

DAY TO DAY PAMPHLETS

No. 31

THE LEAGUE AND
ABYSSINIA

LEONARD WOOLF



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LEONARD WOOLF



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THE LEAGUE AND ABYSSINIA*

I. INTRODUCTION

THE world has not, at the moment, "liquidated" the Abyssinian affair, to borrow a useful word of great significance which we have all adopted from the Communist vocabulary. It is a post-war word and it is significant because it indicates the extent to which the post-war world has adopted or accepted violence as a normal method of settling political and economic problems. It means what we used to mean by such a phrase as "finally settle a question," but it implies that the question or persons liquidated were finally, summarily, and violently settled. In Russia the monarchy, the White generals, the interventionists, the bourgeoisie, the kulaks, and the Trotzkyists have all been successfully liquidated. In Germany Herr Hitler has already liquidated the Communists, Social-Democrats, Jews, and a considerable number of those who helped to place him in power, and is now attempting to liquidate the Evangelical and Roman Catholic Churches. Socialism has been pretty thoroughly liquidated in Austria, Spain, and Italy. Signor Mussolini, having "cleaned up" (to use another technical phrase of contemporary political science) the inside of Italy, then decided to liquidate Abyssinia with an army which has turned out to be about three times too large for accomplishing the task. And now the League of Nations, in the opinion of many people, is engaged in an attempt to liquidate Signor Mussolini.

* Parts of this pamphlet originally appeared as an article in the *Political Quarterly*.

The process in Abyssinia has not yet worked itself out to a definite conclusion, but it is worth while remarking in parenthesis that this is also true of the general process of liquidation as a world technique for regulating social relations. The trouble about the use of force or violence as the primary instrument of a Government or society is the inordinate difficulty of stopping or stabilizing it. It does not matter whether the units be individuals, classes, or nations, the more they rely upon force to determine their relations, the more difficult it becomes to stabilize relations. That is the profound truth which has appealed to so many, Christians and non-Christians, as underlying the flash of intuition in the famous statement that those who take the sword perish by the sword. The whole of history proves it. The intolerable instability of a society in which individuals are allowed to regulate their private and personal relations by force is now recognized over the greater part of the earth, though it took thousands of years to abolish this elementary system of "liquidation." Another instance of the same cause producing a similar effect can be observed in the fact that nearly all revolutions follow the same curve of instability and violence: they begin with a Government established violently, though perhaps bloodlessly; there follows instability with the Government compelled to rely on force against threats and acts of violence from right and left of it, and again and again the curve of violence and instability has risen steadily or rapidly through blood to dictatorship. Another instance is the intolerable instability and anarchy in the society of nations which produced the war, and, after the war, the world-wide movement for ending it through the system of a League of Nations.

The previous paragraph is a parenthesis, but is not, as we shall see, an irrelevant parenthesis. But let us return to Ethiopia. Signor Mussolini has not yet liquidated Ethiopia and the League has not yet liquidated Signor Mussolini. It is impossible, therefore, to know how the adventure will end and what must be the final judgment on its historical

significance. But it has reached a stage at which the outlines of the final figure which it will cut in history may perhaps be discerned, and meditation upon some of its aspects may therefore be useful.

II. THE LEAGUE SYSTEM

The British "National" Government and most people in this country are now, at the present stage, agreed that we are engaged in a test case, probably the final test, in case of failure, of the League of Nations and of what is called a system of collective security. I propose to consider the attitude of the Government and of various important sections of public opinion towards the events which have led us into the existing situation, but before doing so it is necessary to recall some elementary facts about the League and recent history, for there seem to be many people in positions of power and authority who have either no knowledge or no understanding of them. The League of Nations is not a super-state; it has not even that fictitious entity which is usually ascribed to nations. It is an organization of existing states for certain specific purposes. There is no mystery or doubt about its origin or its purpose. It was consciously and deliberately created, in answer to a world-wide demand, to make certain specific changes in the pre-war system of inter-state relations, to substitute for the claims and pretensions of sovereign states to settle things by war the right and obligation to have disputes settled peacefully.

There is, too, no mystery or doubt with regard to the difference between the inter-state organization which existed before 1918 and that which was created by agreement in the Covenant. In 1914 every state claimed to be and was judge in its own disputes; it claimed to be and was absolute arbiter in every case of whether there should be peace or war. So anarchical had the world of nations remained that, if a dispute arose between two states

which, in fact, might involve the peace of the whole world, no other state or states could intervene in order to promote a peaceful settlement without danger that its action might be construed as what was called "an unfriendly act" by one or other of the parties and therefore without danger of itself becoming involved in a war—in other words, a neutral state could only in a crisis intervene to prevent war by making peace a *casus belli*. In such dangerous conditions every state looked for security to armies and armaments, desperately endeavouring to make itself as strong as its resources allowed and stronger than its neighbour, and searching for alliances or understandings which would ensure that, when the inevitable war came, it was on the winning side.

The post-war world attempted through the League to bring into existence an entirely different system of international relations. By entering the League a state renounced the right of being judge in its own case and of settling its disputes by resort to force or war. In order to provide alternative methods to war for settling disputes the Covenant set up an elaborate system of conciliation and arbitration, a system of pacific settlement which in practice has been shown to be efficient whenever—a not unimportant proviso—the object of both disputants has been pacific settlement. (A system devised to ensure international peace cannot be expected to work if those who work it in fact want war.) Finally, the League system proposed to provide for the security of states, not by individual armaments or armed alliances, but by assuring every member of the League that if attacked all the other members would support the victim of aggression against the aggressor.

