

# Abyssinia Betrayed by the League of Nations

By George Padmore

**T**HROUGHOUT the history of predatory imperialism, there has never been a case of such cynicism and treachery as the betrayal of Abyssinia by Great Britain and France, the nations which are supposed to be the bulwarks of the League of Nations and the defenders of "Collective Security." But when their conduct is viewed against the background of intrigues and counter-intrigues which they have carried on against this African kingdom from the 'eighties of the last century, their recent conduct should cause us no surprise. Every great European power has at some time or another entertained designs upon Abyssinia. Italy's onslaught is merely the culmination of half a century of such plotting, and represents the blackest chapter in the history of European colonial expansion in Africa.

But let us examine the part which England and France played in facilitating this rape. In doing so, we can immediately eliminate France, for Laval, the then prime minister of that country, acted the role of open accomplice to Mussolini. It could not be otherwise, for was he not the one who prepared the way for Italy's attack, via the Pact of Rome? And as a corollary to this agreement, Laval naturally had to do his best to obstruct any measures which the League might have attempted to place in the way of his new friend and ally. Thanks to the obstructionist tactics of this Frenchman, the Italian dictator was able to carry on his military campaign without the least fear of effective measures being applied against him by the League.

It is the role of Britain with which we are most concerned. While it was more subtle, it was equally as treacherous as that played by Laval and his successor, M. Flandin, who continued his policy. The British representatives of "democracy," while paying lip service to the Covenant and posing before the electorate at home as champions of peace, justice, and heavens knows what, were carrying on backstairs negotiations with Italy at every stage of the dispute, to see to what extent they, too, could share in the spoils. At no time did the British imperialists ever intend to defend Abyssinia. And when they failed to get what they wanted, they just scurried away like rats from a drowning ship, not only deserting the victim of aggression, but the League and collective security. But little did they realise that when Addis Ababa fell

*"Invasion of sovereign rights has been in progress for centuries. Where is the nation today which during its history has not invaded the sovereign rights of others?"*

*"I consider it monstrous that the process, by which we assumed power in Abyssinia, the necessary expansion of our people, should be criticised. How about others? What have they been doing for centuries? There has never been but one method in the world of imposing one's will on backward peoples. That is by force. It was by no other means that one other secured the greatest Empire on the planet."*

—Mussolini

the peace of Europe would go down with it. And soon the European peoples will be called upon to pay the bitter price for the duplicity of these imperialist brigands.

Following the Wal-Wal incident referred to in the previous article, the Emperor telegraphed to the League of Nations on December 14, 1934, drawing the attention of the Council to the gravity of the situation, and on January 3, 1935, the Abyssinian government addressed a formal appeal to the League under Article II of the Covenant. This request was motivated by the fact that Italy had refused to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the dispute as provided for by the Italo-Abyssinian Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration of 1928. The League took no action in the matter. In the meanwhile, M. Laval visited Rome and made his deal with Mussolini. This agreement undoubtedly affected the whole course of subsequent relations between Italy and Abyssinia, for immediately after Laval's return to Paris, the French pro-Fascist press openly began to incite Mussolini to take firm action against Abyssinia.

## Wink at Invasion

M. Tattinger, the President of the Colonial Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, in a statement in *La Depeche Coloniale*, one of the most influential French colonial journals, wrote: "Sacrifice for sacrifice, I can see no grave inconvenience in that Abyssinia should pass under the sovereignty of Italy, if the latter guarantees not to touch our colonial vertebrates or the development of our African territories," while the

well-known French publicist Pertinax, writing in *L'Echo de Paris*, stated that there were numerous precedents in the history of European relations with backward peoples to justify Italian aggression against Abyssinia, and that in such circumstances Mussolini could rest assured that the French government would place no inconvenience in his way. Pertinax, however, indicated that there was one difficulty which stood in the way, and that was Abyssinia's membership of the League. Abyssinia, like Liberia and China, should not have been allowed to cross the threshold of the establishment at Geneva, a sentiment endorsed by Mussolini in an interview with the Foreign Editor of the *Echo de Paris*, "Has the League of Nations become the tribunal before which all the Negroes and uncivilised peoples, all the world's savages, can bring the great nations which have revolutionised and transformed humanity?" said Mussolini.

