



REPORT
OF THE
Proceedings of a Conference

HELD AT THE
CAXTON HALL, WESTMINSTER,
ON WEDNESDAY, 8th JUNE, 1927, —

ON
The Provision of Instruction for
Children and Young People
in the Aims and Objects of
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

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A Conference of representatives of local education authorities in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was held on Wednesday, 8th June, 1927, at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, to consider the question of providing instruction for children and young people in the aims and objects of the League of Nations. The conference, which was attended by some 600 representatives, was convened by the President of the Board of Education, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Education for Northern Ireland, in pursuance of the undertaking to call a conference of education authorities to discuss this matter, which was given on behalf of His Majesty's Government at the Seventh Assembly of the League of Nations in September last.

The PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION opened the Conference. After referring to the work of the Subcommittee of Experts appointed by the Sixth Assembly of the League of Nations, and reading a letter from the Secretary-General of the League, he said that the Conference had not been convened to consider how we should adapt the teaching in our national schools to the exigencies of international politics. It was a national Conference, summoned for a national purpose. The events of the last thirteen years had shaken and changed the whole civilised world. If in educating men we aimed in any degree at explaining to them the past and preparing them for the future, we could not ignore those events. To many of our fellow countrymen the institution of the League of Nations had become in some measure the symbol and focus of these changes. Our education must take account of it and it was clearly desirable that the account we took of it should be a deliberate one.

The President then referred to the paper on the League of Nations included in the new edition of the Board's "Suggestions for Teachers," and to certain other material which had been submitted to him and which he proposed to circulate for consideration and critical examination by local authorities. The question what we could teach and how we should teach it could only be answered after a careful survey of the ground in consultation with the teaching profession. He hoped, however, that the Conference would allow him to indicate tentatively one or two considerations which occurred to him.

Everyone was agreed that teaching about the League of Nations should not form a separate subject of the curriculum. The tendency to subdivide teaching was one against which all teachers had continually to struggle. But there was also a contrary danger: that in trying to work a particular subject into our general curriculum, we might come to hang our teaching upon it as upon a sort of dogmatic peg. History, for instance, could not

be taught from the point of view of the League of Nations, for the object of historical teaching was to accustom men to view the present in the light of the past, instead of looking at the past through the spectacles of the present. There was special need to beware of this danger in dealing with an institution which had in a measure become the symbol of certain moral aspirations and hopes. The error to which men were perhaps most prone, and which any education worthy of the name should seek to counteract, had been the tendency to substitute the symbol for the substance, the institution for the policy, the means for the end. In the domain of public morals the thing we wished to train children to understand and desire was Peace. Many human institutions, national and international, had been formed to secure Peace. Of the international ones, the League of Nations was the latest and the most comprehensive; and there was real educational value in any teaching which traced through history this story of continuous human endeavour to reconcile conflicting interests, to overcome misunderstandings, and to bring the nations together in practical co-operation in common tasks. But the League remained a human institution to be used with the same discretion and judged by the same standards, as it would assuredly be subjected to the same strains and liable to the same errors, as any human institution of the past. It was neither a new moral revelation nor an infallible authority: it was an instrument to be used by the peoples of the world in the cause of peace, and if it was to be rightly used it must first be understood.

It seemed to follow that specific teaching about the League of Nations, as such, could hardly be carried very far until the pupil knew something of world history up to modern times and had some understanding of the nature of political institutions. In the schools of this country a knowledge of the growth, character and constitution of the British Empire as a co-operative Commonwealth of Nations was a necessary preliminary to an understanding of any forms of wider international co-operation. On the moral side, too, moral qualities could not be inculcated by abstract teaching; they had to be acquired by practice in the sphere of the school itself. It was, therefore, doubtful—and he thought this view was held by some members of the international Sub-Committee of Experts—how far teaching about the League, as such, could effectively be given in primary schools. But even where the League itself did not find an actual place in school teaching it could not be absent from the mind of any intelligent teacher, and his view of it could hardly fail in some degree to influence his teaching. He suggested, therefore, that it was in relation to training colleges that we should principally consider this problem, and that it was the students at such colleges who most needed opportunities for acquiring a sound knowledge and a balanced view of the origins and work of the League. In this, as in all similar matters, our teaching methods could only be worked out by teachers themselves, in the actual course of their work, and

the surest way to solve such problems was to give the members of the teaching profession that background of thought and knowledge which would alone enable them to judge what and how to teach.

