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Can the League of Nations Survive the Manchoukuo Crisis?

BY DR. H. F. MUNRO

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Gentlemen, this week we travel from India to Geneva, the political centre of the international world. The League of Nations which has its headquarters in Geneva seems to be passing through a period of crisis at the present time. Many people are asking themselves, "Can the League of Nations survive this economic depression?" Others are asking, "Can the League of Nations survive the crisis in the Far East?" There are those who ask if it can survive the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference. Many questions are on men's lips—people who are sincerely interested in the promotion of peace and the welfare of the peoples of the world. To-day we have asked Dr. Munro to discuss some of these questions relating to the League of Nations before this club. Dr. Munro is a former Professor of International Law in two American universities. He is a Canadian by birth and is now in the Province of Nova Scotia as Superintendent of Education. At the thirteenth Assembly of the League of Nations held in Geneva late in 1932, Dr. Munro was one of the three Canadian delegates. As one of the Canadian delegates he was selected as reporter of the most important of the committees—the Fourth Committee which dealt with internal re-organization of the League and, as such, he came into rather intimate contact with problems of European diplomacy. If he were to tell us some of the things he saw and learned it would be rather interesting. I do not know if Dr. Munro will go into intimate details

but, at least, he is exceedingly well qualified to discuss the subject and the future of the League of Nations, particularly in relation to the crisis of the day. I have great pleasure in calling upon him to address you.

DR. MUNRO:—Mr. Chairman, members of the Canadian Club of Toronto, first let me thank you for the honor of the invitation to address this most important club. I gather from newspaper accounts that I read from time to time that you are one of the great forums of public opinion, I, therefore, consider it an honor and a privilege to be permitted to discuss the League of Nations, its present status, problems and difficulties before such a representative Canadian audience. I notice that the subject of the address would lead you to conclude that I am going to devote my time to answering the question, "What Becomes of the League if the Manchurian question is not settled in the proper way?" I am afraid that I have to decline to discuss that. It would be rather presumptuous on my part even if I had much more information than I possess, but incidentally, in my remarks, I will say something about the Manchurian crisis, my own personal opinion about it. But what I value to-day is the opportunity to discuss the present status of the League.

One must remember something of its origin, its purpose or purposes and its structure. I find when I address public audience I assume too much. It is too much to expect that the busy man of affairs, who has very little time to devote to the international question, shall always carry about with him a vivid picture of the constitution of the League. But it is vital in any assessment of the future of the League to remember for what purpose the League was constituted, how it functions and what, after all, is its sphere, its scope, how much it can do in the present world situation and how much it cannot do. The League was formed at the end of the Great War. It was formed when idealism was running high and such slogans were heard as "The War to end War." On the 11th November, 1918, we thought we had seen the last of war, that there was to be a new world order. Its spokesman, at the moment, was

Woodrow Wilson. I do not know what you thought of Woodrow Wilson; I do not know what you think of the League, but if you are as great a supporter of the League as I am, you will be thankful that Woodrow Wilson went to Paris and insisted that the first business of the Congress of Versailles was to discuss the question of an association to enforce peace. That was not the final form that the association took, but Woodrow Wilson insisted that before they went on to settle the question of territorial rights and other questions, that they should read into the new treaty, agreement or covenant, machinery that should make such a war as we had just emerged from, impossible in the future.

That was only part of the purpose, but let us thank Woodrow Wilson for doing that. If we did not have the League, I will ask you what do you propose to substitute for it? What I wish to impress upon you is that the covenant of the League is the first two articles of the Treaty of Versailles. If the League goes by the board, the Treaty of Versailles goes by the board. It would be well to remember that there was a great wave of idealism sweeping the world. That is perhaps one reason why the League to-day has not quite the prestige it had when it started. That wave could only last so long, and there are more difficulties in the world than there were in 1919. Our political problems are somewhat different, perhaps more difficult. At any rate, we have not the idealism we had then. We are living in a disillusioned world.

