NINTH PLENARY MEETING
Monday, September 9th, 1929, at 10 a.m.

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30.—I. PROPOSED MODIFICATION OF ARTICLES 12 AND 15 OF THE COVENANT: DRAFT RESOLUTION PROPOSED BY THE BRITISH DELEGATION.

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PROPOSALS OF THE AGENDA COMMITTEE.

The President:

Translation: I have sent the delegations a note conveying to them the suggestions I wish to submit to the Assembly concerning the disposal of the draft resolutions proposed by various delegations. My communication, which was circulated to the delegations in document A.41, contains proposals made by the Agenda Committee as to the draft resolutions submitted respectively by the British and Danish delegations and also my suggestions with regard to the disposal of the draft amendment to Article 7, paragraph 1, of the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure, which was submitted by five delegations.

If there is no objection, and if no one wishes to make any observations, I shall interpret the Assembly’s silence as a sign of assent, and shall consequently consider that the Assembly approves the suggestion that these three proposals be put on the agenda and referred for examination to the First Committee.

The proposal was adopted.

31.—REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE LEAGUE SINCE THE LAST SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY: CONTINUATION OF THE DISCUSSION.

The President:

Translation: The next item on the agenda of the present meeting is the continuation of the general discussion of the report to the tenth ordinary session of the Assembly on the work of the League since the last session of the Assembly.

Dr. Gustav Stresemann, first delegate of Germany, will address the Assembly.

Dr. Stresemann (Germany):

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen — It is natural, as you will understand, that I should begin my speech with a reference to the results of The Hague Conference. As German representative, my mind is naturally full of the recent negotiations, for the questions negotiated and decided at The Hague were and are regarded by the German people as affecting the very existence of Germany and her position as a sovereign and independent State. Perhaps, owing to the form which the negotiations took, public opinion outside Germany has sometimes failed to realise the primary importance of this aspect of those negotiations, but all Germans have always realised what was at stake. The very fact that Germany’s most vital interests were concerned explains why public opinion in my country has not yet been able to form a definite or uniform opinion on the results of the negotiations.

Naturally, I myself cannot indulge in a detailed criticism of those results from this platform, but I must speak of one outstanding point, since it closely affects the very basis of the League — the liberty and independence of its Members. I refer to the granting, at last, of Germany’s request that the military occupation of German territory should be brought to an end.

As you know, before Germany joined the League, many of my fellow-countrymen desired that she
should not do so until the great political problems arising out of the war had been solved.

The German Government confidently opposed this demand, and decided to take an active part in the League’s work as soon as international relations had reached a stage which would allow of this.

The German Government has never regretted its decision; but we have always, and especially at Geneva, felt the continued occupation of German territory very deeply. No self-respecting nation could have failed to do so.

While I am on this subject, I must mention the fact that another part of Germany’s territory — the Saar — is still under non-German administration, although its population unanimously desires to return to the mother-country.

The first step has also been taken to put an end to this state of affairs, and thus to reach a final settlement of the questions arising out of the war. I think the League itself has every reason to desire this, and I hope that, although it did not take the initiative in this matter, it will continue sympathetically to follow the negotiations between the countries directly concerned. The fact that in past years we have refrained from openly expressing our feelings on this question here and have continued quietly to collaborate in the work of the League may be regarded as proof of our confidence in the high aims which we are called upon to prosecute at Geneva.

In any case I think I may now say that not only Germany and the occupying Powers but also the League itself must rejoice that the early evacuation of Germany by foreign troops was definitely decided upon last week.

In this connection I would recall the noble words of the British Prime Minister spoken from this platform: “A political agreement offers as much security as regiments of soldiers”.

If this barrier, which has separated Germany from her Western neighbours since the Armistice is broken down, the way will be cleared for that close and fruitful collaboration between Germany and her former adversaries which is so necessary in the interests of all nations, and consequently of the League itself.

I would like to preface my remarks on the questions which directly fall within the province of the League with a brief reference to the various declarations and proposals contained in the speeches delivered during the last few days. All these declarations and proposals are aimed at perfecting the legal machinery for guaranteeing peace, created by the League Covenant and subsequent resolutions, and they merit our most serious attention.

