

1931 the Assembly believed that in a period of some eight years the problem in its League aspects could be liquidated, and the Budget of the Nansen International Office for Refugees, established under the authority of the League, has every year since been prepared on the assumption that finality would be reached in 1938. Consequently, this year, in addition to the annual report of the governing body of the Office (Document A. 21, 1937, XII), the Sixth Committee had before it a report on the liquidation of the Office (Document A. 11, 1937, XII), together with the replies of certain Governments (Document A. 24, 1937, XII) to a circular letter covering the despatch of Document A. 11, 1937, XII. There was also another document, the report on German refugees (Document A. 17, 1937, XII), which deals with the situation that has arisen since 1931, in which year the Assembly foresaw the possibility of naming a date for the termination of the refugee work. The problems raised by the Armenian and Russian refugees and by refugees of other nationalities, including persons of German nationality who fled from the Saar when, as a result of the plebiscite, that territory was handed back to Germany, have been known for years, and they are more or less understood. But to these problems have in recent years been added others consequent on the flight from Germany of citizens of that country who are not in harmony with the present regime, and more particularly of the Jews. The discussion was opened at the third meeting of the Sixth Committee, held on the 18th September. At the outset the Chairman proposed that in accordance with the usual procedure the various papers should be referred to a sub-committee, which would in due course report to the full committee. The value to a sub-committee of a general discussion in full Committee was, however, not lost sight of, and the Chairman invited members to speak. The discussion was opened by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In addition to the political events on which I have touched, the Norwegian delegate referred to the depression which set in about the time the Assembly took its decision to wind up the Nansen Office, and he claimed that the problem could not be solved by 1938, and that the League must continue to assist, at any rate, to the extent of bringing to an effective conclusion the work at present in hand. He added that he had proposals to make in this connection and would place them before the sub-committee. The Norwegian delegate received a considerable measure of support from the representatives of other countries, including Great Britain, France, Sweden, and Denmark. In accordance with the instructions which had been received from Wellington, your delegate on the Sixth Committee stated :—

“The New Zealand Government would deplore any diminution in the efforts made by, or under the supervision of, the League of Nations for the assistance of refugees, whether these were the responsibility of the Nansen International Office or of the High Commissioner for refugees coming from Germany. They would be happy to collaborate with other members of the League in devising the best means possible for continuing this work, and in default of any better solution would be quite prepared to support an extension of the period of activity of the existing organizations, so long as they could continue to perform a useful function.

“Accordingly, New Zealand supported the proposal advanced by the representative of Norway, and, in regard to procedure, endorsed the suggestions made by the United Kingdom.

“He also wished to identify New Zealand with the statements made in connection with the Budget in Document A. VI, 4. The work done was clearly worth while, and the care and competence with which it was administered were most impressive. It appeared that a supplementary credit of 104,000 francs had been asked for. This was a matter which would apparently have to be decided by the Supervisory Commission and the Assembly, but so far as the present Committee was concerned he hoped, in view of the universal good will felt towards the work, that this sum would be agreed to.”

The representative of France, whilst conscious that the Assembly of 1931 was desirous of bringing the work to an end at a given time, pointed out that the Seventeenth Assembly had adopted a more cautious tone, since in its resolution there occurred the following :—

“Considers, further, that the Assembly should, at the latest at its ordinary session in 1938, determine the general principles which, after that year, should govern the attitude of the League towards the refugee problem as a whole.”

He added that there were still 600,000 refugees in the world and that the League could not ignore them. Whilst he considered that the Nansen Office should be liquidated, it would be necessary to replace that Office by another organization. It is a pleasure to be able to record such a considerable measure of sympathy, but this brief account of the proceedings in the Sixth Committee would not be complete without an allusion to the attitude of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, whose representative stood by the decision to wind up the work by 1938, and to the warning uttered by the Indian delegate to the effect that the Sixth Committee should be careful not to take any action which would perpetuate the problem beyond its necessary duration.

At the meeting held on the 24th September the Sixth Committee considered a communication from the Chairman of the sub-committee regarding the request of the Nansen International Office for Refugees for a grant of a supplementary credit of 104,000 francs. It appeared that after careful consideration the sub-committee had decided, with one dissentient voice (that of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), to recommend the Sixth Committee to ask for the credit, and, in addition, to request a credit of 5,000 francs as representation allowance for 1938 of the President of the governing body of the Office. On the second credit there was no discussion. On the first credit, however, the discussion was prolonged, but it is not necessary to say more than that the recommendation of the sub-committee was accepted by the full Committee, the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics finding himself in a minority of one.