"Requests it, in consultation with the National Committees on Intellectual Co-operation and representative journalists, to study the methods by which the Press might contribute to a better understanding between the peoples by perfecting their knowledge. The conclusions of this study shall be submitted to the fourteenth Assembly;

"National Committees:

"(10) Recognises once again the important part played by the National Committees on Intellectual Co-operation and the necessity of encouraging those already in existence and of affording them additional means of carrying out the more and more numerous tasks of increasing importance which they have to perform;

"Preservation of Historical Monuments:

"(11) The Assembly,

"Approving the resolution adopted by the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation and acceding to the latter's request that it should communicate to the Members of the League the recommendations drawn up by the Athens Conference concerning the preservation of historical monuments and works of art:

"Entrusts to the Intellectual Co-operation Organisation the task of transmitting the said recommendations to the Governments on its behalf;

"Administrative Questions:

"(12) Having noted the results of the administration of the Institute of Intellectual Co-operation as shown by the report of the Governing Body of that Institute:

"Expresses its satisfaction with the excellent methods employed which have made it possible to develop the activities of this organisation and, at the same time, to consolidate its financial position;

"International Educational Cinematographic Institute:

"(13) Having considered the report of the Governing Body of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute:

"Expresses its satisfaction with the systematic development of that Institute's work and, in particular, with the results of the numerous enquiries already completed or at present in progress;

"Has pleasure in recognising once again the value of the International Review published by the Institute and the friendly reception given to it both in educational circles and by the technical experts of the film industry;

"Trusts that the Institute, by extending its activity in those spheres which already engage the attention of the League of Nations, may be able to promote the use of the powerful means of dissemination represented by the cinema in favour of the League's work."

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EIGHTH MEETING

Held on Friday, October 7th, 1932, at 10.15 a.m.

Chairman: M. Lange (Norway).


The Chairman, opening the discussion, drew attention to the documentation submitted to the Committee, which he thought of great interest. He regretted that the principal document (A.31.1932) had been printed in small type, which made it very difficult to read and tiring for the eyes. The economy effected thereby must have been almost negligible.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, said that the Press was the great instrument of publicity. Without that means of appealing to the public opinion of the world, the League of Nations would be, he would not say powerless, but far less useful and effective than it was at present. The co-operation of the Press, therefore, was a vital matter to the success of the League, and all his colleagues would agree that that co-operation had been given with no stinting hand during the history of the League.

It was also true that false news or news likely to exacerbate international relations very much hindered and impeded the work of the League. The object therefore must be, positively,

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1 See (a) the Resolutions of the Conference of Government Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press (Copenhagen, 1932); (b) Minutes of the third meeting of the sixty-eighth session of the Council of the League; (c) document A.31.1932.
to get the assistance of the Press in organising peace and, negatively, to prevent the exacerbation of international relations.

The matter had been referred to the Secretariat by the Assembly of the previous year with instructions to try to obtain, among other things, information as to how to prevent the spread of false news which might threaten to disturb peace or good understanding between nations, and the Committee now had before it two documents of very great importance. A Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press had been held at Copenhagen, and that Conference had arrived at certain important resolutions. In addition, the various Press Associations had been circularised by the Secretariat, and a number of replies received, particularly from the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations and the International Federation of Journalists, as well as from Press Associations in sixteen different countries.

From these replies certain broad results emerged. In the first place, there was very general agreement that the dissemination of false news—particularly false news of a kind likely to embroil the nations—did in effect do a very great deal of harm and constituted a real danger to peace.

The second thing which these documents revealed was the practically universal dislike on the part of all responsible journalists to any increase in Government control of the Press. That point was very strongly urged in a number of the replies received, and nowhere more strongly than by the International Federation of Journalists, which said: "Journalists reject the intervention of any disciplinary authority whatsoever, apart from that set up by themselves for dealing with such cases." Such was the line taken by pressmen all over the world, and he personally agreed with it. The objection was not only to Government control, but to all outside control of the Press. The documents sent in by the journalists accredited to the League emphasised over and over again the point that the way to get a good sound Press actuated by the highest motives was, first and foremost, to give the greatest possible freedom to the journalists concerned. All those connected with the Press were agreed on that point. The best remedy for all false and tendentious news was the fullest and freest supply of news. That was put very forcibly in one of the resolutions of the Conference at Copenhagen which said: "One of the most effective means of combating inaccurate information is the rapid spread of accurate and abundant information through the agency of the Press bureaux"—Lord Cecil might add, not only through the agency of the Press bureaux, but in every possible way.

Another point, which was made very strongly, was worth the consideration of the Committee, and indeed of public opinion. News, it was pointed out, depended on the cost of the newspapers concerned. The public demanded news for a price which was very far from covering the expense of obtaining that news; and the proprietors of the Press and those connected with it had to consider how that gap between the cost price and the selling-price was to be bridged. It was bridged in several ways. In the first place, by the sale of advertisements. Many advertisements were of course unobjectionable; but, according to the journalists attached to the League, there was a type of advertiser who tried to control the policy and the news published in the paper, and that involved deflection from the true representation of the facts. Secondly, there were subsidies, whether from some organisations or from Governments. That also involved some control and some deflection from the truth of news published in the papers. Finally, there was the phenomenon, extremely common and well known in the United Kingdom as elsewhere, of newspapers being bought up by great capitalists with the object, not only of producing a vehicle of news and information of a strictly impartial and objective character, but also of forwarding their private or political interests through the medium of the paper. That again involved diversion from, or distortion of, the truth.

