

LUNCHEON TO MR. HENDERSON

Viscount Cecil on German Claim to Equality of Status

PROTEST AGAINST SECRET DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Arthur Henderson, who presided over the World Disarmament Conference, was entertained yesterday to luncheon at St Ermin's Restaurant by the National Peace Council.

Viscount Cecil, proposing Mr. Henderson's health, paid a tribute to the courage, tenacity, and, above all, the deep sincerity he had shown. While agreeing with Mr. Henderson that the Conference had not failed, he said it had reached a crisis in its fate. He proceeded:

"The next few weeks will show whether we are going to revert to the senseless competition in armaments whose end is war, or whether we are going definitely to break with those bad old traditions, and, turning our faces to the light, enthrone reason and justice as the arbiters of international life. That is the issue, no less.

"Can we succeed? I doubt it not. We have many things in our favour. Above all, we know what we want. We believe that the first step must be to begin to carry out our pledges at the end of the war.

"Germany's claim to equality of status, to have her armaments regulated on the same principles as other States, is irresistible. No one can honestly read the documents signed at Paris without recognising that. And we believe that this must be done by reducing the armaments of the other States and not by increasing those of Germany. If the Conference were to propose rearmament it would be greeted with howls of rage and derision.

"I do not for a moment believe that a treaty founded on such a principle would be signed or ratified by the nations of Europe, and still less of America. Nor is there the slightest reason for suggesting recourse to such an expedient. The proposals put forward by Signor Grandi, and recently endorsed by Signor Mussolini, combined with the suggestion of President Hoover, are certain of overwhelming acceptance on one condition, and that is that they should be wholeheartedly supported by the British Government."

The world, awaited leadership from Britain. "Can it be possible that it will wait in vain?" he asked. "I have no doubt that the mass of opinion in this country would greet with enthusiasm the abolition of monster battleships and submarines, of tanks and huge land guns; and, more than anything, of that devilish form of warfare, air bombing, and the instruments by which it is accomplished. Lastly, we are tired of

the tyranny of armament-mongers, and are ready for any measures that will put an end to it." He added: "If there are objections let us hear them, not whispered in the chancelleries or the committee-rooms, but publicly avowed before the world. It will never satisfy us to be told with many nods and winks that what we want cannot be done because this Admiralty or that War Office will not agree. If it be so, let us hear their reasons. Perhaps they can be met. For my part, I am ready to incur all reasonable sacrifices and even run risks so that the result may be attained." They had a right to know what was going on in so tremendous a discussion. It was not the few statesmen and their professional advisers who would have to pay for failure.

MR. HENDERSON

Mr. Arthur Henderson, who is returning to Geneva to-morrow, said that the Conference had not failed. There was a great deal of apprehension in the public mind with regard to the future work of the Conference. The public realised that when the Conference began work they would be at once faced with the most difficult stage in the whole history of the disarmament movement. There need be no two opinions on that question.

"I will frankly confess," said Mr. Henderson, "that I am not satisfied. But though there are serious doubts existing, I cannot bring myself to believe that the statesmen who assemble at Geneva in the course of a few days are ready and are prepared to take the responsibility for encouraging a competitive race in armaments and the inevitable danger of war arising from the existence of large armies, navies, and air forces. The apprehension that exists in no way causes me surprise. But I do not fully share it, because I am convinced that failure of this Disarmament Conference would be a veritable disaster in the life of Europe and of the world. (Hear, hear.) It would be the missing of a great and historical opportunity. It would be intolerable, and no responsible statesman in my opinion can be prepared to face that position.

"From the beginning of the Conference I have refused to contemplate failure. I refuse to contemplate it now. The case for disarmament never was so strong as it is at this very moment. On every ground—moral, economic, political, material—the case for disarmament by international agreement is overwhelming.

"WORLD DEMANDS REDUCTION"

"I am hopeful also because of decisions taken by the Conference itself, and perhaps that is the most important point of all. The Conference, if it is

not going to be clearly inconsistent with its own decisions, must regard limitations at existing levels as an intolerable result. Reduction, drastic and universal, is what world opinion now demands. Reduction, substantial and comprehensive, is what the Conference itself has declared to be essential. The Conference must not fail.

"We must disarm, as the nations are definitely pledged to do so. You may follow the resumption of the deliberations with renewed interest and with profound hope. I want you to realise that we have now reached the paramount stage in connection with the cause of disarmament.

"Continue your support, for with the pressure of public opinion behind us the Conference cannot possibly fail, and practical achievements must immediately follow. The Conference must go forward. It must make definite progress, or the nations will be compelled to face those sinister and disastrous possibilities which have so often disturbed and which have even sometimes poisoned the stream of international life.

THE GERMAN CLAIM

"The claim of Germany to rearm will present the Bureau and eventually the Conference with its most crucial position. If Germany withdrew from the Conference she might estrange the opinion of some people in Europe. Surely there is a better way, and I hope that that better way will be taken.

"Why should not the Allied and Associated Powers at once get together and recognise that what was said in their names in 1919 must bind them to an obligation from which they cannot escape? Why should they not publicly declare that it is their intention to remove this position of inferiority, that it is their intention, and with all possible haste, to restore Germany to the position of equality of military status?"

"I want you to feel that on this question of Germany and of the vanquished Powers there is in that Conference such a volume of opinion in favour of immediate steps being taken to meet the German claim that I think we can go forward with our work next week feeling that after all this is only one question in the work of the Conference; an important question, I admit, but one, I believe, that with goodwill, the spirit of conciliation, the spirit that characterised those who induced the Germans to commit themselves in 1919, we can settle. We can adjust this difficulty to the advantage not only of Germany and the other vanquished countries but of Europe and of the world.

"It is in this spirit that I shall go forward to the resumption of our conference work. We may yet bring this Conference, which has caused many of you great heartburnings, serious disappointment and dissatisfaction, to a decided success in the interests of the peace of the world."