

**DEVELOPMENT OF
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IDEA**

**DOCUMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF
THEODORE MARBURG**

Edited by
John H. Latané

IN TWO VOLUMES

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INTRODUCTION

The League of Nations is steadily gaining recognition as an indispensable agency for the transaction of general business affecting the international community. It is as yet an imperfect agency and its future development cannot be foreseen. But the advantages of the League method of handling matters of common interest is so obvious and, within necessary limits, has been so successful, that it is hardly conceivable that the nations of the world will ever be able for any length of time to dispense with some such organization. The present League may prove wholly inadequate and may be disrupted or lapse into desuetude, but the idea, we believe, is destined to prevail and to be realized in some efficient form of international government. The most natural and desirable outcome would be the gradual modification of the existing organization until it develops powers adequate for the purposes for which it was designed.

If the foregoing assumption is correct, the development of the League of Nations idea will be a subject of great interest to future generations and all records relating to it should be preserved and made available. The collection here presented of material relating to the American movement for a League of Peace is of value for three reasons: (1) It shows conclusively that the constitution of the League was not hastily improvised at Paris, as some critics have averred, but that the form of the proposed organization was the subject of serious thought on the part of the leading statesmen of several countries long before any of them gave the movement official endorsement. (2) It shows how groups of intellectual leaders acting on their own initiative and in a private capacity thrashed out most of the preliminary problems and made their conclusions available to the official drafters of the Covenant of the League. The gradual unfolding of the minds of a large group of prominent men in this country and of their correspondents abroad as shown in their letters affords interesting material for a study of the molding of public opinion on the subject of the League. (3) It contains ideas and suggestions not embodied in the present constitution of the League which may be incorporated later,

and as the League is an embryonic body, the discussion of its future development should be of importance.

The idea of a league to preserve peace is an old one and has claimed the attention at intervals of statesmen and publicists from the famous plan of the Duc de Sully, minister of Henry IV of France, to Roosevelt's speech at Christiania in 1910, but it was not until after the outbreak of the World War in 1914 that the idea took hold of the popular imagination. The steady progress of the movement for a League of Peace, which resulted in the incorporation of the Covenant of the League of Nations in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, was due to the efforts of groups of public spirited men in this country and in England, reinforced later by smaller groups in other countries, both belligerent and neutral.

It is primarily the work of the American group that is set forth in these volumes. It is to be hoped that other groups will also preserve and publish their records. From the first the moving spirits in the American group were Theodore Marburg and Hamilton Holt. With untiring zeal and indefatigable industry Marburg organized informal conferences of historians, political scientists, and men of affairs and set them to work on the great problem of international organization. As a result of these conferences there was organized June 17, 1915, the League to Enforce Peace with William Howard Taft as president, and a general propaganda throughout the nation was begun. Marburg's diplomatic experience, acquired as Minister to Belgium under President Taft's administration, made him eminently fitted for the chairmanship of the Committee on Foreign Organization. He already had a wide acquaintance among public men in England and in Europe and a letter of introduction from Ex-President Taft to the foreign ministers of various countries (Vol. I, p. 153) was the key that opened the doors of the chancelleries and enabled Marburg to bring to the attention of foreign governments the work of the American organization. His intimate acquaintance with Lord Bryce enabled him to keep in especially close touch with the English groups, later combined in the League of Nations Union.

The American group was the first to undertake a serious consideration of the problem of the constitution and organization of a League. The discussion began at a dinner given at the Century Club of New York by Hamilton Holt and William B. Howland on January 25, 1915. Fortunately summaries of the discussions at this dinner and at the

subsequent meetings were made at the time and are printed on pages 703-17 of Volume II.

These summaries are highly instructive as showing the gradual development of the conception of the proposed league and they supply a key to much of the correspondence that follows. At the first meeting, January 25, 1915, it was agreed by a majority vote that the functions of the League should be limited to (a) "insisting upon, and guaranteeing, the amicable settlement of international disputes between members of the League," and (b) "guaranteeing the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a member of the League as against outside parties." Other questions discussed, but not acted upon at this meeting, were whether the League should intervene to prevent or stop a war between non-member states, whether it should guarantee the geographical status quo, whether it should recognize the Monroe Doctrine and spheres of influence, whether domestic questions including immigration should be withheld from League activities, and whether a true international court of justice should be established and the League be empowered to enforce its decisions.