I am extremely glad to note that His Britannic Majesty’s Government and the French, Indian and Canadian Governments are shortly to sign the Optional Clause of the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice, as Germany and a number of other States have already done. I regard this decision on the part of the Governments in question as a happy sign of the victorious progress being made by the idea of arbitration, which is and will remain the corner-stone of international peace.

We are following the activities of the Permanent Court at The Hague with full confidence, and we see that its prestige is being steadily enhanced by the progress made in the matter of arbitration. The present discussions concerning the partial reform of the Court will, I hope, help to facilitate the work of that body, which has been tested for so long.

Among the various steps to consolidate peace must be mentioned the very important proposals made by the British delegation, in agreement with other delegations, to clear up the relations between the Kellogg Pact of August last and the provisions of the Covenant.

Mr. Henderson, the British Foreign Secretary, has already been good enough to say that the German delegation was in entire sympathy with the fundamental idea underlying this proposal. In view of the German Government’s attitude towards the Kellogg Pact from the outset, I need hardly mention the importance attached to the Pact by that Government.

I fully appreciate the desire to emphasise the connection between the provisions of the Pact and those of the Covenant. It is very necessary that there should be no obscurity or uncertainty in these matters, which determine our conception of right and wrong in the supreme questions of international relations.

Our solemn engagements must be so worded as to be understood not only by experts in international law but also by the man in the street.

I do not wish to start a premature discussion on the best solution of this problem, but I should like to point out that, if we are to have complete concordance between the provisions of the Covenant and the principles underlying the Kellogg Pact, we can hardly, I think, confine ourselves to examining the articles expressly mentioned in the British proposal; we must also examine any other provisions of the Covenant which are inseparably bound up with those of the Kellogg Pact.

Last week M. Briand, with whom I am happy to say that I agree on so many questions of international policy, referred in his speech (which contained an appeal to the rising generation that I should like to see incorporated in all school text-books) to a certain gap.

If I understood him aright, we differ in some respects as to the best way to fill this gap. The German Government has always taken the view that any efforts to ensure peace should be based on perfecting the machinery for the peaceful settlement of all conflicts between States. We cannot obviate war by preparing for a war against war, but only by removing the causes of war. The more successful we are in discovering a practical means of settling present and future disputes between States, and the greater practical effect we give to the idea underlying the model treaty for preventing war, framed on a German suggestion and mentioned by several previous speakers, the less need we shall feel for measures which could only be applied after a breach of the peace had actually occurred.
In my opinion, however, before discussing possible sanctions, we ought to attack another important problem — general disarmament.

All my predecessors on this platform have, I am glad to say, emphasised the great importance, the extreme gravity, of this problem, especially during the present phase of the League's development.

The German Government's view has found such repeated and such detailed expression at previous sessions of the Assembly and at meetings of the Preparatory Disarmament Commission that I will not repeat in detail what has already been said.

After the great disappointment felt at the way in which this question was held up for so many years, there is, I think, reason to hope that definite progress will now be made. It is with the greatest interest and the warmest sympathy that we are following the present negotiations between the great Naval Powers of which we have heard such encouraging reports.

We must ask that the work of disarmament by land be prosecuted with the same energy. You will remember that last spring the German representative, Count Bernstorff, had occasion expressly to dissociate himself from the resolutions of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, because Germany could not agree to share responsibility for a manner of proceeding which was, in her opinion, not compatible with the provisions of the Covenant. I venture to hope that the negotiations between the naval Powers will shortly help us out of our dilemma and enable us to make real progress with the disarmament negotiations.

I said just now, and other speakers have also said, that the success of the political negotiations between the interested Governments was attained only with the assistance of the ideas which find their expression in the League.

The fact that the settlement of the problems arising out of the world war is shortly to be accomplished must inevitably influence the methods employed in attacking the problems which directly affect the League. Otherwise, the nations will imagine that the method of direct negotiation between Governments is the only one which ensures success, and they will believe that the great idea of collaboration is doomed to sterility.

Let us not lose sight of this danger when we come to adopt fresh resolutions in the matter of land disarmament; let us never forget, too, that the League has certain great permanent tasks to perform and that its influence on public opinion will depend on the energy with which it approaches these questions.