III. ABYSSINIA AND THE GREAT POWERS

There can be no real doubt about the facts in the dispute between Italy and Abyssinia. The Emperor of Ethiopia

rules over the only completely independent native state in Africa. Before the war it had been the subject of the usual imperialist manoeuvres and machinations of Great Powers seeking to acquire or control it. The Powers concerned were Italy, Great Britain, and France. It had been partitioned into "spheres of interest," the inevitable prelude to conquest, and in 1896 Italy, who had in some way or other established her right to be the conqueror by squaring Great Britain, marched her armies into Abyssinia. Her armies were defeated, the partition of Africa failed so far as Abyssinia was concerned, and the Italian Government signed a treaty of peace recognizing "the absolute and unreserved independence of the Ethiopian Empire as a sovereign and independent state." But this by no means implied that either Italy or the other Great Powers had finally abandoned their intention to "partition" Abyssinia. In 1906 Italy, Great Britain, and France again signed one of those treaties which have always been the prelude to an imperialist conquest in Africa; they first solemnly pledged themselves "to maintain intact the integrity of Ethiopia" and then proceeded to carve it up into spheres of influence. The immediate protest of the Abyssinian Government showed that it was alive to the danger threatening it. In 1923, at the instance of France and Italy, and against the wishes of the British Government, Abyssinia was admitted a member of the League. That fact should have finally settled the "Abyssinian question," so far as imperialism was concerned. By admitting that country to the League, all the other members pledged themselves to protect its independence and territorial integrity and to settle all disputes which might arise between them and the Abyssinian Government by the pacific procedure laid down in the Covenant. If this was to be a prelude to conquest or forceful partition of Abyssinia at the hands of those states which had admitted it into the League, they were not only reducing the League and its system to a farce, but were destroying all foundations for peace and civilized or ordered relations between

states. There are after all limits to the cynicism with which states and statesmen can afford to break every elementary rule of truth and honesty in the dealings between nations, even though the dealings are between strong and weak nations, for if Great Powers, like Britain and France, regulate their relations with the small Powers by the methods and moralities of tricksters, gangsters, and thugs, it is inevitable that sooner or later they will begin to deal in the same way with one another. That, however, was apparently not the view of the Conservative Government of Mr. Baldwin or of the Fascist Government of Signor Mussolini. These two Governments, in 1925, two years after Abyssinia entered the League, exchanged notes in which once more, though in slightly different and more precise terms, they recorded their agreement upon the measures which they would take in order to exert pressure upon Abyssinia to accept the claims to concessions and spheres of influence enumerated in the 1906 treaty. The 1906 treaty and these notes were clearly incompatible with the obligations incurred by Great Britain and Italy to respect and protect the territorial integrity and independence of Abyssinia, as soon as she was admitted a member of the League, and Abyssinia rightly pointed this out at once and protested "most strongly against an agreement which, in our view, conflicts with the essential principles of the League of Nations."

IV. ITALY INVADES ABYSSINIA

It has been necessary to recapitulate these historical facts, for except against their background it is impossible to understand either the course or significance of what has been happening during the last eleven months. Between 1926 and the second half of 1934 there was no indication of any move by Italy against Abyssinia. Between July 1934 and January 1935 evidence began to accumulate even in the Press that Signor Mussolini was contemplating, and

indeed already preparing, a military expedition for the conquest of Abyssinia, and it is therefore certain that every Foreign Office in Europe must have had far more conclusive evidence of the military preparations. In January 1935 the Abyssinian Government formally brought the matter before the League under Article 11 of the Covenant. It is important to understand what that means: it means that nine months before Italy invaded Abyssinia every Government in the League had been formally warned by Abyssinia that she was threatened with this invasion by Italy and that they were bound by their obligations under the Covenant immediately to take such "wise and effectual" action as would "safeguard the peace of nations." For the next eight months the League Council, impelled by the British and French Governments, did nothing wise or effectual to safeguard the peace of nations. Those Governments again and again during that time prevented the League from putting into operation the machinery of pacific settlement under Articles 10 and 15 of the Covenant, though they were repeatedly asked to do so by Abyssinia. Meanwhile, the Italian Government made no attempt to conceal its intentions and demands. It treated the League and the Council with contumely; it openly repudiated its obligations under the Covenant; it denied that it would be satisfied by any peaceful settlement—in fact, it never even took the trouble to formulate against Abyssinia any serious grounds for complaint or dispute; and finally it stated explicitly that nothing short of a war and the military conquest of Abyssinia would "satisfy" it. Throughout that period Signor Mussolini made speeches to the Italian people informing them that he was going to war; he mobilized large numbers of troops; and he sent to the Italian East African colonies an immense army fully equipped for a first-class war. It was only in September, when it was obviously far too late to prevent a war, that the League was allowed to put into operation its procedure for preventing war laid down in Article 15, and within a week or two Italy invaded

Abyssinia. So flagrant had been the behaviour of Signor Mussolini and his Government that the League unanimously declared Italy to be an aggressor under Article 16 and a discussion as to the application of sanctions immediately followed. About that discussion and the half-hearted application of sanctions I shall say more later.

V. THE POLICY OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

I propose now to examine the attitude during the last twelve months of the Government, the Labour Party, and certain influential sections of what is called "public opinion," vocal in the great newspapers, towards the course of events and policy recorded in the previous paragraphs. And it may as well be said at once that such an examination reveals on all sides a perilous confusion of mind and purpose with regard to even the most general lines of policy which this country should pursue in international affairs. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Prime Minister, and Mr. Eden have all informed us authoritatively on behalf of the Government, at one time or other, that in their opinion the Italian-Abyssinian dispute is, as was pointed out above, a test case of the League system, and of the possibility of basing peace upon collective security. If the League fails in this case and Italy succeeds in reaping the fruits of aggression by acquiring possession of or control over Abyssinian territory, the League as an effective instrument of peace will be finally discredited. Most people agree with this view, but very few of them seem to understand what it really implies. There is for instance continual confusion between "the League" or "the League system" and what is called collective security. They are not the same thing. The League is an organization of states which attempts by agreement (*a*) to regulate interstate relations, (*b*) to provide regular procedure for settling such disputes as may arise among states, and (*c*) to provide for the security of states, i.e. to protect their independence