SIR PERCY JACKSON (West Riding) then moved the following resolution :—

“ That this Conference welcomes the steps which are being taken to give the children and the youth of this country a knowledge of the development of international relations, and of the work and aims of the League of Nations, and requests the Board of Education, the Scottish Education Department, and the Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland to circulate to the Local Education Authorities a report of the proceedings of the Conference in order that they may consider the matter further in consultation with the teaching profession.”

In the first place, he said, the resolution stated that the Conference welcomed the steps which were being taken to promote the knowledge and love of Peace. Before they committed themselves to this part of the resolution they must ask themselves whether, individually and collectively, they were prepared to give whole-hearted support to the movement which had already been started. The League of Nations Union pamphlet, “ The League of Nations in the School,” gave a general survey of what was being done in the schools of the country. In the West Riding, which might be taken as a typical area, the schools had been thrown open to lectures organised by the League of Nations Union, and teachers were encouraged to introduce instruction in the aims and work of the League into the curriculum and into their teaching of individual subjects. League of Nations literature was supplied either direct to the schools or made available for reference in the authority’s bookrooms, and every encouragement was given to the formation of junior branches of the League of Nations Union in the schools. Special attention was paid to the proper observance of Armistice Day and the significance of the commemoration was impressed upon the pupils. In the training colleges, in particular, the study of the work and objects of the League was fostered through the medium of lectures and study-circles, as well as through the supply of suitable literature on the subject in the students’ common-rooms, and similar steps were taken in connection with the West Riding Vacation Course for Teachers. The second part of the resolution indicated their acceptance of the League of Nations as the best and most suitable instrument for promoting the end which they had in view, and a brief review of what the League had already accomplished would, he thought, satisfy them that their acceptance could safely and unhesitatingly be given. Thirdly, the resolution raised the question what should be the next step forward to be taken as a result of the Conference,

and he suggested that the most practical step would be for the associations of local authorities to set up a permanent committee, to serve as a regular means of consultation with the teachers on the subject.

Mr. DUNCAN (Aberdeen), Chairman of the Scottish Association of Education Committees, seconded the resolution. He said that he had no doubt that the Conference would be satisfied that it was desirable to impress upon the young people of the country the necessity for international goodwill and co-operation, and, equally, that the best way to do this was to instruct the children at school in the principles underlying the Covenant of the League of Nations and in the aims and work of the League. As regards the giving of such instruction he ventured to make certain suggestions. In the first place, the teachers should impress upon their pupils that there is no incompatibility whatever between the idea of national patriotism and the great ideal of international goodwill. Secondly, anything in the nature of systematic instruction about the League should be attempted mainly in the case of the older children and should be given as part of, or as a necessary complement to, the course in history, and not treated as something novel and separate; and lastly, it should be made quite clear that the subject was entirely outside the sphere of ordinary party, and even of ordinary national, politics. Mr. Duncan then briefly outlined the course of instruction followed in one of the larger secondary schools of Aberdeen. Starting with an introductory lesson on the nature of patriotism and the duty of a person to himself, his family, his city, and his country, the syllabus traced how, with the growth of civilisation and of ordered intercourse between peoples, an international outlook gradually emerged; next followed some account of previous attempts to secure world peace, leading up to the establishment of the League of Nations after the Great War; then the constitution of the League, its aims and work, and finally, its cardinal purpose, the prevention of war and the enforcement of peace, and the instruments through which this might be achieved, were explained. He was sure that in Scotland a course of instruction of this nature would be welcomed as an integral part of the curriculum for all older pupils, for it would not only give them a general knowledge of the historical development of international relations, but would also accustom them to the idea of the settlement of international disputes by peaceful adjustment instead of by the arbitrament of the sword.