Britain in the meanwhile was pursuing a policy of watchful waiting, as Italian troops, stores and arms were being transported to East Africa. The Suez Canal Company, controlled by Anglo-French capital, took no steps to prevent this waterway being used by Mussolini in preparing his warlike measures against a weak member State of the League. Where profits are concerned there is no morality among imperialists.

Alarmed by Italy's military preparations and the bellicose speeches of Mussolini, directed against Abyssinia, the Emperor again addressed an appeal to the League of Nations, on March 17, invoking Article 15 (also Article 10) of the Covenant. But again the Council, that is to say, England and France, its dominant members, declined to take action. Why should they, when at this time they were still hoping to get a share of the swag? But their cynical conduct was becoming too much for decent-minded people in England and other countries to tolerate, so under pressure of this section of world opinion, reflected in the anti-Fascist and liberal press in all democratic countries, the Council was forced to announce that the Abyssinian question would be discussed in May.

However, during the intervening period, England was busy carrying on secret negotiations. For Mussolini had kept Britain fully informed of his real intentions from the very beginning of the dispute. On January 9, 1935, the

dictator had instructed Signor Grandi, his representative in London, to inform the British Foreign Office that the Italian government was prepared to safeguard Britain's interest in Abyssinia in return for a free hand in East Africa. But what did Britain do? Did she protest? Did she expose this conspiracy between Italy and France to destroy the independence of a weak nation whose sovereignty she was pledged to defend under the League's Covenant? Absolutely no. Instead, the National Government, while publicly pretending to be indignant over Italy's threats against Abyssinia, secretly appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Sir John Moffat, to examine the situation and to report to the government on the extent to which Britain's imperialist interests would be affected by a change in the *status quo* in Abyssinia. The commission's report was presented to the government in June, five months before the war actually broke out. Nevertheless, it was kept secret from Parliament and the British electorate until its contents were disclosed in the Italian journal, the *Giornale d'Italia*, on February 19, 1936, when Mussolini wanted to expose Britain's hypocrisy to the world.

### Indictment of Britain

This document not only indicts Britain for moral turpitude and indirect responsibility for what has happened to Abyssinia; for had the National Government been a sincere supporter of peace and the League, as it pretended to be, it had ample opportunity to avoid the slaughter of thousands of innocent people. But instead, its dilatory tactics merely facilitated Laval in carrying on his obstructionist manoeuvres in preventing the machinery of the League from coming into operation before Mussolini had committed himself to extreme measures. But by the time Britain attempted to mobilise the smaller powers in the League for sanctions against Italy, the war had already started.

The Moffat report also provides us with a very important clue to the understanding of a number of diplomatic events which occurred subsequent to the Duce's offer to Britain in January. We shall return to this aspect of the question later on.

Thanks to the persistent attitude of the Abyssinian government, the Wal-Wal dispute was finally placed on the agenda of the League on May 25, 1936. The Abyssinian delegation, however, was not allowed to participate in these discussions, which were conducted more or less secretly between her three traditional enemies—England, France and Italy. And as was to be expected, the only thing achieved was to throw dust in the eyes of the Abyssinians, and

at the same time create the impression among the small powers and the British people that something was really being done to settle the dispute. In reality, just the opposite was being accomplished. The dilly-dallying conduct of England and France was being utilised by Italy to complete her military preparations for the most shameful outrage in modern history. Incidentally, this merely goes to prove that the League of Nations, dominated as it is by imperialist nations—the Soviet Union being a mere spectator—can never serve the cause of peace. It merely creates pacifist illusions in the minds of the workers and toiling masses of the world—who ardently desire peace—and in this way masks the diplomatic manoeuvres and military plans of the great imperialist powers. "League or no League, a state which has resolved on war can always have it," writes H. A. L. Fisher in *Modern Europe*. Japan conducted her war outside the League, while Italy found it more convenient to do so from within.

The League was even more impotent in the Abyssinian dispute than in the Manchurian crisis, for it ignored the invitation of the Emperor on June 19 to send neutral observers to Abyssinia at his government's expense, to report on the situation on the spot, so that the world might be informed as to the true state of affairs. The League's refusal to accept this pacific gesture of Haile Selassie showed to what extent it was being strangled by the great "peace-loving democratic" nations, England and France.

