Edition corrigée.

(Communiqué au Conseil, aux Membres de la Société et aux Délégués à l'Assemblée.)

Genève,
le 27 septembre 1921.

A. 158. 1921.

SOCIÉTÉ DES NATIONS

RÉDUCTION DES ARMEMENTS

RAPPORT
PRÉSENTÉ PAR LA TROISIÈME COMMISSION

Rapporteur: LORD ROBERT CECIL,
Représentant de l'Afrique du Sud.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

REDUCTION OF ARMAMENTS

REPORT
PRESENTED BY THE THIRD COMMITTEE

Rapporteur: LORD ROBERT CECIL,
Representative of South Africa.
REDUCTION OF ARMAMENTS

REPORT OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY.

Rapporteur: Lord Robert Cecil

The question of reduction of armaments was considered at the First Assembly, and it arrived at three resolutions and one recommendation on the subject. The third resolution, which was in some respects the most important, ran as follows:—

"The Committee, being convinced that the maintenance of peace demands the reduction of armaments, in accordance with the principles set forth in Article 8 of the Covenant and in the preamble of Part V of the Treaties of Peace of Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Neuilly, which declare that the disarmament of certain Powers signatory to those Treaties be provided for in order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations;"

"And associating itself with the pronouncement of the Supreme Council on March 8th last that, in order to diminish the economic difficulties of Europe, armies should everywhere be reduced to a peace footing, that armaments should be limited to the lowest possible figure compatible with national security, and that the League of Nations be invited to examine proposals to that end without delay;"

"And with the Resolution of the International Financial Conference at Brussels, recommending most earnestly to the Council of the League of Nations the desirability of conferring at once, and agreeing with, the several Governments concerned, with a view to securing a general reduction of the crushing burdens which, on their existing scale, armaments still impose on the impoverished peoples of the world, sapping their resources and imperilling their recovery from the ravages of war;"

"Realising on the other hand, that a complete and comprehensive scheme of disarmament depends upon the following conditions: first, under the responsibility of the Powers signatory to the Treaties of Peace, upon the complete fulfilment of the reduction of armaments imposed by the abovementioned Treaties upon certain of these Powers; secondly, upon the exercise, as occasion may demand, of the right of investigation accorded by these Treaties to the Council of the League of Nations, in order to maintain this reduction; and, lastly, on the collaboration of the other great military Powers which have hitherto remained outside the League:

"Invite the Council:—

(a) To request the Permanent Advisory Commission for Military, Naval and Air Questions rapidly to complete its technical examination into the present condition of armaments;

(b) To instruct a temporary Commission, composed of persons possessing the requisite competence in matters of a political, social and economic nature, to prepare for submission to the Council, in the near future, reports and proposals for the reduction of armaments as provided for by Article 8 of the Covenant;

(c) To form within the Secretariat a section to serve as a centre of information for the Commission in question, and also as a channel for the publication and exchange of the information referred to in the Covenant;

(d) To consider the mechanism by means of which the military information to be exchanged under the provisions of Article 8 of the Covenant can be verified, in the event of the principle of mutual verification by Members of the League being confirmed by an amendment to the Covenant."

The action taken by the Council in pursuance of the definite proposals here made will be found in the report to the Second Assembly on the work of the Council.
at pages 75 to 81. It will be noticed that as to proposal (a) no practical result has been achieved. The Permanent Advisory Commission drew up a questionnaire on the subject, but the Council decided it was not desirable to send it out. It is now proposed that the matter should, to some extent, be dealt with in a different way. As to proposal (b) a good deal has been done. The Temporary Commission has been appointed as set out on pages 74 and 75 of the above-mentioned report. Unfortunately, owing to reasons into which it is not necessary now to enter, the Temporary Commission did not meet until July 16th of this year, and has consequently only been able to hold some five meetings, which has necessarily restricted the work it has been able to do. Still even so, there is much that is valuable in its report. An examination of that document will show that the Commission has made certain recommendations which have been examined by this Committee, and they have dealt with them under the following heads:

I. Statistics.

The Committee took note of the resolution adopted by the first Assembly in accordance with which the Assembly, while recognising that the final and general limitation of armaments is subordinate to certain preliminary conditions, expressed the wish that the first steps towards disarmament should be taken without delay:

One of the preliminary conditions is the ascertaining of the present military strength of the various States, and, consequently, it is necessary to carry out a statistical investigation which would bring into clear relief the ante-bellum and the present position of armaments. To this should be added such information of a military and budgetary nature as will allow of an accurate estimate being formed of the military power of the various States and of the measures which they may have already adopted for the reduction of their armaments. Nor must the position of each State from the point of view of its national security be overlooked.

The Committee therefore proposes:

(a) That a statistical investigation should be carried out with regard to the armaments of the various countries for the years 1913 and 1921. The enquiry should bring out the facts indicated in the programme drawn up by the Temporary Mixed Commission in pages 7 and 8 of its report to the Council.

(b) That with regard to the method to be followed, a beginning should be made by gathering all possible information to be obtained from international treaties, official publications, parliamentary papers and debates, year books and other public sources of information; but that, if need be, the enquiry should be completed, as far as the Members of the League of Nations are concerned, by means of a questionnaire based upon the programme which has been approved.

(c) That the Governments should be asked to furnish to the Secretariat of the League of Nations:

1. The military, naval and air budgets for the years 1913 and 1921;
2. The general budget for all the Ministries for the years 1913 and 1921;
3. The reports and minutes of parliamentary debates relative to military, naval and air estimates in 1913 and 1921, and, in general, all legislative documents and other publications which throw light on the military policy of each State;
4. The text of the laws determining the organisation of the land and sea forces;

(d) That, as soon as possible, each of the Governments should be asked to furnish a statement of the considerations it may wish to urge in regard to the requirements of its national security, its international obligations, its geographical situation and its special circumstances.

The Governments should be especially requested to indicate separately the police and military forces which they consider indispensable for the preservation of domestic order, and the expenditure entailed thereby.

(e) That the responsibility for carrying out these Resolutions should be left to the Secretariat, under the direction of the Temporary Commission and of the Council, and that the Secretariat should be enabled to deal as rapidly as possible with
the work of summarising and co-ordinating the statistical data and the documents sent to it, and should be enabled also, in case of need, to call upon the co-operation of competent correspondents in the various countries chosen by the Armaments Section under the supervision of the Temporary Commission.

The Secretariat should be authorised to publish from time to time, with the consent of the Temporary Mixed Commission and of the Council, reports on the partial results of its investigation, without waiting till the results of the statistical enquiry have been fully co-ordinated.

(1) That once the enquiry has been carried out for the years 1913 and 1921, the Council should be responsible for keeping it up to date for the succeeding years and for having it carried into execution by competent bodies.

These resolutions in effect accept the recommendations on the points made by the Temporary Commission. In one point, however, they go further. The proposal that the Governments should make specific returns of what they require for the preservation of domestic order is based on the consideration that with these forces the League of Nations is not directly concerned. Their size and strength are primarily a domestic matter, and do not in themselves affect the international situation. The rest of the forces of each State is for the purpose of combating foreign foes, and it is this portion of the forces which it is the duty of the League of Nations to reduce. It is of great importance that the peoples of the world should be made aware how much of the money and personnel devoted to armaments is the direct consequence of international fear and suspicion, by reason of the relativity of their respective state of safety. It is only by a realisation of this truth that an effective appeal can be made to the reason and conscience of mankind in favour of a serious reduction of armaments.

II. Private Manufacture of and Trade in Arms.

The next point in the Temporary Commission's report dealt with by the Committee was that concerning private manufacture of armaments and trade in arms. These matters are to a certain extent dealt with together by the Temporary Commission, and they are no doubt very closely related, since it is evident that the control over the trade in arms would make a very material difference in the question of their manufacture. Still they are separate questions, and may well have to be dealt with by separate international action. The position of the private manufacture of arms under the Covenant is that it is recognised to involve evil consequences which are not defined, and that the Members of the League are to agree to find a remedy for them. It is obvious that there are two stages necessary before the evils can be dealt with. They must first be examined and their nature ascertained; proposals for dealing with them can then be made.