Those were the facts laid before the Committee in very clear—almost brilliant—language, particularly by the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations; and with this statement of the facts would be found very interesting suggestions as to how the difficulty of bridging the gap between the cost of production and the sale price of the paper could be met.

In the first place, these suggestions referred to the possibility of Governments making news more readily available and cheaper and easier to use. In that connection, Lord Cecil had a suggestion to make. Would it not be possible to use the League wireless station, at any rate during Council meetings or Assemblies, for the dissemination by journalists of the news they desired to communicate cheaply and effectively? If the Committee agreed, he would suggest that it should recommend the Secretariat to look into the matter and, while having regard to legitimate interests which might be in conflict, see what could be done in that direction by way of example, so to speak, to Governments and organisations throughout the world.

A great deal was said in the documents about the evils of indirect payment of the Press—by advertisement, by subsidies—and by other forms of financial control. He himself was satisfied that the claim made by the journalists was justified—namely, that, if they were left full freedom, they would be anxious for every reason to supply good, impartial and, what
he might call, well-meaning news, and not try to embitter controversies throughout the world. They would be actuated by what he believed were the first words printed by that father of printing, Gutenberg—" Fiat lux ''. 

One Press association made the suggestion that, " in the interests of world peace, no armaments industry and no business connected therewith should be permitted to be the owner of a newspaper or of a telegraphic agency, or to subsidise directly or indirectly newspapers or telegraphic agencies ". How far that could be carried out was not a matter with which the Committee could deal there and then; but it was a striking indication of how bitterly journalists felt the charge of disseminating false news, and how strongly they believed that the charge should be made, not against them, but against the interests which, in their view, too often controlled the supply of news.

Such cases were no doubt relatively rare. It was exceptional to find, on the part of proprietors, advertisers, or those who gave subsidies to the Press, any desire to poison the wells of truth.

It had been suggested that it might be desirable to have an International Association of Newspaper Directors with a view to greater co-operation between the newspapers of the world.

In general, Lord Cecil did not think there was any special action the Committee could take. The question was, in the main, a matter for the national Governments. There was, however, one thing the Committee could do to help. It was very strongly recommended that all meetings of the League and of its committees should be open to the Press. No doubt some of them would be regarded as of insufficient public interest to warrant a report of their proceedings, but that, it was urged, was a matter for the journalists to judge. Full opportunity, it was said, ought to be given to them for gathering news of all kinds in every case where an official body or even an unofficial body of the League was at work.

It was also urged very strongly that there should be a more complete distribution of documents; and it was pointed out, among other things, that, under the regulations of the League, it was left to the Chairmen of committees to decide whether documents should be communicated to the Press before being communicated to the Council or the Assembly. He thought this matter might be brought to the attention of Chairmen, who might be asked to consider more carefully how often they could give this permission for documents to be distributed at an earlier stage than was sometimes the case at present.

If the League really wished to secure the full co-operation of the Press, it must give out more, and not less, information. In this connection, the journalists made a very strong statement as to the importance of the Information Section of the Secretariat and the admirable work it was doing. The following statement was made by the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations (letter of September 30th, 1932, from their President to the Chairman of the Fourth Committee of the Assembly): 

"The League's Information Section is still easily the best such service that we know of anywhere and in many respects its work is a model for others that are less handicapped than it. We would add that the highest appreciation of its work comes from those of our members who have the widest experience in different countries with governmental and other Press bureaux."

The establishment of the Court of Honour for Journalists was a matter of great interest. He was sure he was expressing the views of every member of the Committee in tendering their best wishes for its prosperity and success.

To sum up, if it were desired to secure the co-operation of the Press, both positively in support of measures of peace and negatively in the suppression of false and pernicious news, the great thing to do was to foster the healthy growth of journalism. The best means of doing that was to improve more and cheaper news, to enable journalists to work with greater freedom and to fulfil their duties with less outside control and, perhaps, less commercialism. Journalism was an art or a craft of the highest skill; and in this case, as in so many others, the higher the aim, the greater the truth. That was the general conclusion at which Lord Cecil had arrived after a study of the documents before the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN thanked Lord Cecil for having provided so useful a basis of discussion.

The delegates would shortly receive a copy of the correspondence exchanged between the President of the Association of Journalists accredited to the League and the Secretary-General, concerning the discontinuance—as a result of retrenchment—of the posting-up of the Minutes of Committees, in the journalists' hall. This matter had been discussed by the Fourth Committee, which had referred it to the Supervisory Commission. He had just learned that the Supervisory Commission had appointed a special Committee to study the question, in the hope that some workable arrangement would be reached in time for the next Assembly, because there was no possibility of re-establishing the former procedure during the present Assembly. This matter, of course, could not form the subject of any decision or even discussion in the Sixth Committee, but he felt that the delegates of the Sixth Committee should be informed of the course of events.
The Committee now had to consider the Polish delegation's draft resolution.

M. SzuMlakowski (Poland) said that the Polish Government attached great importance to the collaboration of the Press. It had proved its interest by submitting to the Disarmament Conference a memorandum on moral disarmament in which the present question was accorded considerable prominence. As the delegates were aware, the Disarmament Conference had set up a Committee on Moral Disarmament which had already made satisfactory progress in its work. With regard to the Press, the Polish delegation had submitted to this Committee a draft resolution urging the convening of an international Press conference. The Committee had adopted this resolution as a basis of its discussions.

The Secretary-General's report (document A.31.1932) contained several interesting suggestions from the various Press associations. They threw a new light on this complex problem and proved that it would have to be deeply studied before the anxieties expressed in the League and in the Disarmament Conference could be dispelled.

