

Geneva, November 1st, 1932.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS**CONFERENCE FOR THE REDUCTION AND LIMITATION  
OF ARMAMENTS****CO-OPERATION OF THE PRESS IN THE  
ORGANISATION OF PEACE.**

In accordance with the resolution adopted by the Assembly on October 11th, 1932, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Governments of States invited to the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments the following documents:

- I. Report of the Sixth Commission and resolution adopted by the Assembly (thirteenth session) on October 11th, 1932: document A.59.1932.
- II. Extracts from the Minutes of the eighth, ninth and tenth meetings of the Sixth Commission of the Assembly.
- III. Extract from the Minutes of the ninth plenary meeting of the Assembly.
- IV. Annex to the Minutes of the Sixth Commission (document A.31.1932) — Replies from Press organisations to the enquiry into the "spread of false information which may threaten to disturb the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations".

Geneva, October 10th, 1932.

## I.

REPORT BY THE SIXTH COMMITTEE TO THE ASSEMBLY.<sup>1</sup>

*Rapporteur*: Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom).

The question of the collaboration of the Press in the organisation of peace, which was the subject of an Assembly resolution in 1931, comes before this Assembly as the result of a Council decision to have a report prepared on the subject of "the spread of false information which may threaten to disturb the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations".

A valuable contribution to the subject was made by the Conference of Directors of Government Press Bureaux and Press Representatives summoned by the Danish Government at Copenhagen in January this year, and the problem has also been made the subject of consultation between the Secretary-General and various Press Organisations. A circular letter was sent to sixty-four countries and directly reached more than one hundred and thirty Press organisations; the replies received contained some valuable indications.

The problem is how to reduce or diminish false news which has the effect of exacerbating public opinion.

Certain broad results emerge from the replies received, particularly from the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, the International Federation of Journalists, and other Press organisations in different countries. There is general agreement

<sup>1</sup> Document A.59.1932.



that the dissemination of false news does a great deal of harm. There is practically universal dislike on the part of responsible journalists of any Government control of the Press.

The best remedy for false and tendentious news is the fullest and freest supply of news.

An important point covered in the memorandum communicated by the International Association of Journalists is that of the difference between the price that the public is willing to pay for its news and the far greater cost of supplying that news. The ways in which this difference has to be made up tend sometimes to the colouring or distortion of news, though no doubt such instances are rare. True news drives out false news, and the problem is to facilitate the widest possible dissemination of true news.

It has not been possible to enter into all the suggestions contained in the documents before the Committee; some—like those connected with the independence of the Press and the reduction of tariff and other charges which bear upon the Press—need very careful study; and others—like that for the formation of an international association of newspaper proprietors—are rather matters for the Press itself. But there are nevertheless certain important points which the Assembly might well consider.

Would it not be possible, for example, for some arrangements to be made between the League and journalists whereby the new League wireless station might be used during Council and Assembly meetings at cheap rates? The Secretariat might be instructed to enquire into the matter, having due regard, of course, to all legitimate interests which might be affected.

Another question which might be considered is whether the chairmen of League committees might allow more complete and earlier distribution of documents to the Press.

The two broad objects to aim at are the greater independence of the Press from outside control and greater freedom of access to news.

The Sixth Committee's discussion gave rise to various suggestions: the Polish delegate, recalling that the problem of moral disarmament was being considered by a special committee of the Disarmament Conference, proposed that the report and the Minutes of the discussion should be conveyed to the Conference with an intimation of the desirability of summoning an international Press conference. He also proposed that the text of the Assembly resolution and the Minutes of the Committee should be circulated to all qualified Press organisations, and that a report should be submitted to the next Assembly if these steps gave rise to any further developments.

Certain delegates, including those of Italy, Roumania and Yugoslavia, expressed sympathy with the Polish proposal, and others, including the German delegate, were disposed to lay rather greater stress on the valuable statement of the Spanish delegate that she was prepared strongly to recommend to her Government the possibility of its convening another conference on the lines of the Copenhagen Conference summoned by the Danish Government.

Several delegates pointed out that it was for the Governments to consider certain of the mechanical facilities suggested to meet difficulties such as those experienced by more distant countries in obtaining foreign news. This was a problem specially noted by the Roumanian delegates, and it bears close relation to the observations of the Italian and French delegates on the necessity for educating public opinion in international affairs.

