

Report of the Canadian Delegates to the Twentieth Ordinary Assembly of the League of Nations

GENEVA, January 4, 1940.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN COUNCIL:

The undersigned delegates, appointed to represent Canada at the Twentieth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations, have the honour to report that the Assembly met at Geneva from the 11th to the 14th December, 1939. September 11 was originally the date set for the opening of the Assembly, but at the commencement of hostilities the Session was postponed indefinitely with the consent of a majority of Member States. It was later agreed that, in place of holding the Assembly, the Fourth Committee of the Nineteenth Assembly (which had adjourned but not closed its Session on September 30, 1938) should meet in Geneva on December 4 in order to examine the budget of the League of Nations for 1940 and ancillary questions. On December 3, however, the Government of Finland requested the Secretary-General forthwith to summon a meeting of the Council and Assembly in order to consider the situation arising from the invasion of Finland by armed forces of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Secretary-General, pursuant to this request and after consultation with the President of the Nineteenth Assembly, convened the Assembly for December 11.

Forty-three States Members of the League of Nations were represented. Five States Members which have given notice of their withdrawal from the League, Albania, Chile, Hungary, Peru and Spain, did not nominate delegations, although Venezuela, which has also given notice of withdrawal, sent a delegation. In addition no delegates were present from Czecho-Slovakia, Panama and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The proceedings of the Assembly were opened by the President of the Council, Count Carton de Wiart of Belgium. He said that the Assembly would have to examine certain questions which had been on its agenda for some time as well as the appeal of the Finnish Government. In view of the difficulties of the time, there was a feeling among delegates that formalities should be reduced to a minimum and that the work should be performed in as short a time as possible.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

Mr. C. J. Hambro, President of the Norwegian Storting, was elected President of the Assembly. In inviting him to occupy the presidential chair, Count Carton de Wiart said that in existing circumstances he did not propose to follow the usual custom by which the President of the Council briefly addressed the Assembly on the state of the world; since the League was born from the suffering of mankind, it had never been through darker hours; we must believe that dawn would come and must meanwhile keep alight the torch, especially by maintaining the technical activities of the Secretariat and the work of the International Labour Office and the Permanent Court of International Justice.

Mr. Hambro, on assuming the chair, said that the Assembly had met to deal with the appeal of a Member State which, threatened by another Member State, was defending its freedom with impressive heroism. Although it was a critical hour for international co-operation, there was evidence that magnanimity among nations was still a force in the world. The Assembly must not disappoint the expectations of a small nation in distress; it must act with caution and foresight so as to be the starting point for new hopes.