

## Letters to the Editor

### THE LEAGUE SYSTEM

#### PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—There will be general agreement that it is a matter of urgent importance, alike from the standpoint of our national security and that of the peace of Europe, that the issues latent in our policy should be clearly defined in public discussion.

The notable correspondence in your columns has shown that there are two real alternatives—that of replacing the League system or restoring it—and that the first of these policies often masquerades as the second.

"Reform" of the League, as now commonly advocated, really means euthanasia with an epitaph of mingled reproach and regret. A League without coercion; or with only "permissive," and therefore uncertain, coercion; or with coercion confined to a Locarno fraction of Europe, is no League at all. It would be impotent to conciliate, to restrain, or to redress in the actual conflicts of the near future, which will first arise elsewhere and then extend. This is in fact a policy of attempting a localized immunity at the price of abandoning the collective security which is the essence of the League. It has its attractions, but it should present itself as what it is. And at least it should not be justified by the statement that the League sanction system has proved futile. What has proved futile is a policy which (whatever the circumstances which explain it) allowed Italy to believe, until aggression had been made inevitable by the dispatch of a large army, that no action at all would be taken, and then imposed only the lesser half of the sanctions prescribed by the Covenant.

We must be equally clear as to the other alternative, the restoration of the League system. It means that we must secure a union of loyal members, with a collective preponderance of strength. We must be ready to support, by economic measures, local and regional resistance to aggression east of the Locarno line, and we must be prepared for the military or naval risks that may follow. Countries that impose sanctions must find their safeguard against attack, not in half measures too weak to provoke, but in their known collective strength and determination.

Can we, in relation to this policy, secure the necessary strength by buying the adhesion of Italy? Clearly not. The price would be the discontinuance of sanctions, the recognition of the *fait accompli*, and perhaps financial assistance. And, the price once paid, the result would at best be doubtful. Nor could a council, with the condoned and successful aggressor as a principal member, be a nucleus around which the authority of the League could be rebuilt. We must then be collectively strong enough without this perilous and dearly purchased adhesion. A realistic examination of the European situation, country by country, would, I

believe, show that this is still possible if all policy and diplomatic effort is directed to that end—but not if we refuse responsibility east of the Locarno line.

The risks of either policy are serious, but I agree with those of your correspondents who believe that the risks involved in restoring the League are less, and the rewards greater.

And obviously we should decide definitely what we want League policy to be before we go to Geneva. Lesser countries rightly look to France and Great Britain for guidance—and the initiative is with us, both in view of our general position and of the action which we started in September. The most unworthy course of all would be to go, first to Paris and then to Geneva, waiting to see if—perhaps even hoping that—we shall be asked to consent to a policy which we shrink from proposing.

I am, &c.

ARTHUR SALTER.

66, Cornwall Gardens, S.W.7.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Much is being said on the dropping of sanctions. Common sense is pitted against the cranks; principle accuses expediency. Many are not clear for what object they are fighting, but confuse the means to the end with the end itself. What, then, is our object in the field of foreign affairs? So far as I see it it is cooperation between the nations for the purpose of social progress unhindered, so far as possible, by selfish interest or mistrust.

Let us now examine the factors affecting the attainment of this object. There is in England a very genuine and, I think, deeply religious desire for this cooperation, and it is prepared to be unselfish. It is prepared to go a long way, but not to death. I doubt whether there is this genuine feeling in many countries abroad, where I fancy expediency is rather the spur. Italy has outraged this feeling, but has emerged successful in spite of the measures taken against her. The British fighting forces are admittedly unprepared for a major war; but the rest of the world is well armed and in dangerous mood.

The immediate problem is the question as to what to do about the existing sanctions. Let us again consider their peculiar object. They were imposed for the purpose of preventing Italian soldiers from occupying Abyssinian territory, nothing else, and not until Italians were actually on Abyssinian territory.

There are three courses open. First, sanctions may be intensified. If they are it may mean war, perhaps with Italy, perhaps with someone else. The people who demand their intensification should admit this, and so should, at the same time, insist upon immediate conscription in this country, lest we be caught unprepared. They must also ask for a large increase in income-tax and the duty on tea, &c., in order to meet the extra expense and also to pay full wages to men thrown out of work in Wales or elsewhere as a result of this their policy. But what would be their effect, besides risking a probably inconclusive war? They might hurt the poorest of the poor both in Italy and Abyssinia. Italian industrialists welcome them, however, as a form of protection. Certainly neither Mussolini nor one single Italian soldier would suffer, nor would their imposition result in the withdrawal of one single Italian from Ethiopia.