The Committee were therefore of opinion:

1. That the Temporary Commission, aided by the Secretariat, should continue its investigations into the whole subject; and

2. That the Assembly should request the Council to invite all the Members of the League and interested States, which are not Members of the League, to take part in an International Conference on the Private Manufacture of Arms and the Trade in Arms, so far as it has not been dealt with earlier, which should meet as soon as possible at a date to be fixed under the responsibility of the Council. It is considered highly desirable that this date should be prior to the next Session of the Assembly.

The Temporary Mixed Commission should be entrusted with the task of preparing the programme of the Conference and of submitting to it a draft Convention.

Some members of the Committee were anxious that a date should be fixed before which the Conference should be held, but the majority were of opinion that to fix a date might be productive of serious practical inconvenience, and that it was enough to express the view that it was desirable that the Conference should be held before the next Assembly.

III. Arms Traffic.

It will be noticed in the last quoted resolution that the Committee recommend that the Conference should also consider the question of the trade in arms, and indeed it is vitally necessary that some control over the export and import of
munitions of war should be established, and in particular that full information as to the extent and nature of this trade should be given to the League of Nations, and should be published. The Committee are of opinion that this question should be dealt with in a separate Convention concluded at the Conference which considers the private manufacture of arms, so far as it has not been dealt with earlier.

Further, the Committee had before them the first Resolution of the First Assembly, calling attention to the position with regard to the Convention of St. Germain on the traffic in arms, as well as the report of the Temporary Commission on the subject, and they arrived at the following resolutions:

"1. The Assembly is of opinion that the control of the International Traffic in Arms and Ammunition is an essential preliminary to any effective supervision of armaments, and that no international agreement for this purpose can attain the desired object so long as there remain important countries in which the Arms Traffic is not subjected to control. The Assembly, therefore, strongly impresses on all the States signatories to the Arms Traffic Convention of St. Germain, whether Members of the League of Nations or not, the urgent importance of ratifying the Convention at the earliest possible moment; and at the same time it invites all non-signatory States to adhere to the Convention.

"2. The Assembly expresses its earnest desire that the importance of this subject may be strongly urged at the forthcoming Conference on Reduction of Armaments at Washington.

"3. The Assembly, taking note of the view expressed in the Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission on the Reduction of Armaments with regard to the desirability of making provision for excluding the import of arms and ammunition in time of peace from countries in which the traffic is uncontrolled, invites the Council to prepare a draft protocol for this purpose for the consideration of the various Governments. At the same time it expresses the earnest hope that this procedure will not in any way be permitted to delay the general ratification of the Convention of St. Germain." They are further of opinion that some steps should be taken to deal with the large stock of surplus munitions of war at present existing in the world. They are a very serious danger to peace, and it is not too much to say that much of the fighting which is at present going on in the world would not be taking place had the sale of these surplus stocks been more effectively controlled.

The two subjects are closely connected, and as part of their proposals for dealing with the trade in arms, as distinct from the St. Germain Convention on the traffic in arms, the Temporary Commission should also consider what steps can be taken to secure the destruction of existing surplus stocks of munitions.

* * *

The report of the Temporary Commission deals also with certain other subjects, notably, the recommendation of the First Assembly that:

"Pending the full execution of the measures for the reduction of armaments recommended by Article 8 of the Covenant, the Assembly recommends the Council to submit for the consideration of the Governments the acceptance of an undertaking not to exceed for the first two financial years following the next financial year, the sum total of expenditure of the naval, military and air services provided for in the latter budget, subject, however, to account being taken of the following reservations:

"1. Any contributions of troops, war material and money recommended by the League of Nations, with a view to the fulfilment of obligations imposed by Article 16 of the Covenant or by Treaties registered by the League.

"2. Exceptional conditions notified as such to the Council of the League of Nations in accordance with the spirit of paragraphs 2 and 6 of Article 8 of the Covenant."

