REPORT OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE TO THE ASSEMBLY.

Rapporteur: M. René Cassin (France).

I.

Following on proposals by the French delegation, the Council, at its session of December 1926, requested the Advisory and Technical Committee for Communications and Transit to institute immediately with a view to submitting a report to the Council at the earliest possible date, the necessary enquiries in order that the League may have at its disposal a wireless station of its own, sufficiently powerful to enable it to communicate independently with the greatest possible number of States Members of the League. This resolution was adopted by the Council when considering measures to facilitate communications of every kind necessary for the working of the League in times of emergency.

The Assembly, in 1927, after noting the Transit Committee's preliminary report, communicated to it by the Council, adopted the following resolution:

"The Assembly:

"Being desirous of adopting all measures likely to make possible the prompt application of the system contemplated by the Covenant for the maintenance of peace, and of giving to States Members of the League a greater feeling of security;

"Convinced that, in this connection, it is of the utmost importance to ensure the rapid working of the organs of the League of Nations at times of emergency;

"Considering that their intervention in the shortest possible time may prove to be an essential condition for the prevention of war;

"Trusting that greater facilities for the immediate operation of the machinery of the League of Nations will assist the work of disarmament;

"Inspired by the spirit and provisions of the Covenant:

"Reasserts that it is the obligation of the States Members of the League of Nations to facilitate by every means in their power the rapid meeting of the Council in times of emergency;

"Invites the States Members of the League of Nations to take in advance all necessary measures for this purpose;

"Congratulates the Council on having studied the question, to which the Assembly attaches the greatest importance, and requests the Council to continue its studies, particularly in regard to the establishment of a wireless station at the seat of the League and, more generally, provisions enabling the League of Nations to be prepared at any moment to meet any emergency with the greatest possible rapidity."

Between the eighth and ninth sessions of the Assembly, the Advisory and Technical Committee continued its enquiries. In August 1928, new proposals were put forward by the Swiss Government, after a meeting between Swiss experts and experts appointed by the
The present Assembly had the choice of two solutions submitted at the last session of the Assembly. The only essential difference between these two solutions was the manner in which the proposed station should be operated in normal times. In both cases the proposal was to establish a short-wave wireless station which would ensure wireless communications, as perfect as was technically possible, with the various European and non-European stations throughout the world. In times of emergency this station would allow of permanent communications being maintained between the League of Nations and the countries in danger of becoming involved in a conflict. Communications could thus as a rule be passed direct and not through intermediary countries, and the League of Nations would obtain for its telegraphic communications the same independence which national stations in various countries afford their Governments.

In normal times, this station could deal with telegrams exchanged between the Secretary-General and the various delegations and the greatest possible number of non-European States, either direct or by relaying. It could also provide a broadcasting service for circular telegrams, information intended for the various Governments and administrations and, if necessary, the Press. It would facilitate the rapid transmission of important documents to distant States and would thus strengthen the ties between the seat of the League and non-European States. By telephonic broadcasting it would also keep the public throughout the world better informed on the work of the League.

One of the solutions proposed (Solution a) was that the League of Nations itself should own and operate this station at all times, the station being utilised only for official business. The other solution (Solution b) proposed by the Swiss Government in August 1928, which was submitted at the same time by the Advisory and Technical Committee, provided for the establishment of a station which would comply with all the League's requirements, and would carry out the League's programme. This station would be constructed at the cost of the League and would be operated solely on behalf of the League, but in normal times it would be managed by the Radio-Suisse Company, subject to certain definite guarantees to be accorded to the League. In times of emergency as soon as the Secretary-General considered it necessary, the station would pass under the exclusive management of the League.

The two solutions therefore do not differ as regards the operation in times of emergency nor as regards the guarantees accorded either to the League of Nations or to the Swiss Government (these guarantees are analysed below under III).

Nevertheless, the joint discussions between the Third and Fourth Committees showed that, from a financial standpoint, the solution involving the management of the station by the Radio-Suisse Company in normal times and its transference to the exclusive management of the League in times of emergency offers at the present time sufficient advantages to warrant its choice by the Assembly.