The French delegate said he knew of no case in which a journalist had deliberately disseminated false news. News matter was very fluid and ephemeral; it was possible to have tendentious and distorted or inspired news, news given undue prominence by suggestive headlines, incorrect news issued by Governments or Press bureaux, or news fabricated by semi-official representatives of Press bureaux which might mislead the most honourable journalists. A problem which was more serious than the dissemination of false news was the suppression of the truth.

The Australian delegate suggested an historical examination of the problem of the effect of Press utterances on public opinion in times of crisis and their effect on the development of the crisis. During the course of the discussion, the German delegate and the delegate of Chile drew the attention of the Committee to what had already been done in the reduction of rates and in the improvement of facilities for Press communications. It was noted in this connection that several points raised by the International Press Conference of 1927 were under consideration by the Conference for the Revision of the Telegraphic and Telephonic Convention now meeting in Madrid. The German delegate expressed appreciation of the initiative taken by the Danish Government and his satisfaction at the possibility of a second conference of the same kind being summoned at Madrid.

The Norwegian delegate and others emphasised the importance of the independence of the Press in the fullest sense of the term and the public service performed by newspapers.

The Greek delegate informed the Committee that, in his country, there were laws providing penalties for statements defamatory to other countries and likely to disturb good relations.

During the course of the discussion, reference was made to the very interesting initiative of the International Federation of Journalists in establishing at The Hague a Court of Honour for journalists. This Court has not existed long enough for an expression of opinion to be given on the way in which it will work, but it is an experiment which should command the best wishes for its prosperity and success.

The following draft resolution is presented for the consideration of the Assembly:

“ The thirteenth Assembly:

“ 1. Expresses its gratitude to the international and national Press organisations for their views upon the problem of preventing ‘ the spread of false information which may threaten the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations ’;

“ 2. Expresses its thanks to the Danish Government for summoning a Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and representatives of the Press at Copenhagen in January 1932 and notes with great interest the resolutions adopted by that Conference;

“ 3. Trusts that, at a further conference organised on similar lines to the Copenhagen Conference, definite proposals may be made to give effect to some of the principal suggestions already made regarding, in particular, the necessity of a greater abundance of accurate information, of true freedom of the Press, and of co-operation between the Press organisations of various countries;

“ 4. Advocates the fullest possible publicity for League meetings;

“ 5. Commends to the sympathetic consideration of the chairmen of all committees of the League of Nations the earlier and more complete distribution of documents;

“ 6. Desires that the Secretariat should continue to devote its attention to the development by all the means at its disposal of the swift supply to the Press of the fullest possible information concerning the work of the League of Nations;

“ 7. Invites the Council to consider the possibilities of affording to journalists cheap facilities for communicating to their newspapers information through the League wireless station, due regard being paid to interests affected;

“ 8. Requests the Secretary-General to communicate to the Press organisations consulted and to the Disarmament Conference this resolution, together with the Minutes of the Sixth Committee, and to report to the next Assembly on any further developments which may arise.”

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## II.

### EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTH COMMISSION OF THE THIRTEENTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY.

#### EIGHTH MEETING

*Held on Friday, October 7th, 1932 at 10.15 a.m.*

*Chairman:* M. LANGE (Norway).

#### Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace.

The CHAIRMAN, opening the discussion, drew attention to the documentation<sup>1</sup> submitted to the Committee, which he thought of great interest. He regretted that the principal document (A.31.1932) had been printed in small type, which made it very difficult to read and tiring for the eyes. The economy effected thereby must have been almost negligible.

Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, said that the Press was the great instrument of publicity. Without that means of appealing to the public opinion of the world, the League of Nations would be, he would not say powerless, but far less useful and effective than it was at present. The co-operation of the Press, therefore, was a vital matter to the success of the

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<sup>1</sup> See (a) the Resolutions of the Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press (Copenhagen, 1932), (b) Minutes of the third meeting of the sixty-eighth session of the Council of the League, (c) document A.31.1932 (reproduced herewith).

League, and all his colleagues would agree that that co-operation had been given with no stinting hand during the history of the League.

It was also true that false news or news likely to exacerbate international relations very much hindered and impeded the work of the League. The object therefore must be, positively, to get the assistance of the Press in organising peace and, negatively, to prevent the exacerbation of international relations.