The report sets out the replies on this matter which have been received from the various countries, and expresses the opinion that the enquiry has not given very conclusive results. In this opinion the Committee concurs. They think, however, it might be well to circulate the recommendation once again, together with a statement of the results so far achieved. Some of the countries may well be prepared to go further than they have hitherto thought it possible to proceed.

* * *

The Temporary Commission also considered the question of investigation and reciprocal control. The Committee have no observations to make on this part of the Temporary Commission's report.
It will be noted that this section of the Temporary Commission's report deals with point (d) in the resolution of the First Assembly quoted at the commencement of this report. The proposal contained in the remaining point in this last-mentioned resolution, namely, point (c), has already been carried out as set out in the Report of the Council on page 75. The Committee were, however, of opinion that in view of the very considerable addition to the duties of the Secretariat which they are recommending in the matter of reduction of armaments, further provisions should be made for increasing the Armaments Section of that body.

* * *

It will be remembered that, at the first Assembly, proposals were made for condemning the use of poison gas in warfare in accordance with the report of the Council on the subject. The Assembly did not in fact take any action about this, and indeed the experience of the late war has shown how difficult it is to enforce any regulations as to the conduct of war under modern conditions. At the same time the Committee are of opinion that the employment of poison gas and similar devices in warfare is an evil of tremendous proportions. It has been stated that inventions have been made or perfected since the war whereby wholesale destruction of the civil population would be possible by the dropping of poison bombs and the like from the air, nor is there any reason to suppose that the limits of invention in these fiendish devices have been reached. And if, as seems to the Committee to be arguable, the employment of these weapons would be rendered impracticable if there were no secrecy about them, the possibility of obtaining complete publicity for scientific researches in this domain is certainly worth exploring. Accordingly the Committee recommend that the Temporary Mixed Commission should be asked to consider whether an appeal should not be addressed to all scientific men of the world, urging them to publish to the world the results of their discoveries in such matters, so that the knowledge of them having become public property, their use as weapons of war by any single State may be rendered improbable.

* * *

Valuable and important as the proposals are which have been discussed, it is nevertheless true that they do not touch the kernel of the question. If they were all carried out, only preliminary steps would have been taken towards the limitation of armaments. By Article 8 of the Covenant it is made the duty of the Council to "formulate schemes" for the reduction of armaments. No such scheme can yet be said to have been formulated. Doubtless there is much force in the contention that armaments can only be effectively limited when a world-condition of peace has been reached, and when the League has become universal. But even this contention may be pressed too far. Complete peace has scarcely ever existed in the world, and cannot be expected in the immediate future. Few observers will deny that great steps might be taken towards the limitation of armaments in many of the principal countries if it were not for the existence of international fear and suspicion, depending not on present hostilities, but on the recollection of past wars. It is true that no complete scheme of reduction of armaments can be carried out without the co-operation of the United States, Germany and Russia. In particular, the naval strength of the first named Power makes any scheme of naval disarmament impossible without her support, and it is for that reason among others that the Committee warmly welcomes the forthcoming conference at Washington, and trusts that it may be fruitful in securing a large measure of reduction of armaments. But on the military side it must be observed that the Army of the United States has been reduced to 120,000 men. German disarmament, whether complete or not, has proceeded a very considerable distance, and the armies of Russia have neither equipment nor discipline to be a very formidable force to any well-trained European army.

There seems no reason indeed why the Council, in performance of the duty imposed upon them by the Covenant, should not lay down the general lines of a policy for the limitation of armaments. The Committee therefore think it desirable that the Temporary Commission should be specifically charged with the duty of preparing such a policy.

