

# The First Congress of the League

By ROBERT DELL

*Geneva, December 21, 1920*

THE Assembly of the League of Nations came to an end three days ago with a rather too carefully rehearsed oratorical effort by its president, M. Hymans, and a simple straightforward speech from M. Motta, President of the Swiss Confederation, who took the opportunity to repeat the appeal for international reconciliation and the admission of Germany into the League, which seemed not to be greatly appreciated by the French delegation. I am told that more interest has been taken in the proceedings of the Assembly in America than in most European countries, where, to tell the truth, the public has been rather indifferent. Americans will naturally wish to know what the Assembly has done to prevent war or make it more difficult, for that was the chief purpose for which the League was founded. The answer is unfortunately only too easy: it has done nothing. For one can hardly count the institution of a Court of International Justice whose judgments will not be binding as a solid contribution to the end in view. It differs from the Hague arbitration tribunal only in the fact that it is permanent.

But although the Assembly has done nothing effective to prevent war, it has not been entirely useless. The mere fact that forty-two nations have been represented at an international gathering, not only by diplomats meeting in secret conclave, but by men for the most part not professional diplomats meeting in public, is in itself a step forward. Such a gathering would have been impossible seven years ago. And never before have Europe, Asia, and Latin America been brought into such close contact. Latin America is almost unknown to the great majority of Europeans, who imagine that it consists entirely of countries in a state of chronic revolution and less than half civilized. Some of the Latin-American delegates have shown themselves far more in touch with international affairs than many of the Europeans. Señor Pueyrredon is a man of marked ability and force of character, who at once took a prominent place in the Assembly, which elected him one of its vice-presidents. I gathered from American visitors that Haiti is not regarded with very great respect in the United States. If you have many men in your politics as well-informed, capable, and enlightened as M. Frédéric Doret, I congratulate you. We have not many in Europe. He is colored, of course, but I would rather be governed by him than by most of the statesmen now in power in Europe. A great many of the white delegates to the Assembly were very much his inferiors in every way.

But perhaps the outstanding phenomenon of the Assembly was the triumph of Asia. The Chinese and Japanese delegations were second to none and superior to most in culture, in knowledge, in ability. Mr. Wellington Koo was quite one of the ablest men in the whole Assembly. I often wondered what these highly cultured representatives of an ancient and splendid civilization thought of the crude, primitive, half-civilized Australians and New Zealanders. The Yellow Peril must be something like the Jewish Peril—the danger that a more quick-witted and instructed race will cut the others out. I rejoice at the election of China on the Council of the League, for the world has much to learn from her. Chinese policy in the Assembly was most enlightened, and her influ-

ence will be on the side of peace and international reconciliation. The Persian delegation had also an enlightened policy, and M. Zoka ed Dowleh, in particular, more than once intervened happily in the debates. The Japanese were reticent. They concentrated on the Council, from which they failed to obtain their two principal desires—racial equality and the “open door” in the mandatory territories. But the question of racial equality will have to be faced by the League and by the European races. Viscount Ishii announced the determination of Japan to raise the question next September in the Assembly. The ultimate choice will be between conciliation and war. Asia will not consent to anything less than equality with the rest of the world, especially now that she has two out of the eight members of the Council.

A large part of the time of the Assembly was spent in settling its rules of procedure, perfecting its organization, and defining its relation to the Council. Apart from that the only thing that it achieved which is likely to be valuable was the creation of the so-called “technical organizations”—the standing committees which, between now and next September, are to deal, respectively, with economic and financial questions, with transport and communications, and with health. This, of course, is promise rather than performance. The organizations can do much; they may do little or nothing.

