to and from the Metropolitan area. He was informed that the Corporation

down of the old bridge. That was done in defiance of Parliamentary opinion. What we are now dealing with is a River Thames over which there is no bridge—(laughter)—and London traffic demands that there should be one.

HON. MEMBERS.—That is your Waterloo. (Laughter.)

CARRIERS' LICENCES

Mr. GRANT-FERRIS (St. Pancras, U.) asked the Minister of Transport whether he proposed to avail himself of the powers given to him by the Road Traffic Act, 1937, to extend the period of currency of carriers' licences.

Mr. BURGIN.—Yes, Sir. I referred this question to the Transport Advisory Council and am about to publish their report, which recommends an increase of the periods to five years for "A" and "C" licences and to two years for "B" licences, provided that the observance of the conditions of licences be upheld by the strongest possible measures, including, after fair warning, suspension and revocation of licences. I have accepted their recommendations and shall make the necessary regulations with as little delay as possible.

INDIA

THE RESIGNATION OF THE TWO MINISTRIES

Mr. WEDGWOOD BENN (Manchester, Gorton, Lab.) asked the Under-Secretary of State for India whether he could make a statement on the resignation of the Ministries in Bihar and the United Provinces.

EARL WINTERTON, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Horsham and Worthing, U.), who replied, said:—I greatly regret that the Ministries in the United Provinces and Bihar, which since they took office in July of last year have administered the government of two important Provinces with prudence and moderation, have found it necessary to resign. Their resignation arose out of the policy they proposed to pursue in connexion with the release of so-called political prisoners. It had been an important feature of the programme of Congress Ministries in all Provinces to secure the release of all prisoners convicted of crimes which were considered to be actuated by a political motive.

The Governors of the Provinces in which there have been Congress Ministries had, after consultation with the Governor-General, found themselves able to accept the proposals of their Ministries for the release of a substantial number of such prisoners, having satisfied themselves after examination of each individual case on its merits, that no menace to the peace and tranquillity of the Province was involved. In the United Provinces 14 political prisoners had been released in this way and in Bihar 15, but there remain 15 more in the United Provinces and 26 in Bihar, some of whom had been convicted of serious crimes of violence.

"GRAVEST RISK TO PEACE"

The Governors were fully prepared to deal with the cases of the remaining prisoners on the same basis of individual scrutiny, but the Ministers in both Provinces were no longer content with this procedure, and proposed to release forthwith the whole of the remainder of the so-called "political" prisoners in their Provinces without regard to the nature and circumstances of their crimes. The Governor-General, upon whom the Act has placed a special responsibility for preventing any grave menace to the peace and tranquillity of India or any part thereof, after the most anxious consideration, decided that he could not agree to the immediate and indiscriminate release of a body of legally convicted prisoners which includes dangerous terrorists with very bad criminal records. He is satisfied, and my noble friend is in full agreement with him, that adoption of the proposal of the Ministers in these two Provinces would be attended by the gravest risk to the peace and tranquillity of India.

It is clear that unconditional acceptance of the doctrine that crimes of violence, if actuated by a motive that can be described as "political"—and this description might well be regarded as covering communal activities—need not be subject to the penalties prescribed by the law of the land and imposed in the due course

of justice, must strike at the very root of law and order in India. Even if there were some Provinces in which the effects would not immediately be felt, in the end the basis of good government everywhere would inevitably be dangerously impaired. The Governor-General accordingly felt bound to use the power conferred on him by the Act and directed the Governors of the United Provinces and Bihar to refuse their assent to their Ministers' proposal. The Ministries thereupon tendered their resignation.

PLEA FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mr. WEDGWOOD BENN.—May I ask the Prime Minister, first, whether he does not agree that it would be very unwise not to do everything we can to avoid a constitutional crisis in India; and, secondly, whether, inasmuch as the responsibility for all these decisions rests entirely on this House, because the Governors are exercising powers for which we are responsible, the Minister will give us a full statement, including the statements of the Congress Ministers themselves, and also a catalogue of the crimes of which these prisoners were convicted and on what dates?

