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WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVE GUILD

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Notes on the Draft
Disarmament Convention

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Notes on the Draft Disarmament Convention.

IN 1925 the League of Nations set up a committee called the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference. Its business was to prepare the *framework of a Treaty* to be laid before a world Disarmament Conference. This work was completed in December, 1930, and is known as the *Draft Convention*.

This Draft Convention will be the chief business before the Disarmament Conference of 1932. It should be noted, however, that the *Conference will have full power to consider any other Disarmament proposals put forward by any nation, and to incorporate them in the Treaty to be signed by all nations, which it is the aim of the Conference to bring about.*

The main points in the Draft Convention are: Firstly, the limitation of the numbers of men in armies, navies, and air forces; secondly, the limitation of the expenditure of each nation on armaments; thirdly, the appointment of a permanent Disarmament Commission.

METHOD OF PROCEDURE.

The Convention is drawn up in the form of a Treaty, that is, of an international law. To all the sections dealing

with the limitation of war forces and armaments, tables are attached giving the exact kind of limitations. *But no figures are filled in* on these tables, except as regards naval tonnage and guns. It will be the main business of the Conference to fill in these figures. The vital question which will decide the success or failure of the Conference is: What figures will be finally agreed to?

And it is the business of the people, at once and repeatedly, so long as the Conference is sitting, to declare to the Government their determination that the figures must make drastic reductions in *all war forces and all armaments, and make impossible any developments of armaments.*

THE DRAFT CONVENTION IN DETAIL.

The Draft Convention will now be gone through in detail, with notes on each clause as to what is good, what is unsatisfactory, and what action by the Conference is necessary to get real Disarmament measures. At the end, the points omitted from the Convention will be dealt with.

PERSONNEL.

The first part of the Convention deals with Personnel, that is (1) with the number of men in armies, navies, and air forces, (2) with the period of service in conscript forces.

1. NUMBERS.

It is proposed that the numbers allowed should include all formations organised on a military basis, such as police forces, gendarmerie, customs officers, forest guards, as well as regular troops.

Tables are given for the separate limitation of the numbers in land, sea, and air forces. For *land forces*, the

number of officers would be separately limited, but this is not proposed for sea and air forces.

Note.—It is of the utmost importance (a) that the figures inserted in the Treaty should make *drastic reductions* in the size of war forces, and (b) that all public and private associations for training civilians to be soldiers, such as O.T.C.s, University Air Corps, Cadet Corps, &c., should be prohibited; (c) that the number of officers, non-commissioned officers, instructors, &c., should be strictly limited, for if there are only enough officers for, say, 100,000 men, it would mean a long delay before the war forces could be enlarged. All these restrictions have been imposed on Germany.

It would be a real step towards Total Disarmament if the six "Great Powers"—the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Japan—would agree at the Disarmament Conference to reduce the number of men in their war forces to the level of Germany. This would mean that each reduced its army to 100,000 men, its navy to 15,000 men, and that all air forces were abolished.

2. PERIOD OF SERVICE.

This section only applies to countries where conscription exists. It is proposed that the period of service in conscript war forces shall be limited.

Note.—Under conscription all the male youth of the nation serve in the army for one or two years. This system raises very difficult problems. It not only forces pacifists to become soldiers, but it also creates very large trained reserves of soldiers who can be called up to increase the war forces in a few days. In Britain and, since the war, in Germany, there are voluntary armies in which the men

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serve for seven or twelve years respectively. The number of trained reserves who can be called up quickly in these countries is therefore small.

The strong opposition to giving up conscription in many countries, even among the socialist parties, makes this problem very difficult to deal with. The socialists say it gives a more democratic army, in which rich and poor are equal, and that a short-service conscript army is less likely to support fascism or put down socialism than a long-service army. These arguments do not seem convincing to us, because, for instance, a rich conscript can use his money to have a much better time than a poor conscript, and conscription in Italy did not prevent the success of fascism. But they are sincerely held by many French socialists, for example. These socialists propose that, instead of giving up conscription, the period of service should be shortened to six months, as it is in Switzerland. They say that if men are trained only for six months, they are no use as an attacking army though they would be for defence.

This section of the Draft Convention is intended to limit the period of service under conscription. If it were limited to six months, it would be an improvement on the present system. But thorough-going Disarmament undoubtedly requires that conscription should be abolished, and that should be our aim.

MATERIAL.

