

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

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3.40 p.m.

House resumed.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY My Lords, I should like to make to the House a statement which is being made in another place by my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary. This is what my right honourable friend is saying:

"The House will not expect me in the compass of an Answer to this Question to deal with the whole range of developments in foreign affairs since the end of July. I will therefore concentrate on the major problems which are now exercising our attention.

"As the House is aware, I have just held a full conference with the Foreign Ministers of the United States and France, at which we discussed such topics of first importance as Four-Power talks, Trieste, the projected Political Conference on Korea, Indo-China and the Israel-Jordan frontier situation.

"On the question of Four-Power talks I have nothing to add to the terms of the Note delivered to the Soviet Government on Sunday except to say that Her Majesty's Government sincerely hope that the Soviet Government will accept the invitation to a meeting of Foreign Ministers at Lugano on 9th November. Should they do so, I have no doubt that it should be possible to make progress towards a settlement of the German and Austrian question, and so contribute to a significant reduction in world tension.

"Now I come to Trieste, and I should like to start by saying something about the wider background of the decision announced on October 8 by the United Kingdom and United States Governments.

"It was in 1945 that Allied troops entered Trieste. The Italian Peace Treaty was signed in February, 1947. Under that Treaty a Free Territory of Trieste was constituted. It was to be governed under a provisional regime until the permanent Statute could be brought into force. It was intended that this permanent Statute would be introduced at an early date and would shortly be followed by the withdrawal of British, American and Yugoslav troops.

"Unfortunately, the permanent Statute has never been introduced, through no fault of ours. I need not remind the House of the protracted debates in the Security Council in which all efforts to secure the appointment of a Governor were frustrated by Soviet obstruction,

"In March, 1948, the three Governments, France, the United Kingdom and the United States, issued the Tripartite Declaration. That Declaration advocated the award of the whole territory, both Zones A and B, to Italy. This has been a dominant factor in the situation ever since.

"In the years which followed, the United Kingdom and the United States Governments, in conjunction with the French Government, have persistently endeavoured to promote a settlement by conciliation between Italy and Yugoslavia. But Nationalist feeling in both countries proved too powerful to permit of a mutually acceptable solution.

"This was the position when the trouble flared up once again in August. Statements and speeches on both sides became more and more violent and the atmosphere dangerously inflamed. Her Majesty's Government and the United States Government consulted together as to how they should deal with this rapidly deteriorating situation. We sought a means to lance this abscess which was poisoning relations between Italy and Yugoslavia.

"The solution announced on October 8, was admittedly drastic, but it was designed to meet a situation which would have grown more dangerous had we done nothing. It was imperfect in so far as it would leave some Slovenes under Italian administration and some Italians under Yugoslav administration. But the House must recall that repeated attempts to promote agreement on an ethnic basis had failed. The division of the territory along the zonal boundary

seemed to be the only practicable course. As we made clear in the announcement of October 8 our action was expected to lead to a final solution.

"It was not a solution which we had hopes of inducing either side to accept in advance of negotiation. We knew, too, that it would meet with protest and criticism. But from the discussions and contacts which we had had with both parties over many months, there was good reason to believe that it was a solution each side could acquiesce in, if under protest. I do not wish to-day to make any comment on the reaction in Rome and Belgrade. Still less—and I am sure I speak for the whole House—do I want to exacerbate the position. But I do wish to say that Her Majesty's Government strongly deprecate the movement of troops by either party, which can only increase tension and incite public opinion.

"Meanwhile, we continue in touch with the United States and French Governments and also with the Governments of Italy and Yugoslavia. I will do my best"—

this is my right honourable friend speaking—

"to keep the House informed.

"If all concerned will recall the overriding need for unity between nations who should be good neighbours, I believe that we may yet find means of bringing both parties to agree to a settlement.

"Talks with the Egyptian Government about the defence of the Canal Zone were resumed on July 28. I hope to be able to make an announcement within the next few days about the progress of these discussions. They have reached an advanced stage, and I trust that the House will not press me to say any more about them to-day.

"About Persia I hope that a new chapter has opened. There is a new Government there, and to them, and to the Persian people, Her Majesty's Government wish sincerely to extend once more the hand of friendship. The Persian Government are aware that we are ready to resume diplomatic relations; if this can be done it will then be easier for us to discuss together the complex problem of Persian oil.

"I should like to say that the United States Government are working very closely with us in these matters.

"In Korea, the truce has been maintained for nearly three months. Progress in consolidating the Armistice has been slow and difficult. The Political Conference has still to meet. The United States Government, acting on behalf of the nations with forces in Korea, has proposed a meeting of emissaries on October 28 to discuss arrangements for this Conference. I am most happy to learn that the Chinese and North Koreans have agreed.