I am not speaking of any particular question, but of the whole problem at issue, which I should like to define by the following three postulates: prevention of all possibility of war; consequent general disarmament; prevention of a state of frozen inaction by the encouragement of progress on peaceful lines.

Another equally important duty of the League is the protection of minorities to which reference has been made in many speeches. The Assembly having during the past year received from various quarters suggestions for the re-opening of this problem, the Council this year dealt with the question in full detail, at the instance of the Canadian and German representatives. Let me say frankly that my personal suggestions were due to the realisation that, in view of certain events taking place within the League and outside, the time had come to take stock of what had been done in connection with the minorities question, and that, in the light of past experience, we ought to ask ourselves if certain past resolutions and methods should not be modified or amplified.

I do not wish, I repeat, to start a discussion on the fate and the position of certain particular minorities, but rather to ask that serious attention be given to the question of the guarantee assumed by the League in conformity with the treaties and declarations in force, and to the whole principle of the rights and obligations arising out of that guarantee.

All the documents relating to the Council's discussions on this question have been communicated to the States Members of the League, and all the Governments are thus in a position to form an opinion on the various views and suggestions of the Council.

I am happy to say that, in conformity with the Canadian and German proposals, resolutions have been adopted for the procedure to be followed in the question of minority petitions, which undoubtedly constitute an advance on the former position, and justify the hope that, once they are put into execution, they will render the League's guarantee more effective and give the minorities themselves fresh confidence.

It is true that these resolutions of the Council have not given effect to all the suggestions which the German Government put forward in its memorandum and through its delegates. Our main idea was to find a solution of the question of principle, namely, the question of determining the exact significance and scope of the guarantee assumed by the League, and how the competent departments of the League should carry out these liabilities, both as regards minority petitions and otherwise.

I am convinced that in this matter the League ought not merely to give effect to the various petitions submitted to it; under the terms of the minority law in force, it ought to keep itself constantly and generally informed of the position of minorities under the system set up by the treaties in force.

I think we all realise that even the most technically perfect procedure cannot yield the desired results unless the League is absolutely clear and unanimously agreed as to the object to be attained. In view of the turn which the discussions in the Council have taken, I should not like to say whether this has already been realised or not, and I cannot regard the present situation concerning this problem as final. Time will soon show whether the negotiations held and the resolutions adopted are sufficient to lead to what I consider should be the object of the League's guarantee. I am sure that the League will not hesitate to improve the present arrangements, should experience show that our hopes are not materialising.

Let me conclude this part of my speech with a general remark. In the minorities question I make
no distinction between interested and non-interested States. This is one of those problems which, in accordance with the principle of the new regime instituted after the war, affect the League as a whole. If the League approaches this great task with the necessary energy, it will be forging a powerful weapon for the maintenance of peace.

The greater the respect and protection accorded to men and women in the exercise of their inalienable right to preserve and use their mother-tongue, develop their civilisation and practise their religion irrespective of political frontiers, the less likely is it that international peace will be disturbed. No one can, by defending this idea, lay himself open to the charge of bringing about the disintegration of a State.

I venture to hope that the League will shortly set up a special organisation to deal with the minorities question, as it has already done in the case of economic questions and mandates.

Speaking at the last session of the Assembly, the Netherlands representative, M. Beelaerts van Blokland, suggested that a Permanent Minorities Commission should be set up and all the States Members of the League invited to examine these questions and communicate their views. The representative of Switzerland — where the problem of the co-existence of several races in one State was solved in an exemplary manner centuries ago — welcomed this suggestion with the assurance that the Swiss delegation would regard with the greatest sympathy any developments on the lines indicated by M. Beelaerts van Blokland. I am convinced that in any case the League ought constantly to consider how best it can fulfil its duty of protecting minorities. That is why I think that the Sixth Committee ought, as a matter of course, each year to deal with the League’s report on this question and with the solution of the problems brought before it, and should closely follow the progress made in this field.

In view of the fact that, at the last few sessions of the Council, Germany had occasion to make known her point of view, not only in the discussion reproduced in the Minutes of the meetings, but also in her written memorandum, I will not now press this year that the question be discussed by the Sixth Committee; I reserve the suggestion for future years.

