

Mr. Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the United Kingdom, spoke in the Assembly on the 20th September. After a few words of congratulation to His Highness the Aga Khan on having been appointed President of the Assembly, Mr. Eden said :—

“We are met at a time of profound international anxiety. Though the peoples of the earth want peace, they seem as far as ever from attaining to it. In two parts of the world at least—in the south-western corner of Europe and in the Far East—war is being waged as fiercely as at any time in history, while to the age-old bitterness of strife is added the deadly power of modern armament.

“The influence of these events is felt everywhere. Even those of us here whose nationals are not engaged either directly or indirectly in either of these conflicts, even the most peace-loving amongst us, are now spending a vast proportion of national wealth upon armaments.”

Mr. Eden then proceeded to give some figures to illustrate the degree of rearmament which had been forced upon the United Kingdom after the efforts made in the early post-war years to set up a new international order, of which the League was to be the foundation, had failed. He deplored that the lessons of the Great War had not been fully learned. Until they had been learned the League could not play its full part, yet, in his opinion, there was no dispute between nations which could not be settled by peaceful means. The United Kingdom was prepared to use peaceful means in connection not only with policy, but also with armaments, but for the moment collective action depended upon the extent of co-operation of other States, whether members of the League or not. He then referred to Spain, and derived some comfort from the fact that the conflict had not spread beyond the Spanish frontiers. He added :—

“We are ready enough to take our full share, and more than our full share, of responsibility for the policy of non-intervention. We have consistently supported that policy. If non-intervention now has to be discarded, it will not be for lack of patience on the part of its original sponsors. Let us not, however, conceal from ourselves this patent fact : if the policy of non-intervention is abandoned, Europe will be swept into deeper and more dangerous waters. A leaky dam may yet serve its purpose, but we alone cannot decide the fate of this policy. Whatever that fate may be, there is one pledge that I can unequivocally give to this Assembly—that the Government I represent will spare no endeavour to prevent war from engulfing Europe.”

Mr. Eden then devoted a few seconds to the Nyon Conference. He regretted that certain powers had not been represented, but justified the elaboration of a plan without consultation with the absentees on the grounds of speed and efficiency.

A few short sentences having reference to the Far East were followed by a defence of the United Kingdom's adoption of the policy of protection. He then spoke on the problem of raw materials, which he emphasized was, in the opinion of the League Committee which had studied the subject, not primarily or even substantially one of colonial possessions. On this problem he said :—

“Acting in the spirit which promoted our policy in this respect, and wishing to give effect to the recommendation of the Committee on Raw Materials, His Majesty's Government is ready, as part of the efforts now being made to effect economic and political appeasement and to increase international trade—but without prejudice to the principle of colonial preference—His Majesty's Government is ready, I repeat, to enter into discussion with any powers which may approach it for an abatement of particular preferences in non-self-governing colonial territories where these can be shown to place undue restriction on international trade.”

The speech of the Portuguese Foreign Minister was devoted almost entirely to the Spanish conflict. The following quotation from the speech is of interest :—

“It is undoubtedly a fact that we earnestly desire the triumph of Spanish nationalism—we desire it to-day more eagerly than ever—for the simple reason that we all know the absorption of Portugal by Spain to be one of the ambitions of Iberian communism. We do not fear that we shall be absorbed ; we fear only the anxiety and the disorders which naturally result from such an ambition.”

Of the other speeches made I would mention two only, that of Mr. Bruce, the first delegate of Australia, and that of M. Litvinoff, the first delegate of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The first part of Mr. Bruce's speech dealt with the conflict in the Far East. During somewhat lengthy remarks concerning the scope of the Articles of the Covenant which might be invoked in the case of the Chinese Appeal, he said :—

“Nothing could be more fatal to the prestige and future welfare of the League than that we should attempt, by some meaningless formula, to postpone or sidestep facing the issues involved and defining the League's attitude and position. Moreover, honour and the permanent interests of the League itself demand that China should not be misled into believing that she can rely on forms of assistance which may not be forthcoming.”

Mr. Bruce also dealt rather fully with the economic work of the League, including the subject of nutrition.

M. Litvinoff spoke on the recent cases of aggression, on the desirability which had been expressed in several quarters for universality of the League, and on the Reform of the Covenant. His remarks on the assertion that the aggressors both in Europe and in Asia had intervened in order to fight communism were very pointed, and the following is worthy of quotation :—

“I am sure that all sensible people understand perfectly the stupidity of the anti-Communist slogan and the aggressive intentions which it hides, but that they listen to or read the nonsense in silence, out of considerations of politeness, perhaps out of place in the circumstances. The danger is that this silence may be understood by the aggressor as agreement that his aggressive intentions or actions are justified, with all the sad consequences that follow for the cause of peace.