"We have also achieved substantial progress in dealing with the exchange of those prisoners of war who desired repatriation. We have all been glad to welcome home our own prisoners of war after their ordeal. A beginning has been made in settling the future of the remaining prisoners. In this connection, I must pay a tribute to the part played by the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission and, in particular, by the Indian Chairman, General Thimayya, and by the Indian troops under the command of General Thorat. With exemplary tact and patience they have controlled the turbulent prisoners and are carrying through the first stages of the difficult process of explanations as provided for in the Armistice agreement.

"The problem of Arab-Israel relations, which was only settled provisionally in the General Armistice Agreements of 1949, is again causing grave concern. The immediate reason for this is the attack by Israel forces on three villages in Jordan on the night of October 14, which inflicted heavy casualties. This attack was strongly condemned by the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission and appears to have been an organised operation by heavily-armed forces in response to a frontier incident which was already being investigated by Jordan and Israel police working in co-operation.

"The House will recall our responsibilities under the 1950 Tripartite Declaration, and Her Majesty's Government, in concert with the United States and French Governments, have therefore asked the Security Council to consider the situation urgently. I earnestly hope that both the Israel and Jordan Governments will meanwhile refrain from any action which might aggravate the present dangerous situation."

3.55 p.m.

EARL JOWITT My Lords, I should like to thank the noble Marquess, the Leader of the House, for making such an important statement. I wish to ask a question or two with regard to one matter and one matter only—the matter of Trieste. I quite understand the undesirability at the present moment of discussing any further the question of, for instance, Egypt. Let me say at once that we on this side of the House do not wish to exacerbate a situation which has become fraught with grave peril to peace. I agree that the parties concerned have an overriding obligation to do nothing to endanger world peace.

Nor do I propose, for the moment, at any rate, to question the substance of what has been done. But I should like to ask a question or two as to the way in which it was done. May I ask whether any, and if so what, information was given to the Yugoslav Government, to the French and to the United Nations before this announcement was made? It has been stated in the Press—the noble Marquess must have seen it—that the Yugoslav Government had only some two hours' notice of the decision, and that the French had none at all. I can hardly credit that, and I think it is desirable that that point should be cleared up. I should also like to ask whether, when this decision was announced with regard to Zone A, any decision was indicated as to Zone B, which, of course, is not contained in the public announcement. I am very glad to infer that there is still a possibility of a conference; but would not the prospect of a conference have been far easier if it had been held before the decision was promulgated, instead of being held afterwards?

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY My Lords, the noble and learned Earl asked a number of questions, the first of which was as to notice. It would not be true to say that the French Government was given no notice at all, nor would it be true to say that of the Yugoslav or Italian Governments. The Yugoslav and the Italian Governments were given—I should not like to speak without the book, but, as far as I can remember, two or three days, and it may have been more. In the case of the French it was a little shorter. If it be suggested that there ought to have been wider consultations than actually took place, I would indicate to noble Lords that for months and months every effort had been made to enable the two countries concerned to come to an agreement. We should infinitely have preferred that; everybody would have preferred it. So far from that being the case, the situation was exacerbated and had reached a very dangerous stage. Therefore, it seemed to the countries concerned that it was one of those cases where the Powers immediately concerned should indicate the settlement which they thought the most desirable. I cannot believe that any other course would have led to greater agreement. There were two other questions which the noble Earl asked. One was as to Zone B. I think that the reply is inherent in my statement. I said it was expected that this proposal would lead to a final settlement. This indicated that that settlement should take place on the zonal boundaries.

EARL JOWITT That had not been announced before. I have elicited something very important. I understand now that the implication of this statement is that the decision involved that Zone A should go to the Italians and Zone B to the Yugoslavs. But the public announcement, I think I am right in saying, contained no statement whatever with regard to Zone B.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY I think it is inherent in the statement by the Foreign Secretary that I have read to your Lordships to-day, that the division along the zonal boundary seemed to be the only practical course. That is perfectly clear. There is no doubt that both the Italian and the Yugoslav Governments were perfectly well aware that that was Her Majesty's Government's view—the view of the two Governments. If there is any further misunderstanding about the information, it would not be correct to say—it is quite untrue, and I am sure the noble and learned Earl did not mean to suggest any such thing—that longer notice was given to the Italian Government than to the Yugoslav Government. They were given exactly the same notice. It seemed to us vital that the two countries should be treated exactly alike in this respect.

4.1 p.m.

LORD LAYTON My Lords, my noble Leader, Lord Samuel, very much regrets that he could not stay to hear the statement which has just been made by the noble Marquess. On behalf of the noble Lords on these Benches, I should like to thank the noble Marquess for that statement. In particular, I should like very strongly to associate myself with the remarks made about the work done by the Withdrawal Commission and in particular by its Indian chiefs. That work is of the utmost importance to all who realise the tremendously important rôle that India has to play as a bridge between the people of Asia and the people of Europe. There is another point in the statement about which I wish to

say a word, and that is the slow progress—though there has been progress—made in regard to holding the Political Conference in Korea.