and territorial integrity. These three functions of the League are different, though they may be and are closely interconnected. Even if the League did not exist they would still be functions of the international system which took its place, for they must always be among the primary objects of policy of each individual state. An international "system" existed before the war and, like the League system it, too, though in a different way, attempted to perform these three functions: it attempted (*a*) to regulate interstate relations by diplomacy, the rules of international law, and treaties, (*b*) to settle disputes by negotiation, arbitration, or war, (*c*) to provide for security by military offensive or defensive alliances and by competitive armament. The League system differs in two vital respects from this system, because it attempts (*b*) to provide a regular and obligatory procedure for settling disputes without war and makes the settlement of any dispute without resort to war and the use of such procedure a concern not only of the states involved in the dispute but of all the members of the League, and (*c*) to provide collectively for the security of each state by disarmament and the assurance that in case of attack or aggression of one state against another all the other members of the League will come to the assistance of the victim. The important thing to observe is that "collective security" is only a part of the whole system; it comes in only through the provisions, assurances, and obligations described above under (*c*); in practice it consists of the assurances and obligations defined in Article 10 of the Covenant, the reduction of armaments to be carried through under Article 8, and the assurance under Article 16 that if any state resorts to war in disregard of its obligations, the state which is attacked will have the assistance of all the other states in the League, which are bound to apply certain specified sanctions against the aggressor.

Let us first examine the attitude and policy of the Government towards this League system in the Abyssinian dispute. It is unfortunately not possible to isolate the

Government's actions in that dispute, to treat them as if they were unconnected with the general lines of their foreign policy or with their own past. The Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's poem owing to one single act of his had to go about with an albatross instead of a cross hung round his neck, for no one can disencumber himself from the effects of his actions ; when the National Government at the end of 1934 were faced at Geneva with the truculent determination of Signor Mussolini to ignore the League, violate treaties, and make war upon Abyssinia, they entered the League Council metaphorically encumbered with a whole necklace of albatrosses.

The first albatross, though at first sight a little one, has throughout the last twelve months had a disastrous effect upon the mind and action of our Government ; it is the 1906 treaty and the exchange of Notes. Our obligations to Italy implied in those documents are incompatible with our obligations to Abyssinia under the Covenant. They bound us in effect to help Italy to destroy the independence and territorial integrity of Abyssinia, to gain without war what she is now attempting to gain by war, control of Abyssinia, " economic " control which in Africa always leads to political control. It is true that these obligations and understandings, in so far as they are inconsistent with the terms of the Covenant, are by Article 20 of the Covenant declared to be abrogated ; but our Government has never publicly or openly admitted this or taken steps, in accordance with Article 20, " to procure its release from such obligations." On the contrary, up to October of this year in negotiations with Italy it showed that it still considered itself to be bound by these agreements, e.g. in September the British representative informed the Committee of Five that his Government was " prepared to recognize a special Italian interest in the economic development of Ethiopia." It was these same agreements which inspired the Hoare-Laval " peace " proposals and were, in fact, embodied in them, and by publishing them the Government made the fatal muddle and weakness of

their double-headed policy so obvious that in nearly every country of the world public opinion was outraged.

But the muddle and weakness had been there all the time. For here was a test case for the League system, a series of obligations binding Italy and this country to protect the independence and territorial integrity of Abyssinia, to settle all disputes without resort to war, and to apply sanctions to any state which violated these obligations. On the other hand there was a series of obligations binding this country to violate the independence and territorial integrity of Abyssinia in the interests of Italy, to carve up Abyssinia into pieces and give most of them to Italy. For months the Italian Government made open preparations for claiming its meal and assembled its armies to march into Ethiopia. All that time the British Government never made clear either to itself or to Mussolini or to the rest of the world which series of obligations it proposed to stand by, whether, in fact, it was going to stand by the League and protect the integrity and independence of its fellow member Abyssinia or whether it was going to stand by its agreement with Italy and give that country economic and political control over Abyssinia. Up to October Mussolini obviously assumed that the British Government and the League never meant business, and that, as far as we were concerned, after a face-saving process of protest, he would be allowed to do what he liked in Ethiopia—just as Japan had been allowed, after due protest, to do what she liked in Manchuria. And, to tell the truth, he had every right to make the assumption. For up to October the efforts of the British Government on the League Council had been directed to prevent the machinery of the League being brought into operation in order to protect Abyssinia and organize collective security against Italian aggression, while its proposals for " settling the dispute " implied that it was prepared to give the Italians " control " over Abyssinia in a thinly disguised form.

In October the rains stopped ; Mussolini's preparations were complete and he marched his armies into Abyssinia

according to plan. The British Government then stepped forward as protagonist in upholding the League system against Italian aggression. It immediately became clear that, provided that even one of the Great Powers stood by that system, it could be made to work. Italy was declared an aggressor and the sanctions clauses were set in operation against her. Sanctions, we had been told, meant war ; but there was no war. Indeed, it soon appeared that Italy had more than she could manage in Abyssinia. The invasion was a failure almost from the start. The prospect of any success before the next rains vanished. The extension of sanctions by an embargo upon oil would have made it morally certain that the Italian aggression would be definitely stopped by the machinery of collective security. That was the moment chosen by the British Government to put forward " peace proposals " based upon the 1906 agreement, proposals which would have handed over the greater part of Abyssinian territory to Italy and would have destroyed any real independence of Abyssinia. Small wonder that the people of Great Britain and nine-tenths of the rest of the world were amazed and aghast. The old methods of imperialism and of the 1906 agreements, which authorize Great Powers to conquer, control, and exploit the weaker Powers, are inconsistent and incompatible with the League system, which excludes conquest and guarantees independence and territorial integrity to weaker states. There may be something to be said for a national policy based upon either the one or the other ; there is nothing whatever to be said for a policy which tries to poise itself impossibly on or between the two.