MAJOR EDGAR JONES (Barry), speaking in support of the resolution, outlined the origin and course of the movement in Wales and Monmouthshire for giving League of Nations instruction in the schools, and showed how, starting from the initiative of a committee of private persons, the movement had secured the active support and sympathy of all the local authorities, the Central Welsh Board, the examining bodies and the teachers.

Syllabuses and memoranda were drawn up, and the experience gained had shown that the teaching of world history and the work and aims of the League on the broad lines laid down by the committee was not only practicable, but thoroughly beneficial from the strictly educational standpoint. Though the work in the schools was still in its early stages, the results achieved were encouraging, and, to judge by the information which had been collected, there seemed no doubt that there was every likelihood of its rapid development.

Mr. MINSHULL (Sheffield) spoke of the excellent use which had been made in Sheffield of the League of Nations Union films which had, with the co-operation of the Education Committee, the teachers, and the owner of one of the cinemas in the City, been shown to as many as 9,000 children in a week.

Mr. BURDEN (Beverley) expressed the view that all children over twelve and a half years should be given instruction in the work of the League of Nations, that the instruction should be subject to inspection, but that the actual method of giving it should be left to the entire discretion of the teachers concerned.

Mr. PICKLES (Bradford) strongly emphasised the need for this country to give a lead in the matter under discussion with a view to the creation of a mentality for peace and to the cultivation in the children of a spirit of respect and amity towards other nations.

Mr. GOWERS (Ratcliffe) spoke of the work done in his area in co-operation with the Manchester League of Nations Union.

Dr. BARBOUR (Perthshire) said that whilst the statements which had been made of the work accomplished in various areas were certainly encouraging, they represented first steps only, and he therefore welcomed the Conference as likely to strengthen the hands of the responsible administrative bodies in promoting the further development of the movement and to counteract any tendency to rest satisfied with the initial measures which had been taken. Secondly, he emphasised the necessity for securing the active and enthusiastic co-operation of the teachers if League of Nations instruction were to be made a reality in the schools.

Mrs. OGDEN (Burnley) expressed the view that League of Nations instruction might more appropriately be given to the older students in the universities and similar institutions than to children in the primary schools. She also thought that the movement would go forward with greater confidence in this country if it could be assured a corresponding response in other countries.

Mr. TOWNSEND (Stoke-on-Trent) represented that if the League of Nations instruction were to be successful the method of giving the instruction was a very important consideration. The subject had its industrial, as well as its international implications.

MR. ROBB (Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Northern Ireland), concluding the discussion, expressed, on behalf of his Government, his support of the resolution, and said that he felt sure that the opportunity which the Conference had provided for the exchange of information and of views would be a valuable means of stimulating the local authorities represented to further efforts. He endorsed the opinion that the movement could not be enforced from above by the central or by the local authorities, but must depend for its development upon the cordial co-operation of the teachers. He therefore agreed with the suggestion that the next step was that the local authorities and the teachers should decide, in joint consultation, what was the best way to attain the objects which they had in view.

Before putting the resolution to the Conference Lord Eustace Percy expressed his personal sympathy with the proposal that the associations of local authorities should co-operate with the teachers in setting up a permanent committee to consider the question of the best method or methods for providing League of Nations instruction. The reports which they had heard of what was being done in various parts of the country suggested to him that, however useful might be the provision of lectures and literature by the League of Nations Union, a more thorough consideration of the whole question was required if the instruction was to be properly assimilated into the main body of teaching given in the schools.

The resolution was carried unanimously.