The matter had been referred to the Secretariat by the Assembly of the previous year with instructions to try to obtain, among other things, information as to how to prevent the spread of false news which might threaten to disturb peace or good understanding between nations, and the Committee now had before it two documents of very great importance. A Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press had been held at Copenhagen, and that Conference had arrived at certain important resolutions. In addition, the various Press Associations had been circularised by the Secretariat, and a number of replies received, particularly from the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations and the International Federation of Journalists, as well as from Press Associations in sixteen different countries.

From these replies certain broad results emerged. In the first place, there was very general agreement that the dissemination of false news—particularly false news of a kind likely to embroil the nations—did in effect do a very great deal of harm, and constituted a real danger to peace.

The second thing which these documents revealed was the practically universal dislike on the part of all responsible journalists to any increase in Government control of the Press. That point was very strongly urged in a number of the replies received, and nowhere more strongly than by the International Federation of Journalists which said: " Journalists reject the intervention of any disciplinary authority whatsoever, apart from that set up by themselves for dealing with such cases ". Such was the line taken by pressmen all over the world, and he personally agreed with it. The objection was not only to Government control, but to all outside control of the Press. The document sent in by the journalists accredited to the League emphasised over and over again the point that the way to get a good sound Press actuated by the highest motives was, first and foremost, to give the greatest possible freedom to the journalists concerned. All those connected with the Press were agreed on that point. The best remedy for all false and tendentious news was the fullest and freest supply of news. That was put very forcibly in one of the resolutions of the Conference at Copenhagen which said: " One of the most effective means of combating inaccurate information is the rapid spread of accurate and abundant information through the agency of the Press bureaux—Lord Cecil might add, not only through the agency of the Press bureaux, but in every possible way.

Another point, which was made very strongly, was worth the consideration of the Committee, and indeed of public opinion. News, it was pointed out, depended on the cost of the newspapers concerned. The public demanded news for a price which was very far from covering the expense of obtaining that news; and the proprietors of the Press and those connected with it had to consider how that gap between the cost price and the selling-price was to be bridged. It was bridged in several ways. In the first place, by the sale of advertisements. Many advertisements were of course unobjectionable; but, according to the journalists attached to the League, there was a type of advertiser who tried to control the policy and the news published in the paper, and that involved deflection from the true representation of the facts. Secondly, there were subsidies, whether from some organisations or from Governments. That also involved some control and some deflection from the truth of news published in the papers. Finally, there was the phenomenon extremely common and well known in the United Kingdom as elsewhere, of newspapers being bought up by great capitalists with the object, not only of producing a vehicle of news and information of a strictly impartial and objective character, but also of forwarding their private or political interests through the medium of the paper. That again involved diversion from, or distortion of, the truth.

Those were the facts laid before the Committee in very clear—almost brilliant—language, particularly by the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations; and with this statement of the facts would be found very interesting suggestions as to how the difficulty of bridging the gap between the cost of production and the sale price of the paper could be met.

In the first place, these suggestions referred to the possibility of Governments making news more readily available and cheaper and easier to use. In that connection, Lord Cecil had a suggestion to make. Would it not be possible to use the League wireless station, at any rate during Council meetings or Assemblies, for the dissemination by journalists of the news they desired to communicate cheaply and effectively? If the Committee agreed, he would suggest that it should recommend the Secretariat to look into the matter and, while having regard to legitimate interests which might be in conflict, see what could be done in that direction by way of example, so to speak, to Governments and organisations throughout the world.

A great deal was said in the documents about the evils of indirect payment of the Press—by advertisement, by subsidies—and by other forms of financial control. He himself was satisfied that the claim made by the journalists was justified—namely, that, if they were left full freedom, they would be anxious for every reason to supply good, impartial and, what he might call, " well-

meaning news, and not try to embitter controversies throughout the world. They would be actuated by what he believed were the first words printed by that father of printing, Gutenberg—" *Fiat lux* ".

One Press association made the suggestion that " in the interests of world peace no armaments industry and no business connected therewith should be permitted to be the owner or a newspaper or of a telegraphic agency, or to subsidise directly or indirectly newspapers or telegraphic agencies ". How far that could be carried out was not a matter with which the Committee could deal there and then: but it was a striking indication of how bitterly journalists felt the charge of disseminating false news, and how strongly they believed that the charge should be made, not against them, but against the interests which, in their view, too often controlled the supply of news.

