

The agenda (Document A. 2) was adopted, and the items, with the exception of those numbered 8 and 22, distributed amongst the five Committees. These two items were reserved for the consideration of the General Committee of the Assembly. Consideration of item No. 4 (Amendment of the Covenant) was, however, postponed to the next session. With regard to item No. 8 (Commission of Inquiry for European Union), on the 26th September the Assembly passed the following resolution :—

“The Assembly,—

“Having consulted its General Committee on the procedure to be followed with regard to the question appearing on the Agenda for the session as item 8 (Commission of Inquiry for European Union),

“Notes that circumstances have been such that the Commission has been unable to meet since the last session :

“And decides, such being the case, to renew the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry for European Union for the coming year and to place the question on the agenda for the next session of the Assembly.”

A decision had to be made regarding the best manner in which the New Zealand delegate could take part in the work of the Committees, three of which are often sitting at one time. I was accompanied to Geneva by only two members of my staff, my Private Secretary, Mr. C. Knowles, and my confidential typist, Miss E. M. Hannam. I therefore nominated myself as a member of each Committee, and Mr. Knowles as a substitute, a proceeding which enabled the New Zealand delegation to take as full a part as its numbers permitted in the Committees' work.

In addition to the items printed in the agenda, others were proposed during the course of the Assembly. It is unnecessary to mention them specifically here. They will be dealt with in the part of this report devoted to the Committees.

DEBATE ON ANNUAL REPORT.

The formal business having been transacted and the Committees having met for the purpose of appointing their officers, delegations were able to take part in the debate on the report of the Secretary-General (series of Documents numbered A. 6), which opened on the 12th September.

A few years ago this annual debate on the report of the work accomplished in the preceding year was responsible for a great deal of oratory occupying several days of the Assembly's time. This year, however, there seemed to be no great desire on the part of delegates to speak.

M. Motta, the Swiss delegate, paid a graceful tribute to the memory of Chancellor Dollfuss and of Vittorio Scialoja, the latter a great lawyer who was undoubtedly a tower of strength to the League in its early days.

Herr Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, delivered a long speech devoted to his country's affairs and to recent events there.

The speeches which, to my mind, made the greatest impression were those delivered by Mr. De Valera (Irish Free State) and M. Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister.

The proposed invitation to Russia to join the League was very much “in the air.” It had been the subject of several private conferences between important delegates, and the methods employed were not popular with several delegates. Mr. De Valera voiced the feelings of many when he objected to this procedure, and suggested that the Sixth Committee was the competent organ for examining the question of Russia's admission to the League.

As to M. Beck's speech, it was devoted solely to minorities. At the request of the Polish Government, the agenda contained an item regarding the proposal of that Government for the conclusion of a general convention on the treatment of minorities. This question of minorities has undoubtedly given the Council of the League trouble and some anxiety, and every year it has provided an animated and interesting debate in the Sixth Committee. Many of the countries affected by the peace treaties have minorities in varying degree, but they are not all bound by treaty in respect of their minorities. Consequently, the treatment is by no means uniform. As long ago as 1922 the Assembly passed a resolution giving expression to the hope that States not bound by legal obligations to the League would observe in the treatment of their minorities a standard at least as high as was required by the treaties. This expression of hope Poland has long desired to see translated into a convention. The matter will be dealt with under the heading of the Sixth Committee, but I would quote the following from M. Beck's speech :—

“Pending the bringing into force of a general and uniform system for the protection of minorities, my Government finds itself compelled to refuse, as from to-day, all co-operation with the international organizations in the matter of the supervision over the application by Poland of the system of minority protection. I need hardly say that the decision of the Polish Government is in no sense directed against the interests of the minorities. Those interests are and will remain protected by the fundamental laws of Poland, which secure to minorities of language, race, and religion their free development and equality of treatment.”

On the following day Sir John Simon made a brief speech entirely devoted to the situation created by the Polish delegate's remarks. He pointed out that treaty obligations already assumed by any State in regard to minorities did not depend on any decision which might ultimately be made on a proposal for a general and uniform system of minorities. He reminded M. Beck that Poland had accepted in respect of minorities certain obligations which carried the guarantee of the League of Nations; that the United Kingdom, as well as other Powers, were signatories of the Minorities Treaties; and that no country by unilateral action could free itself from such obligations. He also referred to the terms of Article 93 of the Treaty of Versailles, which recreated Poland.