

SECOND COMMITTEE

Economic Conference

The most important question before the Second Committee was the report of the Economic Conference held at Geneva in the previous May. General agreement was expressed with the recommendations of the Conference, which was a body of experts not in any way binding the governments of the countries from which they came. Particular emphasis was laid upon the recommendations against tariff increases and tariff instability, against import and export restrictions and prohibitions, and in favour of uniformity of customs nomenclature—an important point in the operation of the most favoured nation clause in commercial treaties—as well as on the approval of rationalization and of arbitral awards in commercial cases. In the Assembly discussion M. Loucheur and Herr Stresemann both stated that the work of the Conference was in large measure responsible for the conclusion of the recent Franco-German commercial treaty, the first negotiated in sixty years, and Major Elliott called attention to the fact that Great Britain had one of the lowest tariffs in the world, 98 per cent of her imports entering free. The Committee, and subsequently the Assembly, recommended the resolutions of the Economic Conference to the favourable consideration of all governments.

The increasing importance of economic questions in the League's activities led to proposals for a radical re-organization of the existing machinery for dealing with them. A compromise solution was reached, in the retention of the existing Economic Committee of some fifteen members, meeting quarterly, and the setting up of a Consultative Committee of thirty-five members, meeting once a year, and including representatives of the International Labour Office, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the International Institute of Agriculture.

A Finnish proposal to include investigations into alcoholism in the League's activities, and to adopt the International Bureau against Alcoholism of Lausanne as a League agency, met with some support but more opposition; the view expressed in the previous Assembly as to the doubtful expediency of the League scattering its efforts over subjects not clearly within its province found an echo in this connection. General agreement was, however, expressed that some phases of the question were within the competence of the League, and it was finally agreed to place on the agenda of the Ninth Assembly an amended resolution, calling for the appointment of a committee of experts on alcoholism, to study such aspects as came within the competence of the League and could be the subject of scientific or practical work.

A proposal, arising from the Third General Conference on Communications and Transit, held in Geneva in August, to establish an information centre for collecting and tabulating data on transportation, was approved by the Committee, but postponed on financial grounds.

A phase of transportation affecting the League itself was considered. The necessity of rapid communication in the event of a crisis led to recommendations for setting up a League wireless station at Geneva and for providing aeroplane service for the members of the Council in case of an emergency meeting such as dealt with the Greco-Bulgarian crisis in 1925.

The refugee settlement schemes in Greece and Bulgaria, the success of the League's aid in rehabilitating the finances of Estonia and the possibility of similar assistance to Bulgaria, and the extension of the activities of the Health Section to South America, were other questions before the Committee, illustrating the practical and constructive scope of the League's activities.