

The Swedish Premier, M. Tage Erlander, in his capacity of party leader, was one of the guests at a rally in Helsinki of the Finnish Social Democratic Party. M. Erlander greeted the Finnish sister party, and expressed his belief that the bonds between the two nations on either side of the Gulf of Bothnia would prevail over all vicissitudes. The Swedish Prime Minister's visit was greeted with satisfaction by all parties in Finland with the exception of the Folk Democrats. The latter, professed to view the visit with suspicion, and the Communist organ, *Työkansan Sanomat*, delivered an attack which through its absurdity and malevolence must distinguish it from all greetings ever accorded to a leading representative of a friendly Power.

THE LOW COUNTRIES

Belgium

The Chamber of Representatives assembled on the 25th March to hear M. Spaak's statement of policy. M. Spaak began by describing his efforts to form a four-party coalition. These had failed because of Liberal and Communist disapproval of his suggested programme. The alternative was a coalition of the two major parties, and this had been achieved through a compromise on the country's "main problems." An exception, however, was the *question royale*, on which "fundamental agreement" had been reached; but the Cabinet as a whole was fully alive to the necessity of promoting "some kind of settlement."

Turning to the details of the Cabinet's programme, M. Spaak dealt first with the question of female suffrage in parliamentary elections. Women, he assured the Chamber, would have to vote "by the end of this year or the beginning of the next." At the moment he did not propose to devote many words to finance, as in the near future the Chamber would hear a full statement on the subject from the Minister (M. Eyskens); but he wanted members to know that it was the Cabinet's intention to "complete" financial reconstruction and to retain the currency policy which had been followed ever since the liberation. The Cabinet, added M. Spaak, was aware that the entire system of taxation needed overhauling; but, for the time being, the "heavy" taxes now operating had to be paid, and attempts at evasion would be "seriously punished." He promised a simplification of the system. The payment of compensation for war damage, he continued, made a "broadening" of the

credit system "imperative." Accordingly, the Cabinet proposed to alter the constitution of the National Fund for Industrial Credit so as to make it independent of "private capital": it would be run jointly by representatives of industry, labour and the Cabinet. At the same time, they preferred to modify the statutes of the *Banque nationale*, so that it, too, would be independent of "private interests" and thus be able the "more fully" to carry out Government policy. The new Cabinet's "economic aims" were identical with those of its predecessor, although different "methods" would have to be employed to achieve them in order to meet the altered circumstances. A Bill for the establishment of an Economic Council, Joint Professional Councils and Production Committees would be drafted and introduced forthwith. M. Spaak then declared that the problem of prices and wages still commanded the situation, and that so long as that was the case controls would have to stay, although their removal could be expected in any industry which could show a pre-war production level. The Cabinet were opposed to a general rise of wages; but it might be necessary to investigate claims for increases in certain industries. State intervention in industry—essential during the immediate post-war period—would cease. His predecessor's decision to raise the average price of coal to 629 francs a ton (which had proved his undoing) would, declared M. Spaak, be adhered to; and Parliament would be asked to approve the Coal Bill which was now before it. The Cabinet's programme for social welfare was comprehensive, and its keynote was the improvement of workers' "material circumstances": the setting up of a permanent system of unemployment insurance; the examination of the conditions of apprenticeship; the granting of unemployment, health and disability benefits; assistance in finding employment; an increase of old-age pensions (to 16,500 francs), together with a "re-equipment allowance" for pensioners of 1,500 francs; an increase of family allowances as soon as the "quarterly budgets" permitted; and financial aid to newly-married couples setting up house. M. Spaak then announced that the housing programme would be the responsibility of the Minister of Economic Co-ordination (M. de Groot). Grants towards the purchase of houses would be increased, and a "bonus system" instituted: the question of extending these grants-in-aid to persons who at present did not qualify for unemployment insurance was under consideration. The

Cabinet's agricultural policy had for its principal aims the repeal of "useless regulations," the "organisation of production," the securing to farmers of increased financial returns; and a Bill—the Farm Leases Bill—would be introduced in the Senate.

The "great effort" made by Belgium during the past two-and-a-half years, said M. Spaak in conclusion, had to be sustained "without pause and without weakening." "As far as I know," he added, "we have a stable majority which, I am sure, will keep us on the alert through criticism, and a two-fold Opposition which I hope will enable us to rebuild the country." Of the speakers who followed M. Spaak, the most striking contribution to the debate came from M. Devèze on behalf of the Liberals. In a rather bitter and sarcastic speech, he openly accused M. Spaak of having "manoeuvred to keep the Liberals out of the Government." "The Premier," declared M. Devèze, "has now gratified a long-standing wish." He ventured to prophesy a short life for the new Cabinet. Pointing at the C.S.P. benches, he said that "all the Catholic Boy Scouts" had now entered the Cabinet; the contrast between the inexperience of its C.S.P. members and the experience of its Socialist members was "really striking." He thought the C.S.P. had been mistaken in joining the Cabinet "at this juncture." The agreement between the two parties could only encourage "widespread mistrust and opposition"; the main purpose of that agreement was the exclusion of the Liberals.

Winding up the debate (26th March), M. Spaak declared: "I have great hopes of co-operation between the Socialist Party and the C.S.P. I am a Socialist, but nothing in the words 'Social' and 'Christian' offends my ear; and I believe that the future of Europe lies in the combination of Socialism and Christian civilisation." A motion of confidence in the Government was carried by 148 to 13, with 22 abstentions, the Liberals voting against the motion and the Communists abstaining.

FRANCE

The National Assembly broke up last week for the Easter recess after voting another three months' provisional credits, amounting to 110 milliard fr. The

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Budget proper will be presented to the Assembly this month. The Minister of Finance has attributed the delay to his desire to produce a balanced ordinary Budget and he told the Assembly that this object was now virtually secured. Meanwhile an "Axe Committee" is engaged on the task of cutting civil service personnel and appointments: 20,000 posts have already been suppressed, but the goal is 50,000.

The National Economic Council met for the first time on the 26th March. Its existence is provided for in the new Constitution but it is a direct successor of the old Economic Council first set up in 1925. It is consultative but should have more authority than the old Council since the committees of the Assembly are obliged to listen to its advice before economic bills are discussed. The Economic Council has 184 members, representing the different trade unions, employers and professional associations. At the opening meeting of the Council, presided over by M. Herriot, M. Ramadier referred to the good work done by the old Council and showed that the new one would be closely associated with the work of Parliament.

On the 30th March General de Gaulle made his first public appearance for six months when he unveiled a memorial at Bruneval on the Normandy coast in commemoration of the British raid of February 1942. There was a large audience assembled including H.M. Ambassador and British military personalities. General de Gaulle paid a warm tribute to Great Britain and referred to the co-operation between the Allies and the French resistance movement. His speech did not touch on politics, beyond his usual appeal for national union and some veiled attacks on the Communists, but it is expected that more may come of the speech that he is to make at Strasbourg on Easter Monday.

The last few weeks have seen a crop of scandals and unsavoury incidents, ranging from the discovery of a number of arms depôts in different parts of the country to a duel between the Socialist deputy, Gaston Defferre, and the Radical deputy, Paul Bastid, after a quarrel which arose out of the former's alleged connection with the famous wine scandal (see *Summaries* Nos. 363-4). M. Defferre's former chief, M. Gouin, has also been cited again by M. Yves Farge in connection with the wine scandal and he has asked to be allowed to make a statement before the committee of

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