

1939.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

REPORT OF THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DOMINION OF NEW ZEALAND ON THE
NINETEENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, HELD AT GENEVA IN THE
YEAR 1938.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

NINETEENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

New Zealand Government Offices,
415 Strand, London, W.C. 2, 12th October, 1938.

SIR,—

I have the honour to inform you that in the capacity of President of the Council I opened the Nineteenth Assembly of the League of Nations on the morning of Monday, 12th September, 1938.

The Assembly has on more than one occasion opened in an atmosphere of gloom, but never before had the outlook in Europe been darker. It is true to say that the sickness of the League is not of recent origin. Surely we can trace it to the earliest years of the present decade, to the failure of the Disarmament Conference, and to the reluctance or inability of Governments to act collectively in the Far East in connection with the Manchurian crisis. And it is not only the League that has suffered. The seed which was sown has been followed by a harvest of suspicion, fear, and intolerance, until once more we see a large part of Europe an armed camp.

On one aspect of the present situation the League had not been called upon to express an opinion, although that situation weighed heavily on delegates. I refer to the minorities of Czechoslovakia, and particularly to the German minority residing largely in the extreme western part of that country and near the German frontier. It is, of course, known to you that for years the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia had been discontented with their position in the Republic. Economically they had suffered considerably, as have other minorities in Europe, and they had cause for complaint in other directions. Some months ago, in response to pressure, the Czechoslovakian Government entered into negotiations with the representatives of the German minority, but the negotiations hung fire. There were bitter complaints and allegations of insincerity on both sides, until, finally, Lord Runciman was sent to Czechoslovakia as mediator. When the Assembly met the position was, briefly—

- (i) The final offer of the Czechoslovakian Government had been made and was under examination; and
- (ii) The German Chancellor was due to make a speech at the annual party conference at Nuremburg.

Although the eyes of the world were focused on Czechoslovakia, there had been movements elsewhere. The German Army was mobilized for the autumn manœuvres, and the French had taken certain precautions on their frontiers. The train was laid, the smallest spark could set it alight, and Europe might once more be plunged into a violent war. This necessarily brief reference to the situation has not entailed any discussion of the merits of the Sudeten case nor of the offer of the Czechoslovakian Government; nor should it, for it was not a subject for debate in the Assembly.