The mention of Manchuria introduces us to another of the British Government's albatrosses, a much larger and even more disastrous bird. When the Italian-Abyssinian dispute became acute towards the end of 1934—this " test case of the League system "—the League system had all but been destroyed, and the British Government had played a leading part in destroying it. Adequately to prove this statement would require a long and minute

examination of the whole foreign policy of the National Government, a task which is obviously impossible in this pamphlet. Happily such an examination has already been made, and the reader who wishes to have the evidence should read *Inquest on Peace* by Vigilantes. Some people may perhaps consider that the authors of that book are at times intemperate in language and politically biased in their judgments, but their facts remain documented and irrefutable. And the facts prove that at best the Government's foreign policy was muddle-headed, vacillating, inconsistent, paying lip-service to the League and its system, but continually in practice repudiating the obligations the fulfilment of which could alone give reality to the League system of peace, disarmament, and collective security. The effects of this policy can be observed over the whole field of international relations, but they were particularly marked in the Manchurian affair and in the Disarmament Conference, and it is essential to understand why the attitude of the Government in these two cases had undermined confidence in the League system and, therefore, had fatal repercussions in Italy and Ethiopia. The invasion of Manchuria by Japan was as clear a violation of the Covenant and a case of aggression as the invasion of Abyssinia by Italy. The action of Japan immediately presented to the League and to its members, indeed to the whole world, a choice between two different systems of regulating the relations between states. Was Japan, because she was stronger than China, to be judge in her own dispute and of her own claims and to enforce those claims by war ? Or was the dispute between these two Powers to be remitted through the operation of the League and according to the provisions of its Covenant peacefully to impartial examination and decision ? And further, if the stronger party took the law into its own hands, violated its obligations, and resorted to war as its instrument of national policy against the weaker party, were the other states to stand aside from a matter of no concern to them or were they to maintain the system of " collective security " to which they had all

pledged themselves, i.e.—to quote the actual words of the treaty which every one of them had signed and had never denounced—“ to deem the resort to war by Japan against China an act of war against all other Members of the League ” and to come to the assistance of China—that is the very gist and meaning of “ collective security ”—by immediately subjecting the aggressor to the “ sanctions,” the severance of all trade or financial relations, etc., which they themselves had undertaken to impose ?

There could be no real dispute about the horns of the British Government's dilemma. If it chose the first of these alternatives, it was repudiating the system of the League and of collective security and definitely returning to the pre-war system. But if it chose the second, it must meet its obligations and take the risks necessary for the establishment of peace and the resistance to aggression. That is to say, it must insist first, that the dispute be settled pacifically by mediation, conciliation, and arbitration of the League, and secondly, it must make plain from the outset that it stood by the system of collective security and would be ready to fulfil its obligation to resist aggression. And there can be no dispute which horn of the dilemma Sir John Simon and the National Government chose to sit on. They threw over the League and scoffed at the system of collective security. They made a pretence of trying to get Japan to accept a settlement without war, but they showed the Japanese Government from the first that so far as they were concerned it could go ahead and treat the Covenant as a scrap of paper ; the British Government would not under any circumstances fulfil its obligations under Article 16 towards China.

Japan went ahead, attacked China, and took from her the territory which she now calls Manchukuo. The result upon the whole international situation and upon the League was inevitable and instantaneous. The members of the League had repudiated their obligations, led by the British Empire. I say “ led ” advisedly. Supporters of the League system have repeatedly maintained during the last

few years that the influence of the British Empire in shaping the course of international affairs is paramount, that if a British Government takes the lead in establishing the system of peace and collective security, the rest of the world will follow it, and that if that Government stands by its obligations under the Covenant, the League system will work. The view has often been ridiculed as romantic and exaggerated and represented as an invitation to the Government to ride off on quixotic crusades all over the habitable globe. It is a view, however, which is shared by nearly every foreigner concerned with foreign policy or conversant with international affairs. And it has now been proved to be correct by what has happened in the Abyssinian question. As soon as Great Britain stood by its obligations under the Covenant, the rest of the world stood by Great Britain for the Covenant, and, even with a hesitant or hostile France, the League system began once more to work as an instrument for peace and collective security.

The attitude of Great Britain at the Disarmament Conference repeated and confirmed its policy towards Japanese aggression ; it convinced other countries that we had abandoned the League system, were not prepared to fulfil our obligations under the Covenant, and were now determined to look for our own security to our own armaments, re-establishing in Europe the old “ Balance of Power ” system which inevitably involves a competition in armaments. Throughout the first part of the Conference, when it was still possible that something might have been achieved, the representatives of Great Britain were either negative or obstructive to every concrete proposal for limiting or abolishing armaments. The British Government was, in fact, taking the most prominent part in the business of destroying the League and a system of collective security, and it was doing so because it both misunderstood and mistrusted them. This muddle and misunderstanding of their own policy and of international affairs in the minds of British ministers is of the greatest importance, for it still infects their policy. On November 23rd, 1934,

Mr. Baldwin made the following statement of his own view of the League system :

It is curious that there is growing among the Labour Party support for what is called a collective peace system. Well now, a collective peace system in my view is perfectly impracticable in view of the fact that the United States is not yet, to our unbounded regret, a member of the League of Nations, and that in the last two years two great Powers, Germany and Japan, have both retired from it. It is hardly worth considering when those are the facts.