It is clear that if, and when, this policy came to be put into effect by the acceptance of a definite scheme of reduction of armaments by the Governments of the Members of the League, this scheme might take the form either of a general Treaty or of a series of regional Treaties laying down in detailed stipulations the armed forces which each of the contracting parties undertakes not to exceed. There is no need here to go into the exact form which these Treaties would take. There are
already in existence Treaties limiting the armaments of various countries, and possibly these might serve as a model. That, however, is a minor point. The principal thing is that the agreements which bring about the reduction of armaments would have to embody mutual undertakings either as to the number of men to be maintained by the various countries, or as to the amount of money to be spent on the equipment, or as to both men and money. It is most important, in order to bring a concrete proposal before the attention of the peoples of the world, that the Temporary Mixed Commission should, after due consideration, draw up the general lines of some definite plan in accordance with which these agreements may be framed. It would be worth while for them to consider whether they could go so far as to propose a report in the form of a model skeleton Treaty which could be adapted to the requirements of the situation when the actual agreements came to be made. In order to carry out this task the Committee adopted the suggestion of one of the members of the Temporary Mixed Commission that it should be reinforced.

Finally, the Committee recognise that a policy of disarmament to be successful requires the support of the populations of the world. Limitation of armaments will never be imposed by Governments on peoples, but it may be imposed by peoples on Governments. The Committee are firmly convinced that it is of the most urgent importance that an earnest and vigorous propaganda be carried on in all countries of the world, to bring home to their populations the urgent necessity for the reduction of armaments as provided for in Article 8 of the Covenant, and the Committee venture to suggest to the various delegates to this Assembly that they should make it their business to preach this doctrine in their own countries. For it is only by creating an instructed public opinion in each country that the necessary strength of world opinion can be obtained.

The following recommendations have therefore been adopted by the Committee:

1. That it is desirable that the Temporary Mixed Commission should be asked to continue the work which it has begun.

2. That the Temporary Mixed Commission be asked to make proposals on general lines for the reduction of national armaments which, in order to secure precision, should be in the form of a draft treaty or other equally definite plan, to be presented to the Council if possible before the Assembly next year.

In order to enable the Temporary Mixed Commission to accomplish this task, the Council should be asked to strengthen the Temporary Mixed Commission.

3. A statistical investigation will be made with regard to the armaments of the various countries upon the lines indicated in the body of the Report.

4. That the Temporary Mixed Commission be requested to continue the examination of the question of the Private Manufacture of Armaments and the Trade in Arms.

5. That the Council be requested to invite all the Members of the League and interested States which are not Members of the League to take part in an International Conference on the Private Manufacture of Arms and the Trade in Arms, which should meet as soon as possible at a date to be fixed under the responsibility of the Council. It is considered highly desirable that this date should be prior to the next session of the Assembly.

6. That the Temporary Mixed Commission should be entrusted with the task of preparing the programme of the Conference and of submitting it to a draft convention.

7. That the Council take note of the view expressed in the Report of the Temporary Mixed Commission on Disarmament with regard to the desirability of making provision for excluding the import of arms and ammunition in time of peace from countries in which the traffic is uncontrolled, invites the Council to prepare a draft protocol for this purpose for the consideration of the various Governments. At the same time it expresses the earnest hope that this procedure will not in any way be permitted to delay the general ratification of the Convention of St. Germain. The steps that may eventually have to be taken for the destruction of the surplus stocks munitions may be considered by the Temporary Mixed Commission.

8. That, subject to the conditions set out in the recommendation of the first Assembly, the recommendation that Members of the League should undertake not to exceed for the next two financial years following the present
year the sum total of expenditure on military, naval and air forces provided for
in the budget of that year, should be again forwarded to all Members of the
League, together with a statement showing the replies already received to this
recommendation.

9. That the Temporary Mixed Commission be asked to examine — in consul-
tation with the Permanent Advisory Commission — whether it is advisable to
address an appeal to the scientific men of the world to publish their discoveries
in poison gas and similar subjects, so as to minimise the likelihood of their being
used in any future war.

10. That it is desirable that propaganda in favour of the reduction of arma-
ments, as contemplated in the Covenant, should be carried out with earnestness
and conviction in all nations.

II. In pursuance of the third Resolution of the First Assembly, the Committee
is of opinion that the Secretariat should be asked to complete the organisation
of the Section of the Secretariat dealing with the question of the reduction of
armaments and that this Section should have a directorship of its own, or other
equivalent official organisation, quite separate from and, if necessary, in addition
to, those already proposed by the Fourth Committee of the Assembly.