### "Gone With the Wind"

From the committee this book got  
the Pulitzer Prize

But from George S. Schuyler it gets  
the Razzberry

Don't fail to secure your copy of the July CRISIS containing a scintillating article reviewing "Gone With the Wind," the novel of Georgia in the Civil War, which, according to Mr. Schuyler, contains little or nothing good about American Negroes.

Just about this time an event occurred in Europe which influenced more than any other factor subsequent developments in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute. The Tories, peeved over the Franco-Soviet pact of May 2, and the Laval-Mussolini agreement, both of which strengthened the position of France on the continent, as well as the position of Italy in the Mediterranean and North East Africa, began to play their hand. The pro-German elements in the Cabinet succeeded in getting the National Government to sign a naval agreement with Hitler as a warning to France not to flirt with Moscow and Rome at Britain's expense! Such conduct on the part of the National Government had the effect of once more upsetting the balance of power brought into being by the Franco-Soviet *rapprochement* and Franco-Italian agreement, and dealt a death blow to the Stresa front. Central Europe became a diplomatic battleground between Germany and the Soviet Union for winning the support of the small powers—the Little Entente, Balkan Entente, the Baltic Entente,—while England and France and Italy were engaged in quarrelling over Abyssinia.

French indignation was aroused against Britain for having concluded a unilateral agreement outside of the League of Nations, while at the same time exploiting the League in the name of collective security, to bring pressure to bear upon her imperialist rival, Italy.

### Bitter Anti-British Feeling

Never since the days of Fashoda was the French nationalist section of the press so bitter in its attack upon "Perfidious Albion." M. Henri Beraud, one of the outstanding French journalists and publicists, writing in *Gringoire*, of October, 1935, declared:

"Mussolini now knows that with regard to Italy, as with regard to the whole world, John Bull has only one policy, the policy of its bankers and merchants, and that the rights and needs of others have no more importance for the City than the skin of a Boer or the empty belly of a Hindu.

"Listen, John Bull, the traditional principle of your policy, the sole motive of your conduct, the doctrine professed at all times by your publicists and orators and practised at all times by your statesmen, is your exclusive interests.

"It is impossible to remember all the notorious examples of violence, perfidy, implacable egotism, and disloyalty with which your history is sullied. Disturbing nations; fomenting internal discord

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in order to exhaust them; arming the nations in the name of their independence, then abandoning them without pity; crushing, expropriating, decimating conquered peoples; all these acts abound in your history. You have never regarded them as anything but legitimate manifestations of your rights; you have always in your sincerity understood how to subordinate the principles of morality and right to the sacred deposit you call British interests. You treat humanity, justice, liberty, peace and war as business affairs. There is not a nation in the world which has not been the victim of your pride, your violence, your greed, your perfidy, your British honour. . . .

"There was that little affair of the Anglo-German naval agreement last summer. On April 16th the English solemnly signed a pact of mutual action with France and Italy at Stresa. Two months later these same English phlegmatically went to Berlin to discuss *tete-a-tete* with Herr Hitler a very different sort of pact.

"I am amongst those who think that English friendship is the cruelest gift that the gods can give a people. When I see England with the Bible in one hand and the Covenant in the other, defending the rights of the weak or the principles of justice, I cannot help believing that it is in her interest to do so. I believe also that this interest, always unchanging, is supported by a policy as old and as solid as the throne of Edward the Confessor. This policy consists of disturbing the continent in order to rule the seas. It consists of consciences, finding mercenaries and sowing discord; it consists of hindering peace between the nations; it consists of perching clergymen on strong boxes to preach renunciation to the poor. Such is the price the world must pay for British comfort. . . .

"I write this on my own responsibility. I speak only for myself. I hate this people. I hate them in my name and in the name of my ancestors. I hate them by instinct and by tradition. Should Great Britain be reduced to slavery? Yes. The Negus might be given the job."

