

THE SOUTH TYROL

One of the few encouraging developments during the Conference was the independent negotiation by Italy and Austria of an agreement which provided for considerable guarantees being given to the Austrian inhabitants who comprise the bulk of the population of the Italian South Tyrol. When drafting the treaties the Council of Foreign Ministers had considered the claim for the return of the whole or some part of South Tyrol to Austria, but they had not been able to reach unanimity and had therefore rejected the claim. Thus the sole reference in the treaty to this most controversial question was Article 10, which merely provided that Italy and Austria should enter into arrangements to guarantee free movement of passenger and freight traffic between the north and east Tyrol.

The desire of several delegations to see justice done to the South Tyrolese, who had suffered under the rule of Italian Fascists and non-Facists, indicated that another item, involving territorial changes in an important strategic area, would be added to the Conference's agenda of disagreement. When, however, the Italians and Austrians negotiated an agreement which by implication left the South Tyrol under Italian sovereignty, but provided that the Italian Government should give to the inhabitants a wide range of guarantees, which included the use of their own language and local legislative and executive autonomy, these delegations were satisfied and simply proposed that the Conference add weight to the agreement by incorporating its provisions in the treaty.

This proposal, advanced by Belgium and the Netherlands, was opposed by the Russian group (who chose as their chief spokesman the Foreign Minister of Esthonia) on the formal ground that the agreement was between two ex-enemy States and therefore no concern of the Conference, and on the substantial ground that it was unreal to write into the peace treaty an agreement which by making no precise economic arrangements, by using vague words and setting up no practical machinery and by omitting to define the exact territory involved, failed to solve satisfactorily the question of the rights and freedoms of the population, left open the question of the frontiers, gave scope for narrowing the autonomy desired, and thus held no prospect of giving permanent satisfaction either to Italy or to Austria.

The Dutch-Belgian proposal, framed as a new article, 10A, was passed by 13 votes against the conventional 6, with Ethiopia abstaining; the Plenary Conference sent it forward to the Council of Foreign Ministers as a two-thirds majority recommendation.