One of the greatest blunders committed was the postponement until the next session of all the proposed amendments to the Covenant, in deference to the wishes of Great Britain and France. France is particularly afraid of any amendments to the Covenant, for that document is an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles. Mr. Balfour used the fact as an argument against considering any amendments. M. Léon Bourgeois went further, and roundly declared that the League could not do anything that would involve an amendment of the treaty. The Covenant itself justifies no such thesis. Article XXVI puts no limit on the power of the League to amend its own charter, but amendments have to be agreed to by all the members of the Council and a majority of the Assembly, so that France can veto any or all. The theses of Mr. Balfour and M. Bourgeois met with immediate protests. It was clear that the majority was against them. Their position in this matter was typical of the consistent policy of Great Britain and France during the session. The Covenant is so framed as to give all the real power in the League to the Council, on which the five Principal Allied and Associated Powers are to be permanently represented. Its framers intended the Assembly to do nothing but talk; it was to be an occasion for the representatives of the inferior countries to let off steam and to give themselves the illusion that they had a real voice in the direction of the League. The aim of British and French policy at Geneva was to keep the Assembly in its place and maintain the domination of the great Powers in the League. Mr. Balfour, in a moment of irritation, let the cat out of the bag when the report on mandates, presented by his cousin, Lord Robert Cecil, was being discussed. In what Lord Robert afterward described as “somewhat harsh language” Mr. Balfour in effect told the Assembly to mind its own business and said that the Council would do as it pleased. Incidentally he objected to the view

"that the mandatory Power should have all the responsibility and all the trouble and none of the profit"—a precious admission of the hypocrisy of the "mandate" system. And he made an unmistakable threat when he spoke of a possible conflict between the Council and the Assembly, by which the future of the League would be "profoundly imperiled." That is to say, unless Great Britain and France can exploit the League for their own purposes, they will smash it.

It was a pity that the Argentine delegate, Sr. Pueyrredon, retired from the Assembly without first putting up a fight, but he was right in holding that the first thing to be done was to settle the constitution of the League. The Covenant was not framed by the members of the League, but by Mr. Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George, and M. Clemenceau. It should have been regarded as provisional. The fact that the agenda of the Assembly included the consideration of amendments to the Covenant suggested that the Council at least admitted the right of the members to be consulted. The Covenant in its present form paralyzes the League. What can be expected of a body that can make no decision, except in one or two specified cases, unless it is unanimous? The requirement of unanimity enabled the British Empire, France, and Japan to override all the rest of the League on one important matter and led to the postponement of every important question. This grotesque provision must go, and so must the predominance of the Council. As the Argentine delegation held, the Council should be an executive entirely elected by the Assembly, and the latter should be the effective organ of the League. That would involve a change in the system of voting. At present the delegation of each state, however small it may be, has one vote and no more in the Assembly. But it is as unjust to give Haiti or Luxemburg the same voice in the Assembly as the United States as it would be to give a village the same representation in Congress as the city of New York. States should have at least one vote, and an additional number proportional to their population, with perhaps a certain maximum—say five or six. That means, of course, a large number of votes for China, for example, but the prospect has no terrors for me.

Further, as the Argentine delegation proposed, the League must cease to regard itself as a club and it should be made impossible to exclude any nation from it except by its own will. Albania was admitted into the League and Georgia excluded from it, simply because that course suited the policy of certain Powers. It was admitted that Georgia and the Baltic states fulfilled all the conditions of admission as defined by the Covenant, but M. Viviani appealed to the cowardice of the delegates by holding up before them the bogey of Article X and warning them that they might have to defend the states in question from attack. Georgia was indeed attacked by General Denikin, and Lithuania by Poland, the attackers in both cases being subsidized by the Government that M. Viviani represented! The real motive of his opposition was revealed by M. Viviani's remark that the Assembly must not prejudice the future of Russia, or, in plain English, of the Russian reactionaries.

