

The treaty with Italy entered into force on 15 September, 1947, and during the following twelve months the destiny of the colonies was exhaustively discussed by the Council of Foreign Ministers and their deputies. A Commission of Investigation was despatched to the territories and after a tour lasting several weeks made reports, which, though abounding in reservations, dissenting footnotes, and alternative versions, provided a mass of information concerning living and political conditions in the three colonies. In addition, interested Governments were twice given the opportunity of making oral or written statements to the Deputies concerning the fate of the territories. Despite this activity no agreement was reached by the four Powers and on 15 September, 1948, they referred the question to the General Assembly. No discussion was possible at Paris and it was agreed that the problem should be considered at the second part of the third session.

The Former Italian Colonies

The territories concerned—Libya on the Mediterranean, Eritrea on the Red Sea, and Italian Somaliland on the Indian Ocean—have certain common features; all are mostly desert and sparsely populated (a total population of little more than 3,000,000 occupies a total area of 750,000 square miles); all have in the past served as bases for aggression against neighbouring countries; and all are, as an outcome of the war, still under foreign military occupation.

Libya, the largest of the colonies, once the most prosperous and still potentially the most valuable, has since 1943 been administered in three parts: Cyrenaica, which is under British administration and contains 310,000 inhabitants, most of whom belong to the Senussi sect and only 100 of whom are Italians; Tripolitania, which is also under British administration and has a population of 800,000, of whom 44,000 are Italians; and the Fezzan, a vast desert region to the south of Tripolitania which is administered by the French and contains about 50,000 Moslem inhabitants.

Eritrea, the next in importance and in some ways the most spectacular of the territories, contains a mosaic of peoples totalling about 1,063,000, the three major groups of which are—

- (a) The Italians, 26,000;
- (b) The Coptic Christians, most of whom occupy the high central plateau extending from Ethiopia into Eritrea; and
- (c) The Moslems, who occupy most of the remainder of the territory, including the low-lying Western Province and the Red Sea coastal strip.

Italian Somaliland, the third territory, which for the most part is one of the world's least promising deserts, has a population of nearly 1,000,000, over half of whom are nomadic, and 4,000 of whom are Italians.