### League a "Thieves' Kitchen"

This wave of anti-British feeling which swept through the French press and even reflected itself in some of the left organs of public opinion, simply played into the hands of Laval, and enabled him to resist being stampeded in supporting Britain's demands for firm action. From then on Laval was able openly to collaborate with Mussolini's henchman, Baron Aloisi, at Geneva. For how could British publicists criticise his conduct as a saboteur of

the League when their government, which only a few months before had identified itself with other League powers in condemning Hitler for repudiating the military clauses of Versailles by rearming, turned around behind the backs of France and Italy and entered into a treaty with the German government, outside of the League? Britain's action, instead of enhancing the prestige of the League, struck an irreparable blow at the Geneva institution and made it absolutely impossible for concerted action to be taken against Mussolini in Africa.

What is the political lesson to be drawn from this breakdown of the League? It shows that as soon as England and France, the real Powers behind the League, got to wrangling, Italy was able to go about her business unhampered. For the Soviet Union, the only other great Power on the Council, while formally a member of the League, is so dependent upon France through the Franco-Soviet agreement, which up till then had not been ratified, that she could not afford to jeopardize her position in exposing the League for what it is—a thieves' kitchen as characterized by Lenin. It is exactly this irreconcilable clash of interests among the imperialist powers which makes it impossible for the League to pursue a common policy when major crises arise. Because of the very character of imperialism, which is nationalistic and competitive, each power tends to approach international issues from the point of view of its own national interests, and only when those interests are being threatened is it prepared to take risks.

"We are faced at Geneva with the following reality: that the powers—large and small—carry their difficulties and their conflicts of interest to the League of Nations," wrote Signor Dino Grandi, Italian Ambassador at London. "These conflicts do not shrink at Geneva, they expand. The great powers in conflict with one another, seek for allies among the lesser powers and form hostile groups which complicate and aggravate the situation; the small states court the support of the great powers who, in order to maintain their diplomatic combinations, at once take sides. Thus all the disputes brought to Geneva finish sooner or later, either directly or indirectly, as conflicts between great powers.

"During my stay at Geneva I never saw a dispute of any importance settled otherwise than by an agreement between the great powers. They alone are responsible for the situations that arise. A few states that remain outside of fixed diplomatic combinations and are therefore able to maintain an independent attitude, have from time to time exercised a conciliatory influence

at Geneva. But this only happens in the case of secondary disputes, and, moreover, the lesser powers, not having at their disposal the forces that might become necessary to back up their action, are themselves compelled to have recourse to the great powers.

"The whole of Geneva procedure is, in fact, a system of *detours*, all of which lead to one or other of these two issues: agreement or disagreement between Great Britain, Italy, France and Germany—the latter now formally absent, but not yet entirely detached from the League."

It is interesting to compare this cynical yet realistic evaluation of the League with the point of view put forward by M. Litvinov at Geneva on July 1, 1936, in which he stated *inter alia* "There have been attempts to ascribe this lack of success to the League Covenant, to its objects and to the *present composition* of the League. From this are drawn far-reaching conclusions, which may lead to the result that, together with Ethiopian independence, the League itself may turn out to have been buried as well. Such attempts and conclusions must be decisively rejected."

### National Problems Uppermost

In the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, what were the interests involved? First, Abyssinia, a semi-colonial country, was concerned in safeguarding her independence and so looked to the League for protection. Italy on the other hand, was out to conquer Abyssinia, and expected the League to help her achieve this purpose. Britain, an imperialist power that has annexed many an Abyssinia in her history, didn't care a fig whether Abyssinia was conquered or not. Her only concern was, if a change in the *status quo* had to take place, that she should get her share of the swag. But it so happened that Italy in pursuing her main objective, clashed with British imperialism. Britain therefore expected the League to help her safeguard her Mediterranean and North African position against Italy. France on the other hand, was more interested at that particular time in what was happening across the Rhine and in Central Europe. So here we have four nations, each concerned with what it considered its own vital problem, but all looking to the same institution to solve these irreconcilable interests. The League is a political Babel, each nation speaking its own language.

Under these circumstances "collective security" can only operate if the interests of the chief imperialist powers—as for example, France and England—happen to be threatened at the same time and by the same enemy. In other

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words, if Germany were to attack France or Belgium, for that matter, Britain would naturally support France because of her geographical position. For an attack against France not only threatens Britain's imperialist interests but menaces her very national existence. In such a case England would operate military sanctions very speedily, even if the League did not exist, as was the case in 1914, by going to the support of France. This was made clear by Mr. Neville Chamberlain. Advocating the need for Britain's rearmament, the Chancellor said that sanctions involve the risks of war, and therefore "nationals cannot be relied upon to proceed to the last extremity of war unless their vital interests are threatened." These vital British interests, according to *The Times* of June 4, 1936, are the defence of the Empire, the integrity of France and Belgium, and the maintenance of a free passage through the Mediterranean to India, Australia and the Far East.