There is no more honest politician in Europe than Mr. Baldwin, and only muddle can explain the fact that, when he made that speech, his Government and his country were deeply committed to the collective peace system through the Covenant, and in particular by Articles 10 and 16, that he and his Government had never stated that they did not hold themselves bound by the obligations of those articles and had never given notice of intention to leave the League, and finally that within a year of that speech he himself as Prime Minister was saying precisely the opposite about the collective peace system from what he was saying in 1934 and was, in fact, taking the leading part in maintaining that system against Italy even to the point of the application of sanctions. The nature of the muddle is clearly shown in the debates in Parliament regarding this speech of Mr. Baldwin and the whole of the Government's Manchurian policy. For instance, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in explaining the Government's views said that it is a mistake to think that the whole collective system is enshrined in Article 16 of the Covenant ; " the collective system is by no means confined," he said, " to the imposition of sanctions. Personally, I deplore all this talk of war and of sanctions." Here there is complete misunderstanding of the facts and psychology which determine international history. The whole of the League system is, of course, not enshrined in the articles dealing with sanctions, but those articles are a vital part of the

system of collective peace, as the Under-Secretary of State is now learning in the Abyssinian question. The League or any other international " system " is not an artificial, imaginary contrivance inscribed on waste paper and laid up safely out of the way in Heaven or the Foreign Office ; it is a concrete method of dealing with international relations which ministers can use or refuse to use in shaping national policy. There are, I repeat, two great questions which every Prime Minister and Government have to decide with regard to the international system. First, how are they going to regulate their relations and settle any dispute which may rise between them and another nation ? Is it to be by the old system of negotiation in which each side is judge in its own cause and ultimately may rely on war as the instrument of its policy or is it to be the League system of regular and compulsory pacific settlement through third-party conciliation or arbitration ? That is one question, a practical, concrete question always looming over the head of a Foreign Secretary. But instantly and always he is faced by a second question : how in the world of to-day am I to provide for the security of my country against attack ? Whether he rejects the League system or accepts it, he will have to answer that question. He may, like Lord Stanhope, " deplore all this talk of war and sanctions," but he will still have to answer that question and, in answering it, he will have to talk of war and sanctions. He is again faced with two alternatives. He can take the pre-war method of trusting to his own armaments and those of his allies and to a competition in armaments which will put preponderance of power in his hands. In that case he rejects the League system, for he is making a competition in armed forces and not pacific settlement the determining factor in international affairs. But if he accepts the League system of pacific settlement and renunciation of war, he still has to satisfy his own country *and every other member of the League* on the question of security. For every nation will say : " If I enter the League and pledge myself to pacific settlement and

renounce war and no longer try to make myself stronger than my neighbour, where is my guarantee of security against a breach of the Covenant, against an attack from my neighbour?" And the answer, if you accept the League system, is plain and inescapable: a collective peace system implies a system of collective security: if a state enters the League of Nations, it must look for its security to common action by all members in its defence against attack and violation of the peace system: the members of the League pledge themselves to apply sanctions against the aggressor.

Thus the sanctions clauses are not the whole League or the whole collective peace system, but they are a vital part of it because the security of members depends upon their being carried out, and the confidence of states in the League and in their own security depends upon their belief that other members will fulfil their obligations under those clauses. The fatal thing at the beginning of the Abyssinian affair was that that confidence, largely owing to the British Government, had been undermined. There was every excuse for the Italian Government to assume, in the light of such statements as those of Mr. Baldwin and other ministers quoted above, that the British Government repudiated its obligations of collective security and sanctions, and that Mussolini would be allowed to do in Abyssinia what Japan had done in Manchuria. And that assumption was confirmed by the attitude of the British Government and of France all through the negotiations about Abyssinia from January to September of this year. Great Britain worked with France to prevent the regular machinery of the League's pacific settlement being brought into operation. No resistance was offered to Italy's refusal to comply with her obligations and accept pacific settlement. The League was not allowed, therefore, to prevent war, yet no warning of any kind was given to Italy that, if she did make war upon Abyssinia, the provisions with regard to collective security, the sanction clauses, would be put into operation against her, and no preparations

of any kind were made for collective resistance to her aggression.

There is another point with regard to sanctions and the League system upon which the Abyssinian affair throws light, and which is well worth considering. Even after Italy invaded Ethiopia and was declared an aggressor, and in theory sanctions were imposed against her by an overwhelming majority of the League members, the sanctions clause of the League Covenant was not really put into operation. According to Article 16, as soon as Italy was declared to have resorted to war in breach of its covenants, she was "*ipso facto* . . . deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject [Italy] to the severance of all trade or financial relations. . . ." Nearly four months have passed, but still all trade relations between members of the League and Italy have not been severed, and, as these words are written, the question of whether members of the League shall continue to sell petrol, a vital munition of war, to Italy (which has committed an act of war against them) is still *sub judice*. If we enquire from the British Government or from its spokesmen why this should be the case, we are given the following reasons: the French refuse to agree to an embargo on oil; the United States are outside the League and will continue to sell oil to Italy; oil sanctions mean war. These several and mutually contradictory reasons for not putting an embargo on oil are clearly worthy of a Government's consideration. To impose a sanction which would seriously inflame feeling in the aggressor country, and which would have no serious effect upon her power to continue an aggressive war would be stupid, and the League system would never work if the Covenant were carried out mechanically to the point of stupidity. The primary objects of the collective security and sanctions clauses of the Covenant are to prevent the outbreak of war and, if it does break out, to bring it to an end as soon as possible by aiding the victim of aggression and obstructing

the aggressor. If statesmen and Governments really understood and pursued those two objects, no one but a fool or a pedant would complain of their infringing the letter in order to carry out the spirit of the Covenant, for only fools and fanatics fail to see that a certain latitude is essential in the interpretation of laws, international treaties, and the word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.

