LEAGUE OF NATIONS

CONFERENCE FOR THE REDUCTION AND LIMITATION OF ARMAMENTS

Programme of Work of the Conference

REPORT OF THE BUREAU ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL COMMISSION ON MARCH 8TH, 1932.

(Rapporteur: M. Beneš.)

1. At its fourth meeting, held on February 25th, the General Commission took certain important decisions with regard to the organisation of its work. It decided first of all "to carry on its discussions within the framework of the draft Disarmament Convention, full liberty being reserved to all delegations to develop their own proposals in subsequent debate and to move their amendments in the form of modifications, additions or omissions at the appropriate point". It was also agreed, when the General Commission proceeded to set up Special Commissions, that it would be for the former to study, from the point of view of principles, the questions laid before the Conference, to define in this way the general lines on which the other commissions should work and to refer to the latter the questions with which they would have to deal.

The President of the Conference thought it would be well for the Bureau to draw up, in order to facilitate the task of the General Commission, certain proposals with regard to the Conference's programme of work. For this purpose the Bureau asked me to make a preliminary study of all the proposals of the various delegations, which have been brought together by the Secretariat in a printed document (Conf. D.102).

2. I have in the first place drawn up a scheme of work classifying within the framework of the draft Convention the provisions of the latter and the proposals relating thereto submitted to the Conference. This document (Conf. D.102), together with the statement I have had the honour to make to the Bureau in this connection (Conf. D.100), has been communicated to all the delegations with the request that they should inform the Secretariat of any amendments they might wish to make to the summary of the proposals submitted by them.

3. As a result of this request, a number of delegations have sent rectifications, observations or amendments concerning their previous proposals. It should be noted that certain delegations thought it desirable to put forward arguments in support of their respective contentions. I have only been able, however, to embody in the tables the principles or proposals which were already in the documents (memoranda or extracts from speeches) submitted in concrete form and collected in the compilation prepared by the Secretariat. I considered that, if the new arguments submitted by certain delegations were embodied in the tables, there would be a risk of depriving this document of its objective character.

The delegations will naturally be able to defend their respective contentions at any time in committee.

I have had an opportunity of discussing their observations with the various delegations in conversations during which each point was discussed. Thanks to the spirit of conciliation displayed by the delegations, certain points which seemed difficult to retain have been withdrawn or adjusted to the existing framework.

It is unnecessary to say that the co-ordination tables in no way debar the delegations from submitting at any time to the Commissions any amendment or fresh proposal they may think desirable.

The Bureau hopes that the definitive document, based upon the observations which have been received and which has been prepared on a systematic plan, will assist the labours of the delegations and the investigation of those who, whether near or at a distance, are following the deliberations of the Conference.

I do not think there is any need for me to explain afresh the arrangement of the tables, as complete explanations are contained in the written and oral reports of the Rapporteur which were circulated to the delegations a few days ago. I would merely remind you that these tables contain a summary of all the proposals made during the general discussion and, in addition, the questions of principle raised by these proposals. The tables also contain certain suggestions regarding the procedure which the Conference might adopt for the discussion of the various questions.

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4. The Bureau has thought it desirable, not merely to submit the tables, but to add a list of the questions which might be referred to the various Commissions of the Conference (document Conf.D.103). In the preparation of this list, account has been taken of the following principles, which would appear to result from the discussions in the General Commission:

1. The General Commission should, as a rule, first discuss all questions from the point of view of the principles involved;
2. After this discussion, the questions should, if advisable, be referred at the appropriate point to the Special Commissions;
3. Questions which do not require preliminary discussion from the point of view of the principles involved may be referred immediately by the General Commission to the Special Commissions;
4. The Special Commissions should report to the General Commission on the matters dealt with. It is, of course, always open to the Special Commissions to lay before the General Commission any questions of principle which prevent progress and which they are not in a position to settle themselves.

5. The questions of principle to be dealt with by the General Commission may be arranged under three headings:

a. Those of which it will be possible to make a complete and definitive study;
b. Those requiring a first examination involving a statement of views without this discussion necessarily leading to an immediate conclusion in the General Commission. The latter will be able to resume the discussion of these questions when it thinks fit;
c. Those which should be referred by the General Commission to a technical committee for preliminary examination before being dealt with by the General Commission itself.

In considering questions in the first two classes, negotiations between the countries directly and principally concerned may be necessary at a certain stage in the proceedings. Such negotiations at a suitable moment might well end a deadlock over some difficult matter under discussion in a commission and lead to a solution.

Furthermore, questions referred direct to a Special Commission may themselves be divided into two classes—namely, those which, as was mentioned above under (c), are referred to it immediately for preliminary examination and report to the General Commission; and those which have been definitely referred to a technical commission by a formal vote of the General Commission.

6. These are the principles which have guided the Bureau in preparing the list which it has the honour to submit for the approval of the General Commission. The General Commission will, no doubt, realise the importance of not adhering too rigidly to these principles, and of allowing certain modifications in their practical application. Constant supervision and co-ordination will be necessary. With this object, close contact should be maintained between the Bureau of the General Commission and the Chairmen of the Special Commissions.

It will be necessary, in particular, to ensure that discussions on questions of principle should not be taken up again in the Special Commissions, except in so far as may be necessary, and the intimate relationship between certain questions must always be borne in mind.

It is probable that all the Special Commissions will have to appoint sub-committees or committees of experts. In order to prevent the machinery of the Conference from becoming too complicated, it might be well to appoint sub-committees to examine groups of questions or some definite question, it being understood that their mandate will expire as soon as they have disposed of the questions entrusted to them. It might also be necessary to set up mixed commissions or sub-committees, or to instruct a single special commission to examine as a whole a question in which several commissions are interested.

7. After a rapid examination of the questions which appear particularly to come within the scope of the General Commission, the Bureau entrusted its President and the Rapporteur of the General Commission with the task of drawing up a definitive list to serve as a first draft agenda for this Commission.

As a result of the preliminary consultations and discussions I have undertaken, I submit to you this outline of the draft. After you have made the necessary corrections and modifications, it might be taken as the preliminary agenda of the General Commission.

In arranging the order of the questions, I have been mainly guided by the desire to submit, at the outset of our discussions, a form of agenda likely to promote the progress of our work. It would be a mistake, in my opinion, to start off with the discussion of the most difficult questions.

On the other hand, I am convinced that we should not go to the other extreme and postpone indefinitely the consideration of questions which are of fundamental importance for the future work of the General Commission, even though they present serious difficulties, and their examination should not lead us to immediate conclusions.