

Parliament

THE JAPANESE ATTACKS ON BRITISH SHIPS

"STRONGEST PROTEST" AT TOKYO

MR. EDEN AND COMMUNICATION WITH THE U.S.

LORD SWINTON ON CIVIL SAFETY IN AIR RAIDS

HOUSE OF LORDS

MONDAY, DEC. 13

The LORD CHANCELLOR took his seat on the Woolsack at 3 o'clock.

VISCOUNT SWINTON, Secretary of State for Air, moved the second reading of the Air-Raid Precautions Bill. He said that it was not a panic measure, but, like other defence measures, was a necessary insurance premium which, in the circumstances of the world to-day, we must pay for the preservation of peace. Nor did its introduction at a time when defence measures were well under way mean that little had been done in the last few years.

Outlining the preparatory "and more than preparatory" measures that had taken place, the noble viscount said that a great deal of consultation and instruction had been necessary. He was not sure that the majority of people knew how far anti-gas training had been carried. Early in 1936 a school for instructors was established by the Air Raid Department of the Home Office at Falfield, Gloucestershire, and that had steadily passed through 120 trained instructors a month. A second school would shortly be established in the neighbourhood of York. Something like 200,000 volunteers had already been trained by these instructors in anti-gas measures. That was a very formidable figure. (Hear, hear.) In addition every policeman in the regular forces of police throughout the country had been given anti-gas training and very large numbers of the special constabulary as well.

GAS TRAINING FOR DOCTORS

Further, a special system of training was instituted for doctors. The Home Office, in cooperation with the British Medical Association, selected 16 doctors from different parts of the country for special training in the medical treatment of gas cases. These 16 doctors had already passed through this special course something like 10,000 doctors and 10,000 nurses. He was told that that was unique in any country. (Hear, hear.)

It was very important that we should learn from others, but we had a curious English habit of deprecating what we ourselves were doing. He was not trying to make out a case for the Government; he was more concerned that the whole public should not be panicky about these matters and should know the steps that were being taken for their security. Moreover, it was not a bad thing that it should be known throughout the world. With regard to gas masks, in July, 1936, the Government took over a factory in Blackburn

fortunately a great deal was known of the most effective method of combating them.

Then there was gas. He was sure there was the greatest danger was the unknown—*omne ignotum pro magno*. The greatest precaution from air raids was an instructed population, knowing how to protect themselves, and given the means of protecting themselves.

That implied two things, which lay at the root of all precautions and all schemes. They must have groups of people in every place, men and women, trained to carry out their respective functions in an air defence army. Much instruction had already been given—and reasonably and adequately equipped for the purpose. They must have also—here, the instruction was so important—a population instructed in the rudiments of self-protection, and knowing what to do and, not least important, what not to do. Unless they had those two conditions—trained bands to do the work of an instructed people—the supply of equipment of various kinds would be largely ineffective.

REDUCING THE RISKS

It was essentially a case of helping people to help themselves. But it was equally true that once they had these trained bands and an instructed population—and it was not a terrible lot that people had got to learn—then the risks of air attack—combated by active defence in the air and on the ground and by passive defence by an instructed and equipped people—were horrible enough, but they were a much less serious and much less panic-making thing than a great many people had led them to suppose. There was no reason, given the provisions which the Bill, in conjunction with defence measures, would provide, for adopting at all a defeatist spirit in this matter.

With regard to damage, and the casualties which could be caused by bombs, a very great deal could be and would be done in the way of shelters. It was practically impossible on any large scale to protect the population against the effect of a great bomb of a semi-armour-piercing character, which would penetrate even the vastest structure, but anybody who had any knowledge of the air would, he thought, say this. If they were told to go and make an air attack, and do as much damage as they could over some large built-up area, the last way they would try to do that damage would be by very expensive, complicated armour-piercing bombs of that character.

That was not likely. What was much more likely was bombs of quite a different character. But there a great deal of precaution existed and could be improved against that much more probable danger of a direct hit by other kinds of bombs—against splinters and the effect of blast. It was essential that these facilities

a war mentality, and it would do far more harm than it could possibly do good to the cause of peace by making vast numbers of people despair.

In introducing the Bill in the House of Commons, the Home Secretary had envisaged the time when the air menace would be mastered. He (Lord Arnold) could not help feeling that the Home Secretary took on himself a very great responsibility in saying that. So far as he knew that was not a view supported by any expert of note who knew what air warfare was and would be. He was afraid that the event, if and when it came, would be very much more serious than anything which had been indicated this afternoon. If he understood him aright, Lord Trenchard, who was the supreme authority in this matter, did not say very much to lead the people to a sense of security.