It could not be denied that a problem of false news existed and that international relations were even disturbed by the propagation of false and biased news. Endeavours must therefore be made to discover remedies for this evil, of which journalists were generally, not the authors, but the victims. This problem arose within the vast framework of the international collaboration of the Press. The remedy could not be supplied by Governments. That was the natural task of journalists themselves, who were best fitted to find the most adequate solution. In fact, it was absolutely necessary that the qualified Press organisations should be left to deal with the problem of false news themselves. The liberty of the Press must in no way be hampered. He was sure that no delegate, by inopportune action, would desire to complicate further the already complex task of journalists. Governments could assist the Press associations by convening an international Press conference, which, he was sure, would give good results.

This was the method indicated by the Committee on Moral Disarmament. Surely it would not be desirable for the Assembly to deal with this question in its turn without taking account of the results achieved by the Disarmament Conference, particularly as the same States were represented in the Assembly as were present at the Conference. The Polish delegation therefore proposed that the discussion, which would doubtless be of great utility from the standpoint of the future work of the Disarmament Conference, should be closed by the adoption of a resolution, the text of which had already been submitted to the delegations and read as follows:

"Whereas the Assembly has considered the Secretary-General's report on the question of false news and appreciates its highly informative character;

"Whereas the problem of false news, and, in general, that of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, form part of the more general problem of moral disarmament;

"Whereas the Assembly is of opinion that the solution of the problem of moral disarmament so far as concerns the Press can only be effectively sought by journalists themselves, and that it consequently seems desirable that an international Press conference should be convened at an early date;

"Whereas the problem of moral disarmament is being exhaustively investigated by the Committee on Moral Disarmament of the Disarmament Conference;

"The Assembly decides to request the Council of the League of Nations to convey the present resolution, together with the Secretary-General's report and the Minutes of the Sixth Committee, to the Disarmament Conference, and to call the latter's attention to the desirability of an international Press conference."

Finally, he had one suggestion to make. It might be desirable to request the Secretariat of the League to communicate to the international Press organisations all the documents on this question submitted to the present Assembly. The latter, by their replies to the Information Section's enquiry, had shown that they attached great importance to the problem and were prepared to co-operate with the League in solving it. It would therefore only be right to keep them informed of the progress of the work.

M. Filotti (Roumania) said that the Roumanian delegation had been deeply interested in the results of the Copenhagen Conference of Press bureaux and journalists. The Danish Government was to be congratulated on the initiative it had taken in supplying the delegates of the Assembly with the texts of the resolutions adopted. From the results, it was obvious that a considerable measure of agreement had been reached regarding a whole series of highly commendable principles. As regards practical steps, however, there was a wide divergence of opinion. Two fundamental ideas emerged from the discussion: one was that the surest means of combating false news was to spread the truth. Some proposed direct means to counteract the spreading of false news, while others proposed indirect means to prevent its circulation; a third group held that any action at present would be premature. The second fundamental idea was that there should be no restriction of the liberty of the Press. It was obvious that all these proposals would have to be co-ordinated.
One of the most practical means for assisting the Press at the present time were administrative measures for the reduction of rates. This question should be taken into serious consideration by the various Governments, it being always remembered that the best way to deal with false news was to intensify the dissemination of accurate news. There could be no doubt that the dearth of telephonic and telegraphic communications and the restrictions placed on the use by newspapers of wireless news hampered the spread of adequate information. As regarded Geneva, the complications increased in proportion to the distance which separated that city from the journalist’s country. Distant countries, therefore, often experienced difficulty in obtaining sufficient news concerning the League and its activities. Consequently, the space accorded to foreign news was reduced in favour of local news, which led to the over-concentration of public opinion on domestic matters. Any expense incurred by Governments in granting greater facilities would, he thought, be fully compensated by the advantages gained both by themselves and by the League.

Many other interesting suggestions had been put forward, such as the desirability of creating an international federation of newspaper publishers, etc. It was clear that a very wide field of possibilities had still to be explored. He had only just now read the Polish delegation’s proposal. While agreeing that the question of moral disarmament was of the highest importance, he was not sure that the present question was not of wider scope than moral disarmament itself. He would be prepared to accept the Polish resolution with an amendment to the effect that the documents of the present Assembly should be communicated to the Committee on Moral Disarmament, but at the same time the Secretary-General should be requested to continue the enquiry and submit a report to the next Assembly. He did not think that the present financial situation would permit of the convening of another conference. Of course, if any Government or Governments were prepared—like the Danish Government in the past—to organise such a conference, the decision would undoubtedly be welcomed by all concerned.

Mme. Oyarzabal de Palencia (Spain) said it was clear that the Spanish Government took great interest in this question, since the resolution on the subject submitted in the previous year had been proposed by the Spanish delegation. That delegation had put forward its proposal as a tribute to the Press, which had played so important a part in guiding Spain through a very critical period of her development without complications or any really serious disturbances.

Speaking as a journalist, she could say that the report before the Committee admirably explained all the difficulties which were experienced by this very important profession. Above all, it emphasised the unanimous desire of journalists to be accorded full liberty of action. Possibly, in this connection the Spanish resolution had been misunderstood: the only control on the liberty of the Press which it proposed was a moral control. Any other form of control would not merely be disliked by journalists, but would counteract the beneficial action they could otherwise take. It was an extraordinary fact that at the present time, when narrow industrial interests were so well and ably defended on the least provocation, tremendous problems involving the happiness of millions of men and women were left absolutely at the mercy of petty egoisms and covert propaganda. Professional journalists were the first to suffer by it. The swarm of amateur journalists was one of the characteristic weaknesses of our time. It seemed that at the present time everybody considered himself or herself to be a journalist. Some of these persons were undoubtedly actuated by base considerations which hampered the work of true journalists. True journalists—she could say from experience—invariably sought to state the truth and suffered profoundly when they saw their reports distorted.

