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CONCESSIONS TO ITALY

SHOULD "SANCTIONS" BE ABANDONED?

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Your leading article "The Time Factor" wisely calls for thought upon problems of defence under the new conditions of speed. In Germany and elsewhere these new conditions have been thoroughly studied. The *Militär-wochenblatt*, the leading German military organ, dwelt upon them as long ago as September, 1932.

Not less needful is thought upon the present dimensions of what used to be called "diplomatic" problems. Those of your correspondents who extol "the old diplomacy" and advocate gracious concessions to Italy in the matter of "sanctions" seem to be as thoughtlessly glib as are the soldiers and pacifists who talk of the "next war" in terms of the War of 1914-18. "Sanctions" cannot be made the subject of concessions, gracious or otherwise, by any one member of the League. Under Article XVI they followed, albeit haltingly, upon the designation of Italy as the aggressor, that is to say, as a violator of Article XII of the Covenant. Surely it is for the League Assembly to say whether the breakdown of Abyssinian resistance, and the means by which that breakdown was brought about, have now made "sanctions" useless or inexpedient; and whether, in any event, it is prudent for members of the League to encourage future aggression by granting impunity to a present aggressor.

These matters are of wider dimensions than those in which the "old diplomacy" was wont to work. Nothing less than a decision upon the worth of collective security is involved. If collective security be worthless—as the simple dropping of "sanctions" would make it appear to be—the question would arise of finding another basis for British foreign policy both towards Europe and as a concerted course of action among the members of the British Commonwealth.

All the Dominions belong to the League. Unless I err all of them have supported our declared policy—that aggression shall not be allowed to profit the aggressor. Simply to drop or passively to accept the dropping of "sanctions" against Italy would stultify this policy. The League Assembly may or may not think it wise to continue indefinitely the mitigated economic pressure upon Italy which "sanctions" represent; but if the British Commonwealth is not to suffer humiliating—and, possibly, disintegrating—defeat, it seems clear that any change of League tactics must be preceded or accompanied by more than one definite decision. Of these decisions the first might be to withhold any recognition of the Italian conquest in North-East Africa. Another might be an undertaking that no member of the League will grant Italy financial assistance in any form, or share, directly or indirectly, in loans or credits designed to relieve the Italian exchequer or to cover the cost of "developing" Abyssinia. A third and most important step would be for those members of the League who oppose aggressive war to declare, jointly and severally, that all their financial, economic, and military resources will henceforth be used in concert against aggression.

If and when these things were done, the arguments for and against the dropping of present "sanctions" might be considered on their merits. Unless and until they are done the dropping of "sanctions" would be equivalent to the dropping of collective security. There is reason to believe that the armed anti-war forces of the world are still—even in Europe—superior to the war forces. Potentially, the anti-war forces are vastly superior. But if this superiority be not organized, the peace of Europe will be at the mercy of any strong aggressor who, having thought out the bearing of the speed factor upon modern warfare, may seize and hold the advantage of the initiative. Hence the importance of not putting a premium upon future aggression by making gracious, that is to say, weak, concessions to Italy now. The League may have lost the first round in the struggle against war as an instrument of national policy. But surely, Sir, it is too early for its backers to throw up the sponge.

I am, &c.,

London, June 2. WICKHAM STEED.