

Letters to the Editor

A POLICY OF PEACE

COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—*The Times* of April 9 reports a speech on British foreign policy by the Prime Minister and another by the Foreign Secretary. "The object of that policy is to maintain peace," said Mr. Chamberlain. According to Lord Halifax, "the main objective of all our policy must be honourable peace." If we ask by what measures that object is to be attained we have the Prime Minister's exhortation not to abandon "the idea of a bigger and better League in the future," his insistence on the need for British rearmament in present circumstances, and his welcome assurance that "the Government have a very clear and definite foreign policy." This policy ought to have a united country behind it. Will not the Government help to that end by letting us have a few more particulars of their practical proposals for the safety of Britain and the peace of the world?

A section of public opinion does not even yet understand that British rearmament and air raid precautions belong to this category. No sensible person imagines that these measures are designed to help Britain in the role of aggressor. They are therefore devoid of provocative effect. Their influence is wholly in the opposite direction. They make an attack upon this country less likely to succeed and so diminish the risk of its being attempted. And, as many of the smaller Continental nations gratefully acknowledge, British preparedness makes for peace abroad as well as for peace at home—the more so, since, on March 24, Mr. Chamberlain warned aggressively minded Governments that attacks on other countries may be regarded as attacks on Britain.

As part of a peace policy, "We may help" is good, but "We will help," backed by public opinion, would be better. The danger of aggression against this country would be much further diminished if any likely aggressors were convinced that they would be resisted, not by Britain alone or by the British Empire alone, but by a still larger and more powerful combination. If, however, others are to help us, we must be ready to help them; and our public opinion needs to be persuaded that this is necessary.

But no combination, however powerful, can establish the reign of law and finally get rid of the danger of aggression unless it also provides social justice for individuals and political justice for nations without their having to fight for it. A peace policy for this country must therefore aim at something more than the temporary avoidance of war. It requires to have a positive as well as a negative aspect. The Government's "very clear and definite foreign policy" will have the best chance of rallying the

great mass of latent opinion, irrespective of party, if the country can be assured that this policy includes definite action on some such lines as the following:—

1.—The Members of the League of Nations should share the high purpose of developing their League into a world commonwealth. To this end they should forthwith separate the Covenant from the Versailles and other Peace Treaties and make such changes in the interpretation of the Covenant as Mr. Eden proposed to the League's Seventeenth Assembly on September 25, 1936.

2.—This rudimentary Commonwealth of Nations should—in ways proposed by M. Van Zeeland, and in particular by means of free or comparatively free trade within its borders, loans on easy terms to its poorer Members, and organized facilities for the migration of its populations—increase the material well-being and raise the standard of life of all its citizens, so that the contrast between the Commonwealth and the isolationist or totalitarian States outside it will gradually compel them to come in.

3.—The Commonwealth should provide all its Member States with equal rights and justice. The first practical steps to this end include a development of Article XIX of the Covenant such as was worked out by a League of Nations Union Committee under the chairmanship of the late Lord Phillimore.

4.—While the Commonwealth must be a defensive alliance against aggression from outside, as well as a preventer of war and a provider of justice within its own borders, it should be an open alliance which all may join. To speak of the Commonwealth in this way does not imply the division of the world into two groups of armed rivals as happened in Europe during the years before 1914; for the Commonwealth has no aggressive intentions or ambitions against the States outside it, while they are welcome to come inside whenever they choose, and so enable armaments to be reduced all round.

5.—The advantages offered by the Commonwealth to its Member States—material benefits for their and its citizens, together with equality, justice, and security for the States themselves—should be available for all non-Members, but on condition that they enter the Commonwealth. Small States would have no future except within the Commonwealth.

6.—The citizens of the States Members of the Commonwealth should learn to think of themselves as citizens also of the Commonwealth, and to feel a loyalty to the Commonwealth as strong as any of their national patriotisms. The extremes of nationalism from which the world is suffering to-day are due not so much to excessive patriotism as to insufficient world loyalty. These two consistent sentiments should reinforce each other as a Scotsman's British patriotism is strengthened by his love of Scotland.

One other element is essential in a peace policy that is to move mankind to its support. Pericles believed that if his dream of "a united Greece with Athens as its eye" were ever to come true it must have behind it a religious motive. So also the World Commonwealth, the grown-up League of Nations, must be, not merely a profitable business enterprise or a reliable insurance company, but the expression of a great ideal and the embodiment of some of the deepest longings by men of all nations who have dreamt dreams and seen visions of the Commonwealth of God on earth.

Yours, &c.,

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The Athenaeum, Pall Mall, S.W.1,
April 16.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The speeches on the subject of the Italian Agreement made by Mr. Attlee and Mr. Alexander and reported in your issue of to-day fill one with despair at their utter lack of responsibility for the duty which, as leaders of the Opposition, they owe not only to their own party but to the country as a whole. For they seem to forget that, however little attention such diatribes may merit from sensible