EARL WINTERTON.—Of course, it is my duty, on behalf of the Secretary of State, to afford all possible information to the House and I quite appreciate the point that the right hon. gentleman has made, but I would deprecate any attempt to anticipate the future course of events. These Ministries have only just resigned, and it is possible that other Ministries may be formed. I should like to add that the Governor-General took action himself in pursuance of his own statutory duty.

Mr. WEDGWOOD BENN.—May I ask the Prime Minister whether it is not a fact that this House in the Statute deliberately assumed responsibility for these matters? While I agree entirely with the noble lord that precipitate action might do much harm, is it not the duty of the Government to see that we have to decide, are put in possession of the fullest information from both sides?

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN.—My right hon. friend has just promised to do such a thing.

WHITE PAPER POSSIBLE

Miss WILKINSON (Jarrow, Lab.).—Is it not a fact that the whole situation under which these prisoners were convicted was due to their objection to an alien rule? (Ministerial cries of "Oh!"). Well, most of them.

The SPEAKER.—I do not think the hon. member has the right to raise the question of the merits of the convictions of these prisoners. We cannot have a debate.

Miss WILKINSON.—I only wanted to raise the point in view of the very *ex-parte* statement which has been made by the Minister. Is it not a fact that the change in rule—the character of rule—in this country makes all the difference in the attitude of these men to the Government?

Mr. BEVAN (Ebbw Vale, Lab.).—When will this information be given?

EARL WINTERTON.—I am sorry if I gave the impression that I would not afford the House the fullest information. I quite appreciate that it is my duty to do so. All I said was that I would deprecate an attempt to anticipate the future course of events. Certainly I shall be prepared to ask my noble friend to lay Papers or if necessary publish a White Paper on the subject. (Hear, hear.)

RELATIONS WITH EIRE

MINISTERS MEETING ON MONDAY

Mr. ATTLEE (Limehouse, Lab.) asked the Prime Minister whether he could say when the meetings between United Kingdom Ministers and Ministers of Eire would be resumed.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN.—Yes, Sir. As was announced on January 19, the meetings between Ministers were suspended pending a more detailed examination of a number of points by the officials of the two Governments. The necessary data are now available for further discussions between Ministers, and it has been arranged that Mr. de Valera and his colleagues should return to London for a resumption of the meetings next Monday, February 21.

SIR R. ROSS (Londonderry, U.).—Will the Prime Minister indicate to the Ministers from

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WATERLOO BRIDGE

SIR W. DAVISON (Kensington, S., U.) asked the Minister of Transport in what circumstances and by what authority he had agreed to make a grant from public funds to the London County Council towards the cost of rebuilding Waterloo Bridge, seeing that Parliament had refused to make any grant for this purpose.

Mr. BURGIN (Luton, L. Nat.).—I would refer my hon. friend to the reply given by me on December 22 last to the right hon. gentleman the member for South Hackney (Mr. H. Morrison), when I explained the circumstances in which the Government proposed to approve a contribution from the Road Fund towards the cost of building the new Waterloo Bridge.

SIR W. DAVISON.—Is my right hon. friend aware that in that reply neither of the two points about which I ask in my questions on the paper is dealt with—namely, in what circumstances and by what authority the Minister of Transport took upon himself to override the decision of Parliament expressed on more than one occasion that no grant should be made?

Mr. BURGIN.—My hon. friend suggests that Parliament had come to a decision not to make a contribution to Waterloo Bridge. The facts are that the Government came to the conclusion not to make a grant to Waterloo Bridge. Circumstances have changed and in the interests of highway facilities in London in general and cross-river facilities at the site of Waterloo Bridge I am convinced that it is necessary and in the interests of traffic that Waterloo Bridge should be constructed and should be constructed on certain lines. To retain control of the construction and to contribute to highway improvement generally I advised—and take the responsibility for advising—that there should be a grant, and the Government have so decided. (Cheers.)

SIR W. DAVISON.—Is there no object in Parliament on three occasions expressing the opinion that there should be no grant made because the L.C.C. decided to pull down the bridge and not to recondition it as Parliament desired?

Mr. THORNE (Plaistow, Lab.).—This Parliament has more common sense. (Laughter.)

Mr. BURGIN.—It is not proposed to make any grant towards the cost of the pulling