After the Anglo-German agreement, the League already in a dying condition, was as good as dead. From June on, events began to move rapidly at Geneva as well as in East Africa. Following the breakdown of direct negotiations between the Italian and Ethiopian representatives over the Wal-Wal affair, the Emperor continued to appeal to Geneva, asking that measures be taken to arrest the warlike preparations which Mussolini was all the time carrying on.

While "new diplomacy," represented by the Arbitration Commission, was pursuing its labours in Berne and Paris, "old diplomacy" was functioning side by side. Britain, alarmed by Mussolini's threats to bomb Malta, made a desperate effort to try and satisfy Italy's claims, while at the same time safeguarding her interests in Abyssinia.

With the approval of Laval, Eden had succeeded in getting the August session of the Council to place the dispute in the hands of the representative of the three great powers—England, France and Italy. Nothing pleased Mussolini better than this, for it enabled the three states most concerned in carving up Abyssinia to bargain over the share-out behind the back of the victim. From that moment the old game of secret diplomacy dominated the Geneva deliberations. It was the Morocco situation all over again. The only difference this time was that a League existed to act as a smokescreen for the war preparations of the imperialist bandits.

Furthermore, by handing over the dispute to the parties of the Tripartite Agreement, it only served to draw a red herring across the true issue *vis-a-vis* Italy-Abyssinia without in any way safeguarding the interests of the latter. Its effect was to strengthen Mussolini's position at home. Whereas before this move the war was unpopular among the overwhelming majority of the Italian people, the Duce was now able to exploit the new situation to his own advantage, by creating the impression among the masses that it was a conflict between British and Italian imperialisms and not a Fascist war of aggression against a weak African nation, as those who had criticised Italy tried to make out. From then on the impression grew among the Italians that the greedy Britishers just wanted to deprive them of what they most wanted—colonies.

### Safeguard for Lake Tsana

This action on the part of Britain and France in discussing the fate of Abyssinia on the basis of the 1906 secret agreement clearly showed that these so-called peace-loving democratic powers never intended to be guided by the letter or spirit of the Covenant, which has as its fundamental principle the guaranteeing of the independence of all League members. What, then, has the Tripartite Agreement in common with the Covenant?

Britain's sole concern throughout these proceedings was to try and defend her share of the swag, Lake Tsana. However, before negotiations got very far, the Italians made it clear that they were not out to accommodate even John Bull. Had Mussolini acceded to Britain's desires, the national government was quite prepared to bring diplomatic pressure to bear upon the Emperor to grant the maximum economic, political, and even territorial, concessions to the Italians. This is as plain as a pike-staff, for at the time of the Hoare-Laval agreement the Foreign Office sent a note to Sir Sidney Barton, the British Minister at Addis Ababa, instructing him to exert the maximum amount of pressure upon the Emperor to accept the scandalous proposals embodied in this infamous document.

But having failed to win over Mussolini, to their Little Englander scheme, which they were conducting with all the subtlety of oriental bargaining, characteristic of British diplomacy, and alarmed by the dictator's blunt refusal of Mr. Eden's offer to give Zeila to Abyssinia as part-compensation for any territorial adjustment made in Italy's favour, the Baldwin government decided upon a new line of tactics.

The Foreign Office resorted to direct action, hoping that by threatening sanc-

tions against Italy Mussolini would come to terms. For by this time Abyssinia had been relegated to a secondary position, the issue having developed into an open Mediterranean struggle between British and Italian Imperialisms. Mussolini, however, assured of the support of France, and knowing perfectly well that Britain would never risk a war against him that might have the effect of bringing down his regime and ushering in Communism, which the British imperialists feared more than Fascism, proceeded with his military plans. This fear was openly voiced by that neo-Fascist apologist for British imperialism, J. L. Garvin, editor of the influential London *Observer*: "Any result but signal victory in arms or its equivalent in the shape of wide territorial concessions, whether in the name of the League or not, could mean the fall of Signor Mussolini himself, the crash of the Facist regime and Italian chaos."