It will be observed, however, that the reasons given are inconsistent. Two of them imply that the reason for not imposing the sanction is that it cannot be made effective, while the third implies that it would be so effective that Mussolini would treat it as a *casus belli* against those imposing it. Either of these considerations, if there were grounds for believing in it, might be a good reason for not imposing an embargo upon oil, but both cannot be. The truth probably is that an embargo upon oil, even if France stood out—an extremely doubtful proposition—and if the United States continued her normal supplies of oil to Italy would be an extremely effective sanction, but there is no reason to believe that the prophecy that an oil embargo means war would prove to be any truer than the exploded prophecy that sanctions mean war. But this brings us to a consideration which is never mentioned by spokesmen of the British Government. Once more it has to be repeated that the object of the League of Nations, its only reason for existence, is to prevent war and to give to its members assurance of collective security against aggression. That assurance depends very largely, if not entirely, upon the sanctions article of the Covenant, and the extent to which states can rely upon its fulfilment. Since 1918 we have heard a great deal about the problem of "security" from France and from Germany, from Poland and from Czechoslovakia, from Belgium and even from Italy. The truth is, of course, that international politics since the war have been dominated by the problem, not of international security, but of national insecurity, a sense of terror in every nation that its neighbour will attack it. The same problem dominated international affairs before the war,

though not quite so many ordinary men were then aware of it. The terror and problem are inherent in the system upon which the states of Europe have chosen to organize their relations. A dozen or more heavily armed states, sitting cheek by jowl with their great cities, their armies, and their bombing aeroplanes separated from one another by only a few miles, their inhabitants taught from childhood to fear and to glorify war, to nurse national grievances or injustices, to fear and hate this or that nation as an inevitable enemy, with no means of settling disputes or solving "problems" except ultimately by the threat or use of force, with the knowledge that in all vital questions war will be used by their neighbours and by themselves as an instrument of national policy—such is the international "system" in which terrified dictators, panic-stricken Prime Ministers, and their bewildered subjects helplessly and hopelessly search for "national security." If common sense was admitted into the discussion of international politics, the statesman who talked about the possibility of national security, so long as this system was allowed to continue, would long ago have been lynched or laughed out of his office.

The creation of the League was an attempt to alter the system. But the League system could not and cannot be created in a vacuum. The old system was there and with it the universal sense of national insecurity. The League not only has to provide a new system but to assuage the sense of insecurity inherent in the old one. In other words we are back once more to that bleak fact that, if the League system is to be made a reality, if nations really mean to abide by their obligations, to rely upon conciliation and arbitration and to renounce war as an instrument of their national policy, they or rather their statesmen and inhabitants will require some assurance of security, some guarantee that they will not be left a helpless victim to a possible aggressor. Under the League system that assurance and guarantee are given in Article 16. The assurance is collective security, a guarantee that if a state X, having complied

with its obligations and eschewed war, is attacked by a state Y in violation of its obligations, then all the other members of the League will consider that the act of war against X has been committed also against themselves, and will come to its assistance. And the minimum assistance, the immediate severance of all economic relations with the aggressor, is prescribed, because obviously there can be no real assurance, no adequate sense of security, nothing which common sense could regard as "collective security," if members of the League are complacently to supply the aggressor with the munitions and sinews of war which he requires in order to make his aggression successful and effective.

Thus, once aggression has taken place and the aggressor has attacked his victim, the primary consideration of any statesman who understood what he meant by the League and really desired to make its system effective would be: what effect will it have upon the establishment of a system of collective security if I do not comply with my obligations under Article 16, how will the sense of security or insecurity of League members be affected if I do or do not apply this sanction against the aggressor? It is a remarkable and disquieting fact that during the last few months no spokesman of the Government has uttered one single word to show that such a consideration has played any part at all in determining their policy with regard to imposing or not imposing particular sanctions. In most discussions of the question it seems almost to be assumed that the desirability of a sanction is in inverse proportion to its effectiveness, since the more effective it is the less the aggressor will like it, and the greater the risk of his resisting it. The idea that a system of collective security can be established and that war can be prevented without "risk" in the world of madmen in which we are now living is fantastic. Risk is inherent in any system of collective security, the risk that the aggressor will turn upon those states which comply with their obligations and stand by the victim of aggression, i.e. which take steps to make the

security effective. States and statesmen who are not prepared to take that risk should not be in the League at all; but they must abide by their choice; they must take the risk involved in the pre-war system of armed and hostile sovereign states, each a law unto itself; they must accept the "security" of international chaos, the value of which we learnt in August 1914.

VI. MR. GARVIN'S POLICY

So much for the British Government. Let us examine very briefly the attitude of mind during this long-drawn-out crisis of some non-official currents of public opinion. The case of Mr. Garvin is the most remarkable. He is editor of one of the most important English newspapers; he writes every week upon politics; he has written books which show that he is not completely ignorant of history; he addresses an immense public and might be expected, therefore, by the canons of British journalism, to feel some measure of responsibility for what he writes. Yet week after week Mr. Garvin pours out a flood of vituperative misrepresentation over every one who says a word on behalf of the League system or of trying to prevent Italy attacking and conquering Abyssinia. Those who wish to prevent war and resist aggression collectively are dismissed as "jingo pacifists and warmongers." The facts with regard to the League which have been given in the previous paragraphs are completely ignored and suppressed. The notion that states like Britain and Italy should respect and fulfil obligations which they have assumed by signing treaties, e.g. the Covenant, is ridiculed. Mr. Garvin's policy is bleak, bare, and, as he says, based on realities (just like the Kaiser's and Admiral Tirpitz's between 1910 and 1918). Italy is a Great Power, Abyssinia is a small Power; therefore, Italy has a right to do what she wills with Abyssinia. Abyssinia is a barbarous state, has no right to be in the League, has no right to the territory

which she governs, has in fact only one right—to be conquered and ruled by Italy. Great Britain cannot oppose Italy, because Italy is stronger than Great Britain. Great Britain must, therefore, give way completely to Italy and rearm herself—presumably, though this is not stated, in order eventually to be able to fight Italy. Many people laugh at Mr. Garvin, but the phenomenon is really no laughing matter. When the editor of a great English paper can take this view of the principles upon which British policy and the world's international affairs should be based, not laughter, but terror is the appropriate emotion—terror at observing what a very little separates us from the chaos and barbarism which Mr. Garvin foolishly imagines to be confined to Ethiopia.

