

**A LEAGUE OF NATIONS,
VOL. IV, NO. 1, FEBRUARY,
1921. THE FIRST ASSEMBLY
OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649082759

A League of nations, Vol. IV, No. 1, February, 1921. The first Assembly of the League of nations
by Various

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Vol. IV, No. 1

DOUBLE NUMBER

February, 1921

The First Assembly of the League of Nations

Published Bimonthly by the
WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION
40 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston

Price, 10 cents per copy; 25 cents per year

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PREFACE

Said Léon Bourgeois in the debate on mandates at the 30th plenary meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations on December 18, 1920:

"Let us not be skeptical and let us not be impatient. Remember that the League of Nations is a new-born child and wants time in order to acquire strength for the tasks of the future. . . . There are many men in the world who are looking upon this Assembly and looking upon us now with a hypercritical view so that not a single point of difference of opinion between any of the Members is missed by those men. As soon as they suspect any little difference of opinion they immediately start to write to the world's press and distribute hundreds of telegrams to the various countries saying that the League of Nations is in danger and that it is in process of dissolution. I say that the League of Nations is not in process of dissolution. On the other hand, these writers, when they are faced with a unanimous vote, make little count of it, and they much prefer to emphasize our tiny, insignificant points of difference. Let the skeptics smile; but let us be sure that the fruit of our deliberations will soon be placed before the public, and then the number of people that have confidence in us will increase."

This publication, quite independently of the distinguished Frenchman's knowledge, aims to do what he anticipated. It gives an adequate account of the problems before the first Assembly of the League of Nations and the substance of the more important debates. Every effort, consistent with clearness, has been made to present the facts as nearly as possible in the actual words of the participants. All resolutions and recommendations of the Assembly—complimentary ones omitted—are given textually, being printed in solid 10-point type, as distinguished from the leaded 10-point type of the regular text and the leaded 9-point employed for quotations.

Aside from the narrative necessary to bind the discussion together or to summarize it, the entire work is taken exclusively

from official sources. There have been used in its preparation 267 Assembly Documents, referred to by the abbreviation A.D.; the Provisional Verbatim Report of the 31 plenary meetings; the 21 numbers of the Procès-Verbaux of the Committees; and the 36 numbers of the Journal of the First Assembly. The permanent Record has not yet reached us, and on that account references are omitted. The material has, however, been carefully assigned to its proper session, to facilitate finding the original passage in the permanent print, should the reader have occasion to do so.

THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

The first Assembly of the League of Nations was held at Geneva November 15 to December 18, 1920. Since May, 1919, the League had been in being under the auspices of an Organization Committee of the Paris Peace Conference; and since January 10, 1920, it had been in legal existence by virtue of the entrance into force of the treaty of Versailles. The Council had met ten times and together with the Secretariat had organized the League so far as possible. In addition, the Council had done a great amount of work within its competence.

The Assembly had before it the task of completing the organization of the League, making itself a reality along parliamentary lines and of handling various questions within its competence and incident to the world situation. The meeting of the Assembly was the first gathering of nations under a permanent agreement made in advance; it was the first direct contact of the majority of the member states with the League which they had joined. The work outlined for the Assembly was, consequently, to depend upon how 41 states—big and little—would work together; and the question thus brought forward was of importance because the bulk of the Assembly's work was the building of the structural framework within which the League would develop in the future. How many rights would states intrust to the League; would big and little states harmonize their interests for the general good?

The answer was satisfactory; the framework, as set up, left each state its right to decide essential questions, but at the same time built for the general interest. Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe met in the common forum and produced, with a minimum of friction, decisions which made the League of Nations an all but universal instrument "to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security" by organic means agreeable to them all.

But let the Assembly speak for itself. Paul Hymans of Belgium presided at the first meeting and then voiced the purposes of the Assembly and of the League:

"Our aim is in the first place to establish frequent and friendly intercourse between independent states and to form ties which will lead to mutual understanding and sympathy.

"By the good offices of the Council and the Assembly, by arbitration and conciliation, and by the establishment of a regular and permanent international jurisdiction, by a series of organizations within which, as it were in laboratories, financial, economic and commercial problems, the conditions of labor and questions of health will be subjected to an impartial and objective investigation, the League of Nations will be able to play a powerful part in preventing dangerous crises, in the settlement of disputes which, if prolonged, run the risk of becoming more bitter and more acute, and in improving the moral and material lot of the peoples by wise co-operation.

The Common Life of Nations

"In a word, our ambition is to create by degrees within ever widening spheres a certain common life of nations, ruled by the principles of justice, swayed by good faith and loyalty, and inspired by an international spirit. By an international spirit I mean the spirit which places general interests above individual interests, the spirit of fraternity which strives to alleviate the sufferings of peoples and the difficulties under which the Governments labor, to co-ordinate their action and to appease the hates and rivalries which sometimes suddenly give rise to those great outbursts of madness which shake the world to its foundations and threaten to ruin the work of centuries.

"Thus it is that we are not working together for the accomplishment of a work of practical utility only, but we are pursuing a lofty ideal to which our hearts and thoughts aspire.

"In spite of criticism—sometimes very severe criticism, which comes from far away and precisely from that quarter from which we hoped and continue to hope for fruitful collaboration—we have the conviction that the League of Nations responds to a need and an appeal which comes from the soul of the peoples