1. LIMITATION OF EXPENDITURE ON ARMAMENTS.

It is proposed that there should be—

- (a) Limitation of the total expenditure on the upkeep, purchase, and manufacture of all war material.

- (b) Within this total limitation, it is proposed that the amounts to be spent on land war material and on sea war material should be separately limited, but no separate limit is proposed for air war material.

Note.—The probable method of making these limitations will be to lay down that the present expenditure of each nation shall be reduced by the same percentage.

Here again, it is of the utmost importance that the reduction in expenditure should be drastic. A small reduction, say of 10 per cent or even of 25 per cent, would be of hardly any use in removing fear and suspicion between nations, or in reducing the burden of armaments.

It would be a real step towards Total Disarmament and full security for all nations, if the nations agreed at the Conference to reduce their expenditure on armaments by half, or better still by 75 per cent.

Further, it is very necessary to have a separate limit for air force expenditure. This is the force which all nations are most bent on increasing, and which provides the most horrible prospects for the next war. Without a separate limitation, a nation might economise on land and sea armaments, and enlarge their air armaments instead.

2. DIRECT LIMITATION OF NAVAL SHIPS AND GUNS.

Besides the limitation of expenditure on navies, the following limitations are proposed—

- (a) Limitation of the total tonnage of the whole navy.
- (b) Within this total, limitation of the amount of tonnage allocated to the following classes of

ships: Capital ships (often called battleships), aircraft carriers, cruisers with large guns, cruisers with small guns, destroyers, and submarines.

- (c) Limitation of tonnage and size of guns of individual capital ships, aircraft carriers, and submarines.
- (d) Limitation of the number of very large guns any ship may carry.

It is proposed that a nation may change the number of war ships in any category provided it does not increase any category above the tonnage agreed on, and that due notice is given.

Note.—These naval provisions are taken from existing Treaties, and are the only cases in which figures are inserted in the Draft Convention. But *these figures do not reduce the size of any navy*; indeed, in some cases they allow navies to be increased above their present size.

Very drastic reduction should be made in these figures at the Disarmament Conference.

3. LIMITATION OF WAR AIRCRAFT.

It is proposed that war aircraft should be limited in numbers and total horse power, separately for airplanes and airships.

Note.—The only satisfactory way of dealing with war aircraft would be to abolish them altogether.

CIVIL AIRCRAFT.

It is proposed, in order to prevent civil aircraft from being used for war purposes, that no steps should be

taken in peace time to embody military features in civil aircraft, which should be constructed solely with a view to the greatest security and economic return; no preparations in time of peace should be made for the installation in civil aircraft of warlike armaments which would enable civil aircraft to be rapidly converted into war aircraft; civil aviation enterprises should not be required to employ men trained for war aviation; no subsidies should be given to air lines principally established for military purposes.

Note.—These provisions are most valuable and should be strongly supported.

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION.

It is proposed that every country shall supply the League of Nations annually with the particulars of (a) the number of men in their land, sea, and air forces respectively; (b) their total expenditure for the year on armaments, with separately their expenditure on land armaments and sea armaments; (c) the laying down and completion of new war ships; (d) the number and total horse power of their war aircraft; (e) the number and total horse power of their civil aircraft, and the amount spent on civil aviation by the Government.

All this information would be published annually.

Note.—All publicity about armaments is valuable. These provisions about publicity should be strongly supported, and it should be urged that they should be extended so that there may be full publicity about all aspects of armaments, such as reserve stocks, kinds of weapons, &c.

CHEMICAL ARMS.

It is proposed that nations should undertake not to use poison gas in war between nations who sign the Treaty, and to unreservedly abstain from bacteriological warfare.

Note.—This provision is the same as an existing Convention. It is of little use as it stands because it does nothing to prevent research for and manufacture of poison gas weapons. It should be strongly urged that measures prohibiting all preparation for poison gas warfare should be inserted in the Treaty.

PERMANENT DISARMAMENT COMMISSION.

It is proposed that a Permanent Disarmament Commission should be appointed to follow the execution of the Treaty. Its members would be appointed by Governments, but, once appointed, they would work as members of an international body, and not as representing national interests. The Commission would be authorised to obtain the assistance of experts. It would receive all official and other information offered about the working of the Treaty, and issue a report annually.

Note.—This is a most valuable proposal and should be strongly supported. At the same time it should be urged that the powers of the Commission should be extended to enable it—

- (a) To inquire into all the problems of Disarmament, and frame schemes for further Disarmament for submission to future Disarmament Conferences. It should be specially instructed to do this at once as regards the prohibition of research for and manufacture of all new and improved weapons, the results to

be submitted to a world Disarmament Conference within two years.