LONDON TUBES AS REFUGES

Continuing, the noble lord said that the Government and their advisers regarded the London tubes as not suitable for refuges. He did not believe that it was beyond the skill and knowledge of the engineering profession to make those tubes safe refuges. Such preparation had been made in other cities, notably in Paris, and what the French engineers could do our own engineers could do.

The Government should tackle the question of evacuation with more vigour. Already the scenes during the early morning and evening "rush" hours in London were positively disgraceful. Those conditions, in the event of an air raid warning, would become inconceivably terrible.

He feared that the very efficient staff officers dealing generally with the question of air raid precautions had been too few. There had, for instance, been no special observers in either Spain or China and yet there were wonderful lessons obviously to be learnt in both those terrible theatres of war.

He urged on the Government the necessity of dealing immediately with the location of industry by legislative action. They should not allow another factory to be erected in London or Greater London without a licence. This was going to be one of the worst difficulties in the air defence of the Metropolis. What was going to be so damaging in air raids generally was the utter dislocation of the highly complicated economic life of modern communities. It was to be hoped that realization of that would prevent what they were all anxious to avoid.

LIBERAL ATTITUDE

VISCOUNT MERSEY said that the peers on the Liberal benches recognized the great amount of expert and devoted work that the Secretary for Air and the Home Secretary had put in connexion with the whole of these precautions. They did not want to criticize or look back on what might have been done by to support the Government's measures in every possible way. Much of the information must of necessity be secret, but other information should be as widely disclosed as possible.

A certain number of industrial undertakings were providing or contemplating providing underground shelters for their employees at considerable expense. It would be a good thing if they might be assured that when the moment came to put the shelters into use it would not be open to the local authority to use them for the whole of the civil population apart from those employees.

"THE FIRST TEN WEEKS"

LORD TRENCHARD ON KNOCK-OUT BLOW

VISCOUNT TRENCHARD, who was heard with difficulty in the Press Gallery, said that the proposals in the Bill were gratifying and useful. The object of the Bill was to prevent a "knock-out" blow and to use all the Empire's resources. If they could hold out for the first 10 weeks they would win. He did not know that they were not spending too much energy on all the precautions against gas. There was a far greater danger of panic and material damage from the high-explosive bomb and the incendiary bomb. It was the question of getting the right proportion in the matter that would make the precautions useful or otherwise.

The proposals in the Bill had been well

householders now, unless there was some secret about them. He would take a dozen himself now and practise his children in the use of them. It was particularly necessary in the case of children, and he wanted to know how far the bucket and sand method was effective against incendiary bombs. If they were to have some chemical extinguishers, when would they be distributed? When he was a boy he himself put out a fire with an extinguisher at school.

A NOBLE LORD.—Did you light it? (Laughter.)

LORD STRABOLGI.—No. I can prove a complete alibi. (Laughter.)

Continuing, the noble lord said that the Government and their advisers regarded the London tubes as not suitable for refuges.

This country was more vulnerable than any other European country. It was said that progress had been made in defence, but what skill and knowledge of the engineering profession to make those tubes safe refuges. Such preparation had been made in other cities, notably in Paris, and what the French engineers could do our own engineers could do. The Government should tackle the question of evacuation with more vigour. Already the scenes during the early morning and evening "rush" hours in London were positively disgraceful. Those conditions, in the event of an air raid warning, would become inconceivably terrible.

FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY

He noticed that machine-gun fire from aeroplanes had not been mentioned, but when everything was taken into account it was surely absurdly optimistic to believe that the people would act promptly in regard to all those measures of defence. It seemed a matter of amazement that road accidents still continued in spite of regulations which the people knew, but did not carry out. What about the regulations that would exist in the next war? That war would come without any warning. Evacuation of the population had been referred to, but even if it were accomplished it would be a matter of enormous difficulty. How on earth were the services to be maintained, and how were the people who were evacuated going to be maintained?

The Government instead of trying to reassure the nation ought to tell the facts. If people realized the horrors of air warfare they would turn against war altogether. But this Bill might have been designed not to turn people against war but to enable them to learn to die quietly. If the Government could not put in connexion with the whole of these precautions. They did not want to criticize or look back on what might have been done by to support the Government's measures in every possible way. Much of the information must of necessity be secret, but other information should be as widely disclosed as possible.

A certain number of industrial undertakings were providing or contemplating providing underground shelters for their employees at considerable expense. It would be a good thing if they might be assured that when the moment came to put the shelters into use it would not be open to the local authority to use them for the whole of the civil population apart from those employees.

GOVERNMENT REPLY

MAXIMUM INTENSITY OF ATTACK

The EARL OF LUNSTON, Lord in Waiting, said that during the next war air raids on this country would be at their maximum intensity from the beginning of the war, and there would not, therefore, be time to develop our organization in a comparatively leisurely fashion as might have been done in former conflicts. During this Bill was passed the schemes submitted by the local authorities would come rapidly before the Air Raid Precautions Department.

