M. AVENOL said he was on the whole satisfied with his visit to Rome. He had had a very long talk with Signor Mussolini. He had found the Italian attitude on disarmament changed.

Sig. Mussolini now argued that Germany's rearmament must be accepted as an accomplished fact and that as there was no question of any action to stop this process of rearmament the only thing that could be done was to conclude an agreement which would regulate the rythm of German rearmament. The alternative was between regulated and unregulated rearmament. In the circumstances there could be no question of the other Powers giving up any of their existing armaments.

Sig. Mussolini's idea therefore was limitation of other armaments at existing levels with a measure of rearmament for Germany to be established by negotiation and a system of control applying all round.

M. AVENOL had the impression that the Italian Government were now beginning to feel nervous about Italy and that while they would sit on the fence as long as possible they would, if they had to come down, certainly not come down on the side of Germany. He did not believe that Italy in the existing circumstances wished France to reduce her armaments and he thought that in both France and Great Britain the Governments had abandoned the idea of disarmament.
As for the German Government there was no doubt that they were not in the least interested in other Powers disarming but concerned exclusively with securing as much and as quick rearmament as possible for themselves. Hitler had repeatedly stressed his desire for armaments in order to speak with authority in the Councils of the nations and to feel himself on level terms in this respect with the other great Powers. On the other hand, he did not believe the German claims had increased to any extent since Germany left the Conference and that Hitler was not thinking of war for the present as he realised he would be starting with a heavy handicap. The German Government seemed primarily concerned with prestige and this could be gained only if it received international sanction and approval for its rearmament programme.

In reply to a question from Mr. Henderson, M. Avenol did not appear to anticipate serious difficulties in securing the adoption of a Convention providing for German rearmament and limitation of other armaments with supervision for all. He thought that difficult as the situation was a solution of this kind was possible and would be preferable to no Convention at all. If the Conference broke up without any Convention whatever, he feared the result to the League might be well nigh fatal.

He had also spoken with Sig. Mussolini about the League. From what he heard afterwards, and from what passed at the time, he believed he had succeeded in bringing home some aspects of the situation that hitherto had escaped the attention of Il Duce. In particular he had pointed out that the idea of a purely European League was impracticable,
for Great Britain could not join any international group that
did not include the Dominions and the British Commonwealth
was world-wide and not European. Moreover, in the Far
East the situation was that Japan was endeavouring to obtain
a position of hegemony and this was contrary to the interests
not only of China but of the Russians, the Americans, Britain
and one or two other Powers. It was for this reason that
America had co-operated so closely with the League in the
first two years of the conflict and was represented on the
Assembly Committee still charged with following the develop-
ments of the situation.

Again, in South America, the League was active in
two big disputes and a small Central American State - Guate-
mala - for the first time had asked for a League financial
adviser. This showed that the influence of the Monroe
doctrine was weakening, if it was not dead, and that South
American States had a direct interest in cultivating their
relations with Europe through the League.

On the other hand, he saw no reason why it should
not be possible to form a European Committee of the Council
just as there had been Greek, Bulgarian, Austrian and other
committees for special purposes. The League procedure
was elastic and could be adapted just as readily to private
and discreet methods and to the working of small groups of
Powers as it could be to big public conferences of States.
In general, the only thing rigid about the League was its
Covenant and the Covenant was a document which had been so
wisely drafted as to allow every possible latitude and adap-
tation to practical exigencies.

Mr. HENDERSON agreed that there was much to be said
for the view that no Convention would be a greater disaster
than any Convention whatever, even a Convention of the kind
mentioned by M. Avenol. This had not been Mr. Henderson's
opinion originally, but he now saw reason to change his mind
on that point. He doubted whether, in view of the diffi-
cult circumstances, the Great Powers would be ready with their
discussions by the second half of January. In that case
if they asked for more time he supposed there was nothing
for it but to let them have it.

He was most gratified at what M. Avenol told him
about the Italian Government's attitude to the League which
appeared to show that the newspaper talk about Italy's inten-
tion to leave the League was very much exaggerated.

M. AVENOL confirmed this view and said that he
thought there was no danger of the Italian Government leaving
the League.