

## SECOND COMMITTEE: ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND OTHER TECHNICAL QUESTIONS.

Delegate: Sir JAMES PARR. Substitute: Mr. R. M. CAMPBELL.

For reasons distinct from its agenda, the proceedings of the Second Committee in 1936 acquired a special interest. In the midst of its sittings, on 26th September, the European gold bloc crumbled; the joint declaration by the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and France showed that the devaluation which had long been feared and resisted was now welcomed in the hope that it would "establish more solid foundations for the stability of international economic relations"; and the welcome was very generally endorsed at Geneva. No doubt this was an event of high value; it certainly was a useful reminder that countries in which parliamentary democracy survives can still act decisively and in unison.

Yet one feels that its beneficent economic consequences can perhaps be exaggerated. At least, if only to temper our uncritical enthusiasm, we may recall the singularly different reception that was given to a comparable event five years ago. In September, 1931, also during the League Assembly and while the Second Committee was sitting, Great Britain went off gold: the entire Committee, according to the record, then felt deep sympathy for the country which had been obliged to suspend the gold standard.\*

So do times and views change. If experience has shown that the earlier fears were exaggerated, is it not possible that in retrospect observers will be obliged to confess that they erred in the measure credited to currency adjustments in 1936 as the solution of the world's economic problems?

To give these matters their due place in the Second Committee's proceedings, however, I shall refer in the approximate order of their consideration to the several subjects dealt with by the Committee.

## HEALTH.

A review of the League's work in the sphere of health was occasioned by the fact that its Health Committee's three-year term expires on the 31st December, 1936. What may be described as its routine activities cover epidemic-intelligence, malaria-research, biological standardization, and the Singapore Bureau, the functions of which extend to the problems of ill health in the East. Of a more *ad hoc* character have been regional conferences—in 1935 the Pan-African Health Conference met in Johannesburg and the International Pacific Health Conference in Sydney; housing and rural hygiene problems have been under preliminary inquiry, and further collaboration and preparations for a Conference are under way; collective study tours were conducted, with the co-operation of the Governments immediately concerned, to the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, tours the value of which in demonstrating recent achievements in public health and social welfare has been attested.

## NUTRITION.

Nutrition is a special subject which came in the first place within the purview of the Health Committee, whose activities in this field took definite form as early as 1926. More recently, and particularly since the debates at the International Labour Conference and the League Assembly in 1935, international concern in the subject has been stimulated, and a number of useful reports, at once the outcome of and the cause of further interest, have resulted.

Reports in four volumes before the 1936 Assembly and its Second Committee were respectively:—

- (i) The interim report of the Mixed Committee;
- (ii) A technical report on the Physiological Bases of Nutrition;
- (iii) A descriptive summary of post-war developments in the field of nutrition in various countries; and
- (iv) Statistics of food production, distribution and prices.

The last mentioned of these, as was commented not infrequently when the report was published, revealed relatively satisfactory standards of nutrition in New Zealand compared particularly with less-fortunately placed European countries. It showed, to cite two examples, that in the five-year period 1930-34 the average annual consumption of butter varied from 2.3 lb. in Italy to 37.7 lb. in New Zealand, and of meat from 35 lb. in Italy—again the lowest of the seventeen countries recorded—to a maximum of 236 lb. in New Zealand.

These figures, while striking in their way, were not taken—certainly not by the representative of New Zealand—as warrant for our being content or complacent. On the contrary, Sir James Parr observed that there is a problem in ensuring better nutrition in the interests of health, even in the most favoured of countries. He stressed the need for guarding against any erroneous inference that the current awareness of nutrition problems by the Government and people of the United Kingdom indicate that conditions here are exceptionally bad. Noting further that low wages and purchasing-power are the root cause of inadequate nutrition, Sir James Parr was able to point to New Zealand's recent improvements in pay to the employed and the unemployed, as well as to the more direct attack on the nutrition problem, by way of milk-supply to children as forecast in the Finance Minister's 1936 Budget.

All speakers at Geneva appreciated the value of the action that is being taken by the various organs of the League in the sphere of nutrition. Many were able to report that National Nutrition Councils have been set up in their countries, and one resolution suggested by the Second Committee and adopted by the Assembly looked forward to the exchanging of views among representatives of these Councils in regard to their common problems. Generally, one might describe the discussion as being wholly

\* Cf. Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 95, Records of 12th Assembly, Second Committee (21st September, 1931), page 49.