

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

1/18/21

I have always banked on Article 19 of the Covenant; and it has seemed to me to be entirely overlooked in much of the discussion that has gone on over the document. The way in which people have jumped to the conclusion that the terms of the treaty, once adopted, could not be changed, is unjustified in face of Article 19. A case came up before the Assembly to show the way in which it can be used.

When the Bolivian delegation asked the League to revise a treaty of peace between Bolivia and Chili, signed in 1904, its request was based on Article 19. The delegation said in its communication that it did not expect the Assembly during its session to examine and express an opinion on the advisability of a revision, but it asked that a commission be formed to go into the matter and to submit its report at the next session of the Assembly. Here is an example of exactly what Article 19 was framed to do, that, when any treaty became, as the Covenant puts it, "unapplicable," or any situation

as the Covenant puts it, "unapplicable," or any situation arises which threatens to disturb peace, then the Assembly could proceed to examine the treaty, the object, of course, being to so revise it that it would make for peace instead of war.

In an address before the Assembly, the delegate from Venezuela called attention to the fact that Bolivar in 1826, had proposed at a congress held in Panama a league, inspired by the same ideas as the League of Nations. According to Bolivar, this society of nations would become a great political power, since it had as a supreme end, preventing and limiting decisions by war. It would become the supreme mediator, a great moral, moderating power, a faithful interpreter of

treaties, a conciliator in all difficulties, a counselor in conflicts. It was because of the hold this conception of Bolivar had in Venezuela that in October, 1914, the governments of the armed nations sent a communication in which it suggested the advisability of calling a congress, the chief end of which should be the prevention of wars. It was quite natural that the representative of Venezuela in joining the League should have called attention to the fact that, historically, it had always stood for the same ideas.

Now, what is this League of Nations? How does it work? What does it mean for us here in the United States? Roughly speaking, I think we may call it the world's first national, permanent parliament--the first attempt to organize the world, something in the way our original States were organized. It forms a head for the

great countries of the world which in modern times have been drawn so closely together, whether they liked it or not. Like any government, it has its capital--Geneva, Switzerland. Like every other modern republican government, it has its great assembly. Each nation is allowed three representatives; that is, if there should be 50 signatories, this assembly will consist of 150 people. And it has a smaller, more flexible body, its council, which may roughly be said to correspond to the cabinet of a president. This council consists of representatives of the five great powers and of four of the smaller powers. Which these four shall be, the assembly decides. This number of smaller powers may be increased if the assembly thinks wise. While the assembly only meets as the governments think it necessary, the council must sit at least once a year.

But this is not all that the League provides in the way of machinery. There is to be a permanent secretariate; that is, a body something like the group of departments that we have in Washington, which will carry on day by day the work of the League. There is to be a general secretary at the head of this group, the ablest man that can be found for international affairs. Great permanent commissions, charged with various international interests, will be established at Geneva. Thus there will be a commission which is always

studying international economic questions, another for international labor questions--one of great importance, which is to keep its eye on national armament, keeping track of what each nation of the world is doing in the way of armament, advising the League as to danger points and as to reductions,--the kind of an international body which, if it had been in existence before the present war, would have made known to every government officially what Germany was doing, would have forced their attention. There will be a permanent court of international justice, which will take up all kinds of international disputes. Its relation to the assembly and the council will be very much like that of our supreme court to congress and the cabinet.

And there is another different, but to my mind most wise provision, and that is that the international Red Cross should be a part of the League. Do you not see what this does? It brings into this League of Nations what I think they may call a lubricant, that humanitarian spirit, that spirit which seeks nothing for itself but everything for those who are weak or in trouble. It recognizes international humanitarianism as one of the great forces, and ought, if it is properly kept alive and developed, to oil this great machinery, soften its asperities, keep it from becoming distinctly political, keep its mind turned more fully towards its great object which is of course the fostering of peace and good will among men.

Now, how would this think work in our case? Suppose that after the League has gone into operation, we have acute trouble with Mexico. Mexico is not one of the original members of the League of Nations. She has not so far been invited to accede to the covenant.

It is stated--on what authority, I do not know, that she has sworn roundly that she wanted nothing to do with it. Let us suppose that trouble arises. The League then at once is obliged to invite Mexico to accept a place in the League for the purpose of adjusting the dispute with us. If Mexico does this, she thus becomes obliged to accept the conditions of the arrangement which the Council deems just. The Council will institute an inquiry and recommend whatever she thinks best under the circumstances. But if Mexico shall refuse to accept the obligations of membership in the League in order to settle this dispute and goes to war against us, she will be regarded as having gone to war against all the other members of the League and they will all, instantaneously, break off trade and financial relations with her. All intercourse will be forbidden between Mexico and the other members of the League; and if that is not sufficient, the members of the League will severally contribute to the armed force which will be necessary to bring her to terms. That is, if the United States does not, as would be probable in this instance, take care of the situation herself.

One of the great original suggestions in this League is for dealing with nations which are still too young and inexperienced to take care of themselves,--an arrangement by which they may have their chance for individual development. This is what is called the system of mandatories. It originated, I believe, with Gen. Smuts. At all events, it is one of the devices of the League which has great possibilities in it. It takes those kingdoms and territories which the world war has freed from the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them, and entrusts them to a nation which by its geographic

position, its resources, its experience is considered by the League to be the best fitted to look after the young nation.

Of course this is putting a responsibility on the nation that accepts such a mandatory, for it means that she must give to the weakling of her administrative ability, that she must stand behind her financially, that she must help her devise proper education, that she must look after her health; that is, that she must help bring her up, put her on her feet, prepare her to go it alone in the society of the nations of the world.