Though there were no greater enthusiasts for truth than the journalists themselves, the League must help by reacting against inaccurate news. Journalists knew how deep an impression inaccurate news could produce on the masses. It was enormously important that news should be accurate: better only a little news, better even unpalatable news, than news which was untrue.

The facilities indicated on page 6 of the report before the Committee would be of great assistance to the Press, particularly in the case of papers which did not possess great financial resources. It was essential that more documents and information should be made available and all meetings should be open to journalists, as Lord Cecil had suggested; but some more definite action was necessary. The Polish delegation’s proposal was unacceptable, for financial reasons, at a time when the League had had to curtail so many of its activities on grounds of economy. Would it not be possible to obtain the desired result by the same method as that which had been the occasion of the Copenhagen Conference? She was prepared to recommend to the Spanish Government that it should consider favourably the possibility of convening such a conference. She had of course no mandate from her Government to make this suggestion and was merely stating her personal willingness to raise the point. She was sure, however, that the Spanish Government would consider the possibility with sympathy.

It was the duty of everyone to aid in the dissemination of truth. Even silence bred fear, and semi-silence misunderstanding. Truth dispelled fears and misapprehensions and helped to promote a better understanding which in turn led to good fellowship.
M. Lucien Hubert (France) said that he would leave his colleague, M. de Tesson, who directed the foreign political news of one of the most important regional dailies of France, to deal with the technical aspects of the question.

In the first place, he paid a tribute to all the work which had been accomplished, to the excellent report and to the manner in which Lord Cecil had explained and commented on the situation. He agreed with Lord Cecil that all efforts must be based on the entire liberty of the Press. Lord Cecil had shown how such liberty was sometimes menaced by publicity contracts, Government subsidies, etc. Of course, it was for the newspapers to protect themselves against such menaces, but the League could help them by doing its best to counteract false and dangerous news. The antidote for false news was true news. He had no need to insist on that point, which had been sufficiently emphasised by previous speakers. False news had never, perhaps, been a greater danger to the world than it was to-day; therefore the League must fight it, the Press must aid the League, and the League must aid the Press.

D’Annunzio once dedicated a book to Anatole France in the following terms: “To him whom both error and truth seek equally to beguile”. The same might be said of journalists, except that journalists sought for truth, while error sought for them—though it should be remembered that there were some truths which it was not always a good thing to make public. He believed, however, in the force of truth. There was an African proverb which said that, however early in the morning a lie set out, it would be overtaken by truth before the evening. The League should aid journalists in their task and should rely on the journalists themselves to do the rest.

Sir Donald Cameron (Australia) said that there was no need for him to emphasise the supreme importance to peace of the accuracy and understanding nature of all information of an international character published by the Press. The problem of avoiding the publication of news that might either be false or, even if true, harmful if released at a time of national crisis was, he was sure, receiving the sympathetic consideration of newspaper proprietors and journalists’ associations throughout Australia. Reports received by the Australian Government from Australian journalists’ associations showed that the very heavy responsibility of the Press in this matter was fully appreciated. That the danger existed was self-evident. He thought the most effective action would be to bring journalists and newspaper proprietors throughout the world to realise their immense responsibility. It was difficult to say how this result could best be achieved. He felt sure, however, that the subject should not be approached without a close historical investigation of the effect of Press utterances upon national feelings in past crises and the apparent influence of such utterances on the development of those crises. This was a most necessary undertaking if the League was ever, with the assistance of the Press, to ensure that news should not be published if it were false or, if true, harmful.

In considering this question, the fundamental and, in his opinion, vital principle of the freedom of the Press must always be borne in mind. Any restrictions placed on the Press would eventually prove more harmful than beneficial. The whole question should be approached with very great care. Personally, he did not think that, when the League had come to consider the question of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, there had been any suggestion of imposing control on the Press. In such matters, however, co-operation, unless carefully directed into the right channels, not infrequently resulted in control which was tantamount to restriction.

It was perhaps unnecessary to emphasise the inestimable advantage, of a free Press. Those advantages were, however, set off by the disadvantage that some journalists or newspaper proprietors endeavoured to seek publicity or profit by the publication of exaggerated or untrue statements, even when such statements might dangerously inflame public opinion. The most effective manner in which such danger could be avoided was the provision of an ample supply of true and accurate information. The end to be attained was a candid and truthful presentation of news of international concern, and it could never be attained without the goodwill of newspaper proprietors and journalists themselves. Provided the problem were approached in the right spirit, a great step forward could, with the co-operation of the Press, be achieved in the maintenance of world peace.

M. Valdés-Mendeville (Chile) said that it was obvious that the Chilian Government fully approved the efforts being made to secure the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, since, in 1923, the Chilian delegation had been the first to raise the whole question. At that time the proposal had perhaps seemed to be Utopian. Time had been necessary to allow the question to mature.

The first result of the proposal had been the Press Conference of 1927. The question had since then entered into a second stage. The third stage would begin with M. de Tesson’s proposals, which the Committee would discuss later. The importance of the first stage should not, however, be minimised. Many of the recommendations of the 1927 Conference had been carried out, while others were in process of execution—for instance, the Madrid Conference for the Revision of the International Telegraph Convention including the proposal to institute urgent Press telegrams and a deferred Press telegram service.
He fully agreed with Lord Cecil’s remarks and believed that in the work of co-ordination the full liberty of the Press must be guaranteed. He hoped that the Press would be able to take spontaneous decisions which would help the matter forward. He would quote the instance of one very small country whose Press had proposed that the International Press Organisations should give a definite undertaking to help. That country, Honduras, had, in another sphere, given an excellent example of conciliation by submitting a very important frontier question with her neighbour Guatemala to arbitration.