France, too, threatened to leave the League if Germany were admitted into it. And Germany was excluded, because the British Government bartered the exclusion in order to get French support for other propositions, particularly for opposition to any sort of international economic arrangement. Had Great Britain supported the admission of Germany, France would never have dared to run the risk of being isolated in Europe, for she would have had no support except from Belgium, Greece, Poland, Rumania, and possibly

Czecho-Slovakia. The Greek, Polish, and Rumanian delegations were the faithful satellites of the French in the Assembly; the Greek delegation, of course, representing M. Venizelos. Belgium by no means always voted with France; the Belgian Government instructed its delegates to vote for giving obligatory jurisdiction to the Court of International Justice, to which France was opposed. In the election of non-permanent members of the Council France ran Rumania against China, and Rumania got seven votes. France was supported by only six delegations in her opposition to the motion asking governments not to increase their armaments for two years; they included Brazil and Chile.

The views of the Argentine delegation about the Covenant were undoubtedly shared by the majority of the Assembly. One of the most interesting phenomena was the development of a consciousness of international solidarity, and the instinctive tendency of the Assembly to regard itself as the sovereign organ of the League. But the British Empire ultimately dominated the Assembly, as in fact it dominates the Council. This was not the necessary consequence of the separate representation of the British Dominions, whose delegations took a very independent line, especially that of South Africa, which Lord Robert Cecil represented with Sir Reginald Blankenberg. Lord Robert was perhaps the most prominent figure in the Assembly; he intervened on every question, but no other delegate had so much initiative and few had as much courage. On the whole he was a progressive force, but he sometimes unexpectedly gave way. Separate representation of India was indefensible and in fact a breach of the Covenant, for India is not a "fully self-governing state, dominion, or colony," nor had the government official, the tame Maharajah, and the very governmental Indian politician who formed the delegation any claim to speak on behalf of the Indian people.

The Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand delegations were among the most backward in the Assembly. They evidently had a sincere desire for peace, but they were destitute of international spirit and ignorant of international affairs. Their point of view was intensely and narrowly nationalist and their ideal seemed to be a self-contained, protectionist British Empire, which would lead inevitably to war, for the rest of the world would sooner or later be obliged to combine against it. They were unpopular in the Assembly and contributed greatly to the general unpopularity of the British Empire. There are rocks ahead if and when there is a change of government in England, for nothing could be more alien from liberal and labor opinion in England than the point of view of the Dominions, always excepting South Africa. The Dominion delegates believed themselves to be very much ahead of the "old world." To me they seemed about a century behind it. Their opposition to measures for the protection of racial minorities was a case in point. Their ideal, they said, was the absorption of racial minorities and their transformation into hundred per cent Canadians or Australians. The protection of racial minorities is, of course, an interference with national sovereignty. But as the Belgian delegate, M. La Fontaine, said in the debate on the Court of International Justice, national sovereignty means the right to make war and that is just what we have to get rid of.

The question of giving obligatory jurisdiction to the Court was an acid test. The British Empire was solid against it—even Lord Robert Cecil was on the wrong side—and was supported by France, Japan, and Greece. All the rest of the Assembly was in favor of it. The matter was



settled in committee, and the majority made a great mistake in not fighting it out in the Assembly. Although unanimity was necessary for action, the moral effect of an overwhelming majority voting for obligatory jurisdiction would have been considerable. On this matter England and France have gone back, for they advocated a tribunal with obligatory jurisdiction against Germany at The Hague in 1907, when M. Bourgeois was one of the French delegates!

The failure of the Assembly to deal with the economic question was also due to the non possumus of the British Empire, supported by France. This was the greatest failure of all. A great part of Europe is slowly starving to death and the whole world is faced with the prospect of famine and final economic disaster, yet the matter has not even been discussed in the Assembly, although it was mentioned in one of the general debates. The Italians did their best to get the matter considered. They wanted international control and rationing of raw materials, or at least the removal of all restrictions on their exportation. The British policy of selling coal at a comparatively low price to the home consumer at the expense of the foreign consumer is inflicting grievous injury on Italy and Switzerland. In Geneva coal costs 300 francs (about \$50 at the present rate of exchange) a ton. Great Britain, however, refused to hear of any sort of international economic arrangement. We shall have to come to universal free trade if we wish to save the world from ruin and to secure permanent peace. Some day the imposition of import duties by any state will be regarded as what it is—a declaration of economic war—and treated accordingly.

