List of Questions to be Examined by the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference.

REPORT BY M. BENES
adopted by the Council on December 12th, 1925.

The report which M. Paul-Boncour has submitted to us with regard to the list of questions to be examined by the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference states that the programmes of work presented respectively by the delegates of the British Empire, France and Spain have been amalgamated by the Committee of the Council in a single programme of seven questions. The Committee of the Council has not felt itself called upon to pronounce upon the respective merits of the two points of view expressed with regard to two of the questions included in the programme presented by the French delegate and has preferred to leave it to the Council to elucidate this question.

I feel sure that I am interpreting the view of everyone in expressing in our name the thanks of the Council for the successful result of the work of the Committee, which has been able to draw up a unanimous programme on almost all the points submitted to it, notwithstanding the fact that it was dealing with a question which bristles with difficulties and which, by reason of its complex character, is difficult to express in formulas.

As regards the question which the Committee of the Council has left for our decision, certain opinions were expressed, in the course of the discussions, which it would seem useful to mention for future guidance in the preparatory work. In the first place, recalling the resolution of the Fifth Assembly on the question of the reduction of naval armaments, the French, Italian and Japanese representatives stated on behalf of their Governments that they could not see their way to dissociate the various kinds of armaments — military, naval and air — and to consider them at separate conferences.

Secondly, a large number of delegates urged that it was impossible to deal with the disarmament question without reference to what has been called the potential war strength of the various countries — in other words, their population and their economic and industrial resources. As there could be no question of effecting a reduction in such factors, nor even of usefully examining them, they thought that it would not be practicable to find a fair basis for comparison between peace-time armaments properly so called, unless the potential war strength of various countries were made comparable by organising economic and financial assistance as provided in principle in Article 16 of the Covenant.

Again, the French representative laid great stress on the point that one of the essential objects of the reduction and limitation of armaments was to secure a position in which no country committing an aggression would be able to make head against the total forces which could be brought against it by the Members of the League acting conjointly in pursuance of Article 16 of the Covenant and of regional agreements as contemplated in Article 21.

Lastly, the British, French and Spanish delegates expressed the opinion that the question of an international supervision to ensure that the observance of limitation of armaments was being observed should be examined by the Preparatory Commission. The French delegate emphasised the necessity of such supervision, particularly during the period when the arbitration and conciliation proceedings provided for in the Covenant of the League of Nations and in the various agreements recently concluded were in progress.

1 "The Assembly is of the opinion:
1. That the question of naval disarmament should be discussed as part of the general question of disarmament to be dealt with by the International Conference proposed in the Resolution of September 6th, 1924, adopted by the Fifth Assembly, and that it rests with the Council to settle the programme."
2 See Annex II (note, containing extracts from the Minutes of the Committee of the Council).
Finally, I have to record the agreement which has fortunately been arrived at between the different points of view. A slight amendment in the wording of Question V has made it possible to include in the programme of work which we have to draw up for the Preparatory Commission some of the main ideas contained in the questions of the French delegate’s programme referred to above and in the questions proposed by the Belgian delegate. I would once more express my satisfaction with the happy results due to the spirit of conciliation which prevails in our discussions.

I therefore propose for your adoption, having regard to the conclusions of the report of the Preparatory Commission which I have just submitted to you, the following resolution:

"The Council,

"Having regard to the report of the Committee of the Council concerning the list of questions to be examined by the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference,

"Decides:

"(1) To adopt the list of questions prepared by the Committee of the Council in the amended form in which it appears in Annex I of this report;

"(2) To refer this programme, together with the Minutes of the Session of the Committee of the Council and of the present Session of the Council relating to the problem of disarmament, to the Preparatory Commission, constituted by its decision of to-day;

"(3) To convene a meeting of this Commission on February 15th, 1926, at Geneva in order that it may be duly constituted and that it may engage in a preliminary exchange of views regarding the accompanying list of questions, and may refer, if necessary, to the Technical Commissions attached to it the examination of the military and economic aspects of the questions which it has to consider."

Annex I.

LIST OF QUESTIONS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION.

Question I.

What is to be understood by the expression "armaments"?