Such cases were no doubt relatively rare. It was exceptional to find on the part of proprietors, advertisers, or those who gave subsidies to the Press, any desire to poison the wells of truth.

It had been suggested that it might be desirable to have an International Association of Newspaper Directors with a view to greater co-operation between the newspapers of the world.

In general, Lord Cecil did not think there was any special action the Committee could take. The question was, in the main, a matter for the national Governments. There was, however, one thing the Committee could do to help. It was very strongly recommended that all meetings of the League and of its committees should be open to the Press. No doubt some of them would be regarded as of insufficient public interest to warrant a report of their proceedings, but that, it was urged, was a matter for the journalists to judge. Full opportunity, it was said, ought to be given to them for gathering news of all kinds in every case where an official body or even an unofficial body of the League was at work.

It was also urged very strongly that there should be a more complete distribution of documents; and it was pointed out, among other things, that, under the regulations of the League, it was left to the Chairmen of committees to decide whether documents should be communicated to the Press before being communicated to the Council or the Assembly. He thought this matter might be brought to the attention of Chairmen, who might be asked to consider more carefully how often they could give this permission for documents to be distributed at an earlier stage than was sometimes the case at present.

If the League really wished to secure the full co-operation of the Press, it must give out more, and not less, information. In this connection, the journalists made a very strong statement as to the importance of the Information Section of the Secretariat and the admirable work it was doing. The following statement was made by the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations (letter of September 30th, 1932, from their President to the Chairman of the Fourth Committee of the Assembly):

" The League's Information Section is still easily the best such service that we know of anywhere and in many respects its work is a model for others that are less handicapped than it. We would add that the highest appreciation of its work comes from those of our members who have the widest experience in different countries with governmental and other Press bureaux. "

The establishment of the Court of Honour for Journalists was a matter of great interest. He was sure he was expressing the views of every member of the Committee in tendering their best wishes for its prosperity and success.

To sum up, if it were desired to secure the co-operation of the Press, both positively in support of measures of peace and negatively in the suppression of false and pernicious news, the great thing to do was to foster the healthy growth of journalism. The best means of doing that was to provide more and cheaper news, to enable journalists to work with greater freedom and to fulfil their duties with less outside control and, perhaps, less commercialism. Journalism was an art or a craft of the highest skill; and in this case, as in so many others, the higher the aim, the greater the truth. That was the general conclusion at which Lord Cecil had arrived after a study of the documents before the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN thanked Lord Cecil for having provided so useful a basis of discussion.

The delegates would shortly receive a copy of the correspondence exchanged between the President of the Association of Journalists accredited to the League and the Secretary-General, concerning the discontinuance—as a result of retrenchment—of the posting-up of the Minutes of Committees in the journalists' hall. This matter had been discussed by the Fourth Committee, which had referred it to the Supervisory Commission. He had just learned that the Supervisory Commission had appointed a special Committee to study the question in the hope that some workable arrangement would be reached in time for the next Assembly, because there was no possibility of re-establishing the former procedure during the present Assembly. This matter, of course,

could not form the subject of any decision or even discussion in the Sixth Committee, but he felt that the delegates of the Sixth Committee should be informed of the course of events.

The Committee now had to consider the Polish delegation's draft resolution.

M. SZUMLAKOWSKI (Poland) said that the Polish Government attached great importance to the collaboration of the Press. It had proved its interest by submitting to the Disarmament Conference a memorandum on moral disarmament in which the present question was accorded considerable prominence. As the delegates were aware, the Disarmament Conference had set up a Committee on Moral Disarmament which had already made satisfactory progress in its work. With regard to the Press, the Polish delegation had submitted to this Committee a draft resolution urging the convening of an international Press conference. The Committee had adopted this resolution as a basis of its discussions.

The Secretary-General's report (document A.31.1932) contained several interesting suggestions from the various Press associations. They threw a new light on this complex problem and proved that it would have to be deeply studied before the anxieties expressed in the League and in the Disarmament Conference could be dispelled.