He reserved the right to study later the Polish delegation’s very interesting proposal, in the light of its various aspects and possible consequences.

M. ANDRITCH (Yugoslavia) said that he had, as his country’s representative on the Committee on Moral Disarmament and its Press Sub-Committee, on several occasions expressed his Government’s opinion on the question now under discussion. He need, therefore, merely state that he fully shared the views set out in the Polish delegation’s draft resolution. Knowing only too well the dire effects of false news on public opinion, the Yugoslav delegation felt that States should do everything in their power to suppress and combat such news. The campaign, however, could only be carried on with the help of journalists themselves. The only effective action against the newspapers was that undertaken by the Press itself. The Yugoslav delegation shared Lord Cecil’s view that all the League’s work should be open and accessible as far as possible to Press representatives. Such a policy would be beneficial to all countries and the League itself.

M. DE MARSANICH (Italy) pointed out that the dissemination of false news was not necessarily, as the Empire Press Union had observed, a matter for international action. The remedy might lie in the better education of the public in international affairs. It was necessary to establish much closer contact between the Press and Governmental Press Bureaux by means of more frequent conferences. Stress should be laid on the personal responsibility of journalists. Only trustworthy persons of highest repute should be allowed to engage in the profession. There ought, in every country, to be official registers of journalists such as existed in the case of the legal, medical and other professions. A necessary balance must be struck between the freedom of the Press on the one hand and its responsibility on the other. Liberty had no meaning unless it was counterbalanced by responsibility.

He entirely agreed that the Minutes of the present discussion should be communicated to the Disarmament Conference.

M. DE TESSAN (France) had read most carefully the excellent report submitted by Mr. Clarence Streit on behalf of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, and had listened no less carefully to the observations submitted on the subject by Lord Cecil and other speakers. All through the discussion, however, in which so much had been said about “false information” and its pernicious effects on the various sections of world opinion, no one, so far as he was aware, had explained exactly what was meant by “false information”. The supplying of information was an extremely delicate task, since the elements of that information were often fluid and ephemeral and essentially non-stable in character. At what precise point could it be said that news was absolutely correct? News that was true in the morning might be false in the evening, or vice versa. A rumour, for instance, that was at first indignantly denounced, might become an article of faith. A journalist working under difficult conditions in the midst of political and diplomatic offensives and counter-offensives found it very difficult to discriminate. He did his best.

M. de Tessen had never known any professional journalist worthy of the name who had deliberately invented a piece of news or published information such as to lead to catastrophic results. When a journalist made a mistake, it was generally because he had been misled himself or because influences brought into play later had distorted the whole affair. M. de Tessen did not deny that there were tendentious campaigns, that pressure was brought to bear on public opinion through the intermediary of the Press, or that there were ways of giving this or that piece of news exaggerated importance by means of the head-lines and typographical lay-out of the paper. There thus existed the possibility of doing a great deal of harm, of arousing passions, of irritating people’s minds instead of rounding off the angles and working for mutual comprehension, as the spirit of the League demanded. To assert the contrary would be to refuse the Press the influence it enjoyed in varying degrees in different countries. But here again it was not a question of false information unscrupulously manufactured in the interests of some particular cause, but rather of misleading propaganda injurious to good understanding between the peoples.

How, then, could journalists and correspondents be enabled—so far as that was humanly possible—to avoid the mistakes and to cope with the drawbacks of incomplete information or news that might tend to unsettle people? That was a point which M. de Tessen would like briefly to consider. In his view, the possibilities of improvement were of two kinds—mechanical and moral. Journalists must be given assistance in the exercise of their profession, by facilitating all electrical means of transmitting news, particularly by reducing the telephone, telegraph, cable and wireless rates for long distances. They must be enabled to travel about easily and more cheaply in the pursuit of their enquiries. They should be given access, without irritating formalities, to all means of land and air transport to enable them to carry out their task with the necessary rapidity.
Mr. Clarence Streit's report contained some excellent suggestions on this subject. He suggested—with a view to assisting the distribution of newspapers and giving the Press access to a larger public, especially in countries suffering from the economic crisis—the reduction of Customs duties on newsprint, paper, ink, and machinery.

He would add that, if such privileges were accorded to the Press, it was not only the newspaper owners or companies that must benefit by them. It was only right that the position of the journalists within the organisation itself should be improved and consolidated. It was for this that the trade unions were fighting. They demanded a better status, adequate pensions, and more definite guarantees. Here at Geneva the word "security" was being much discussed. M. de Tessan felt sure he could say without offending anyone, certainly not any technical member of the Press, that journalists were in need of security. In many places, they were not paid as they should be; they could not look forward to a comfortable old age; they did not possess a status such as to protect them adequately or enhance their professional prestige. In order to have good journalists, in order to build up a sound journalistic profession and raise the standard of the recruits, the necessary financial sacrifices must be made. Journalists were anxious that their profession should be in every sense of the word a liberal profession, with the material and intellectual independence which that implied.