Addressing his troops at Eboli on July 6, Mussolini said: "Our decision is irrevocable. There can be no turning back. Government and nation are now engaged in a conflict which we have decided to carry on to the bitter end. The Italians have always thrashed black people in warfare. The defeat at Adowa was an exception . . . Today all Italy is behind her sons leaving for Africa. Italians prefer a life of heroism to an insipid existence."

And to help him prepare the way at Geneva for this much advertised adventure, the French press which had been carrying on a regular pro-Italian campaign from the very beginning of the dispute, had the audacity to demand the expulsion of Abyssinia from the League. These journalistic prostitutes to Fascism claimed that such action would solve two problems with one stroke: It would enable the League to exonerate itself, and at the same time avoid irritating Mussolini and losing the membership of a "good European." But this cynicism was too much even for the hard-boiled politicians at Geneva to countenance, when an easier way out could yet be found to accommodate Mussolini. Italy would be allowed to wage her war upon the blacks, while all the other powers would look on, some approvingly, others with varied degrees of indifference. For was not Italy about to emulate what others had been doing for centuries? Spreading the "White Man's Burden" to heathens and savages?

Not without reason, Sir John Simon informed the House of Commons that as far as he was concerned "Abyssinia was not worth a British warship." Sir John Simon could well afford to forget the sacrifices rendered by black people in defence of his Empire in its hour of

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need. But what is more significant is, that such statements reveal the hypocrisy which characterized the conduct of the British government throughout the whole of this unfortunate episode. It showed that at no time did the national government intend to take any risk in implementing its pledges for "collective security." Sir Samuel Hoare's famous speech of September 11 was sheer poppycock having a two-fold purpose: To throw dust in the eyes of the world; and for home consumption, to rally votes for Toryism at the General Election which took place on November 14, 1936.

### Ethiopians Denied Arms

Today the nation is reaping what the government has sown, Britain's name is a byword for scorn and derision in the market places of Africa and the bazaars of the orient.

As war clouds grew more and more threatening over Africa, and the League revealed its impotence to prevent war—even a localized conflict—the Abyssinians decided to depend upon themselves. Already denied the possibilities of obtaining arms, thanks to the embargo imposed by England, France and other League powers during the eight months already wasted in fruitless negotiations, the Emperor addressed a special appeal to the League on August 12 asking for financial aid and other forms of material assistance, such as the removal of the arms embargo, in preparing the defence of his country. But even in the face of this most urgent appeal, this august body remained unmoved, although England and France had by treaty in 1930 pledged themselves to facilitate the Emperor in obtaining all the arms necessary to defend the independence of his country. And as for the League, there can be no excuse for its conduct in refusing to aid the victim of such barbarous aggression, when it had for years financed such states as Austria and Hungary, the very ones that were among the first to refuse to abide by its sanctions decision. The Abyssinians were the victims of treachery on every hand.

On September 4 the Council convened to hear the findings of the Arbitration Commission which had been appointed at the August session. The commission decided that neither party to the dispute was wholly responsible for what occurred at Wal-Wal in December, 1934. With this question out of the way, the Council proposed to set up a Committee of Five to "undertake the

general examination in its various aspects of the relations between Italy and Abyssinia." This body was nothing else but a plaything in the hands of the Big Two—England and France. The first thing the committee did was to assure Mussolini that it was quite prepared to satisfy all Italy's demands providing he would refrain from war which might mean the end of what little prestige still remained to the League. But more important still, the committee was afraid that the war might give rise to serious political repercussions in Europe as well as arouse indignation and unrest among the coloured races of Africa and Asia. Mussolini, however, rejected the kind offer of the committee.

Faced with the Duce's intransigent attitude, British diplomacy had again to trim its sails to suit the new international wind which was blowing. On the one hand, the British government had more openly to adopt the role of defender of Abyssinia by pretending loyalty to the League and the principle of "collective security." Sir Samuel Hoare declared: "The attitude of His Majesty's government has always been one of unswerving fidelity to the League and all that it stands for, and the case now before us is no exception, but on the contrary the continuance of that rule. The recent response of public opinion shows how completely the nation supports the government in the full acceptance of the obligations of League membership . . . In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression."