- (b) To organise international inspection of armaments in all countries.

DEROGATIONS.

It is proposed that a nation should have the right to suspend temporarily any provision of the Treaty if a change of circumstances, in its opinion, menaces its national security, provided that it immediately gives full particulars of its action and of the circumstances leading to it, to the Permanent Disarmament Commission. This Commission would at once inform all the other Powers, in order that they may promptly advise on the situation.

Note.—This section is most undesirable.

COMPLAINTS.

It is proposed that complaints about any supposed breach of the Treaty should be examined by the Permanent Disarmament Commission, which would hear the parties concerned, and report to the League Council, which would deal with the matter.

Disputes about the interpretation of the Treaty which could not be otherwise settled, would go before the Hague International Court.

EXISTING DISARMAMENT TREATIES.

It is proposed that the new Disarmament Treaty shall not affect any provisions of previous Treaties which provide for greater Disarmament than the new Treaty. Further, the nations affected are to give a definite undertaking to abide by the previous Treaties.

Note.—The chief effect of this clause is to maintain the Disarmament enforced on Germany, Austria,

Hungary, Bulgaria, by the Peace Treaties. It would be disastrous if the Conference allowed any nation to increase its armaments. But it is equally disastrous for the victorious nations to remain far more strongly armed than the defeated ones. There can never be real peace and friendly working together in Europe until all nations agree to drastic Disarmament as a step to Total Disarmament.

DURATION OF TREATY AND FURTHER DISARMAMENT CONFERENCES.

It is proposed that the time for the Treaty to continue in force should be fixed in the Treaty, and that before it expires a further Disarmament Conference should be held. An earlier Conference might be held if technical changes or special circumstances were considered by the Permanent Disarmament Commission to justify it.

Note.—It is most necessary to provide for the holding of further Disarmament Conferences within a short period.

OMISSIONS FROM THE DRAFT CONVENTION.

Several important Disarmament measures are altogether omitted from the Draft Convention, but they could be raised at the Disarmament Conference by any nation that desired to do so.

1. There are no proposals for *limiting the number of trained reserves of soldiers* due to the system of conscription.

2. There are no proposals for *limiting the numbers, size, and classes of land armaments*, such as guns, tanks, machine guns, rifles, &c. This limitation has been imposed on Germany. On the Preparatory Commission

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a resolution to include the principle in the Draft Convention was only defeated by a narrow majority. Our Government should be urged to bring forward a scheme dealing with this question at the Disarmament Conference.

3. There are no proposals for *limiting and reducing stocks of arms*. If this were done, it would make the problem of trained reserves less serious, as soldiers are of little use without arms. Germany is not allowed to keep reserve stocks of arms.

4. There are no proposals for *limiting and reducing the works, arsenals, and dockyards where armaments may be made*. This is an essential part of thorough-going Disarmament, and should be included in the Treaty. It has been imposed on Germany.

5. There are no proposals for *limiting the exact kind and power of the arms allowed*. This is most necessary to ensure that one country does not produce some new and more powerful weapon, and so start a new race in armaments.

6. There are no proposals for *prohibiting all research for and manufacture of new and more deadly weapons*.

CONCLUSION.

We see, therefore, that the Draft Convention is not by any means a complete and thorough-going scheme of Disarmament. In the main, it only deals with three of the principles of such a scheme—limitation of the size of war forces, limitation of expenditure on armaments, and the appointment of a Permanent Disarmament Commission—and its proposals with regard to these do not go nearly far enough.

At the same time, it is possible to make it a real start on the road to Total Disarmament, if the figures

inserted make very large reductions in the present size of war forces and in expenditure, and if the Permanent Disarmament Commission is given large powers to forward further Disarmament. With all our power we must urge that these great reductions should be made, these powers given, always making it clear that these steps are not nearly enough, and that we whole-heartedly support Total Disarmament. This is the best way of strengthening the position of our Government at the Disarmament Conference in working for real Disarmament. The more we ask for, the more we shall get.

And we must urge also, most strongly, that our Government definitely proposes these great reductions. We want our delegates at the Disarmament Conference to propose straight out that the present war forces and armaments should be reduced by 75 per cent, or, as an alternative, that all the restrictions imposed on Germany should be accepted as the basis of the Disarmament Treaty. Nothing adequate will be done unless some powerful nation makes such proposals.