It could not be denied that a problem of false news existed and that international relations were even disturbed by the propagation of false and biassed news. Endeavours must, therefore, be made to discover remedies for this evil, of which journalists were generally not the authors but the victims. This problem arose within the vast framework of the international collaboration of the Press. The remedy could not be supplied by Governments. That was the natural task of journalists themselves, who were best fitted to find the most adequate solution. In fact, it was absolutely necessary that the qualified Press organisations should be left to deal with the problem of false news themselves. The liberty of the Press must in no way be hampered. He was sure that no delegate, by inopportune action, would desire to complicate further the already complex task of journalists. Governments could assist the Press associations by convening an international Press conference, which, he was sure, would give good results.

This was the method indicated by the Committee on Moral Disarmament. Surely it would not be desirable for the Assembly to deal with this question in its turn without taking account of the results achieved by the Disarmament Conference, particularly as the same States were represented in the Assembly as were present at the Conference. The Polish delegation therefore proposed that the discussion, which would doubtless be of great utility from the standpoint of the future work of the Disarmament Conference, should be closed by the adoption of a resolution, the text of which had already been submitted to the delegations and read as follows:

“Whereas the Assembly has considered the Secretary-General's report on the question of false news and appreciates its highly informative character;

“Whereas the problem of false news, and, in general, that of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, form part of the more general problem of moral disarmament;

“Whereas the Assembly is of opinion that the solution of the problem of moral disarmament so far as concerns the Press can only be effectively sought by journalists themselves, and that it consequently seems desirable that an international Press Conference should be convened at an early date;

“Whereas the problem of moral disarmament is being exhaustively investigated by the Committee of the Disarmament Conference on Moral Disarmament:

“The Assembly decides to request the Council of the League of Nations to convey the present resolution, together with the Secretary-General's report and the Minutes of the Sixth Committee, to the Disarmament Conference, and to call the latter's attention to the desirability of an international Press conference.”

Finally, he had one suggestion to make. It might be desirable to request the Secretariat of the League to communicate to the international Press organisations all the documents on this question submitted to the present Assembly. The latter, by their replies to the Information Section's enquiry, had shown that they attached great importance to the problem and were prepared to co-operate with the League in solving it. It would therefore only be right to keep them informed of the progress of the work.

M. FILLOTI (Roumania) said that the Roumanian delegation had been deeply interested in the results of the Copenhagen Conference of Press bureaux and journalists. The Danish Government was to be congratulated on the initiative it had taken in supplying the delegates of the Assembly with the texts of the resolutions adopted. From the results, it was obvious that a considerable measure of agreement had been reached regarding a whole series of highly commendable principles. As regards practical steps, however, there was a wide divergence of opinion. Two fundamental ideas emerged from the discussion: one was that the surest means of combating false news was to spread the truth. Some proposed direct means to counteract the spreading of false news, while others proposed indirect means to prevent its circulation; a third group held that any action at present would be premature. The second fundamental idea was that there should be no restriction of the liberty of the Press. It was obvious that all these proposals would have to be co-ordinated.

One of the most practical means for assisting the Press at the present time was administrative measures for the reduction of rates. This question should be taken into serious consideration by the various Governments, it being always remembered that the best way to deal with false news was to intensify the dissemination of accurate news. There could be no doubt that the dearness of telephonic and telegraphic communications and the restrictions placed on the use by newspapers of wireless news hampered the spread of adequate information. As regarded Geneva, the complications increased in proportion to the distance which separated that city from the journalist's country. Distant countries, therefore, often experienced difficulty in obtaining sufficient news concerning the League and its activities. Consequently, the space accorded to foreign news was reduced in favour of local news, which led to the over-concentration of public opinion on domestic matters. Any expense incurred by Governments in granting greater facilities would, he thought, be fully compensated by the advantages gained both by themselves and the League.

Many other interesting suggestions had been put forward, such as the desirability of creating an international federation of newspaper publishers, etc. It was clear that a very wide field of possibilities had still to be explored. He had only just now read the Polish delegation's proposal. While agreeing that the question of moral disarmament was of the highest importance, he was not sure that the present question was not of wider scope than moral disarmament itself. He would be prepared to accept the Polish resolution with an amendment to the effect that the documents of the present Assembly should be communicated to the Committee on Moral Disarmament, but at the same time the Secretary-General should be requested to continue the enquiry and submit a report to the next Assembly. He did not think that the present financial situation would permit of the convening of another conference. Or course, if any Government or Governments were prepared—like the Danish Government in the past—to organise such a conference, the decision would undoubtedly be welcomed by all concerned.

