

REFUGEES.

For two reasons the question of international assistance to refugees called for special consideration by the Assembly and its Sixth Committee in 1938: first, because the two existing League organizations, the Nansen Office for Refugees and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees coming from Germany (and Austria, by Council resolution of 14th May, 1938), were to end on 31st December, 1938; and, secondly, because urgency was given to the problem by developments beyond immediate League control, including the recent Evian Conference, and by the ominous outlook for minorities and prospective refugees, victims of more or less peaceful frontier adjustment and racial theories. Already some six hundred thousand refugees are in some way or other dependent on the League, the object of which is, of course, to facilitate their absorption in the countries of refuge.

The Sixth Committee at once (14th September) set up a sub-committee, representative of eighteen States, which had as the basis of its work the plan proposed by the Council in May, 1938, by its Committee of Three (Bolivia, the United Kingdom, and France). New Zealand's attitude, pursuant to the helpful directions which the Government have continued to give me as their delegate, was one of warm approval of the continuance of every possible endeavour to mitigate the unhappy lot of refugees, an attitude which, it is gratifying to note, is maintained as well by all others at the League of Nations Assembly, its Committees, and the Council.

Hence there was little difficulty in completing and in the Assembly's approving the plan (for full text, see A. 54, 1938, XII) for setting up a new and unified League Office for Refugees, with headquarters in London. It is to be controlled by a High Commissioner appointed for a term of five years from 1st January, 1939; the first appointee, nominated by the United Kingdom, is Sir Herbert Emerson, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., C.B.E.; for the first year a League grant of 224,500 Swiss francs is fixed.

MANDATES.

A tribute to the good working of the mandates system generally, some differences of opinion respecting the partition of Palestine (the League to date has gone no further than authorize the mandatory Power to continue the study of this solution), and a resolution expressing "the hope that the problems relating to Palestine may be solved in the near future, account being taken of all the legitimate interests at stake"—this briefly but adequately covers the Sixth Committee's and the Assembly's 1938 proceedings in regard to mandates (Document A. 53, 1938, VI).

SITUATION IN SPAIN.

This came formally before the Sixth Committee by the Assembly's adopting a resolution proposed by the Spanish delegate referring to the Committee the section of the Secretary-General's report relating to the situation in Spain. Subsequently a more specific issue came to it in the form of a draft resolution, also submitted by the Spanish delegate, giving effect to the Spanish Government's request for a League Commission to verify "the immediate and complete withdrawal of all the non-Spanish combatants engaged in the struggle in Spain on the Government side."

The issue, as might be supposed, quickly resolved itself into one of belief in greater or less competence of the "Committee of Non-Intervention," already in existence, if not very active, in London. The Foreign Minister of Spain at the outset made it clear that, though his Government had co-operated with the Non-Intervention Committee whenever requested to do so, they could not agree simply to transmit this matter to that Committee. "Would it be reasonable or defensible," he asked, "to shunt the Spanish Government's request—admittedly so valuable a contribution to international pacification and the abatement of tension—on to a track so bristling with obstacles and difficulties as that represented by the London Committee, while the League of Nations offered a speedy and straightforward method of ensuring the complete and immediate execution of the proposal?"

The Spanish proposal was supported by Mexico without qualification; by the United Kingdom, welcoming the decision as a step towards withdrawal of foreign combatants from both sides in Spain, but subject to its being made clear that the Non-Intervention Committee's plan would not be prejudiced (on which point Senor Azcarate, for Spain, was at once reassuring); by France; by Colombia; by Sweden. It was opposed by Portugal, Albania, Poland, and Hungary, with the representative of Ireland also joining in the hope that the withdrawal of foreign combatants would be carried out under the supervision of the Non-Intervention Committee. M. Litvinoff (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on 29th September—an occasion otherwise of some historic importance on account of that day's meeting at Munich of the heads of four Powers dealing with Czechoslovakia—supported the Spanish request. It was, he contended, a request that could be granted without the least sacrifice by League members—"it could not even bring down upon them the wrath of the present dictators of Europe, before whom some members had become accustomed to tremble." By granting the request "members of the League would be doing a service not so much to Spain as to the League itself and to the cause of peace."

In the face of this evident absence of unanimity, the Sixth Committee proposed, and the Assembly agreed, to refer the Spanish proposal to the Council for consideration in the light of the discussions in the Sixth Committee.