VII. THE PACIFIST POSITION

It remains to consider the attitude of the opposition parties to the crisis. The Labour Party has always stood officially for the League system, and has supported it in its entirety as the only hope of preventing war. But Abyssinia revealed fundamental differences of opinion and considerable confusion of mind with regard to the foundations of international policy, both among its leaders and its supporters. The majority endorsed the Party's previous official policy, but in the minority two broad and deep currents of opposition may be detected.

There is first the 100 per cent. pacifist position, which maintains that the use of force and, therefore, the application of sanctions by a Government should never be supported in international affairs. It is an intelligible policy, but those who urge it upon Britain in the Abyssinian crisis should have made their position clear before the crisis came; it is a policy incompatible with Britain remaining a member of the League—a fact which was as obvious before as it was after Italy invaded Abyssinia. Yet many of those who, for pacifist reasons, are opposed to

the fulfilment of Britain's obligations under the sanctions clauses had always previously urged that Britain should remain a member of the League and show her "loyalty" to the Covenant.

But the difficulty in the pacifist position goes much deeper than the level of mere consistency or inconsistency. In a sense I am myself a 100 per cent. pacifist, for I believe that force, whether between individuals in the form of violence or between the state and the individual in the form of law or between states in the form of war, is always evil, bad for the user and bad for the victim. But the idea that you have solved any problem of practical life in modern societies by saying that X or Y is bad, and that you will, therefore, have nothing to do with it, may sound extremely fine and attractive, but is really either a doctrine of despair or just silliness. In a world of evil things, even the best and wisest of men can only make it better by again and again choosing the lesser of two evils. He may, if he is good and wise enough, be forced to choose the lesser evil of suicide, but he will remain neither good nor wise if he cheats himself with the delusion that he can go on living in a world of evil things and "have nothing to do with" evil. So no man can go on living in the world to-day and "have nothing to do with" force, evil though all force may be. His everyday life is founded upon the use of force. The reason is that the vast majority of his fellow beings and fellow citizens still believe that force and violence are not evils, that they are good and legitimate instruments of individual self-interest and national policy. In such a world the problem of civilization and of civilized men has been, and still is, to curb and canalize the use of force in forms and channels where it can do the minimum amount of evil, and this has been done to some extent, as I think history shows, by change of habits, customs, beliefs, laws, and the political and economic structure of society.

Thus, though in theory the Tolstoyan and the anarchist are right, they are right only in the sense that anarchy, the elimination of the use of force in all social relations, is

ideally right. But it is obvious that the ideal is not immediately, if ever, completely attainable. The canalizing of the use of force in law and police within separate states has meant that less force is used and less evilly than when its use is left to the unrestricted inclinations of individuals. Most people believe and all act upon the assumption that in modern society it would simply be impossible suddenly to abolish law and the communal use of force behind law and return to a state in which individual violence was unrestrained and unregulated. An effective League of Nations and system of collective security would canalize and control the use of force by individual states in exactly the same way. Human beings may, of course, be so stupid or savage that this is impossible, but ethically there is no reason why the pacifist should oppose the canalization and control of force internationally and yet accept and approve exactly the same thing provided that it is kept within the confines of national frontiers. And if this be true, it has an extremely important corollary. The use of force to resist aggression by states organized in a League to eliminate war is not war, unless the use of force to resist violence by a state organized to eliminate crime is crime. When, therefore, Mr. Garvin or the 100 per cent. pacifist calls the pacifist who holds that sanctions should be imposed against an aggressor according to our obligations a warmonger, he may be using a good *argumentum ad hominem*, but he is using a dishonest argument. It would be perfectly honest to argue that a collective security system will produce more violence than it will prevent; it is dishonest to imply that those who believe the opposite do so because they want war and are "jingo pacifists." Unless, of course, it is honest to argue that people who maintain that the police should use force for the prevention of murder and the apprehension of murderers, even at the risk of their own lives and those of the murderer, do so because they want murder and are really criminals.

Finally, the 100 per cent. pacifist and Mr. Garvin, who reject the system of collective security, cannot be allowed

merely to leave it at that. They have to face the question what they propose to put in its place, and to put in its place not 100 years ago—the world in which Mr. Garvin lives perpetually—or 100 years hence—where many pacifists are living—but to-day in the year 1936, less than twenty years after the war. They never face it. They are, quite rightly, afraid to face it. For every sane man knows that if we revert to the pre-war international system, another European war is absolutely inevitable, and a war infinitely more vile, more useless, and more destructive than the stupid, senseless war of 1914. Every sane man knows that unless some kind of League and collective security system can be established between states, the relations between states must be anarchical, determined by violence and competitive armaments—and that means war.

VIII. THE SOCIALIST POSITION

The second current of opposition on the Left to League action and the application of sanctions against Italy on behalf of Abyssinia is Marxian or socialist. The League, it is argued, is a League of capitalist states; capitalism inevitably implies imperialism and imperialism inevitably implies war; therefore the League cannot prevent war, and the application of sanctions will be only the camouflage of a quarrel between rival imperialist Powers. This has been made quite clear by the course that the Abyssinian affair has taken in the last few months. Britain took the lead at Geneva in applying the League Covenant against Italy only when she conceived that the interests of the British Empire were threatened by Italy. And the Hoare-Laval proposals show that at any moment she is prepared to do an imperialist deal with the aggressor and hand over the victim to him, if it suits her imperial book. It follows that a socialist or a socialist party should refuse to have anything to do with the League, with sanctions, and with

war between capitalist states, or should at least refuse to "support" a policy of sanctions unless there is a socialist Government in power.

