On March 16th the Disarmament Conference entered on a new phase in its work, when a Draft Convention was laid before it by the leader of the British Delegation.

This Draft Convention differed in essentials from that drawn up by the Preparatory Commission two years ago, for this new Convention was a Plan dealing comprehensively with many parts of the problem and containing practical proposals, complete with figures, for definite armament reduction. As I write these lines, it seems probable that it will be accepted as the basis of discussion. If this should prove to be so, the prospect of the early and successful conclusion of the Conference will be nearer than it has ever been before.

By that I must not be understood to mean that the Conference has not hitherto done work of the highest value. As everybody knows, it has been faced with more difficulties than have ever happened in the lifetime of any great Conference before. The last and most formidable of its delays was that from July 23 to January 23rd during which time no serious work could be accomplished owing to the absence of the German Delegation. But in spite of all difficulties and delays, the discussions of the Conference have helped to create that instructed opinion upon which alone its real success can be founded. The Prime Minister himself laid great stress upon the value of these discussions, and indeed it is clear that his Draft Convention could never have been produced a year ago. When historians come to examine the work of the Conference they will see how ideas have gradually moved forward and how proposals, such as the abolition of military and naval aviation or of artillery of more than 4" calibre, which would have seemed Utopian a year ago are now put forward as the most powerful mutations in the world for general acceptance.

As the Prime Minister said in his speech to the Conference, the Draft Convention is an amalgam of the different proposals.
put forward by the various delegations. No one, least of all its authors, will claim that it is perfect. There are gaps which any student of the subject could enumerate, for example Budgetary Limitation and Control, the abolition or regulation of the Private Manufacture of and Traffic in Armaments and instruments of war. But whatever its defects, whatever may be the fate which lies before it, it is a great historical fact that a Treaty containing definite figures should have been laid before the nations of the world. The vested-interests press has been freely saying that it is the 57th such treaty since 1922 — or sometimes they say since Feb 2nd 1932! In fact, it is the first such document that has ever seen the light. Its importance cannot be overstated. Whether, actually taken as a basis of discussion or not, I believe that any Convention the Conference may make will be highly influenced by these proposals. The Prime Minister therefore rendered a great service to the world when he came to Geneva and put them forward.

It is not my purpose to offer any opinion upon the details of the scheme. The Prime Minister explained that it was built upon the Agreement reached on December 12th 1932 by Five Great Powers in virtue of which Germany returned to the Conference. He explained that that Agreement was founded upon two essential factors, Equality of rights, in a system that should give Security to all nations.

It has always been obvious from the day on which the Conference opened, that no Convention could be made that did not take account of these two elements.

On the one hand, it is only by organising peace; by perfecting the machinery for preventing war; by ensuring that that machinery will work; that new wars can be prevented. If the procedure followed by the League of Nations on every occasion in the past, had been adhered to in the disputes about Manchuria, Grand Chaco, and Letitia, there is
good ground for thinking that those conflicts could have been averted or quickly ended. We need to study that procedure, to build upon it a code of rules, to ensure that these rules will be followed and applied, so that at the time of a crisis, the whole machinery of the League will not fall to pieces. War will not come to an end if we sit with folded hands and wait. We must take active measures to enthrone international law and to bring brute force under its beneficent control.

On the other hand, Equality of Rights with regard to armaments is, in the long run, no less important. There cannot be two categories of States within the League. I do not believe that armaments in themselves are good or that they bring Security to nations which maintain them. History teaches indeed that they destroy the very Security that they are designed to give. I believe therefore that the Rearrangement of the disarmed Powers would not today bring to those Powers any safety which they lack. On the contrary, I believe it would bring disaster to all Europe, and first and foremost to the rearmed Powers themselves. It would bring disaster — moral and spiritual as well as financial — in time of peace; disaster beyond imagination in time of war. But when I have said this, I find it impossible to believe that a unilateral system of Disarmament can indefinitely endure. It is inconsistent with the nature of the League to have two sets of rights and duties and obligations. Equality, therefore, must be achieved by stages, with compromises on one side and the other, but integrally and beginning from today.

Equality must mean one of two things; the Rearrangement of the disarmed Powers, or the Disarmament of the armed Powers. Now that the Conference is about to take decisions; now that it is reaching the vital stage in its labours, I think that it would be a crime against those who gave their lives in the last war, a crime against future generations, to choose Rearrangement. It would be a betrayal of faith for which
simple citizens of every nation in the world.

Believing these things with deep conviction, I think that the British Government were right to build their Draft Convention on the Agreement of December 11th, and that they were right to include in it provisions for Security on the one hand and for Disarmament on the other. If I were to offer any comment on the substance of the Convention, I would only say that I wish there were still more of both. But as I have said, I do not desire here to comment upon the substance of a document which, in all human probability, will be under discussion in the Conference before these lines appear in print. I want rather in conclusion to speak of the spirit in which that work will be begun. Everything will depend upon the goodwill which Delegations now bring to their task.

Whatever the Convention may contain, no Government will be fully satisfied with the results. If we are to get a result at all, every delegation must be ready to give and take. Every Delegation must think not in terms of tactical advantage, but of the success of the Conference as a whole. If they do not, if they think purely in terms of relative military advantage, if, insisting upon what they call national interests, they let the Conference fail, they will betray the true interests of the nations they represent. They will be paving the road to the next war.

I have authority behind me when I say that. On March 20th, I received a deputation from two international organisations of Ex-Service Men — the C.I.A.M.A.U. (International Conference of Associations of Ex-Service Men and War Victims) and the F.I.D.A.C (Interallied Federation of Ex-Service Men). Their delegates spoke in the name of twelve million paying members from 14 different countries who fought on both sides. United in their detestation of war, these men presented to the Conference a resolution which ran as follows:-
"Solemnly recalling the fact that peace is the primary condition for the happiness and prosperity of peoples, and that ex-service men and war victims are its best qualified defenders; that its maintenance is only possible when based on the respect for treaties and equality of rights for all States, and by observing the following great principles; Compulsory Arbitration or in any event the settlement of differences without recourse to force, Security and Disarmament, both moral and material:

"They affirm that moral disarmament entails the suppression of everything which publicly — and particularly in schools — tends to hinder mutual understanding between the peoples.

Material disarmament should be substantial, simultaneous and progressive, it should include the suppression of private manufacture of and private traffic in arms, together with effective mutual international control.

They insist firmly that the President and Members of the General Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armament interpret in their decisions the wishes thus expressed and that, instead of seeking to "humanise warfare" they institute an effective organisation for the prevention and, if need be, repression of aggression."

I cannot believe that the Governments will be deaf to so authoritative an appeal. I still cannot believe that within a reasonable time we shall not have made a First Disarmament Convention for the reduction and limitation of armament of every kind.