

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY

LEAGUE REFORM

M. BONCOUR DEFENDS "SANCTIONS"

DIVERGENT VIEWS ON UNIVERSALITY

FROM OUR LEAGUE CORRESPONDENT

GENEVA, FEB. 1

In the discussion on League reform in the Committee for the Application of the Principles of the Covenant to-day, M. Paul Boncour said that those countries which had left the League and still wished to destroy it had seized upon the vulnerable point in the League. They had recognized that Article 16 was the keystone of the Covenant and that if this were removed the whole edifice must inevitably collapse.

That was the attack from without. He would not be too much disturbed by it, but some speakers representing certain countries in whom the League spirit had never failed had expressed the anxiety of their Governments and peoples with regard to Article 16 and had raised the question whether it was wise to maintain it in its present form. He dreaded that doubt should be entertained from within as regards these principles which really constituted the basis of the League.

The conception of collective security was seriously wounded if not absolutely killed through the failure of the Disarmament Conference. He did not agree at all with those who suggested that in order to secure the adhesion or the return of certain States, they must abandon or weaken the principles which constituted the *raison d'être* of the League. There was no State whose return was worth the weakening of the Covenant.

Some States feared that they might be involved in the application of sanctions and in a conflict over interests not vitally their own. He would remind them of the unanimity rule which was introduced in order to safeguard the sovereignty of the members. Repeated violation of a rule did not modify the rule. It was not the Great Powers who stood most in need of the benefits of this article. The threat of danger led those threatened to forget that the conception of collective security was related less to what might happen if war broke out than to the necessity for avoiding war.

POLISH POLICY

The early stages of the discussion were marked by declarations of views of the frankest kind.

M. Komarnicki (Poland) said that it would not be fair to lay upon member States obligations out of proportion to the international responsibilities of non-members, since such obligations were not compensated by the advantages which the League gave its members. Certain provisions of the Covenant could not be automatically set in motion. The question of their effective and useful application must be left to the judgment of members in each particular case. Poland thought that each State must have the right to determine whether it should take part in any action; but there could be no question of widening the League's competence in the matter of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Dr. Wellington Koo (China) thought a non-coercive League could neither promote peace nor exercise a restraining influence on aggression. To transform the present League into an intermediate League would not only undermine the principle of collective security for the enforcement of peace but bring about its eventual destruction.

M. LITVINOFF'S VIEW

M. Litvinoff, speaking for Soviet Russia, brought a more combative spirit into the debate by making a destructive analysis of the arguments of those who would abolish "sanctions."

The opponents of Article 16, he said, would evidently like to see the League transformed into a universal non-intervention committee, with full freedom of action for any aggressor in any circumstances, a League which was something between a diplomatic academy and a charitable society. He asked those who had expressed the wish to regain absolute neutrality whether they expected the League to safeguard their neutrality, or to remain neutral if it were violated; and whether, in freeing themselves from the obligations of Article 16, they still intended to take part in the discussions upon its application.

The delicate situation of Belgium was tacitly implied in the statement of M. van Langenhove.

The view of the Belgian Government, he said, was that in consequence of changes and modifications, coercive action now depended on the way in which members of the League appreciated the political situation and the gravity of the interests involved for each of them. Therefore, the League must not undervalue the declarations of members who had stated that provisionally the principle of coercive action had nothing more than an optional character.

CANADIAN ATTITUDE

A Dominion point of view was presented by Mr. Hume Wrong (Canada), who said that his Government were in favour of every practical effort to obtain the substantial universality assumed in the Covenant and necessary for the effective working of the League.

They realized, however, that universality could not be secured immediately by any change in the Covenant, some countries outside being unwilling to enter or re-enter regardless of whether it were organized as an instrument of force or an agency of conciliation. The Canadian Government therefore believed that the only possible course was to keep the League operating as effectively as possible and leave to a more opportune time the formal adjustments to secure the cooperation of all States.

Señor del Vayo (Spain) touched upon the cruel irony of his own presence as representative of a European State which had the greatest reasons for complaining of the treatment it had received from the League, yet he came to defend with unshaken firmness the principles and intangibility of the Covenant.

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