Lord Cecil had just put before the Committee the ideal of a Press entirely free from pressure. M. de Tessan agreed with him most heartily. But it was rare, in the present day, to find newspapers edited, controlled or owned by pure journalists. Coalitions of interests often weighed on newspapers, or magnates acquired control, preoccupied with their own particular interests rather than those of the general public. It might even happen that in whole regions the Press was in the hands of a trust or was simply a cog in a higher organisation. With the freedom of the Press thus threatened, it was for the people in every country who still preserved their feeling of independence to react and break down those various coalitions which stifled the spirit of criticism and smothered free discussion. To a Frenchman the freedom of the Press was an inalienable democratic principle. They rejected the idea of censorship in any form. One of the great French polemical writers said: "You cannot kill ideas with a gun." M. de Tessan would add: "Neither can you eliminate them with a pair of scissors". The clash of ideas, it had been said, produced the spark of vision. These general clashes of ideas must be allowed to occur, and nothing must prevent them.

Further, Governments should supply journalists with entirely objective documentary material and should not seek to influence them, according to their immediate views, by giving them incomplete information. There would be less false news in the world if the Press bureaux were more careful to supply only impartial information, and if persons not holding any actual office, but responsible, in point of fact, for the propaganda of this or that State, refrained from giving journalists suggestions in keeping with their own particular wishes. It would be seen how difficult it was for professional journalists to keep a clear head in their work and to insist upon their right of independent judgment.

M. de Tessan would now consider another aspect of the problem. To encourage the dissemination of accurate news was excellent. To give the Press the material means to inform the world without delay was also an excellent idea. But how was it possible to cope with one weapon which was more terrible than all the rest—namely, silence? There were, in truth, regular conspiracies of silence. Useful news was systematically eliminated. Certain problems were jealously kept beyond the reach of discussion. No matter whence the mot d'ordre emanated, silence was reprehensible. To know the truth and not to spread it was worse than to manufacture tendentious news or carelessly to spread abroad a piece of false information. In that last case there was always the possibility of a denial, to act as an antidote for the effects of the poison of noxious information. But what weapon could be used when news which might enlighten public opinion was not allowed to penetrate, news which would permit of contrary views being heard, news which would result in a more rational outlook? Silence constituted the most redoubtable, the most deadly tactical means at the disposal of anyone fighting to prevent rapprochement between the peoples.

Whatever the difficulties of the task, the Press must be allowed to co-operate in the work of moral disarmament and the organisation of peace. A number of practical means had been suggested with a view to informing the public more fully, strengthening the prestige of journalists and promoting the independence of the Press. But the education of the newspaper-reading masses did not depend on the Press alone. Their education might be supplemented by means of the instruments of intellectual co-operation at the disposal of the League. What was being done in the matter of the education of the people—wireless, the cinema—gave ground for hope that the masses would gradually become more enlightened and better prepared to defend their liberties. More than ever, for which the essential requirement was peace. In this situation, as M. de Tessan had already explained, was closely linked up with the action of the Press. The more intelligent readers there were in the world, the more important the rôle newspapers would be called upon to play. The more independent newspapers were, the more effective would that rôle be. Mankind would have everything to gain by this double progression, and there would be cause for real satisfaction when the readers of the important daily papers were in a position to exercise intellectual censorship—the only kind of censorship that really counted—to interpret news accurately, to understand all that the Press told them and even, if necessary, all that it did not tell them. 

The continuation of the discussion was adjourned to the next meeting.
25. Slavery : Adjournment of the Appointment of the Advisory Committee of Experts : Communication by the Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN said he had received a letter from the Fourth Committee to the effect that the Committee had decided, by 18 votes to 8 and 9 abstentions, to adhere to Article 16 a of the Financial Regulations and adjourn the appointment of the Committee of Experts until next year. He proposed to ask Sir Loudon, Lord Cecil and M. Lucien Hubert to examine the situation.

NINTH MEETING

Held on Saturday, October 8th, 1932, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman : M. Lange (Norway).


M. Loudon (Netherlands), Rapporteur of the Sub-Committee, stated that he had been asked to attend the meeting at which the Fourth Committee discussed whether the request for a supplementary credit involved by the Sixth Committee's resolution on slavery could be considered. The Chairman of the Fourth Committee had given him an opportunity to make a pressing appeal to that Committee to afford the support necessary for the execution of the plan drawn up by the Sixth Committee. In spite of the Sixth Committee's unanimity, the results of the preliminary vote in the Fourth Committee had been eighteen against to eight in favour, with nine abstentions. In these circumstances, the Rapporteur could only withdraw.

As a result of this meeting of the Fourth Committee, the Sixth Committee had asked a Sub-Committee consisting of Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom), M. Lucien Hubert (France) and the Rapporteur to see what could nevertheless be done, within the limits of the regulations, to carry out the Sixth Committee's clearly expressed desire. The members of the Sub-Committee had agreed to submit the following new resolution to the Committee :

"The Assembly,

"Notes the report of the Committee of Experts on Slavery which was transmitted to it by the Council's resolution of September 23rd, 1932 ;

"Expresses its appreciation of the excellent work done by the Committee of Experts;

"Draws the attention of the Governments of the Members of the League and of the States parties to the 1926 Convention to the opinions and suggestions contained in the report of the Committee of Experts, and hopes that the organs of the League will be kept informed of the measures which the Governments continue to take for the total abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in its different forms ;

"Decides that an Advisory Committee of Experts shall be constituted whose composition, competence and functions are described in the annex to the present resolution ;

"Requests the Secretary-General to include in his draft budget for 1934 the necessary credit for this Committee ;

"Requests the Council to take, in the interval, all measures not requiring a budgetary credit and which will conduce to the carrying out of the proposals which have been made."

Mme. Oyarzabal de Palencia (Spain) was very glad to see that, owing to the ingeniousness of the members of the Sub-Committee, the Sixth Committee's decisions would not be ineffectual.

