

THIRD COMMITTEE

Reduction of Armaments

To this committee fell the most important task of the Assembly, a solution of the conflicting views as to the next step in the campaign for disarmament.

The Polish resolution against wars of aggression; the Dutch resolution calling for restudy of the principles of disarmament, security and arbitration; a French resolution on the same lines but more detailed, put forward by the unfaltering champion of the Protocol, M. Paul Boncour; a Finnish proposal for financial guarantees to the victim of aggression, and a Norwegian proposal for study of a comprehensive plan of judicial settlement of legal disputes and conciliation in other disputes, provided the subject-matter of the Committee's discussion.

The points of view from which the subject was approached were equally varied. The champions of the Protocol, including the majority of European states and particularly the victors or offspring of the Great War, emphasized as the end, peace on the basis of the status quo, and as the means, "security". Disarmament could come only if states could be assured that a substitute for their own armed force could be found in firm guarantees by other powers to come to the aid of the victim of aggression or disturbance of the status quo; and aggression could be determined only by setting up an elaborate machinery of arbitration which would ensure that if war came, the party which rejected this means of settlement would stand branded as the aggressor, whereupon all the guaranteeing powers would automatically be called upon to apply economic or military pressure against the outlaw: thus disarmament through security, and security through arbitration backed by sanctions or guarantees. The German view was that disarmament must precede security; that armaments bred rivalry and fear, and that if the guarantees of the Covenant and of Locarno did not yield France and Belgium sufficient security against a disarmed Germany, no heaping up of further guarantees could give this unattainable perfection of security. The Scandinavians emphasized arbitration, not as a test of aggression and a means of ensuring that if war came all other states would band against the aggressor, but in order to prevent war and remove its occasions. The British stood against any further general guarantees or general commitment to arbitration, and emphasized the necessity of other powers being given an opportunity to offer limited regional guarantees such as they had undertaken on the western borders of Germany.

Out of these conflicting views, patience and goodwill brought a remarkable degree of agreement. The Committee first dealt with several minor issues: the necessity of keeping the development of civil aviation distinct from that of military aviation; measures to facilitate rapid meeting of the Council in time of crisis; and the desirability of further sympathetic study of the Finnish proposal for financial aid to states victims of aggression. On the major issue it recognized in a measure the need of pooled security as a basis of disarmament, urged the early reassembling of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, provided for establishment by the Commission of a special committee on arbitration and security, and set forth as means to the desired end, first, action by the League in promoting special or general agreements on arbitration and security; second, a further exploration of the obligations and consequent procedure of the Covenant as it stood; third, regional agreements for mutual aid; and fourth, the giving to all members of the League an opportunity to state precisely what aid, if any, they could give, over and above the obligations of the Covenant, in the event of a conflict breaking out in a given region.