On the question of armaments the Dominions were opposed to Great Britain and were keenly desirous that measures should be taken to limit them. But Great Britain, France, and Japan blocked the way. France would not even support a mere pious hope that armaments would not be increased. In this matter the Assembly has done nothing and could not do anything. It passed some excellent recommendations in regard to mandated territories, but the Council will take no notice of them and they will likely remain ineffective.

So the Assembly avoided division only by postponing the difficult problems. But they cannot be postponed indefinitely. Next September will show whether the League can hold together or not, for then will be fought out the struggle for supremacy between the Assembly and the Council. It will in effect be a fight for the deliverance of the League from British domination. Italy seems likely to lead the opposition. No doubt Italy's motive is self-interest, but at any rate it is enlightened self-interest, and that is more than can be said of French and British policy. A change of government in England and France would of course alter the situation. A liberal England and a liberal France might make the League of Nations an instrument of internationalism and peace, not, as the present governments of the two countries are trying to make it, an instrument of domination.

### Contributors to This Issue

JOSEPH GOLLOMB is an American journalist now traveling abroad.

HENRY W. NEVINSON is the well-known English writer and correspondent.

## Coal's Black Record

By GEORGE SOULE

**M**OST people know very little about the coal industry except that it is the perpetual bad boy of the American industrial family. It is always getting us into outlandish trouble of some kind or other. There are shortages which nearly close down the railroads and freeze us out in zero weather. Prices mount at the most inconvenient times to prohibitive figures. There are strikes which cause both expense and wasted wrath; first we condemn the miners for their impudence in demanding a thirty-hour week, and then we discover that the miners are actually asking for longer hours than they had been permitted to work, on the average, throughout the year. We are told that some coal companies made war profits running into the thousands per cent, and yet the miners cannot be paid a subsistence income. We hear of feuds and disposessions and murders in the war of the operators against the union in West Virginia—and such things have been going on for years.

Now, listening to the investigation of the Calder Committee, we discover that high prices have been boosted by four or five unnecessary "brokers" and middlemen between producer and consumer. We discover that the War Department appointed as its purchasing agent a large operator who bought coal from his own mines at more than twice the cost of production. We discover that as a result of a threatened bituminous shortage in some localities the Interstate Commerce Commission authorized the issuance of priority orders for coal shipments, specifying that in carrying out those orders contracts previously signed might be broken. Then we find that subordinate transportation officials forged and padded the priority orders, accepting bribes for doing so, so that coal might be diverted to speculators and contracts favorable to the purchasers might be invalidated. These measures having been taken to deal with the "shortage," we discover that up to November 6, 1920, 46,000,000 tons more coal had been mined in the United States than in the corresponding period of 1919. We read that in Scranton, Pa., the heart of the anthracite district, anthracite is so scarce that in some households there is actual suffering. And at length we get some measure of the former profiteering by seeing coal fall. Inside of a few weeks the price of export coal fell from about \$14.50 at the mine to about \$3.50. Whereupon the operators said that it would be "*unprofitable to continue to mine coal under \$3.00.*" Apparently, then, they had been making a sales profit of some 400 per cent on every ton when the price was fourteen dollars.

After this happy and bewildering experience with the vagaries of coal, we are shocked and astonished to hear a Republican Senator, Mr. Calder, threaten something very like nationalization of the industry. Does not everyone know that government ownership is a blight on enterprise, and that the present system is the ideal one because it "works"? What can the Senate Committee be thinking of when it reports: "Our investigation into the coal situation has convinced us that private interests now in control of the production and distribution of coal, in spite of the efforts of some, are actually unable to prevent a continuance or repetition of the present deplorable situation, and that it is the duty of the Government to take such reasonable and practical steps as it may to remedy the evil?"