

A second meeting was held in the afternoon, when the Chinese and Japanese representatives made a statement on behalf of their respective Governments, and the Assembly approved of the proposal of the Bureau to set up a General Commission on which all delegations would be represented, with freedom to discuss the question in all its aspects. At the conclusion of this meeting the Assembly decided to refer further discussion and consideration to this General Commission.

On the afternoon of the following day the General Commission met. After Mr. Hymans had been elected President, Mr. Yen, the Chinese representative, stated that the Chinese command had proclaimed the cessation of hostilities at midnight on the previous day, but that the Japanese were still attacking. Mr. Matsudaira, the representative of Japan, produced a communication from his Government to the effect that the Japanese troops were bound to reply to the fire of the Chinese troops, but that the Japanese Army had no intention of resuming hostilities or of advancing unless the Chinese Army delivered an offensive. So unsatisfactory was the information available, that the President felt an essential first step was the prevention of further bloodshed; he therefore suspended the sitting in order that the Bureau might prepare a draft resolution to serve as a basis for discussion. After an interval of an hour, this draft resolution was produced. It was debated for one and a half hours and ultimately was passed with a slight amendment of drafting. The Assembly was immediately convoked, there was a roll-call, and the resolution, which reads as follows, was passed unanimously by that body:—

“The Assembly, recalling the suggestions made by the Council on the 29th February and without prejudice to the other measures therein envisaged,

“(1) Calls upon the Governments of China and Japan to take immediately the necessary measures to ensure that the orders which, as it has been informed, have been issued by the Military Commanders on both sides for the cessation of hostilities shall be made effective;

“(2) Requests the other Powers which have special interests in the Shanghai Settlements to inform the Assembly of the manner in which the invitation set out in the previous paragraph is executed;

“(3) Recommends that negotiations be entered into by the Chinese and Japanese representatives with the assistance of the military, naval, and civilian authorities of the Powers mentioned above for the conclusion of arrangements which shall render definite the cessation of hostilities and regulate the withdrawal of the Japanese forces. The Assembly will be glad to be kept informed by the Powers mentioned above of the development of these negotiations.”

During the next few days reports of fighting were received, but there was reason to believe that, apart from small incidents, fighting had ceased, and this was confirmed through independent sources.

But the bringing to an end of hostilities was not the sole, or indeed the main, reason for convoking the Assembly. Consideration had to be given to the dispute itself, and a discussion by the General Committee began on the 5th March. It had been rumoured that the representatives of some small nations would be somewhat critical of the action, or—as some said—want of action, on the part of the Council; but there was surprisingly little criticism of an adverse nature. Certainly no one suggested the application of Article 16 of the Covenant, and I cannot help thinking that a proposal to invoke this would have met with little or no support, even if only for the reason that the machinery provided in Article 15, and in other articles, had not been wholly applied.

The faith of small nations in the efficacy of the Covenant as an instrument for the preservation of peace had been rudely shaken. Mr. de Water, the representative of South Africa, said that the smaller nations looked to the Great Powers for a lead in this matter, and what had the Great Powers done? He may have been voicing the inarticulate thoughts of many speakers who had preceded him. However that may be, the combined wisdom of the elements which compose the Council—both great and small—had failed to achieve a solution, and the authority of the League was at stake. Moral force is a quality which is precious in Geneva, and Mr. Motta said it was for the small States to mobilize the moral forces of the world and demonstrate the solidarity of nations.

A corrected edition of the verbatim record of the speeches is not yet available, so that I have to refer you to the summaries published in numbers 30, 31, and 32 of the *Journal*. The debate was one of the most important which has ever taken place in Geneva; nearly every speech was read, and with truth it may be said that every word was weighed before being uttered. The tone was admirable, and so was the restraint which the speakers exercised. No speaker attempted to prejudge the issues, although some stated that the landing of troops and their use for military operations upon the territory of another Power was contrary to the Covenant and the Pact of Paris.

Under the Covenant every nation has the right of ensuring its legitimate defence, but it has not the right of seeking justice for itself without the authorization of the League. Mr. Sato, the Japanese representative, stated that his country desired that the Covenant and the Pact of Paris should be applied: she had not sought to settle the dispute by force nor entertained the idea of prejudicing the political independence and administrative integrity of China; but she had been obliged, in face of pressing danger, to take temporary measures of protection, as other Powers had been compelled to do in the past.

Towards the end of the debate Mr. Yen said that, if mediation by the Assembly failed, his Government expected the Assembly would exhaust every provision of Article 15. Various nations had given their views through their authorized speakers, and valuable proposals had been made. Dr. Benes, who had been appointed Rapporteur, suggested that the Bureau, in conjunction with the authors of the proposals, should draft a motion for submission to the General Commission. This suggestion was accepted.