(a) Definition of the various factors — military, economic, geographical, etc. — upon which the power of a country in time of war depends.

(b) Definition and special characteristics of the various factors which constitute the armaments of a country in time of peace; the different categories of armaments (military, naval and air), the methods of recruiting, training, organisations capable of immediate military employment, etc.

Question II.

(a) Is it practicable to limit the ultimate war strength of a country, or must any measures of disarmament be confined to the peace strength?

(b) What is to be understood by the expression "reduction and limitation of armaments"?

The various forms which reduction or limitation may take in the case of land, sea and air forces: the relative advantages or disadvantages of each of the different forms or methods: for example, the reduction of the larger peace-time units or of their establishment and their equipment, or of any immediately mobilisable forces: the reduction of the length of active service, the reduction of the quantity of military equipment, the reduction of expenditure on national defence, etc.

Question III.

By what standards is it possible to measure the armaments of one country against the armaments of another, e.g., numbers, period of service, equipment, expenditure, etc.?

Question IV.

Can there be said to be "offensive" and "defensive" armaments?

Is there any method of ascertaining whether a certain force is organised for purely defensive purposes (no matter what use may be made of it in time of war), or whether, on the contrary, it is established for the purposes in a spirit of aggression?
Question V.

(a) On what principle will it be possible to draw up a scale of armaments permissible to the various countries, taking into account particularly:
- Population;
- Resources;
- Geographical situation;
- Length and nature of maritime communications;
- Density and character of the railways;
- Vulnerability of the frontiers and of the important vital centres near the frontiers;
- The time required, varying with different States, to transform peace armaments into war armaments;
- The degree of security which, in the event of aggression, a State could receive under the provisions of the Covenant or of separate engagements contracted towards that State?

(b) Can the reduction of armaments be promoted by examining possible means for ensuring that the mutual assistance, economic and military, contemplated in Article 16 of the Covenant, shall be brought quickly into operation as soon as an act of aggression has been committed.

Question VI.

(a) Is there any device by which civil and military aircraft can be distinguished for purposes of disarmament? If this is not practicable, how can the value of civil aircraft be computed in estimating the air strength of any country?

(b) Is it possible or desirable to apply the conclusions arrived at in (a) above to parts of aircraft and aircraft engines?

(c) Is it possible to attach military value to commercial fleets in estimating the naval armaments of a country?

Question VII.

Admitting that disarmament depends on security, to what extent is regional disarmament possible in return for regional security? Or is any scheme of disarmament impracticable unless it is general? If regional disarmament is practicable, would it promote or lead up to general disarmament?

Annex II.

NOTE ON THE STATEMENTS MADE AT THE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE COUNCIL REGARDING THE SUPERVISION OF ARMAMENTS.

It will be seen from the Minutes of the Committee of the Council that on one highly important question — that of the supervision of armaments — no conclusions were reached, although certain delegations seemed to be in agreement on the subject.

The Minutes of the fourth meeting (Saturday, December 5th, 10.30 a.m.) contain (page 4) the following statement by Viscount Cecil:

"One question would at any rate have to be added. The Preparatory Commission would have to enquire into the nature of the international supervision to be, if possible, established in order to make sure that countries kept within the limits of the scale of armaments which had been fixed for them. It might prove impossible to establish such international supervision, and countries might have, as at present, to rely on their military attachés, but this was a matter which the Preparatory Commission should investigate."

In the same Minutes (page 8) we find the following statement by M. Paul-Boncour:

"If the limitation of armaments were not to have as a counterpart a general system of control, it would be equivalent to placing a premium on bad faith. If, however, only the visible disarmament in peace time were taken into account, this control could only be exercised over the actual troops in barracks and on the material of war in the magazines. On the other hand, were account to be taken of the potential war strength, it would have to be admitted that war material would have at the same time to be controlled, and that control should be particularly active and vigilant during the period when the procedure of conciliation and arbitration was being applied. This procedure had just been defined by the recent agreements, which contained valuable promises of security."

Lastly, the memorandum submitted by M. Cobian mentions the idea of an "international organisation" set up to supervise the observance of limitations of armaments and "to take measures to prevent re-arming."