The treatment of the minority problem is a matter not of speedy negotiations, but of the persistence and vigour with which the question is followed up.

The British Prime Minister, in his speech on September 3rd, expressed the wish that the majorities should use their great privileges to ensure that the minorities feel at home in the country where they live and be proud to belong to that country.

I associate myself entirely with these statements. A State which contains minorities and seeks to stifle their cultural life gains nothing externally or internally by so doing, but may well give the impression that it is not strong enough to lead and rule its peoples.

I now come to the question of the reorganisation of the relations between the various countries of Europe. This question is not, strictly speaking, one which directly concerns the League, as the League is a worldwide institution and is not confined to one continent; but it is a question which indirectly affects the whole conception of world economy. There are many who, from the first, have declined to discuss this problem.

Such people are confirmed pessimists who dismiss every thought as sterile if it does not happen to fit in with universally accepted ideas. They condemn it as “romantic” and maintain that it is impossible to translate it into the realm of reality. I for my part will have nothing to do with such fundamental scepticism. As a German writer has said: “Ein grosser Einfall scheint am Anfang toll.” Every great idea seems mad at first.

Why should the idea of uniting all the elements that can bring the countries of Europe together be impossible?

But, although I refuse to entertain the scepticism which rejects the whole idea as preposterous, I should like to plead for absolute honesty with ourselves as to the aims we are prosecuting in these discussions. I absolutely reject any political ideas directed against other continents and anything that could be interpreted as an economic autarchy of Europe, but it does seem to me that a great deal has not been done that could still be done.

How many things there are that appear so extraordinarily absurd about Europe and its construction, from the economic point of view! It is absurd to me that Europe should appear not to have progressed, but to have gone back. Look at Italy. We can scarcely imagine there being no united Italy, or the different parts of what we now call Italy being separate economic entities and fighting against one another. Nor can we conceive without a smile what a German was like before the Customs Union, when merchant ships from Berlin were held up on the Elbe because some other Customs system began at the frontier of Anhalt. Just as these are ideas which strike us as quaint and mediaeval and which we have long outgrown, so there are many things in the New Europe which give a very similar impression.

The Treaty of Versailles has created a large number of new States. I do not propose to discuss the political aspect of the Treaty of Versailles; I assume that my views on it are known. But I should like to emphasise the economic aspect and say that this Treaty, while creating a large number of new States, entirely ignores the question of their incorporation in the general economic system of Europe.

What is the result of this sort of omission? The multiplication of new frontiers, new weights and measures, new usages and new currencies, and continual hindrances to traffic. Is it not absurd that modern invention should have reduced the journey from South Germany to Tokio by twenty days, while in Europe itself hours are wasted stopping at frontiers for Customs inspections, as if Europe were a sort of little huckster’s shop still open beside the big world emporium. New industries are founded for reasons of national prestige; they must be protected, must seek new markets and are rarely able to find profitable ones in their own country.

Where is the European coinage, where are the European stamps that we need?

Are not these subdivisions born of national prestige long since out of date, and do they not do our continent an immense amount of harm, not only in the relations between various countries,
but also in those between Europe and other
continents, which often have more difficulty in
adapting themselves to this sort of thing than
Europeans have, although Europeans themselves
are beginning to become confused. Every step
toward the rationalisation of economic conditions
would benefit not only European competitors,
but also exporters of other continents.

When the time comes for this idea to be discussed
by the League, which we created for purposes such
as these, and when fresh negotiations are opened for
the conclusion of agreements for the simplification
of the exchange of commodities and for checking
the insensate raising and counter-raising of Customs
barriers, you will always find us ready to collaborate
with you in considering any proposals made to us.

In conclusion, I would remind you that in the
discussions repeated reference has been made to
the fact that the League has been in existence for
ten years. This indeed has been made the occasion
for laying the foundation-stone of a new building.

If you will allow me to touch upon something
which affects us rather closely, though lying outside
these grave and far-reaching problems, I should
like to ask the Secretariat to make an effort, during
the five years which must elapse before this building
is ready, to do something to render the conditions
of work in this building and in its “lobbies” more
human.

