

Parliamentary Review

France

ON June 28th, a debate was held in the French Senate ranging over the whole field of foreign policy. Although priority was given to a discussion of regional pacts, it was quite clear that the underlying feeling was one of fear with regard to Germany's intentions. Quite early in the debate, M. Lemery made a somewhat flamboyant appeal for military alliances in preference to regional arrangements. He distrusted pacts, which, while paying lip-service to policing functions, at the same time invited malefactors to darn the constable's uniform. M. Cachin welcomed the Government's proposals for the establishment of a European Commission which would unite all European countries into a common security system which would pave the way to a general disarmament. In summing up the debate, M. Delbos, the Foreign Minister, repudiated the policy of alliances. He admitted that pacts of mutual assistance were to some extent analogous, but he pointed out that such pacts were really the complement of a system of arbitration, that they were aimed against no particular countries and were thereby stripped of any "offensive" character. He again emphasised the desire of his Government to strengthen the preventive action of the international community, and pointed out how Article XI of the Covenant could be revised for this purpose. He insisted that war in Europe could not be localised. France was vitally interested in the preservation of peace in Central Europe and in the Mediterranean, and would admit of no so-called League reforms which left these regions outside the Collective System of security. The debate, although expressing the French desire to strengthen the League, did little to clarify her policy with regard to regional pacts. A precise statement as to their scope and character has yet to be made. At the moment, we must be satisfied with the assurance that they will be based on the all-important principle of mutual assistance.

The Private Manufacture of Arms controversy which has raged violently in every democratic country for years past, came to a head when on July 17th the Chamber of Deputies passed a Bill for the nationalisation of the war industries. Thus one country has at long last had the courage to take decisive action on Article VIII, para 5, of the Covenant, which states that

"The members of the League agree that the private manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections. The Council shall advise how the evil effects attendant upon such manufacture can be prevented. . . ."

In his speech, the Rapporteur of the Commission on this subject pointed out that it had been impossible to arrive at an international agreement, "but," he asked, "how can an international agreement for the control and limitation of armaments be arrived at if each member State of the League of Nations has not itself organised this control within its own frontiers"?

Another point from his speech was that "in order to be effective the control must be limited to certain 'master pieces' of war material." Those who dispute THE NEW COMMONWEALTH case that the differentiation of weapons is a practical policy, will do well to examine the method whereby this policy is being applied to arms manufacture in France. As M. Daladier pointed out later in the debate, sardine tins and other such missiles will still be made by private firms.

Great Britain

The Foreign Affairs debate in the House of Commons on July 27th was of outstanding importance in that Mr. Eden made a comprehensive survey of the whole field of British Foreign Policy. His tone was one of optimism, but the material was far too non-committal for his hearers to judge whether that optimism was justified. All that could be said of the London meeting of the representatives of Britain, France and Belgium preliminary to a meeting of the Five Locarno powers was:

"We have now reached a stage when, if a real spirit of collaboration exists among all concerned, we should be able to surmount the obstacles that confront us."

Turning to the vital question of the reform of the League, Mr. Eden was meticulously vague. All he would say was that there were fundamental differences of opinion on this subject.

"At one extreme are those who say they would like to see the Covenant shorn of what I may call its coercive or repressive provisions.

"At the other extreme are those who say they would like the obligation to render military assistance to the victim of aggression to be universal and automatic." (Hon. Members: "Hear, hear!")

"I can assure the Committee that, whatever the final view of His Majesty's Government may be, they are not in favour of either of the two extreme courses to which I have made allusion. Between those two there is an almost infinite gradation of opinion."

On the subject of freer access to such raw materials as are produced in the Mandated Territories and the Colonies, Mr. Eden assured the House that the Government would be glad to discuss the subject at some international conference under the auspices of the League, but on the subject of the actual transfer of territory held under mandate, he could only express the hope that the question would not be raised in an acute form to add to the manifold problems of an already complex situation.

Concluding his speech, the Foreign Secretary made two very important declarations which will be welcomed by all members of THE NEW COMMONWEALTH:

"The fact that we have certain obligations in certain parts of Europe—I say this for the Government—does not mean that we disinterest ourselves to-day from what happens in the rest of Europe."

And in the second place,

"I would ask the Committee to take note of this: Our armaments, for which we are asking, will, in fact, never be used for a purpose inconsistent with the Covenant of the League or the Pact of Paris. They will not. That is the undertaking. They might, and if the occasion arose, they would be used in self-defence."

These are important statements, but how much greater would have been their stabilising effect if Mr. Eden had linked them together and been as positive about the force which Great Britain is prepared to place at the disposal of the League to deter aggression—at least in Europe—as he was about the force necessary for self-defence.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, opening the debate from the Opposition benches, put forward two major constructive proposals for the strengthening of the League's machinery both for security and for peaceful change.

"Article XI," he said, "should be so re-interpreted as to make it possible for the League to take action to check preparations for war even before aggression is actually committed without counting the votes of disputing Powers.