M. Melot (Belgium) supported the Rapporteur's proposal. He observed that the Fourth Committee's difficulty was chiefly that the Sixth Committee's request had been received too late.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom) desired to prevent a possible misunderstanding. He did not believe that the Fourth Committee had raised any objection to the substance of the Sixth Committee's proposal. As, however, the proposal had been referred to it somewhat late, it could only have been considered if a majority of two-thirds had voted in its favour. The United Kingdom delegate believed that the Fourth Committee's decision did not in any way indicate that that Committee was opposed to the substance of the proposal.

Sir Denys Bray (India) thanked the Sub-Committee, whose action had made it possible to reduce to a minimum the damage which the Fourth Committee's decision would cause to the Sixth Committee.
M. Biancheri (Italy) regretted that the Fourth Committee's decision threw some doubt on the proposal to create a permanent committee. His delegation was in favour of it, and he would support any decision which would obviate the Fourth Committee's difficulty.

The Chairman thought that Viscount Cecil's observation should be noted. He observed that this was not the first time there had been a divergence of opinion between the members of the Fourth Committee, which discussed the granting of credits, and those of other committees, which examined questions of principle. This discrepancy was due to the fact that the delegations had no established policy. Before adopting schemes necessitating credits, the members of the Sixth Committee should reach agreement with their colleagues on the Fourth Committee. He believed this method would be to the League's interest.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom) pointed out that, as the report communicated to the Fourth Committee had not been accepted, the Sixth Committee would have to present to the Assembly a new report embodying all the necessary changes. Care must be taken to avoid new difficulties on that point.

The draft resolution was adopted.

The Chairman asked M. Loudon to make the necessary modifications in the report to the Assembly.

27. Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace: General Discussion (continuation).

M. Von Weizsäcker (Germany) associated himself with the excellent speeches made during the previous discussion. He was able to do so the more easily because his country was in favour of any measures by which the unfortunate results of the transmission of false news might be overcome.

He concluded from the documents communicated to the members of the Committee that journalists cared for nothing so much as the truth, and nothing cost them so much as the truth. Obviously, facilities of all kinds which might be offered to journalists, such as a reduction in the cost of transmission, would facilitate the campaign against false news. This campaign would be the more efficacious if a large number of journalists could obtain information by their own means. He observed that the chief questions involved were to be found in the agenda of the World Telegraphic Conference, which was at present meeting in Madrid, and the Wireless Conference.

He pointed out that the cost of Press communications had already been reduced by 10 per cent during recent years. In addition, certain special facilities had already been granted: the transmission of Press telegrams was no longer restricted to certain hours, telephonic communications from journalists had priority without additional charge, etc. The German delegate stated that he had just learnt with pleasure that the Madrid Conference was about to decide that urgent Press telegrams should also be accorded a reduced tariff. That was one more step in the right direction.

The German delegate considered the Spanish delegate's proposal to convene a new Conference similar to the Copenhagen Conference both useful and practical, and would be particularly glad if this Conference could meet in Madrid. International journalists' organisations, such as the International Federation of Journalists and the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League, might consider how technical developments could be utilised to facilitate the work of journalists. Efficacious contact between the Press and the League of Nations would be furthered if the latter association made suggestions as to how the dissemination of false news could be prevented. The spirit prevailing in that association would undoubtedly ensure the utility of such collaboration and enable further progress to be made.

M. Papadakis (Greece) emphasised the importance which his country attached to the problem of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, and especially to the question of the dissemination of false news. It had expressed its interest at the time of the Copenhagen Conference, when the Greek delegate had submitted a draft resolution recommending close international co-operation between official, semi-official and private bodies or persons who could help to prevent the spreading of false news. The events which had occurred in the past year in Cyprus had given the Greek Government an opportunity to take steps which showed that its anxiety to safeguard the truth was not merely theoretical. Many misunderstandings had been prevented by these measures, and considerable undesirable friction had been avoided. Greece had also recently enacted legal provisions imposing very heavy sanctions on attempts to defame foreign Governments. These provisions had been applied in a recent case, and, as a result, public opinion in a neighbouring country had been given satisfaction.

The Greek delegate desired to explain, however, that it had rarely been necessary to apply the provisions in question, for the Greek Press had already a profound realisation of the contribution it was called upon to make in moral disarmament.

The Greek delegate thought that, in view of the very interesting suggestions which the journalists' associations had themselves submitted to the League, those associations should be thanked for their co-operation and sincerity. M. Papadakis firmly believed that the programme of reform which these associations had proposed should be studied carefully, although some of
its features might perhaps appear rather bold, such as the idea of making newspapers a public undertaking, part of the cost being borne by the State budget. In spite of appearances, several of the proposals were logical and realisable.

The Greek Government had already extended to journalists many facilities, including transport, communications, reduction of Customs duties on paper for newspapers, etc. Material pressure on newspapers was becoming more and more rare in Greece.

It must also be remembered that, when in certain States the Press was subject to regulations compelling it to keep silence on certain questions, that might be due to temporary circumstances; this method might have been applied as an experiment to a Press which sometimes became too violent, and might be part of a system necessitated by the special situation of a particular nation. Care must be taken not to attack the sovereignty of States. M. Papadakis pointed out, in this connection, that in his country the Press had complete liberty.

Finally, the Greek delegate stated that he shared the Spanish delegate’s doubts as to whether it would be possible for the journalists themselves to organise a new Press conference in the present circumstances. If Mme. Oyarzabal de Palencia’s appeal to her Government were successful, the League would have still more reason to be grateful to the Spanish Republic.

(At the Chairman’s request, M. Valdés-Mendeville, Vice-Chairman, took the chair.)

