

SECRET

NOTE ON ASSYRIAN SETTLEMENT

It will be recalled that the Assyrian community, numbering about 30,000, at present in Iraq and Syria, were driven from their original home in the mountainous Hakkari district of Turkey as a result of an unsuccessful revolt which had been largely encouraged by Imperial Russian authorities in connection with military operations against the Turks during the last war. Subsequently they were left stranded in Iraq by a decision of the Council of the League of Nations, which was strongly opposed by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, to award Hakkari territory to Turkey instead of to Iraq. The Turkish Government have consistently opposed the re-admission of the Assyrians to the Hakkari district or to any other Turkish territory. And the frontier question could not usefully be re-opened on the basis of a territorial exchange between Turkey and Iraq, since

- (a) the Turks have in recent years set much store by the development of their eastern provinces.
- (b) there is no sufficiently attractive quid pro quo which Iraq could be pressed to offer to Turkey, and
- (c) Iraqi Government could hardly be induced to surrender territory to Turkey for sole purpose of benefiting the disliked Assyrians.

2. Mohammedan Iraqis dislike of the Christian Assyrians led to constant friction between them which culminated in fighting between the Assyrians and Iraqi forces in 1933 involving massacre of several hundred Assyrians at Simeel. Whole question then came before League of Nations which set up special Assyrian Committee to attempt to re-settle the Assyrians outside Iraq. This Committee set about its task bearing in mind that the Assyrians, a hard-working and honest people, were pastoral rather than agricultural in their inclinations and best suited to mountainous terrain. Schemes for settling them in Parana district of Brazil, in British Guiana, Paraguay, and elsewhere were thoroughly investigated with, for various reasons, no success. An abortive attempt was made to settle them in Ghab district of Syria. This scheme broke down because the French found themselves obliged in 1936 to promise accelerated political emancipation to Syrian Republic, and re-integration into Syria proper of hitherto autonomous territory of Latakia in which the Ghab scheme was situated. However, before negotiations broke down, 10,000 Assyrians had been temporarily settled by the French authorities on the Khabur river in North East Syria in anticipation of their permanent settlement in the Ghab area. These Assyrians remain there to this day. A proposal to settle the Assyrians in the Lebanon was then examined but the French were not disposed to permit a strongly pre-British community to settle in their midst.

3. The League Committee had therefore no alternative but to face the fact that its efforts had failed and that the best service it could do for the Assyrians would be henceforth to assist Assyrian communities both on the Khabur and in Iraq to settle down as rapidly as possible in their present homes in the States of Syria and Iraq respectively, and to accept political assimilation while retaining the status of a religious minority.

4. So far as the Dominions are concerned the Governments of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, all received an appeal despatched by the League Secretariat in November 1933 to a large number of countries to consider taking Assyrians as settlers. Subsequently in June 1934 further appeals were addressed to Australia, Canada and the Union of South Africa. None of the four Governments was able to give favourable consideration to the proposal to settle Assyrians in their territory. The Commonwealth Government did not definitely refuse but stated that owing to existing unemployment and other economic circumstances they could not at that time see their way to rendering assistance. Subsequently the matter was discussed informally with the representatives of the Commonwealth

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