This speech had the effect of placating public opinion at home and in the colonies, where Mussolini's arrogant threats against the last independent African kingdom had aroused bitter resentment. But while Sir Samuel was paying lip service to the Covenant, his colleagues in the Foreign Office were at the same time secretly bargaining with Mussolini, for it will be recalled that at no period during the controversy was the British Ambassador in Rome, Sir Eric Drummond, so frequently assuring Mussolini that Britain had no intention of closing the Suez Canal or applying force than during the months immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities.

### Sanctions Failed

Having taken the precaution of safeguarding their imperial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, without even waiting for the consent of the League of Nations to approve the despatch of

the Home Fleet, Mr. Eden, following up the honeyed words of Sir Samuel, mobilized the League states to apply sanctions against his country's rival. Britain considered this her trump card, having already decided not to resort to force against Italy. She hoped that sanctions would have the effect of scaring Mussolini and forcing him to adopt a more conciliatory attitude and agree, even at this late moment, to accept the offers previously made to him by the Committee of Five. Had Mussolini fallen into the trap, Britain's interests in Abyssinia would have been safeguarded, for the Committee had planned to place the Lake Tsana region under a League mandate; in other words, under British control, after giving Italy the major portion of the country. But Mussolini stood firm and sanctions failed, for the simple reason that Britain, although she had taken the initiative in this direction, never intended carrying them to the point of causing Italy to suffer defeat. Britain feared such an outcome more than anything else. For defeat for Mussolini would not only have been a serious blow to capitalism in Italy, but would have served as an inspiration to the anti-Fascist forces in other European countries, as well as the anti-imperialist movements in Africa and Asia. For long before the war started, the colonial peoples, especially in Egypt, South Africa and the Near East (Palestine) had begun to get restless. So while shouting for sanctions and still more sanctions, the British imperial government, which has the controlling interest in the Anglo-Persian (Iraq) Oil Company, was seeing to it that Mussolini got all the oil that his aeroplanes needed to drop poison gas bombs upon defenseless villagers, women and children. British imperialism is the bulwark of world reaction. The Soviet Union, like Britain, America and Rumania, continued to sell oil to Italy throughout the war and was the first great power to propose the lifting of sanctions.

Reviewing the entire episode, one can truly say that from the outbreak of the dispute, arising out of the Wal-Wal incident, Britain and France, though fully aware of the ultimate aim of Mussolini, did everything possible to conceal the real danger confronting Abyssinia. Further, they prevented the Abyssinians from obtaining arms, assuring the Emperor that his country's independence was secure in the good offices of the League, while at the same time they were facilitating Mussolini's plans by masking his war preparations behind diplomatic discussions and dishonest declarations of devotion to peace. And, as a final act of treachery, the British and French imperialists deliberately ob-

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structed the carrying out of those sanction measures which, in order to placate world public opinion, they were empowered to institute after Italy had been officially declared the aggressor.

### Delay Piled on Delay

A bird's eye view of the events which took place at Geneva during these months will suffice to show the dilatory tactics pursued by the so-called democratic powers in helping Fascism to achieve its aims—the conquest of Abyssinia.

On October 2, 1935, the war began, when Italian troops violated the Abyssinian frontier to the South of Mount Mussa Ali, near French Somaliland. Five weeks later (November 6, 1935) the Committee of Eighteen met and the sanctions committee approved oil sanctions "in principle."

Eleven weeks later (January 22, 1936) the Committee of Eighteen decided to appoint a special committee of experts to study oil sanctions.

Thirteen weeks later (February 3, 1936) the committee of experts on trade in petroleum met. Fourteen weeks later (February 12, 1936) the committee of experts reported their findings. Seventeen weeks later (March 2, 1936) the Committee of Eighteen discussed the report of the committee of experts on oil sanctions. On March 4, the Committee of Eighteen referred points about oil sanctions to a sub-committee.

Twenty-two weeks later (April 8, 1936) the Committee of Thirteen, the Council of the League of Nations, minus Italy, discussed the Italian and Abyssinian replies to the appeal of the League to the two parties for peace.

Seven months later (May 2, 1936) the Emperor of Ethiopia left Addis Ababa, placing the Government of his country in the hands of a Council of Ministers at Gore.