We have so many problems of the first magnitude to settle that everywhere men's hearts are beginning to fail. Well now, while idealism produced the League, none the less the principles of the League were practical. If you are a student of political science, you will admit that possibly there is only one other piece of political construction that can compare with the League covenant and that is the American Constitution drawn up one hundred and fifty years ago.

In the preamble to the Covenant the purpose is stated to be two-fold. The League is organized first, to promote

international co-operation; and second, to achieve international peace and security. It is very simple, not complicated, no doctrinaire at all, and notice this put in the foreground: international co-operation. Now, the average man of the street thinks that the League was created for one purpose—to abolish war. Any student, I am sure, knows that war cannot be abolished any more than cancer at one fell sweep. It may be a long time, if ever, before we abolish war. The League does not undertake to do that. The League undertakes to promote international co-operation in order that men may get to know each other and trust each other more and co-operate more. We have got to achieve the most difficult problem ever presented to mankind. It was never more difficult than it is at the moment. I do not know any way you are going to get international co-operation except through the League.

What about its structure? The framers of the Covenant were practical and sensible and did not build up an elaborate political structure that requires constitutional lawyers to interpret. There are twenty-six articles only. They created just three or four simple pieces of machinery. In that structure they embodied (and here is where, I think, they were masters of political craft and political science), they embodied the two outstanding principles in the world today, and they have tried to reconcile them. The first, the corner stone of international law, is the principle of the equality of status. Our international society is based on that principle: that all states are equal, irrespective of power and resources. Every State that is a member of the League has the right to send three members to the Assembly: all equal, each having exactly the same voice and the same vote, thus recognizing the fundamental principle of international law. But, in this practical world we all know that we have great powers that bear the responsibility for the well-being of the world and its political welfare. If war breaks out they have to bear the brunt. If there are difficult diplomatic situations, they have to do most of the work. They are known as the great powers. When the Council of the League was first formed it consisted of

nine members. Five were to come from the Great Powers, Great Britain, the United States, Japan, Italy and France. The United States declined and that left four Great Powers which had a permanent seat always on the Council. That is to say, four Great Powers were always entitled to have representation on the Council. The other four seats on the Council were divided up among all the other members of the League—then about forty, now fifty. They recognize, therefore, the primacy of the great powers in the transaction of world business. Then the third item in the structure that they reared was the Secretariat. Sir Eric Drummond became first Secretary-General, just retired, and he can retire with great satisfaction as he looks back on the work done in thirteen years. The Secretariat is a technical body which carries on work of a financial, social, political and diplomatic character. It is efficient. Some of the very ablest minds in the world are employed in the Secretariat. The formation of such a technical body of experts, highly-trained, from all the countries of the world, would in itself be a great tribute to the authors of the League and to Sir Eric Drummond, who was the first Secretary-General.

Then the fourth element in the structure was the permanent Court of International Justice which was launched by the League and which sits at the Hague and is staffed by the League. The structure, therefore, is simply laid down.

Now, let me pass quickly on to a few remarks on the 13th Assembly which was held this year in the latter part of September and the first part of October. In many ways, it was the least interesting assembly that has been held, for one reason. It assembled at a time when the cloud of depression was very thick over the world, and, secondly, most of the great questions that were occupying the attention of statesmen were being settled in another place than at Geneva. There was the Disarmament Conference, and if anything is achieved from it, it will be due primarily to the work of the League. For the moment the Manchurian crisis is being considered by a Commission under Earl Lytton. Economic questions were to be considered in the

World Economic Conference which has not yet met and which will probably meet in the spring, so that the chief questions were to be discussed elsewhere. That made the Assembly more or less uninteresting to the laymen and public. But, over and above that, there was an atmosphere of gloom in Geneva and in Europe. Remember, there were two first-class crises. There was the economic depression and there was the Manchurian crisis, and there was also, at that moment, the crisis that arose as a result of the deliberations in the Disarmament Conference. Germany had practically withdrawn from the Disarmament Conference on the ground that she got uncalled for treatment under the Treaty of Versailles. She maintained that she must be placed in a position of equality with other states and must not be restricted in her freedom. That, of course, precipitated a first-class crisis because France was afraid that if Germany were given equality in this matter, her security would be endangered. So when we landed in Paris all France was agog. It was a real crisis. France, of course, stands four-square for the enforcement of the Treaty. Great Britain, to some extent, was more or less disposed to revise the treaties, but France stood by and said, "No. We cannot yield here. If we yield here, we yield there."

