
(The Committee not having appointed a Rapporteur, the President requested Dr. Limburg, Vice-Chairman of the First Committee, to be good enough to submit the report.)

Dr. Limburg (Netherlands), Vice-Chairman of the First Committee, submitted the report and the draft resolution, worded as follows:

The Assembly decides that Rule 12 of its Rules of Procedure shall be deleted.

The President:
Translation: As no one wishes to speak, I shall consider the First Committee’s report and the accompanying draft resolution adopted.

The draft resolution was adopted.


The President:
Translation: The next item on the agenda is the discussion of the Sixth Committee’s report on the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace (document A.59.1932, Annex 15).

(On the invitation of the President, Dr. Lange, Chairman of the Sixth Committee, and Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Rapporteur, took their places on the platform.)

The President:
Translation: Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Rapporteur, will address the Assembly.

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (United Kingdom), Rapporteur. — The subject that I have to bring before the Assembly is one, I think, which will be recognised as of considerable importance. It is the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace. It is a very old observation in these Assemblies that public opinion is the life-blood of the League of Nations, and if that is so, it is of the greatest possible importance that that life-blood should be pure and abundant. The co-operation of the Press is absolutely essential if that object is to be secured.

I do not think that the Sixth Committee was of opinion that the danger of actual false news being disseminated by the Press was, in practice, a serious one. That it may sometimes have happened is no doubt true, but the general sentiment expressed in the Committee was that, if it did happen, it happened very rarely, and that it was not the chief danger to be feared. What was felt was that, quite apart from actual false news, there was a danger of news being distorted: perhaps an even greater danger — as was pointed out by one of the members of the Committee, a member of the French delegation — was the suppression of news. He pointed out, and I think we all agreed with him, that the suppression of news might be just as harmful to the object we have in view — the formation of a sound and vigorous public opinion on these questions — and just as disastrous as the distortion or even the invention of news. That was our sentiment, and we felt the matter to be one of considerable gravity; but we also felt that the remedy was not to be found in some measure of coercion.

In the first place, it was felt that it would be almost impossible to devise any measure of coercion capable of the effective suppression of the Press, even with the best intentions, was probably a grave mistake. There was absolute unanimity amongst those associations which had been consulted — associations of journalists and those connected with the Press — that any interference by Governments was certain to do more harm than good. It is, of course, quite a different matter if journalists themselves choose to take measures for raising or suppressing the evils that may arise in the exercise of their calling, and in that connection we had before us a very interesting experiment — the creation of a Journalists’ Court of Honour; but on that matter the Committee did not feel that it was either desirable or practical for it to express an opinion. In its view, this was entirely a matter which must be left in the hands of the journalists themselves.

The Committee felt that journalism might be and should be, as far as possible, freed from outside control, whether that control was exercised commercially or officially. It considered very strongly that freedom in the exercise of their calling was both desirable from the point of view of the journalists and still more desirable from the point of view of their co-operation in the cause of peace. The Committee believed that this was likely, not only to promote a free and good supply of news, but also to assist journalists to raise the status of their profession to the height which it ought certainly to occupy as one of the great professions of the world.

Further, the Committee thought that the measure of freeing the Press from outside control was one which should be carried out partly by the Press itself and partly by the nations, if there was an opportunity for national intervention. This is not a matter in regard to which the League itself could usefully take any action, but in another sphere it was thought that the League might do something to help. The Sixth Committee felt very strongly that the great remedy for any evils that might threaten journalism, and consequently journalistic co-operation, was a free and full supply of news. It believed that the best remedy for all these difficulties, whether the dangers to be fought were distortion or suppression. It believed that the freeing of news, making good and true news more easily available, would itself combat the less pure sources of news that might exist. The Committee therefore recommends very strongly the increase of publicity in every way. The League should take pains to hold all its meetings in public, not only the meetings of the Assembly, the Council, and the principal Committees, but also all other meetings. Further, it is considered that the increase of publicity the greater would be the purity of the news flowing from those meetings.

It was also felt that, where possible, documents relating to those meetings should be distributed as early and as fully as possible, and the Committee recommends strongly that the Secretariat, through every means in its power, should continue to do its utmost to make all League news readily and easily available to the Press.

Again, the Committee thought that something might perhaps be done — as regards the method, it expressed no very definite opinion, in the absence
of further information — towards cheapening the supply of news. Some of those who were consulted by the Committee emphasised very strongly that one of the great difficulties of the Press was that the price of the newspaper by no means compensated for the cost of obtaining its contents and that anything that could be done to cheapen the cost of output of the paper would be an advantage, not only from the point of view of the Press, but also from that of the purity of the news, since it would diminish the necessity of obtaining financial resources from other directions. The Committee therefore recommends that everything possible should be done to cheapen news, though, so far as the League was concerned, it could only suggest that the matter should be examined. The League has recently established a great wireless station; the Committee therefore thought it might be worth while to examine — and it urged the Secretariat to do so — whether through the machinery of that wireless station the output of news could be cheapened.

It further recommended that consultations should, if possible, continue on this subject and it finally requested the Secretary-General to keep in touch with all the movements in this field and to report to the next Assembly on any further developments.

I will now read the resolution which is to be found at the end of the report.

The Assembly:

1. Expresses its gratitude to the international and national Press organisations for their views upon the problem of preventing "the spread of false information which may threaten the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations";

2. Expresses its thanks to the Danish Government for summoning in January 1932 at Copenhagen a Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and representatives of the Press, and notes with great interest the resolutions adopted by that conference;

3. Trusts that, at a further conference organised on similar lines to the Copenhagen Conference, definite proposals may be made to give effect to some of the principal suggestions already made regarding, in particular, the necessity of a greater abundance of accurate information, of true freedom of the Press, and of co-operation between the Press organisations of various countries;

4. Advocates the fullest possible publicity for League meetings;

5. Commends to the sympathetic consideration of the Chairmen of all Committees of the League of Nations the earlier and more complete distribution of documents;

6. Desires that the Secretariat should continue to devote its attention to the development by all the means at its disposal of the swift supply to the Press of the fullest possible information concerning the work of the League of Nations;

7. Invites the Council to consider the possibilities of affording to journalists cheap facilities for communicating to their newspapers information through the League wireless station, due regard being paid to interests affected;

8. Requests the Secretary-General to communicate to the Press organisations consulted and to the Disarmament Conference this resolution, together with the Minutes of the Sixth Committee, and to report to the next Assembly on any further developments which may arise.

The President:

Translation: If no one else wishes to speak, I shall regard the draft resolution submitted by the Sixth Committee as adopted.

The draft resolution was adopted.

49. — PROTECTION OF MINORITIES: REPORT OF THE SIXTH COMMITTEE.

The President:

Translation: The next item on the agenda is the discussion of the Sixth Committee's report on the protection of minorities (document A.60.1932.1, Annex 16).

(On the invitation of the President, Dr. Guani, Rapporteur, took his place on the platform.)

The President:

Translation: Dr. Guani, Rapporteur, will address the Assembly.

Dr. Guani (Uruguay), Rapporteur:

Translation: The report which I have the honour to submit to you on behalf of the Sixth Committee is merely a summary of the important statements made by various delegations on the protection of minorities.

I desire to note here the great importance of that discussion. Having myself been a member of various Committees of Three, and having thus been able to follow the development of the procedure in this matter, I can appreciate the efforts which have been made in the execution of the task of conciliation devolving upon the League in regard to minority claims.

Dr. Guani then read his report.

The Assembly took note of the report of the Sixth Committee.

(The Assembly rose at 12.40 p.m.)