M. Lange (Norway) wished to say, in his capacity as Norwegian delegate, having read the replies of the Press Organisations,1 he had been particularly impressed by the introductory letter from Mr. Streit, President of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League. The whole document was, in his view, one of the most noteworthy that he had ever read since he had attended the Assembly’s proceedings as a delegate.

There was plainly one fundamental condition which must exist if the Press was to carry out its true function of giving expression to all the shades of opinion in any country. That condition was that the Press must be really independent. It could not make use of the liberty granted it by law unless it was independent in every sense of the word.

He would recall Mr. Gladstone’s statement that all the liberties existing in a country could not be suppressed without any great danger so long as the liberty of the Press was preserved. That was a profound truth. For this reason, the particular problem under consideration by the Sixth Committee was, in reality, only one factor of a far wider problem—namely, the independence of the Press. The Sixth Committee was not asked to find a solution for this latter issue. It might, however, include among its conclusions certain suggestions as to ways and means of mitigating the evil. It was true that the position of the Press differed in the different countries. It was only one factor in the general situation, but it would be remarked that the Press exercised greater influence in countries where it was independent.

M. Lange had always admired the way in which the British Press devoted a large amount of space to letters to the Editor. Under that system, dissentient opinions found free opportunity of expression, and it should be followed generally. True, it would be illusory to imagine that public opinion in all its shades was favourable to peace. He, however, found satisfaction in that fact when he considered that no great cause had triumphed without passing through the ordeal of public discussion and free criticism on the part of its opponents.

M. Lange favoured the method of consulting the heads of the official Press bureaux in the different countries, but he would like the journalists themselves to be consulted as well. He had been glad to hear various speakers endorse Mr. Streit’s suggestion in that connection. He considered that the Press might, to a certain extent, be regarded as a public utility undertaking, part of the cost of which should be borne by the State. Further, the profession of journalism should be endowed with a charter. This would engender a feeling of its responsibility, more particularly for truth and justice.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, noted with satisfaction that no criticism had been made against the considerations he had offered at the previous meeting. He accordingly concluded that his statement had been accepted in its general outlines.

He agreed with the Norwegian delegate that his remarks covered only part of the general problem of the Press. The Sixth Committee was not the place to deal with these general questions, but which must nevertheless be borne in mind.

The United Kingdom was not the only country in which the Press published letters to the Editor, as M. Lange had said. Nevertheless, such letters did provide a very useful safety-valve for public opinion.

The Rapporteur had listened with interest to M. de Tesson’s remark to the effect that no mention had been made during the debates of the fact that silence might cause an impression no less incorrect than that due to the use of any particular words. It must, however, be admitted that it was very difficult to make people speak when they did not wish to do so.

Two salient points in the discussion were the independence of the Press and the facilities to be given to newspapers to enable them to obtain news more easily. Those were the two main conditions for the real liberty of the Press, and they were therefore the two points to be drawn more particularly to the Assembly’s notice.

1 Document A 31.1932.
The Rapporteur would mention in his report the Spanish delegate's suggestion. The carrying out of that proposal would obviously depend to some extent on the Spanish Government's goodwill, on which the League could, of course, rely.

He considered that the proposed Conference might usefully examine certain practical methods for giving effect to the general ideas advanced during the present discussion. He would take account in the report, after consulting the Polish delegation, of the substance of the latter's resolution.

The general discussion was declared closed.

TENTH MEETING

Held on Monday, October 10th, 1932, at 5 p.m.

Chairman: M. Lange (Norway).


Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, read his draft report and resolution.

M. Szumlakowski (Poland) accepted, on behalf of the Polish delegation, the draft report and resolution submitted by the Rapporteur.

M. de Tessan (France) thanked the Rapporteur for his impartiality and the masterly way in which he had summarised the Committee's discussions. On behalf of the French delegation, he associated himself entirely with the draft resolution, and expressed the hope that the Press Conference, which it was proposed to convene at Madrid, would take place as soon as possible.

Mme. Oyarzabal de Palencia (Spain) also thanked the Rapporteur, whom she congratulated on the lucidity of his report. She hoped that the Madrid Conference would meet and examine the two principal points mentioned in Lord Cecil's report.

The report and draft resolution were adopted.


The Chairman requested Lord Cecil to submit the report to the Assembly.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom) accepted the Chairman's suggestion and paid a tribute to the help he had received from the Committee and the Secretariat.


M. Guani (Uruguay), Rapporteur, submitted his draft report.

M. von Rosenberg (Germany) said that his delegation was prepared to accept the draft report. He much appreciated the Rapporteur's effort to give an impartial account of the discussion and to do justice to the divergent opinions which had been expressed in the Committee. He thought, however, that certain concrete suggestions put forward in the course of the discussions were presented in the report in a somewhat abstract form which deprived them of part of their significance. He hoped, nevertheless, that the debates in the Committee would have a satisfactory effect and would help to improve the position of the minorities. The responsibility devolving upon the League from the fact that it was incumbent upon it to see that the rights of minorities were safeguarded was so great that it could not, without loss to itself, tolerate any setback in the development and improvement of the minority procedure.

M. Zaleski (Poland), on behalf of his delegation, accepted the draft report, and thanked the Rapporteur for the impartiality which he had displayed.

M. Fotitch (Yugoslavia) also accepted the report, and congratulated the Rapporteur on giving a faithful rendering of the discussions.

M. Andvord (Norway) was not completely satisfied with the report. He would have liked the Committee to examine the suggestions made by several delegations for changes in the minorities procedure; those changes could have been achieved without affecting the agreements in force. The suggestions in question had, he thought, been in line with a fairly widespread feeling among the members of the Committee. What he had principally in mind