I got talking to a Frenchman who found out a good deal about me and where I was from. He found out that I was a Canadian which was rather a recommendation. He wanted me to see him the next day, but I said, "No. I am going to Geneva tomorrow." "Going to the League?" he asked. "Yes. I am going to the League." "Well, you will do the best you can for us?" That was the attitude of France. So the League met in this atmosphere. The real crisis was discussed by diplomats in private rooms, while the ordinary procedure was discussed in the Assembly. They discussed the work of the League and of the Secretariat generally and discussed the fortunes, philosophy and outlook of the League. This year, we were told that, on the grounds of economy, we should make as few speeches as possible and get down to the real work of the League. There were six committees. One had to deal with legal

questions, another with economic and financial questions, another with political, another with social, a fifth with disarmament and another one, on which I served discussed the structural and financial organization of the League itself and the Secretariat. But the Disarmament Committee did not meet because there was a Disarmament Conference in being, but the other five committees met. Before we proceeded with committee work, there were a few notable addresses delivered in the Assembly.

Our friend, Mr. De Valera opened the Assembly and sounded the keynote of all the speeches delivered in the Assembly. He pointed out that the situation facing the League was grave. He put the situation squarely before the members. In spite of the orders not to speak, a few of the more notable members of the Assembly did speak. One speech which aroused keen interest was that of Herriot, then Premier of France. This crisis was in full bloom between France and Germany so every syllable Herriot read was reported the world over. Herriot took his stand of course, to use his own phrase, on "The whole League and nothing but the League." That is the corner stone of French foreign diplomacy, because in the League they feel there is the only guarantee of security. Herriot's address was very well reasoned out, a little idealistic but it made a very favorable impression.

Two speeches which I would specially emphasize are those of Mr. Motta, President of the Swiss Republic and Lord Cecil because they were very frank in their diagnosis of the situation.

Motta is an outstanding Swiss statesman and has been President times without number. He is an outstanding world statesman and a great League Statesman. I will quote a sentence from him to show what a man of experience thinks of the League. He says: "Doubtless the man of the street, as well as the student of affairs had grown tired of a fruitless idealism, but both would refuse to follow those who were seeking for the happiness of their fellows in a return to the past, forgetting that the law of progress for individuals as for communities was a constant and

vigilant equilibrium between the necessities of conservation and evolution. If States were not yet ready to surrender important parts of their sovereignty, they were, nevertheless, under a sacred obligation not to destroy the instrument of co-operation whose value remained inestimable and which, once broken, could not be restored."—Words of wisdom from a very wise League statesman.

Lord Cecil, as you might suppose, is a man of broad experience. I was very much impressed with him. The League, remember, had no power; it never had. An engine is only efficient in so far as you contribute motive power. Fifty or sixty states create the engine called the League of Nations which set up an efficient secretariat which does good work when permitted, so far as the member states give it power. It is not criticism of the League that should be made but criticism of the members of the League, of your state, of my state. Here is what Lord Cecil said:

"The real cause of the present difficulties was a diminution in the nations of the will to peace. That diminution had been foreseen and had now to be faced. . . The real trouble, for example, in the case of the dispute which had arisen between Bolivia and Paraguay, was that one or other of the parties (he made no charge against either of them) had not in fact based its policy upon a complete acceptance of the principles of the Covenant. The same observation applied to the dispute between China and Japan in the Far East. If both parties (again he made no criticism of one or the other) had full applied the principles of the Covenant, there would have been no need to deplore the long continued dispute which had so seriously embittered their relations. It would be asked why the League did not enforce the sanctions provided by the Covenant. That was a proper question and would require full and perfect examination at the proper time. The application of sanctions implied a breach of duty and he would express no opinion in the merits of the case. It was clear, however, that one or other of the parties must have been guilty of a breach of its obligations and that, along with other nations, was not acting up fully to the spirit of the League.

