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FAITH IN THE LEAGUE

SIX

BRITAIN AND GENEVA

MR. EDEN'S PLEDGE

From Our League Correspondent

GENEVA, JAN. 27

The League Council met this evening under the presidency of M. Mostafa Adlé (Iran) for the first sitting of its hundredth session. The Council Chamber was filled to capacity. The occasion was used to review the attitude of the Powers towards the League, and through their declarations ran a thread of optimism for the future, restrained by the recognition of past mistakes and the permanent limitations of the League.

Earlier in the day there had been a long series of conversations directed towards achieving unity of expression in the speeches that were to follow. To some extent this was obtained by an amicable limiting of the field of discussion, but even so a far greater degree of unanimity was apparent than previous statements had suggested.

The so-called neutrals had their conference with Switzerland during the morning. The proceedings were private, but it is understood that they were far from being of one mind in the direction of forcing a declaration on Article XVI. Only Sweden and Switzerland insisted on the demand for a discussion in the Committee of Twenty-Eight, the others, notably Holland and Belgium, showing moderation to an extent which suggested that they were not actuated by a common policy and that they were obliged rather to take account of their own special problem. The burden of their discussion, as of the declaration in the Council by M. Spaak (Belgium), was that they could not consent to be bound by obligations which were really beyond their powers of fulfilment. How this was to be achieved, whether by interpretation or reform, was left to future consideration.

Mr. Eden, who made the first declaration, said:—

You have referred, Mr. President, to the fact that this is the hundredth meeting of the Council. This fact in itself is sufficient to show that the League has given its proof; it has a record of achievements which should not be forgotten by those who are more apt to contemplate its failures. Diplomatic successes have little news value, while diplomatic failures have resounding consequences which continue for long to be heard and felt.

The League can legitimately be proud of its achievements, but there can be no advantage in shutting our eyes to certain events, however regrettable and however much we may deplore them. By the defection of some of its more important members the League is now faced with the fact that the area of cooperation is restricted and that its ability to fulfil all the functions originally contemplated for it is thereby reduced.

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BASIS OF TRUE PEACE

The principles on which the League was founded are laid down in the Preamble to the Covenant. They are the promotion of international cooperation and the achievement of international peace and security on the basis of respect for international law. To those principles his Majesty's Government hold fast, and they believe that true peace and orderly progress and prosperity cannot be looked for in the world unless all nations cooperate in some system based upon those principles.

We must realize that, in present circumstances, the League is not in a position to achieve all that was hoped of it. It was designed to hold all the nations of the world together in resistance to war and injustice. It was born of the universal desire to avoid a recurrence of the horrors through which the world had just passed. It was an idea hailed by all nations as responding to an urgent and spontaneous impulse. Believing, as we do, that that impulse survives, we can hope that it will ultimately prevail and that differences will be narrowed to those of method.

For this reason it seems to his Majesty's Government essential, in these difficult times, to retain what still exists. They consider that the League, in spite of its limitations, is the best instrument which has yet been devised for giving effect to the principles of international cooperation, and they are therefore determined to keep it in existence, to give it their full support, and make use of its machinery and procedure to the fullest extent that circumstances permit. Within the limits which they have to recognize they intend to make it as efficient an instrument as possible.

ADAPTATION

His Majesty's Government will welcome any cooperation in the work of the League which non-members may be disposed to give, and they do not regard their membership of the League as preventing or hindering friendly relations with non-members, since they see no reason why such relations should involve them in any departure from the principles to which I have referred. In the meantime they still believe that one day, possibly with more or less adaptation to circumstances, the League will become the universal organization which its founders contemplated. For the present, if and for so long as other great nations withhold their collaboration, the field of action by the League is to that extent in practice inevitably restricted.

Attention has recently been drawn in more than one quarter to the danger of widening this breach by the advocacy of any particular system of government. The League has never been, and his Majesty's Government for their part are resolved to do all in their power to ensure that it shall not become, the home of any ideology save that of peace through international cooperation. Let us hold fast to our principles if we believe in them, and devote our whole energies to proving their worth. Let us not be drawn into any sterile and embittering controversy with those who do not think and work with us at this moment. Let us rather hope that an appeasement may be achieved that will unite all nations in the desire once again to find the way of peace through cooperation.

When that day comes it may be that we shall unite in finding new and better methods and in adapting or modifying our procedure, but for the present we must recognize realities, and our best course would seem to be that we should continue to use the instrument that lies ready to our hand for all the purposes for which it is fitted, and thus show our faith in the essential principles on which the League was founded.

The speeches of M. Delbos, who affirmed the fidelity of France to the League, and of other representatives of member-States, will be found on page 13