There is further the advantage in the present state of technical improvements, for the League of Nations to have at its disposal, in times of emergency, not only a short-wave, but also a medium-wave station. In the suggested arrangement with the Swiss Government, the short-wave station would be erected as an addition to the medium-wave station, which has already been erected at the cost of the Swiss authorities. The whole of this installation would pass under the exclusive management of the League of Nations in times of emergency.

The arrangement with the Swiss Government would be operative for ten years. After that date, it would remain in force by tacit agreement. It might, however, be denounced by the Swiss Government or the Secretary-General of the League of Nations under conditions to be defined later in the agreement, taking into account the interests at stake and particularly the fact that the cost of establishing the short-wave station would have been borne by the League.
III.

Such is the general nature of the solution proposed for the Assembly's approval. It is important that the Assembly should also be acquainted in outline with the political, legal and technical safeguards this solution provides, both for the Federal Government and for the League and its Members. As regards the Swiss authorities, it is definitely recognised in the resolution that the use of this station by the League in times of crisis can in no case be invoked against Switzerland as affecting her international responsibility. Moreover, the Swiss Government will be able to be represented at the station in times of crisis by an observer, whose duties will be as laid down in the Council’s resolution of March 9th, 1929. Lastly, it should be explicitly mentioned here that the use that would be made of the station by the League when the station came under its exclusive management in times of emergency would be that laid down by the Council in its resolution of March 9th, 1929.

All these safeguards which are given to Switzerland would, of course, equally hold good if the League should in the future possess and work a wireless station of its own at all times.

The proposed agreement provides specific guarantees to the League that the station which is to be ordered as advised by the Secretary-General will meet the League’s requirements, will be kept furnished with all the latest technical improvements, and will be operated as desired by the League, preference being given to the needs of official traffic. In normal times, the Secretary-General will have a representative at the station, and will be represented on the board of directors of the Société Radio-Suisse. Further, all necessary provision is made for facilities to be given in normal times to a staff selected by the Secretary-General of officials undergoing training or of supernumerary officials, so that he may have an international staff at his command in times of emergency, while the ordinary staff of the station would still be at his disposal.

The transfer of the short-wave and medium-wave stations to the League’s exclusive control in times of emergency will thus be secured under satisfactory conditions.

Having regard to the independence of the League and the peculiar position of Switzerland the solution offered for the Assembly’s approval seems to reconcile satisfactorily the interests involved. The States Members of the League will be assured, by this arrangement, of unrestricted communication with the League’s headquarters. They will certainly realise that the station specially established for League work is of public importance, and will do their best to keep it in full work in normal times.

The decision to be taken by the Tenth Assembly, only a few days after the laying of the foundation-stone of the new building, will not merely be of great importance in itself, but will constitute one of the clearest signs of its growing strength and influence. Rapid and reliable intercontinental communications are a feature of the modern world, and one of the most powerful factors in bringing the nations into closer touch. It will be of real assistance to the League, which is an expression of the international community to have at its disposal a station that can, apart from other means of communication and transport, communicate with all the world at critical moments.

The Third Committee accordingly proposes that the Assembly adopt the following resolution:

"The Assembly:

"Desiring that the League of Nations should have means at its disposal, and under its direct management, at any rate in times of crisis, for independent radio-telegraphic communication with as many Members of the League as possible;

"And, being desirous of facilitating at all times relations between the League of Nations and its Members, more particularly those at a distance from the seat of the League:

"Instructs the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps for the provision, as early as possible, of a radio-telegraphic station, comprising in any case a post with a worldwide radius so far as this may be technically possible, in conformity with the proposals submitted to the Assembly by the Communications and Transit Committee.

"The Swiss Government can be represented at this station by an observer, whose duties would be as laid down in the Council’s resolution of March 9th, 1929.

"The Assembly declares that the use of this station by the League of Nations in times of crisis can in no case be invoked against Switzerland as affecting her international responsibility."