Progress of the Work of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference.

REPORT OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE TO THE ASSEMBLY.

Rapporteur: Viscount Poulett (Belgium).

During the general discussion in the present Assembly on the work done by the League since its ninth session, a large number of speakers laid particular stress on the importance of the disarmament problem. At the request of the Netherlands representative (Chairman of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference), the part of the General Report and Supplementary Report dealing with this grave problem was submitted by the Assembly to the Third Committee. The Third Committee devoted several meetings to examining the state of the work of the Preparatory Commission. At the opening of the discussion, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, representative of the British Empire, submitted the following draft resolution:

"The Assembly:
"Being convinced that a progressive and general reduction of armaments is urgently needed throughout the world:
"Expresses the hope that the Preparatory Commission will finish its labours at the earliest possible moment;
"And considers that, in completing the Draft Disarmament Convention, it should consider how far the following principles have been or ought to be adopted:

(a) The application of the same principles to the reduction and limitation of personnel and material whether in land, sea or air forces;
(b) The limitation of the strength of a force either by limiting its numbers or its period of training or both;
(c) The limitation of material either directly by enumeration or indirectly by budgetary limitation or by both methods;
(d) The recognition of a competent international authority to watch and report upon the execution of the treaty."

In explaining the nature of his draft resolution, Viscount Cecil emphasised the fact that it was not the object of this draft to give instructions to the Preparatory Commission, but only to draw its attention to certain points. Of the four suggestions which the British delegate proposed that the Assembly should submit to the Preparatory Commission, the third, which referred to the limitation of war material, was, in his opinion, the most important. The Preparatory Commission had dealt with this question, but had been unable to agree on the method of effecting a direct or indirect reduction and limitation of the war material of land forces, and it had merely provided for the guarantee of publicity in regard to expenditure.
M. Loudon (Chairman of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference) paid a tribute to the British representative. The Commission’s work was held up pending the conclusion of a naval agreement; negotiations were progressing favourably, and the Commission was impatiently awaiting their result so that it might be discussed by a larger body on which the other Powers concerned in the question would also be represented. As regarded the suggestions submitted by the British representative, M. Loudon explained that, according to the Preparatory Commission’s programme of work, that Commission was to deal with the problems raised in (a), (b) and (d).

The British draft resolution received in some cases a complete, and in others the partial, support of a large number of delegations. A large number of other delegations, however, made every reservation regarding the substance of the questions raised by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, and objected to his proposals on the grounds of procedure and of advisability.

The discussion, in which eighteen delegates took part, showed that the Third Committee unanimously agreed that the work of the League should be hastened so as to enable a first step to be taken as soon as possible towards carrying out the programme for the reduction of armaments stipulated in Article 8 of the Covenant. Moreover, the Commission unanimously recognised the importance, for the progress of the Preparatory Commission’s work, of negotiations between the principal naval Powers with a view to the reduction and limitation of naval armaments.

The Third Committee thought that it should take note of, but should not vote on, the different opinions expressed at the Committee concerning the principles on which the final work of the Preparatory Commission should be based.

To split the Committee into majorities and minorities would only make the task of the Preparatory Commission and the first General Disarmament Conference more difficult. The only way of solving the disarmament problem would be through mutual concessions by Governments in regard to the proposals they preferred, provided, of course, that solutions thus reached were not exclusively negative in effect and that they would result in securing a first application of Article 8 of the Covenant.

Summing up the debate, M. Politis, the Greek delegate, thought that it was only right and proper that the authors of the various declarations made at the Third Committee should be permitted to reiterate them and expound them before the Preparatory Commission. For that reason, in the last paragraph of the draft resolution submitted by M. Politis, and quoted at the end of this report, the Assembly is asked to decide that the Minutes of the plenary meetings of the Assembly and of the Third Committee regarding disarmament should be communicated to the Preparatory Commission for any necessary action.

At the request of the Danish delegate, certain resolutions adopted by the twenty-fourth Inter-Parliamentary Conference concerning a technical scheme for the reduction of armaments will be annexed to these Minutes.

At the close of the discussion, the Greek delegate submitted the following draft resolution based on the general trend of opinion expressed by different speakers, which was unanimously adopted by the Third Committee. It is hereby submitted for the approval of the Assembly:

"The Assembly:
    "Having taken cognisance with interest of the work of the last session of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference:
    "Cordially welcoming the prospect of an early agreement between the naval Powers with a view to the reduction and limitation of naval armaments, which agreement may enable the Preparatory Commission to secure general agreement on the methods to be adopted for the reduction and limitation of naval armaments;
    "Taking note of the statements made in the Third Committee with regard to the principles on which, in the opinion of various delegations, the final work of the Preparatory Commission should be based;
    "Noting that the solution of the disarmament problem can be attained only through mutual concessions by Governments in regard to the proposals they prefer;
    "Urging, in accordance with its resolution of 1928, ‘the necessity of accomplishing the first step towards the reduction and limitation of armaments with as little delay as possible’;
    "Confidently hopes that the Preparatory Commission will shortly be able to resume the work interrupted at its last session, with a view to framing a preliminary draft Convention as soon as possible for the reduction and limitation of land, naval and air armaments;
    "And decides that the Minutes of the plenary meetings of the Assembly and of the Third Committee shall be communicated to the Preparatory Commission for any necessary action."