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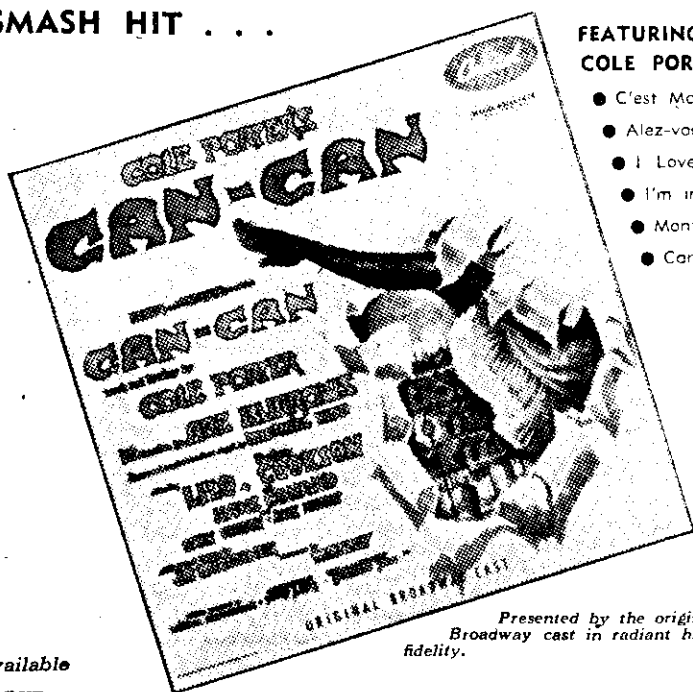
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The Intervention

IN the past ten days the British Commonwealth has been under its severest post-war strain. A cease-fire in Egypt, however much it may be an occasion for thankfulness, can leave few illusions about what still has to be faced. British-French action in the Middle East has altered the balance of international relations, and has profoundly influenced the moral attitudes upon which they rest. The conflict of opinion, alas, will not die away in a flurry of words: it will have far-reaching results. In New Zealand there has so far not been much discussion outside the editorial columns of newspapers, but public opinion has been troubled, and will need expression.

The British Government acted without the support of the Opposition in the House of Commons. It received qualified support from New Zealand and Australia, but its policy was opposed by Canada, and condemned by India and Pakistan. The President of the United States, Britain's strongest friend, spoke plainly and firmly against the British-French intervention. And earlier, in the Security Council, the United States and Russia had voted together for a pacific resolution which the Allies rejected. These facts were strange and disturbing. The peoples of Britain and the Commonwealth reach unity, suddenly and completely, when they face a common danger. It is a necessary condition of this unity that the stand should be against aggression and that no peaceful and honourable settlement is possible. The present divisions have arisen because people are not convinced that there was no alternative to the use of force.

Egyptian policy has been provocative, and Arab States must share with Israel the responsibility for border frictions. But the event which provoked a British-French ultimatum was an act of aggression by Israel; and although the operations which followed were intended to protect the Suez Canal, they were launched against Egypt, who in this instance was not the aggressor. If the situation as a whole was a danger to peace, the intervention should have come

from United Nations. It is difficult to believe that action had to be swift and sudden, since no gains by Israel could have been massive enough to have withstood pressure from Powers which would have included the United States. It is now being said of Britain and France that they acted independently to protect their own interests. And only to protect the interests of all mankind (we have been told many times, by British spokesmen among others) can armed intervention be justified in the age of the hydrogen bomb.

There does not seem now to be the danger of wider operations which might have existed if Russia had been less deeply preoccupied with Hungary. But if the fighting has been brief and confined to the Suez Canal zone, the aftermath will be long and bitter. Any attempts to keep the canal open, presumably until it passes under international control, will be costly and difficult. The use of force will not facilitate a settlement: on the contrary, it will create new frictions which must prolong and intensify the dispute. These prospects are bad enough; but the worst feature is the effect of British and French action on United Nations. The strength of United Nations is moral; it can grow only as its work earns it the respect and confidence of peoples throughout the world. Britain has played a full and sometimes a noble part in this work for peace. And yet now, to the grief and embarrassment of her friends, she is exposed to a charge of aggression. People in British countries know quite well that Britain's intentions were not aggressive; but they may be less certain that she has acted wisely. The proposal to set up a United Nations "Police Force," with which Britain is in agreement, should help to improve a bad situation. There will be relief in British countries when United Nations takes over full responsibility, and a New Zealand contribution will undoubtedly have public approval. But peace has been so grievously weakened that many days must pass, and much hard work be done, before hope and confidence can return.

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