

British Office Now Favours Franco-Belgian-Italo-German Pact on Frontiers Problem

by Walter G. Fuller (*Special Correspondent of The Eagle*)

London, March 12 — It would be an exaggeration to say that England is all stirred up by the news that Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Premier Baldwin's Tory Cabinet, has just made another speech in Geneva which deals a knock-out blow at the "Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes," to give the document its full and high-sounding name. It would be an exaggeration even to say that anybody is even interested in what is said and done by the League of Nations in Geneva.

Crimp News Puts League's Doings in Shade
To speak truthfully, most English people just now are thinking and talking either about a certain sensational lawsuit in which a lot of high society's dirty linen is being washed in full public view or else about a peculiarly sordid murder that took place recently on a country farm which is now being investigated in the courts.

The Englishman's love of a "good" scandal or a "good" murder is notorious, and no mere question of foreign affairs, even though it has to do with the roots of the next war, could be expected to rival in public interest such a high-grade scandal and such a first-class murder as now occupy the attention of the British people to the exclusion of all else.

Chamberlain's Speech

Yet something very significant has been happening at Geneva lately, and Austen Chamberlain's speech is bound to have far-reaching effects. First of all, of course, the speech represents the considered opinion of the British Foreign Office. Through the present Tory Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Office, always a Tory stronghold whatever the colour of the party in power may happen to be, has been able to speak its mind more frankly and more openly than it could possibly do when Ramsay MacDonald was in office.

It is an open secret that from the time of its inception the protocol had no friends in the

British Foreign Office. The most that Ramsay MacDonald could do as Foreign Secretary last year was to give it a very ambiguous blessing. Even now he has not quite made up his mind about it. A few days ago the ex-Premier deliberately stated in a signed article in a leading newspaper that in his opinion the frontiers fixed by the Versailles Treaty and by the other post-war treaties would have to be revised sooner or later.

This of course is a hateful doctrine in French ears, and when he was in office Ramsay MacDonald had to watch his step very carefully when he came to deal with the question of frontiers.

MacDonald's About Face

Yet now we find MacDonald urging the ratification of the protocol, which fixes the existing frontiers and in effect treats the Versailles settlement as unalterable.

This, of course, is music in French ears. And so the ex-Premier manages to straddle the fence in a way that reveals the inherent weakness of the man. The fact is now being generally recognized by most people — by all his opponents and by many of his friends — that Ramsay MacDonald has a very vague mind. He is, in a word, a sentimentalist — in this case, as in so many others, swaying in his emotions between two diametrically opposite conclusions and strangely unable to see any self-contradiction in his attitude.

Chamberlain's Job Well Done

Austen Chamberlain is, of course, not a great man; he is not even a great Foreign Secretary, but he is simple-minded enough to prefer to be frank and logical in his statements rather than obscure and confused. And so he has done his job at Geneva very well. The British Foreign Office was determined for its own reasons (to say nothing of the additional reasons provided with so much vigor by the British self-governing dominions) that the protocol must be gotten out of the way. And in Austen Chamberlain

they found a spokesman ready and willing to do the deed when the time came.

So now the protocol is now not only dead but damned. What next? Well, it looks very much as if British Foreign policy was now all in favour of organizing some special agreement between France, Belgium, Italy and Germany, to which Britain would be a party, by which all parties would pledge to join forces against any power which might attempt to disturb the present frontiers as defined by the post-war treaties.

Agreement in Sight

Such an agreement is actually in sight, it is said. Germany, like David Copperfield's friend, Barkis, is willin' to come into such a pact if her eastern boundaries are exempted. These she would not accept as permanent. Nevertheless she is prepared to take a pledge not to seek to alter any of these boundaries except by arbitration.

Such a pact as this would be impossible under the protocol. So, the British Government having decided to back Germany and the pact rather than France and the protocol, has

now made its decision known to Geneva and the world through Austen Chamberlain.

So the protocol passes definitely from the stage. The French cannot save a line of it. Nor can all the propagandists of the League. The British Government is too strong in Parliament, and for that matter in the country, to fear any hostile criticism of what it has done. The London press in the main had long ago decided that the protocol would never do, so nobody in England is in the very least upset about this latest rebuff to the poor old League of Nations.

League Stock Low in Britain

As a matter of fact, League stock is pretty low in Britain just now. It is a strange thing that though the need for an international council of the nations becomes stronger and stronger every day, the body in Geneva which claims to fulfill that function grows weaker and weaker. What is wrong? The average Englishman answers that question by asking another: "What else can one expect of the League so long as America stays out?"

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