

*League of Nations*

The government naturally will seek to meet the wishes of the house. There have been reasons why we have thought it inadvisable just at this moment to bring on a debate on the European situation. We shall wish to consider carefully all matters that should be considered in that connection. There is however no desire to delay discussion if hon. members deem it advisable to have League matters debated at an early date.

I may be mistaken, but I believe that the great majority of members in this house as well as the great majority of the citizens of Canada are of the opinion that we shall be contributing more effectively to an amicable adjustment of the very difficult situation which faces European statesmen at the present time if we consider very carefully the time at which we enter upon discussion of that situation. I ask my hon. friend to consider what the effect of a discussion in this parliament two months ago, one month ago, two weeks ago, might have been upon the matters that are being discussed at Geneva and in London at the present time. Would a discussion have been of assistance to those who are wrestling with these great problems which, it might almost be said, are the most critical the world has been faced with at any time? Has the government not pursued the wiser course, of proceeding as rapidly as possible with the matters which are of immediate concern to us here and which we feel should be considered first because of their great importance to Canada at present. We have adopted the course we have indicated because we believe it to be the best one to follow, all circumstances being considered.

I did say that when we came to a discussion of the estimates of the Department of External Affairs ample opportunity would be given for a discussion of all matters pertaining to the league, and one item was reserved for that purpose. I believe I am right when I say that it is the view of the great majority of members of this house that it would be better not to enter too precipitately into a debate upon the European situation but rather to consider very carefully the time at which it would be best to take it up. The government will endeavour to select the best possible moment but while I say that, however, I wish to make it clear that I am not precluding any member from bringing on a discussion at any time he may wish. The fact that the hon. gentleman has made a speech this afternoon on the subject indicates that he has the right to speak at any time when the house is being moved into committee of supply or committee of ways and means. I believe, however, that the fact that other members have not followed his example in that regard is evidence that the house generally feels, as I

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

am sure the country feels, that the situation in Europe is very grave and critical and that great caution should be used on the part of members of this House of Commons with respect to discussions which may take place here on the European situation.

Right Hon. R. B. BENNETT (Leader of the Opposition): When the other afternoon the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Woodsworth) asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) to set aside a day for discussion of the relations of Canada to the League of Nations, I recalled that a few weeks ago the Prime Minister indicated to the house that when the External Affairs estimates were under consideration the fullest opportunity would be given for discussion. It is obvious that in view of the fact that questions must be asked and answered a much fairer opportunity for real discussion would be given by that procedure than would be afforded by making set speeches in the house with the Speaker in the chair, inasmuch as a good deal of information must necessarily be obtained as to what attitude has been taken by Canada at various times during the last few months in connection with the matters under consideration. For my own part I think the Prime Minister has discharged his duty to the house by making it clear that before the house rises there will be ample opportunity for us to be fully informed, through, as well, discussions in the country itself, of everything that is connected with the European situation.

I do not share the view of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, that discussion in this chamber is going to have any particular effect upon the world situation at large, nor do I share the Prime Minister's view in that regard. I realize that at the moment these matters are in the hands of the council of the League of Nations; that Canada is not a member of that council, and that any observations which might be made in this house, and which would embarrass an already embarrassed situation, would be, in my judgment at any rate, not only unsound but calculated to retard rather than to assist the accomplishment of the purposes and ends we have in view.

I feel quite certain that when the appropriate time comes—that is when the External Affairs estimates are under consideration—many of those at least with whom I am associated will be glad to be informed of the progress of events and no premature or merely academic discussion with a view to determining in theory what we are or what we are not, what we should do or what we should not do, will advance the purpose we have in mind. Our effort must be to uphold the hands of those who are endeavour-