The second course is to refuse to take a lead at Geneva, pretending that we are prepared to go the whole hog, knowing full well that others will not do so, and secretly hoping that sanctions will thus peter out through no fault of ours, and that thus will we save our face. This is clearly dishonest and perfidious. We have always been ready to give a lead hitherto. We must be just as ready to do so now, however difficult it may be. Our prestige will suffer less by clear thinking than by muddled hoping upon hope.

The third and wise course is to drop sanctions forthwith, because they have ceased to serve their immediate purpose, and their continuance in a spirit of revenge is hardly likely

to assist the attainment of the main object. Let us also admit that we cannot now help in any way to help the inhabitants of Ethiopia by coercing Italy, but we may possibly be able to do a little for them by cooperation.

Then must we plan for the future. Before doing so let us learn from the past that we are not normally prepared to die, or even to die, in war unless they think that all is lost and live for is threatened. Furthermore it is obvious that no aggressor will fire the first shot until he is prepared to withstand all weapons that are likely to be used against him. Sanctions are now just as much a weapon as gas, and the aggressor will be equally prepared for them before he starts. Economic sanctions will then be security to no one, and a nation will, when the call comes, only agree to assist militarily if it considers itself to be vitally affected. Therefore no promises should be made which are unlikely to be kept.

Our immediate danger is war in Europe. It may come any time during the next 10 years. We must be prepared to defend ourselves single-handed, if necessary. But what happens in the immediate future we must be turning our eyes far ahead for what may be a greater danger. The wheel of progress is turning. We think at present in terms of England and France and Germany. We must once think in terms of Wessex, Northumbria and East Anglia. In the not distant future we must prepare ourselves for the Negroids, Semitic peoples, Mongol races, &c. ourselves. We shall find one day that England, France, Germany, and the Scandinavian peoples and the Netherlands have identical interests. The sooner we begin telling each other so the better. The sooner we join up the closest union the better for us all.

I am, &c.,

J. R. J. MACNAMARA

House of Commons, June 14.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—There is one aspect of the League action regarding Abyssinia which seems to have received little attention in recent letters and speeches—namely, the moral issue involved. Which side stands for the right: the League and its insistence on the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations, or Mussolini's cynical and ruthless regard of these things?

There surely can be but one answer, and to-day we lack the courage and determination to continue our support of the League for reason that it stands for justice and the sanctity of treaties, we shall assuredly have to pay penalty in the future.

I do not believe, however, that such timidity represents the true mind of our people, and only the moral issue were put clearly before them the Government could be sure of nation's support in standing firmly by League.

I am, &c.,

S. R. DRURY-LOWE

42, Hamilton Terrace, N.W.8.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I cannot accept Colonel Maunsell's statement that "nobody wishes to impose sanctions against Italy or any other country." On the contrary a great many busybodies have long been clamouring them.

As regards pledges, it is always easy to them at other people's expense. "Honour" as Colonel Maurice Spencer says, "she still count for something"; but the chief honour and honour of our statesmen should be to protect civilization and keep it intact, not allow it to go down in a brutal and unnecessary war. I suppose a suicide pact is a pact? to honour it would be considered a criminal offence. The verdict should now be brought in "Suicide while of unsound mind."

Do not let us block the way once again so often before, with the corpses of idealisms. It is quite extraordinary how natural loyalty of the people of this country allows them to cling for years to things which they no longer believe. Our duty is to see straight and build for the future testing every method of securing peace until we finally discover the correct one.

I am, &c.,

OSBERT SITWELL

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## NORTHERN STATES AND LEAGUE

### PLEA FOR MUTUAL POLICY

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

COPENHAGEN, MAY 22

The leading politicians of the five northern countries—Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland—met to-day in Copenhagen for their yearly inter-Parliamentary congress. Although Iceland is not a member of the League, special interest is attached to the debate concerning the future of the League.

The Danish Foreign Minister, Hr. Munch, said he feared the present transition period, with its unsettled problems, would last longer than the summer, but European anarchy could not continue much longer. The former Norwegian Prime Minister, Hr. Mowinckel, proposed that the Northern States in future should not be forced to take part in a policy of sanctions, but should remain neutral, if possible, in the event of a new war.

Hr. Mowinckel said it would be wise if the northern countries took the initiative in concluding an air treaty with Great Britain, Russia, Germany, and France on the lines proposed by Herr Hitler.