At the second conference, January 31, 1915, resolutions (a) and (b), adopted the week before, were reconsidered and the following resolution substituted: "That it shall be the function of the League to guarantee that no dispute to which any member of the League is a party shall be settled by other than amicable means under penalty of the employment against the offending nation of the united forces of the League." Other questions discussed were membership in the League, the sanction of force, and the use of existing agencies for the settlement of international disputes. It was further resolved, "That we regard it as of high importance to the successful functioning of the League that a true International Court of Justice shall be established."

At the third conference, March 30, 1915, Lord Bryce's "Proposals for the Avoidance of War" were laid before the meeting and the views of the English group were compared with the propositions discussed at the previous meeting. Lord Bryce's proposal of a Council of Conciliation—the future Council of the League—was a step in advance of the American group and required careful consideration. The results of this and the previous discussions were embodied in five resolutions:

(1) "The function of the League of Peace shall be to guarantee that no dispute to which a member of the League is a party shall be settled by other than amicable means, the guarantee to be maintained when necessary by the

use against the offending nation of the united force of the nations of the League."

(2) "Disputes not settled by diplomacy to which a member of the League may be a party shall be referred for settlement to existing institutions, such as the International Commission of Inquiry, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, good offices and mediation, or to other institutions to be established for that purpose. The early creation of an International Court of Justice is held to be especially important."

(3) "The League ought to be formed as soon as practicable but not until the nations adhering to its constitution shall represent a sufficient preponderance of power to enable it to maintain the guaranties of the League."

(4) "Initiative for the formation of a League of Peace ought to be taken by the United States immediately without waiting for the end of the war."

(5) "The nations of the League shall provide an assembly to meet periodically to discuss affairs of common concern."

At the fourth conference, April 9, 1915, a group of men of wider practical experience in public affairs was present. The resolutions adopted at the earlier meetings were reconsidered and the Bryce proposal of a council of conciliation was endorsed in the following resolution: "That nations be compelled to submit non-justiciable questions to a Council of Conciliation before going to war, under the same penalty as provided above" (See Resolution No. 1). It was also decided at this conference that the project of a League was sufficiently developed to be placed before the American people and a statement of principles embodying the resolutions already adopted was drafted by a committee and referred to Mr. Taft for revision. The movement was publicly launched at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, June 17, 1915, by the organization of "The League to Enforce Peace," the election of Mr. Taft as president, and the adoption of the following program:

"First: All justiciable questions arising between the signatory powers, not settled by negotiation, shall, subject to the limitations of treaties, be submitted to a judicial tribunal for hearing and judgment, both upon the merits and upon any issue as to its jurisdiction of the question.

"Second: All other questions arising between the signatories and not settled by negotiation, shall be submitted to a council of conciliation for hearing, consideration and recommendation.

"Third: The signatory powers shall jointly use forthwith both their economic and military forces against any one of their number that goes to war, or commits acts of hostility, against another of the signatories before any question arising shall be submitted as provided in the foregoing.

"Fourth: Conferences between the signatory powers shall be held from time to time to formulate and codify rules of international law, which, unless some signatory shall signify its dissent within a stated period, shall thereafter govern in the decisions of the Judicial Tribunal mentioned in Article One."