When discussing the policy of the last decade,
many speakers have ignored the question whether
the progress made during the past ten years in
the desire for conciliation has been influenced
directly or indirectly by the League. It is very
difficult to say what is cause and what is effect.
In any case, let us rejoice that progress has been
made, for no one can deny that, unless he is blind
or pretends to be blind.

M. Briand once said how very difficult it was
to win the young to the idea of international
reconciliation and peace, as the poetry of past
centuries, and even modern poetry, was saturated
with the idea of war heroism. That is certainly
true, and we will say, in all frankness, we are glad
that heroism and readiness to lay down one’s life
for a great ideal will never die out among the
nations of the world. But I must remind those
who live upon the memories of youthful heroism
throughout past centuries and past ages that,
from anything else, the technical wars of
the future will give little scope for personal heroism.
I foresee that the wide field of conquest over
Nature will give sufficient outlet for heroism and
even furnish men with opportunities of laying
down their lives for great ideals. This is a vast
field indeed, and one where, perhaps, in the future,
the eternal riddle of man’s relationship to
the universe will be pondered and brought a stage
nearer to its solution, to the great advantage of
mankind.

Meanwhile, it is our prosaic duty to bring the
people nearer together and bridge over their
differences. Let us not imagine that they are
already as near to one another as could be wished.
Let us face the fact that there exist conflicting
— violently conflicting — interests, and we shall
find our resources taxed to the utmost to make
progress in our work of reconciling these interests
and attaining the goal we have set ourselves to
reach. It is work that will not be done at once
nor by empty enthusiasm alone; it belongs to
that category of tasks of which a German poet
once said:

“... zum Bau der Ewigkeiten,
Zwar Sandkorn nur um Sandkorn reicht,
Doch von der grossen Schuld der Zeiten,
Minuten, Tage, Jahre streicht.”

The President:

Translation: M. Scialoja, first delegate of Italy,
will address the Assembly.

M. Scialoja (Italy):

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen
— Last Saturday, on returning from the ceremony
of laying the foundation-stone of the new League
buildings, I was glad to think of our distinguished
architects who had decided to follow the traditional
method of beginning with the foundations, rather
than with the vane of the edifice. True, we have
heard from an authoritative source that the
opposite method has much to recommend it, but
though it may be desirable to begin with the top
when designing the edifice, I think it is best to make
sure of solid foundations when we start building.

As I have already had occasion to remark, this
difference of standpoint explains for the most part
the divergence between my conclusions and those
so eloquently stated by other speakers who have
preceded me.

We have worked together for the last ten years to
banish war from the haunts of civilisation, and none
will deny that already our work has borne fruit.
The Briand-Kellogg Pact to which so many States
have acceded proclaimed the outlawry of war.
But all crimes are beyond the pale; yet this does not
mean that crime has ceased.

We have striven for disarmament, thinking that
we had only to disband our troops for war to be
impossible — as if, for centuries, when armies were
nothing like their present size, war was not as
common as, nay, commoner than it is now.

In short, we concentrated on the phenomenon of
war, forgetting to take sufficiently into account the
causes of that phenomenon. Our chief consideration,
in fact, has been the legal aspect of conflict, and
from this standpoint we have accomplished excellent
results and can hope for even better results in the
future. That in itself is a great deal; that alone
should be enough to vindicate the League in the
face of ignorant criticism. But that is not all. In
1924, you will remember, during the discussion on
the Protocol—a work in which, despite what has
happened since, I shall always be proud to have
cooperated— I reminded the Assembly that
though war is a crime, it is first and foremost a
disease, and that the first step must be to determine
the causes of that disease.

That is what we have to do, though it does not
mean that we must not press on along our present
line of endeavour.

I wish now to pass briefly in review a few of the
League’s principal activities, and in so doing to
make some reference to the standpoint from which
Italy views these particular problems.

As regards disarmament, we are all agreed
that effect must be given to the provisions of
Article 8 of the Covenant, and we trust that a basis
will ultimately be found for an agreement the moral
effect of which shall be such as to allay the anxiety
of nations still troubled by memories of the war.