The Government were not prepared to distribute respirators to the civilian population at the present time. At present, there might be a serious deterioration of certain positions.

failure of the Brussels Conference to recommend any action in defence of China.

Mr. EDEN.—No, Sir. His Majesty's Government do not at present intend to take the initiative in making such a proposal, more especially since they have received no indication that any Government desires such an initiative to be taken by His Majesty's Government.

WITHDRAWAL OF VOLUNTEERS

COMMITTEE AT WORK

Mr. THORNE (Plaitow, Lab.) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he could give the House any information in connexion with the decision of the Non-Intervention Committee upon General Franco's reply to the proposals for the withdrawal of volunteers: Whether General Franco had demanded official recognition; and if he could state the text of the reply to General Franco's proposals.

Mr. EDEN.—The replies of the two parties have been published by the Non-Intervention Committee and the hon. member will see that the reply of General Franco refers to the question of recognition in its relationship to the granting of belligerent rights. The Committee agreed that the replies of both parties were of such a character as to enable it to proceed with its work, and I understand that these replies are now being dealt with.

ITALY AND THE AZORES

MR. EDEN ON "FANTASTIC STATEMENTS"

Mr. A. HENDERSON (Kinswford, Lab.) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he was aware of the statement published in the entire Government-controlled Italian Press that His Majesty's Government intended to annex the Azores Islands, now Portuguese territory; and whether, in view of the continuous anti-British propaganda carried on from Italian officially-controlled sources, he would invite the Italian Government to state whether or not they intended to conform to the terms of the joint declaration of January, 1937.

Mr. EDEN.—I am aware of the publication in the Italian Press of the statement to which the hon. member refers. I am confident that it will be everywhere appreciated that no significance need be attached to fantastic statements of this kind, which are of course entirely devoid of foundation. (Ministerial cheery.)

Mr. HENDERSON.—In view of the fact that one of the terms of the joint declaration of January was to the effect that the Italian Government would discourage any activities likely to impair the good relations of this country, does he consider that this kind of continuous propaganda fulfils the terms of that undertaking?

Mr. EDEN.—I am dealing here with a specific case; and I have said to the hon. member that in my own view fabrications of this kind can only do harm to the people who use them. (Ministerial cheery.)

Mr. PETHERICK (Penryn and Falmouth, U.)—Will he take steps to see that his statement covers the widest possible circulation in Portugal, where these allegations are calculated to do a good deal of harm?

Mr. EDEN.—I am quite sure the Portuguese Government no more credit them than we do ourselves.

MEDIATION IN CHINA

LIEUT.-COM. FLETCHER (Nuneaton, Lab.) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he had any information as to the German Ambassador in China offering his services as a peace mediator between the Chinese and Japanese Governments.

Mr. EDEN.—No, Sir. I understand from the German and Japanese Governments that the German Ambassador in Tokyo has made the strongest protest to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who has promised to make an immediate inquiry.

The seriousness of these incidents needs no emphasis, but in view of the grave issues involved I hope that the House will not ask me for any fuller statement to-day. (Hear, hear.)

THE FAR EASTERN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. A. HENDERSON asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether His Majesty's Government intended to propose that a meeting of the Far Eastern Advisory Committee should be held, in view of the

failure of the Brussels Conference to recommend any action in defence of China.

Mr. EDEN.—No, Sir. His Majesty's Government do not at present intend to take the initiative in making such a proposal, more especially since they have received no indication that any Government desires such an initiative to be taken by His Majesty's Government.

Mr. HENDERSON.—Are we to understand that His Majesty's Government prefer to wait until some other country takes the initiative?

Mr. EDEN.—I think if the hon. member sees my answer he will see our reason for not taking it.

PROPAGANDISTS FROM JAPAN

Mr. CREECH JONES (Shipley, Lab.) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs what representations were made to His Majesty's Ambassador in Tokyo in connexion with the proposed visit of Japanese propagandists to this country; was permission sought; and, if so, what was the object of this mission.

Mr. EDEN.—Such individuals as have come to this country have, so far as I know, come in a private capacity. There was, therefore, no question of any representation to His Majesty's Ambassador in Tokyo nor of any permission being sought.

FIRING ON BRITISH SHIPS

"STRONG PROTEST" TO JAPAN

Mr. ATLEE (Limehouse, Lab.), who was received with loud Opposition cheers, asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he had any statement to make with respect to the action of Japanese forces in firing upon British warships yesterday.

