

## COCKPIT BELGIUM: It Lengthens Military Service, Plans Forts on French Frontier



Leon Degrelle . . . threatened Brussels

Busy little industrial Belgium, sensing danger of a Continent-wide conflict, woke up last week determined to uphold her recently declared policy of "voluntary neutrality," even at the cost of once more becoming the cockpit of Europe.

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Clenching the Government's determination to ward off all possible aggression with a force of steel, he prevailed upon Premier Paul Van Zeeland to push through the Chamber of Deputies a bill increasing the military service from twelve to eighteen months for Belgium's 44,000 conscripts.

At the same time, the bill aims to subject all citizens to conscription over a twenty-five-year period, and strengthens defenses on the French frontier by way of conciliating the pro-German Flemish elements.

Quickly, Belgium's Leftists raised the cry of militarism, while the Right wing of Rexists (Fascists), Flemish Catholics and Nationalists clamored for a complete withdrawal from the League of Nations, severance of the French alliance and a drastic armaments program.

"New Deal"—But moderate Premier Van Zeeland clung to his bill and defended it as a compromise between the demands of the warring factions, who threaten to wreck his "New Deal" system, whereby he hopes to revive Belgian industry and cautiously avoid international entanglements.

Of deep and immediate concern to his Cabinet's future is the militant attitude of the Rexists, whose leader, Leon Degrelle, threatened to march on Brussels "to sweep out the Van Zeeland Government and its

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## *Belgium: 1936*

corruption" and thus duplicate *Il Duce's* March on Rome fourteen years ago. Backed by the Socialist counter-menace, the Premier found himself compelled to use police contingents in quelling the 5,000 marchers on the Capital.

While Belgium's move puzzled Europe's statesmen, French diplomats shook their heads and read in it a sinister blow to the system of collective security whereby they hope to conserve peace on the continent. Wily Frenchmen, however, have long suspected Belgium's drift away from their network of alliances, especially when Reichsfuehrer Hitler remilitarized the Rhine early this year and threw a scare into Belgian hearts.

**Distrust**—As if to confirm French suspicion, Foreign Minister Spaak stated that "the League of Nations has finally been put to the test and shown that its aims are too high. So it is impossible to base entirely on it Belgium's international status."

"Perhaps Ethiopia would still exist under the rule of the *Negus*," he remarked ironically, "if she had not placed her whole confidence in the League!"



**Posters cry out for the support of the Rexists**

Moscow likewise took a gloomy view of the situation and saw in it the disintegration of the French defense system and a victory for German and Italian diplomacy. The Netherlands, however, was moved to reenforce its own defenses, while even Switzerland, wedged in between the French, German and Italian frontiers, is preparing to strengthen her mountain defenses. On the heights of 13,669-high, snow-capped Jungfrau she is building a fortress equipped with heavy guns to belch fire at enemy planes.

From its gun bases on clear days Swiss artillerymen may take the range of targets as far away as the Vosges mountains in France and the Black Forest in Germany.