Now, the League very properly insists that this mandatory is a trust. There is to be no profiteering on the part of the nation which takes the responsibility. It is to be a big, disinterested service to the feeble nation. If we should take a mandatory, for instance, we would be obliged to submit annually a report of our work to a permanent commission on mandatories which will sit at Geneva.

There was strong opposition to this system of mandatories on the part of certain nations that sat at the peace table. Australia and Japan, for instance, expected to have permanently annexed to them certain islands that formerly were the property of Germany, which the war had loosened. Mr. Hughes of Australia was very angry at the idea that his country might be asked to take a mandatory instead of taking possession, so angry that he threw the only really discordant note into the gathering which accepted the covenant, and I am told that he at least once, if not oftener, flounced out of the meeting where the matter was under discussion.

The mandatory system, however, is generally accepted, and there is little doubt that we will be asked to accept the mandatory of Armenia. Armenia itself wants us. The Armenian delegation to the peace conference happened to be at the hotel where I lived for the four months that I was in the city. Frequently they said to me that Armenia wanted nobody but America. "She has been our best friend in all our sufferings. There are 400,000 of our people in the United States. It is your people whose nurses and missionaries have done most to help us. It is you alone who have no entanglements in the East to prevent your working out what another nation, France or England, might not be able to do, such are their entanglements with the Turk and the Arab. You are free and disinterested and generous. Take us." The president of the delegation told me that in coming to Paris he had gone through all Armenia, to Constantinople, into Egypt, wherever there are Armenians. He had said to them, "Whom would you like to have as a mandatory?" And always they had made the answer, "We want the United States." It is truly a cry from Mesopotamia that has come to us. How can we refuse it? It means responsibility. There is no question at all that the critics of the League of Nations are quite right when they say that this is putting new and untried burdens upon us. But what becomes of the nation that refuses burdens as they are turned up by the struggling world? Why, the same thing inevitably comes to them that comes to a man or woman who refuses to take the burdens which present themselves in the natural course of life--dry rot, chilled heart, and shrunken brain. We grow in proportion as we

grapple with the thing which is hard for us. Our hearts expand and grow warm in proportion to the way we accept suffering, not flee from it. Our minds broaden in proportion to the way we tackle hard, new problems. Let the United States refuse the responsibility which this new world situation offers to her and she will begin to shrivel. The fact that we are rich and powerful does not exempt us from the inevitable operation of the spiritual, the intellectual and the moral laws which govern the world. The League of Nations was framed and adopted before peace was made. The early developments at the peace conference, the situation today demonstrates more and more clearly the wisdom of President Wilson, and of certain ones of the English in their insistence that it should be framed before the peace treaty was made. How far they feared that the peace treaty must, in the very nature of things, be unsatisfactory to many nations, it is impossible to say. They certainly see it now. These must be conscious that when the treaty is signed there will be sown, as somebody has said, another crop of dragon's teeth. For five years now dragon's teeth have been sown daily. These adjustments, make them as good as it is within the power of limited human beings to make them, square them up as nearly as human integrity and human intelligence is able to square them by the fourteen points, and you will yet have dissatisfaction, national claims, national jealousies. We are working with human elements, and they are feeble and frail and bungling. That is, after the peace treaty is signed, make it as good as you will, there will be causes of war within it.

But the peace treaty itself accepts the League of Nations, and the business of the League of Nations is to keep an eye on all of these unsatisfactory adjustments, to study them, to familiarize itself with the peoples who feel them, and to devise readjustments which may better suit the contestants. If the arrangement about Danzig does not work, the League of Nations is there to suggest and try to work out with Italy and Germany and Prussia, with Poland and Danzig an arrangement that will work. Its whole business is to try to soften jealousies, modify resentment, correct what proves to be impracticable, and forever to keep before the dissatisfied the council of justice, the horror and stupidity of war, the happiness and progress that lie in the very effort to live justly and peaceably with your neighbors.

Thus the League of Nations becomes a great school in good will. Indeed I am not sure but the true name for the League of Nations is school--school of nations, a school of friendliness, a place where we are all learning about one another, where we are trying to help one another to a better understanding of ourselves, where we are actually trying to correct each other's faults, live down the bitterness which came from past struggles; where we are learning to contribute to one another of whatever is best in ourselves. Such is the possibility of the League. But it can never be carried out unless the people of the nation get a vision of its possibilities and are willing to do the work and are willing to accept the sacrifices, the responsibilities, the hard work

particularly, should do.

What does the peace conference mean? And what did we want from it at the start? To the soldier in the line it meant a speedy return to his wife and children or sweetheart. It meant sleeping in a bed with white sheets, reading by his own lamp, sitting down at table with those he loved, going back to his old job. To the folks at home it meant plenty of bread and sugar and cheaper rents. To the governments of the nations it meant getting their armies back, stopping the hideous war expense, restoring their commerce, and arranging to pay their debts.

Probably the first thing that everybody thought of was that the peace conference was going to return us to our normal ways of thinking and acting and feeling. But we asked something more of it. We asked that the peace conference would so organize the affairs of the world that such a horror as had overtaken it could not occur again.

The soldier asked this. In the armies of all the leading Allies you will find the great majority of the soldiers saying, "We are fighting this war that there may be no more wars." Undoubtedly that was the deepest thing in the heart in this country, to put an end in the world to this kind of thing. It is what the people of the United States particularly hoped from the peace conference--a just and durable peace, not a peace of vengeance but a peace of justice, that would endure.

Many of us had long had the idea that permanent peace

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