From the date of the Philadelphia meeting an active propaganda for a League to Enforce Peace was carried on throughout the United States and it met with a very genuine and widespread popular response. The same sort of propaganda was carried on in England, and how closely the views of the English and American sponsors of the movement coincided is revealed in the correspondence. In France and on the Continent generally the organization of the League to Enforce Peace was at first regarded as a stop-the-war movement and the idea was not favorably received. The belligerent governments were too much engrossed with the overwhelming demands of the war to give the subject serious official consideration. Both Balfour and Wilson were deeply interested in the League idea and in the work of the private study groups. (See Balfour to Marburg, February 12, 1917, and Wilson to Marburg, January 25, 1917.) In fact Balfour suggested that a "draft convention" of the proposed league "embodying the best views in different countries" be submitted to the governments for their consideration. Lord Bryce, in a letter to Marburg received May 1, 1918, suggested that "five of your best and five of our best minds" be brought together to work out alternative plans to be placed at the disposal of the governments at the end of the war. Marburg forwarded this suggestion to President Wilson and his reply (May 6, 1918) is interesting both for the expression of his respect for Bryce's judgment and for his objections to the appointment of a body of official experts at that time.

At the outset responsible statesmen, while in some cases encouraging the movement, hesitated to commit their governments to a project so radically at variance with the old methods of diplomacy. It is interesting to note that some of them foresaw the difficulty of securing the co-operation of the United States. (See in particular the letters to Marburg of Premier Borden, August 23, 1916, and of Viscount Grey, September 16, 1916.)

The most important event in the history of the movement was President Wilson's address at the meeting of the League to Enforce Peace at Washington, May 27, 1916. There was great enthusiasm

among the members of the League when it was announced that the President of the United States had accepted the invitation to address them and still greater enthusiasm when he endorsed the general principles of their program, although he avoided the use of the word "enforce" and spoke of "an universal association of nations." President Wilson was the first statesman of the world in office to give official approval to the idea, and from this time he was the leading advocate of a League of Nations. Without the initiative of the head of a state the League idea could not be realized, but the head of a state is also the head of a political party, and President Wilson's advocacy of the League eventually transferred the project from the realm of non-partisan discussion to the arenas of national and international politics.

The letters have been printed in strict chronological sequence. This seemed the only practicable arrangement. The table of contents lists some of the more important correspondents. For others the reader is referred to the index, where he will also find the more important topics listed.

JOHN H. LATANÉ.

FOREWORD

THE documents and correspondence here published, correspondence conducted by me as chairman of the foreign organization committee of the League to Enforce Peace, disclose several distinct aims. Chief among these are: (a) continuous effort to perfect the project from the day of the first meeting (January 25, 1915) of the American group which initiated the movement for a league of nations to the convening of the Paris Conference (1919); (b) acquainting foreign governments with our purposes: letters from William Howard Taft introducing me to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of fifteen countries enabled me to open up direct communication with them in addition to several Foreign Ministers whom I knew personally and was already in touch with; (c) urging upon the Allies the importance of committing themselves to the principle during the war; (d) that commitment having been secured (January 10, 1917), a further effort to get neutral countries to make like commitments; (e) pressing for the setting up of official committees to study the question with a view to presenting at the Peace Conference, when called, thought-out official plans.

The Bryce "Proposals for the Avoidance of War," dated February 24, 1915, reached the American group at its third meeting, March 30, 1915. During the two months which I spent in England in the early part of 1916, Lord Bryce brought me into touch with his associates and with others working on the problem and thereafter the American group and these several British groups cooperated closely throughout the war.

The first intimation I had that we were likely to get what we were asking for, namely the formal acceptance by the Allies of the principle of a league of nations, came to me in a letter from Sir Gilbert Parker dated September 19, 1916, in these words: "I THINK THAT YOUR IDEA OF THE ALLIES DECLARING IN FAVOR OF COMPULSORY INQUIRY, AND A LEAGUE TO ENFORCE IT TO BE SET UP AFTER THE WAR, MAY BE CARRIED OUT, BUT IT HAS NOT BEEN DEFINITELY SETTLED."

To Switzerland belongs the distinction of having been the first of the European governments to declare for the principle. It came to me in a letter dated December 11, 1916, thus antedating by practically a month the Allies' declaration to our Government. The acceptance of the second neutral country, Spain, followed close on the heels of the Allies' note. The letter of her Foreign Minister, which see, is in fact dated only three days later, namely January 13, 1917.

THEODORE MARBURG

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