For the rest, the statement is not exactly a cheerful statement, and I do not propose to press any further the questions that have been asked with regard to Trieste, except to say that public opinion in this country does feel that there has been a misjudgment in the action taken by the Governments of the United States and Britain, as has been shown by the reaction. We all hope that talks between the four or five Powers involved can, in fact, be got going. The greatest and most valuable statement which could emerge from any of these discussions would be that such a conference had, in fact, taken place. After all, it is a very serious proposal that two countries which have been acting as police in one of the key spots of the world should withdraw in conditions in which the probable result of their withdrawal is war. That, I have no doubt, is a matter which we shall be discussing. I should only like to ask whether the noble Marquess has any views as to the date on which these matters can be discussed. I am quite sure that the whole House will agree with the noble Marquess that the decision must rest with Her Majesty's Government and depend on the state of affairs at the time.

LORD LAWSON My Lords, may I underline what the noble and learned Earl, Lord Jowitt, has said? He said he did not wish to say anything this afternoon that would exacerbate matters. With that I agree. But since this episode occurred, I have sometimes wondered whether the Government really understand one thing about which there should be no illusion if they are going to deal with this matter effectively, and that is the widespread feeling throughout the country that Yugoslavia, a friend who fought with us during the war, has been given a raw deal as against one who was an aggressor and against us during the war. I do not think the Government should be under any illusion as to that feeling, which is not limited to Members on this side of the House.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY If that is so, I should like to ask the noble Lord why his Government agreed with the Tripartite Agreement of 1948, which gave both Zones to Italy.

LORD LAWSON I should like to remind the noble Marquess that that same Government made a considerable contribution towards bringing Yugoslavia into high consideration throughout this country and the Allied world.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY I am not in the least critical about the part which the noble Lord's Government played. We are all very happy that the attitude of Yugoslavia should have improved towards the Western world. There is, indeed, no difference between the two policies of the two Governments in this respect. It was in the days of the present Government that Marshal Tito paid his visit to this country. But under the Tripartite Declaration of 1948, both Zones would have gone to Italy. Under this proposal Yugoslavia does better than she would have done under that proposal. It is a very difficult matter to find any solution to this problem. It is the view of this Government and of the Government of the United States that these proposals represent the fairest and most acceptable that could be put before the two countries. They represent, so far as one can get such a thing, a middle line, and for that we shall continue to work.

EARL JOWITT Is the noble Marquess aware that in the Observer of last Sunday there was recorded an interview with Marshal Tito himself in which he said (I speak from memory) that the only notice he had was two hours. We have now the authoritative statement of the noble Marquess that the time was, in fact, two days.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY This is a very delicate subject. Although the noble and learned Earl thought it right to ask this question, it is an extremely difficult one for any Government spokesman to answer. Personally, I should not wish the House to suppose that the documents which were published reached the Yugoslavs at an earlier period than Marshal Tito suggested. All I meant to suggest was that I thought that Marshal Tito was aware of the general tenor of the proposals before. I would rather not have gone as far as this, because this is such a delicate question, and I do not want any accusations of disagreement on this or that decision. I do not dispute the fact that these documents were published late, but I think both sides were aware before that date of the general nature of the proposals.

EARL JOWITT I think it would be desirable, if the Leader of the House agrees, that we should have a debate on this matter—not extending to the whole ambit of foreign affairs, but concentrating on this particular matter. I should very much hope, especially if such a debate is to be held in another place, that we might have the opportunity for a similar

debate here. Perhaps I may approach the Leader of the House through the usual channels to see if we can arrange something on those lines.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY As soon as we hear that there is to be a debate in another place, we shall be very happy to arrange one here. I should prefer not to have it before the debate in the other place, but either afterwards or simultaneously.

EARL JOWITT I feel sure the other place would prefer that we did not have it before their debate. If we had it afterwards we should be flogging a dead horse. I think the best way would be to have it simultaneously. But, as I say, I will approach the noble Marquess the Leader of the House on the subject.

VISCOUNT ELIBANK If that debate is arranged, will it mean that no other question, such as the Far East, or similar matters, can be raised?

EARL JOWITT I hope that we shall have a debate on foreign affairs very early in the new Session.

THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY If the noble Viscount wishes to raise any particular matter he can always put a Question. He has the right to do so at any time. If a debate is about to take place which will include that particular question, it is often better for it to be left until the debate takes place when it can be more fully expounded. I leave that to the noble Viscount.