As a socialist and, in my own opinion, a rational Marxist, I have the deepest sympathy with certain aspects of this argument, but as a whole and as an argument for "having nothing to do with the League," it seems to me theoretically unsound and practically suicidal. It is true that in the long run a world of capitalist states, with or without a League of Nations and a system of collective security, cannot eliminate war. The analysis of the international relations of such states by Mr. Brailsford and others demonstrates that they are inevitably driven into a policy of what for short we call imperialism, and that sooner or later the clash of armed, economic imperialisms will issue in war. The growth of fascist, imperialist states, the behaviour of the fascist Government of Italy during the last twelve months, confirm this analysis. But this is no warrant for a belief either that the existing League cannot prevent war or that a League system and a system of collective security are not required in international affairs. The extreme socialist position—"have nothing to do with a capitalist League"—is based upon two further beliefs, both of which are certainly false. The first is due to an unconscious perversion of the truth, correctly stated above, that *sooner or later* a world of armed capitalist states will be driven into war. It is tacitly assumed that this means that the policy of capitalist states must to-morrow and the day after and always end in war, a statement disproved by events and obviously absurd. But absurd though it be, it is the argument which underlies the position of those socialists who maintain that the League is useless because war is inevitable among capitalist states. For even though war be inevitable, a League *might* prevent it for five, ten, fifteen, even twenty years, and war must always be inevitable, if the League is useless merely because war is inevitable.

The second fallacy is a variation of that astonishing

superstition or dogma which masquerades as orthodox Marxism, and which often proposes to conceal its absurdity under the formidable aliases, economic determinism or the materialist interpretation of history. Peace or war is determined, it is argued, solely by capitalism or socialism, because, it is assumed, all historic events, including peace or war, are determined solely by economic causes. Thus a League of Nations and a system of collective security can have no effect upon war or peace, because war or peace must depend upon whether the world of states is socialist or capitalist. This is the view held, consciously or unconsciously, by those who maintain that a League system and collective security are useless shams, because the causes of war are economic. It is a melancholy example of how important truths are distorted into senseless dogmas. Two considerations prove this. First, though it is true that economic causes play an enormous part in the determination of international as of all historical events, non-economic causes also play an important and sometimes an all-important part. Take, as an instance, the history of the last few months. The wave of public opinion in Britain and the rest of the world which forced the French and British Governments to abandon the Hoare-Laval plan was not economically determined; it was neither capitalist nor socialist, neither bourgeois nor proletarian. It was determined by a complicated psychology in which the important elements were a desire for peace, belief in the League system as a means of ensuring peace, and ethical ideas connected with "justice" and "good faith." Among the millions of ordinary men who were outraged by the proposals few perhaps might have been able clearly to analyze what each of these psychological elements contributed to their total state of mind, but that does not alter the fact that their state of mind had been determined by various elements unconnected with their economic interests or with the economic structure of society. The state of mind produced, because of its extent and depth, was strong enough to counteract and defeat the intentions of

two capitalist Governments, although those intentions, on the Marxist hypothesis, were typical products of the capitalist psychology and the capitalist structure of society. This example is peculiarly illuminating because it shows exactly what the rational Marxist can reasonably hope for from a system of collective security. The non-economic psychology of the masses which defeated the economic psychology of M. Laval and Sir Samuel Hoare on this occasion is precisely that psychology which placed behind the League in a world of capitalist states might for a time make the system work, delay and obstruct the forces in the international economic system which produce war, and so provide the world with a breathing time of peace. That indeed is all that sensible men at the moment—among whom must be reckoned the statesmen at the head of the only socialist state in the world—look for from the present League of Nations.

The second consideration is this. It is possible that a completely socialist world would make war impossible. But a completely socialist world would require an economic structure and a psychology in the individual which even the most advanced socialists and communists at present show no sign of understanding or accepting. It would require a complete internationalization of the means of production and of all national territories and properties. It is, as I think, the only logical conclusion of socialism. But, as I say, there is not the slightest sign of its acceptance by the socialists either of Russia or of the rest of the world. The socialism of the U.S.S.R. is an enthusiastically national socialism, and even if the whole of Europe followed the example of Russia by becoming socialist during the next 100 years, it is certain that it would also follow the Russian example in making its socialism national. In other words we should have a Europe not of international socialism, but of national, possibly nationalist, socialist states. That means that the interests, economic or non-economic, of the separate states are not identical, for the relations between national socialist states are

not necessarily socialistic and may indeed be capitalistic. In such a world of socialist states conflicts of interests, similar to those which afflict the world to-day, will persist, and if their relations remain unorganized and anarchic, with no regular system of settling disputes and preventing war, war sooner or later will be inevitable. That is why some kind of League system and collective security would be almost as necessary among socialist as it is among capitalist states.

I suggest that the social attitude to war, cruelty, and violence changes from age to age and, although influenced by economics, it is also influenced by other things. The opposition to and revulsion from them increased considerably in Europe for 150 years before the beginning of the present century. It manifested itself both within nations and also in the increasing demand among all classes and in many countries that the relations between states should be regulated and their differences settled without war. Such a revolutionary movement of feeling and opinion, as this against violence, is due to and influenced by a vast number of different factors, besides the economic factor, and it ebbs and flows through centuries. We are, therefore, spectators and participants in a long-drawn-out struggle between two different methods of organizing relations between states, the method of violence and war and the method of settlement and agreement. It is true, I think, that without socialism the permanent elimination of war is impossible, but even a world of socialist national states would be faced with the choice of regulating their relations either in the one way or in the other. The outcome of this struggle is doubtful; it will not be determined either to-day or to-morrow, either by "victory" or by "defeat" of the League in Abyssinia; but it will be profoundly influenced in every incident and "crisis" by the choice which each individual, party, class, and nation makes, and by its ability to distinguish without prejudice the instruments and methods of peace and civilization from those of war and barbarism.