Seven months of bloodshed, and the League of Nations was unable to prove its efficacy as an instrument for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Seven months of brutality and carnage, and the League of Nations was unable to stem the tide of Italian imperialistic greed. Seven months of Italian savagery, and the League of Nations kept instituting committees of twos, of threes, of eighTEENS, *ad infinitum*. Seven months of bombs, of poison gases, of forbidden instruments of warfare, and the League of Nations remained throughout inert, impotent and drowsy.

Thus was Ethiopia sacrificed in "a war of civilization and liberation," a

war "of the poor, of the disinherited, of the proletariat!"

Surely the colonial peoples, like other small nations, cannot be expected to have confidence in the integrity of such an institution as the League of Nations after the shameful way in which China and Ethiopia have been let down. At every phase of this disgraceful business the Abyssinians were tricked, deceived and led to the slaughter by the League, headed by the great "peace-loving" democratic powers, Great Britain and France.

Not even the organized labour movement, which is supposed to be passionately anti-Fascist, did more than express pious words of sympathy. The stalwart leaders of the Second and Third Internationals and their sections, especially in those countries where so-called bourgeois democracy exists, and where the facilities for mobilising the masses were favourable, did nothing to help the workers. These great "champions" and stalwart fighters for the rights of the colonial peoples and subject races did not provide one gas mask, one ambulance outfit, much less financial assistance, to help these Abyssinians.

### Failure of Revolutionary Parties

It is to the everlasting shame of the organised labour movements of Europe and America that bourgeois humanitarians did more in a practical way to help the Abyssinians than any of the national sections of both Internationals. Perhaps their leaders felt like Mr. Brailsford that Abyssinia "was a feudal kingdom outside the fraternity that links workers the world over." Imperialists, headed by Lloyd George, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Cecil, and others, did more to collect money for Red Cross purposes and despatch ambulances to help the Abyssinians. This does not mean these imperialists are for coloured independence; but it shows the bankruptcy of the revolutionary leaders in their attitude towards subject races. The African peoples want to see more deeds and less table talk about international brotherhood. Nevertheless, the fact remains that these politically backward Abyssinian warriors with their primitive weapons, fighting against overwhelming odds, to throw back Fascist-imperialist barbarism from the shores of Africa, will long be remembered when those "revolutionary socialists" who betrayed them shall have been forgotten.

When one reads such utterances as those by Mr. Brailsford, one of the leading theoreticians of the socialist movement, one cannot help feeling that, had it been Abyssinia raining death from the air upon a white people—even if they were among those "outside the

fraternity that links workers the world over"—Europeans would not merely have passed pious resolutions on behalf of the victim. Not without reason, Haile Selassie, in his last appeal to Europe, declared: "Do the peoples of the world not yet realise that by fighting on until the bitter end I am not only performing my sacred duty to my people, but standing guard in the last citadel of collective security? Are they too blind to see that I have my responsibilities to the whole of humanity to face? I must still hold on until my tardy allies appear. And if they never come, then I say prophetically and without bitterness, 'the West will perish.'"

How truly prophetic! Yesterday it was Abyssinia. Today Spain. And tomorrow . . . . .?

The next article by Mr. Padmore will deal with Hitler and African colonies. It will appear in an early issue.

## LETTERS from READERS

### Praises Schuyler Article

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CRISIS: I wish to thank Mr. Schuyler, through your valuable organ, for his excellent article entitled "Do We Really Want Equality?" It is scholarly, timely and effective. Just what we need to stir us up. Great good will come from it.

Among other things Mr. Schuyler points out the fact that we contribute so little for the defense of our citizenship rights. This is true. However the fault is not due wholly to the indifference of the people. The stronger fact is that the N.A.A.C.P. does not appear to be alive to the truism that you must spend money to get money. If you do not want money, send for it. If you do want money, you must go after it. If the N.A.A.C.P. wants money it must go after it under the specific leadership and direction of a person who knows how to get money. Printed appeals, circular letters and the like will help, but they will not bring in much money. Much money can be obtained only by the personal touch of one who knows and understands the peculiar psychology of the people and how to get money out of them. The people will give and they will give generously, if the matter is presented by a qualified and proper person. They have given through the long years to all good causes. They have given and are giving to many bad causes. They will give to anything, if the person appealing knows