There was one great test of sincerity in the will to peace. He was referring to the question of disarmament. Were the nations really willing to disarm? No one doubted that disarmament was possible and the question asked by the common man was whether the governments, and especially the governments with great military and naval forces, actual or potential, were really in earnest. There was no escaping that question. If it were answered in the affirmative, and a Disarmament Treaty could be framed, the whole international atmosphere would change as by magic. The nations would have then made a definite choice for peace and not for war. If the answer, however, were in the negative, there would inevitably be a reversion to pre-war conditions, since a negative answer implied that the nations were not prepared to abandon war."

We come back again to disarmament. The Manchurian question is serious, and there are the debts and reparations questions, but if the modern society that we call modern civilization is to persist we have to have disarmament. We may as well face that fact. That is the great question before the world to-day. I do not see how it can be done except through the League and its work, its commissions, and, generally, through policies of the League.

I should like to refer to two bits of work. In spite of the fact that the late Assembly was not picturesque and was uninteresting to the outside world, in spite of that we did two pieces of good work which show progress. First, Iraq was admitted into membership in the League. That shows progress. I was proud to belong to the British Commonwealth of Nations when Iraq was admitted. Sir John Simon made a very felicitous address. It was a happy incident.

Another thing that was done was to give the minor powers a place among the principal officers. There are five principal officers. There is the Secretary-General; the Deputy Secretary-General and three under Secretaries-General. That is a further advance. It means that the minor powers are getting some right to mould the policy of the Secretariat.

Now, a word about the Manchurian crisis. You will understand I know nothing about that officially because the Assembly I attended had nothing to do with it. The Lytton report had not come down until after we met on the first of October. The original flare-up in Manchuria occurred on the night of the 18th of September, 1931. At once, China protested to the Council of the Secretary-General. The League Council was summoned to consider it. The thing went from bad to worse so that it became necessary for the Council to meet again. This time they appointed a Commission. They thought the best thing to do was to send that Commission out to study the situation and make recommendations. That Commission was composed of five members from the five great powers. There was Earl Lytton of Great Britain, there was a Frenchman, there was a German, there was an Italian and there was an American even although the United States is not a member of the League. They went out to take evidence and finally presented their report early in October. Meantime, there was another flare-up in Shanghai and China again brought the matter to the attention of the League in special assembly.

When the Lytton report was presented, Japan asked for six weeks consideration so that she could send a person qualified to speak at Geneva. So that postponed consideration of the report until the 1st December, when a special Assembly was summoned. The special Assembly consists of one representative from each member instead of three. It is that special assembly that still has the matter *sub judice*.

The Lytton Report seems a very fair way out. It is one of the most notable state papers I have ever read. It recognizes realities. It recognizes that Japan, up to a certain point, is interested in Manchuria. It recognizes China's great difficulty in modernizing herself. It is not easy to modernize a nation of four hundred million people. Naturally, there is a great deal of disorder. Naturally, there is a great deal of economic confusion. Japan, right on the spot, feels the brunt more than any other nation. The Lytton Report says "We cannot go back to the conditions that existed in Manchuria before September 18, 1931."

So far as I can see, it will bring peace to the Far East, if everybody has that will to peace. If anybody or everybody has not, then it will not be so good. It may be, a certain State may retire from the League, I do not know. If it does, it will be a bad blow against the League, but not a knock out. The world cannot get on to-day without the League. You have the best constitution ever written. It may encounter great difficulties. It may be unable to solve them all, but that is nothing against the intrinsic merits of the constitution. As I said, the only thing to compare with the League of Nations is the American Constitution.

The League can only work if the members of the League are prepared to stand behind it and infuse into it the motive power to make it work with the will to peace and peace in our time.

MR. CHALMERS:—Dr. Munro, we thank you for your very clear outline of the League of Nations and the problems facing the League at the present time. I observe that you are something of a realist as well as an idealist. I hope your appeal to keep the machinery of the League at work will not be in vain. We thank you for your address.