

1935.

NEW ZEALAND.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION,

STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT HON. G. W. FORBES, PRIME MINISTER,
RELATIVE TO.

Laid upon the Table of the House of Representatives, 19th February, 1935, by Leave.

THE position of the world at the moment is one of extreme difficulty and perplexity both economically and politically, and it is in the highest degree desirable that this House and the people of the Dominion should be as well informed as possible on international movements as they occur. It would be absurd to suggest that this small and remote Dominion plays any decisive part in world politics, but the times call for the efforts of all well disposed peoples, and perhaps the weight even of New Zealand might conceivably turn an evenly balanced scale.

We are facing at the moment a most interesting and important development in the association of European nations, a movement which may well lead to a material improvement in international security, and, correspondingly it may be hoped, to a substantial reduction in the armaments of the world.

Honourable members will remember that by the Covenant of the League of Nations each member of the League undertook, *inter alia*, to respect and preserve the territorial integrity of every other member, and that when the Covenant was framed there was considerable difference of opinion as to whether this collective guarantee of each individual State was, if necessary, to be supported in the last resort by force. The Covenant as adopted did undoubtedly contemplate the application of force in certain circumstances, but since the inception of the League the tendency has for obvious reasons been strongly against the application of force and in favour of the alternative method of conciliation, arbitration, and judicial settlement. In many cases it has been found possible to obtain agreement at Geneva (sometimes, perhaps, at the expense of the principles originally laid down), but the absence of Germany, Russia, and the United States from the League was for a lengthy period a great weakness. Certain European nations who have felt themselves particularly open to attack have not been satisfied that their safety was sufficiently safeguarded by the conciliation machinery set up at Geneva, and felt that something more definite was necessary if their people were to be secure. These doubts led to the famous Geneva Protocol of 1924, which was an attempt to provide "teeth" for the Covenant and to ensure that Covenant-breaking nations would be restrained by force. Great Britain, among other Powers, declined to accept this Protocol, on the ground that it amounted to a blank cheque that could involve Great Britain in every war that might break out in any part of the world. The next step, in 1925, was a more limited one.

Honourable members will be familiar with the details of the Treaties of Locarno, and especially the Locarno Treaty of Guarantee signed in 1925 by Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy. Shortly, this Treaty provided that Germany and Belgium and Germany and France mutually agreed that they would in no case attack or invade each other or resort to war against each other. Great Britain and Italy bound themselves to come to the assistance of any one of the three Powers just mentioned who was attacked by one of the others in violation of the Treaty, and as one of the conditions of the agreement Germany joined the League of Nations.

The signature of this Treaty led to a general improvement in the European situation, and for a time it appeared probable that the League machinery would be found adequate to meet any eventuality that might arise. Grave doubts were, however, held by many of the more vulnerable Powers, especially having regard to the existence in Europe of two groups of nations whose interests were diametrically opposed—those who as the victors in the Great War had gained substantial accretions