Mr. EDEN.—Yes, Sir. I regret to say that several attacks were made yesterday by Japanese forces on foreign shipping, including His Majesty's ships, on the Yangtze River. A concentration of British merchant shipping with His Majesty's ships Cricket and Scarab in company at a spot between Nanking and Wuhu were attacked with bombs three times, but fortunately without a hit being registered. His Majesty's ships opened fire in return with no reported result.

At Wuhu further incidents took place. His Majesty's ship Ladybird, while proceeding to join a British tug which had been attacked by machine-gun fire, was fired on by a field-gun battery. Four direct hits were sustained by His Majesty's ship Ladybird, and I deeply regret to have to report that one naval rating was killed.

There were in addition several casualties, including the Flag Captain. The same battery had been firing at merchant ships and at least one British merchant ship was hit. His Majesty's ship Bee, which arrived shortly after, was also fired upon but was not hit. The senior naval officer landed and made a strong protest to the senior Japanese military officer, who stated that the firing on the warships was a mistake but that he had orders to fire at every ship on the river.

The Japanese civil, military, and naval authorities in Shanghai were immediately informed and have undertaken to warn the Japanese forces in the field. Meanwhile His Majesty's Ambassador in Tokyo has made the strongest protest to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who has promised to make an immediate inquiry.

The seriousness of these incidents needs no emphasis, but in view of the grave issues involved I hope that the House will not ask me for any fuller statement to-day. (Hear, hear.)

COMMUNICATION WITH THE U.S.

Mr. ATLEE.—May I ask the right hon. gentleman if he has information that similar attacks have been made on ships of the United

States, and if so whether he has been in consultation at all with the United States Government on the subject of these repudiated attacks?

Mr. EDEN.—The answer to the first part of the question is, I regret to say, that the United States gunboat which was also attacked has actually been sunk, and with it, appears, loss of life. The answer to the second part of the question is that we are in communication with the U.S. Government.

Mr. T. WILLIAMS (Don Valley, Lab.)—May I ask the right hon. gentleman how the Japanese explanation can be reconciled when they say first that it was an accident, and secondly that their instructions were to fire on every ship in the river?

Mr. EDEN.—This is just one of the questions I would not like to answer.

Mr. GALLACHER.—Is it not time the Government got into touch with the nations who are still at the League of Nations?

The SPEAKER.—The Foreign Secretary has said that he cannot answer any further questions.

DEFENCE OF HONG-KONG

LIEUT.-COM. FLETCHER asked the Minister for the Coordination of Defence when the last joint inquiry by representatives of the three Defence Services into the question of the defence of Hong-kong took place; and whether he was satisfied that the British forces there were sufficient for the defence of the Colony, having regard to the existing state of affairs in the Far East.

SIR T. INSKIP (Fareham, U.)—The defences of all British defended ports overseas, including the port mentioned in the question, are kept constantly under review by the appropriate Sub-Committees of the Committee of Imperial Defence, on which all three Services are represented. All the relative circumstances are taken into account.

LIEUT.-COM. FLETCHER.—Has the advisability of reinforcing the China Squadron recently been under consideration, and is it not very desirable to have some capital ships in those waters at the present moment?

SIR T. INSKIP.—That is a different question; perhaps the hon. and gallant gentleman will put it down.

B.B.C. AND THE PUBLIC

Mr. DE LA BERE (Evesham, U.) asked the Postmaster-General, having regard to the widespread desire throughout the country for closer contact between the public and the British Broadcasting Corporation, whether he would consider introducing legislation to revise the charter in this connexion.

MAJOR TRYON (Brighton, U.)—No, Sir. Closer contact between the public and the British Broadcasting Corporation in various ways, and I see no reason to suppose that these would be made easier or more effective by any change in the terms of the Royal Charter, which was granted less than a year ago after full discussion in this House.

Mr. DE LA BERE asked whether the Government were aware of the increasing ramifications and responsibilities of the B.B.C. Were they further aware that there was a real totalitarian dictatorship at Langham Place?

MAJOR TRYON.—The hon. member is mistaken. The methods by which the B.B.C. keep in touch with different districts include regional conferences, conferences, and other methods.

AIR MAELS SALVAGED

Mr. MONTAGUE (Islington, W., Lab.) asked the Postmaster-General whether, arising out of the wreck of the flying-boat Cygnus, carrying a heavy Christmas mail, he could give any information as to the losses consequent upon the dislocation of business by these accidents; whether representations had been made to Imperial Airways, Limited, as to the necessity for providing rubber or other waterproof mail-bags in order to preserve the contents; if so, what reply was given by Imperial Airways, Limited; and whether he contemplated any measure to safeguard air mails.

MAJOR TRYON.—I am advised that the great bulk of the mails has been salvaged and that the damage done to individual letters is on a comparatively small scale. I much regret the consequential delay in delivery. The

116735