Mme. OYARZABAL DE PALENCIA (Spain) said it was clear that the Spanish Government took great interest in this question, since the resolution on the subject submitted in the previous year had been proposed by the Spanish delegation. That delegation had put forward its proposal as a tribute to the Press, which had played so important a part in guiding Spain through a very critical period of her development without complications or any really serious disturbances.

Speaking as a journalist, she could say that the report before the Committee admirably explained all the difficulties which were experienced by this very important profession. Above all, it emphasised the unanimous desire of journalists to be accorded full liberty of action. Possibly, in this connection the Spanish resolution had been misunderstood: the only control on the liberty of the Press which it proposed was a moral control. Any other form of control would not merely be disliked by journalists, but would counteract the beneficial action they could otherwise take. It was an extraordinary fact that at the present time, when narrow industrial interests were so well and ably defended on the least provocation, tremendous problems involving the happiness of millions of men and women were left absolutely at the mercy of petty egoisms and covert propaganda. In all this the chief sufferers were the journalists themselves. One great drawback at present was the existence of so many self-styled journalists. It seemed that at the present time everybody considered himself or herself to be a journalist. Some of these persons were undoubtedly actuated by base considerations which hampered the work of true journalists. True journalists—she could say from experience—invariably sought to state the truth and suffered profoundly when they saw their reports distorted.

Though there were no greater enthusiasts for truth than the journalists themselves, the League must help by reacting against inaccurate news. Journalists knew how deep an impression inaccurate news could produce on the masses. It was enormously important that news should be accurate: better only a little news, better even unpalatable news, than news which was untrue.

The facilities indicated on page 20 of the report (document A.31. 1932) would be of great assistance to the Press, particularly in the case of papers which did not possess great financial resources. It was essential that more documents and information should be made available and all meetings should be open to journalists as Lord Cecil had suggested; but some more definite action was necessary. The Polish delegation's proposal was unacceptable for financial reasons at a time when the League had had to curtail so many of its activities on grounds of economy. Would it not be possible to obtain the desired result by the same method as that which had led to the convening of the Copenhagen Conference? She was prepared to recommend to the Spanish Government that it should consider favourably the possibility of convening such a conference. She had, of course, no mandate from her Government to make this suggestion and was merely stating her personal willingness to raise the point. She was sure, however, that the Spanish Government would consider the possibility with sympathy.

It was the duty of everyone to aid in the dissemination of truth. Even silence bred fear, and semi-silence misunderstanding. Truth dispelled fears and misconceptions and helped to promote that understanding which in turn led to good fellowship.

M. Lucien HUBERT (France) said that he would leave his colleague, M. de Tesson, who directed the foreign political news of one of the most important regional dailies of France, to deal with the technical aspects of the question.

In the first place, he paid a tribute to all the work which had been accomplished, to the excellent report and to the manner in which Lord Cecil has explained and commented on the situation. He agreed with Lord Cecil that all efforts must be based on the entire liberty of the Press. Lord Cecil had shown how such liberty was sometimes menaced by publicity contracts, Government subsidies, etc. Of course, it was for the newspapers to protect themselves against such menaces, but the League could help them by doing its best to counteract false and dangerous news. The antidote for false news was true news. He had no need to insist on that point, which had been sufficiently emphasised by previous speakers. False news had never perhaps been a greater danger to the world than it was to-day; therefore the League must fight it, the Press must aid the League, and the League must aid the Press.

D'Annunzio once dedicated a book to Anatole France in the following terms: "To him whom both error and truth seek equally to beguile". The same might be said of journalists, except that journalists sought for truth, while error sought for them—though it should be remembered that there were some truths which it was not always a good thing to make public. He believed, however, in the force of truth. There was an African proverb which said that, however early in the morning a lie set out, it would be overtaken by truth before the evening. The League should aid journalists in their task and should rely on the journalists themselves to do the rest.

Sir Donald CAMERON (Australia) said that there was no need for him to emphasise the supreme importance to peace of the accuracy and understanding nature of all information of an international character published by the Press. The problem of avoiding the publication of news that might either be false or, even if true, harmful if released at a time of national crisis, was, he was sure, receiving the sympathetic consideration of newspaper proprietors and journalists' associations throughout Australia. Reports received by the Australian Government from Australian journalists' associations showed that the very heavy responsibility of the Press in this matter was fully appreciated. That the danger existed was self-evident. He thought the most effective action would be to bring journalists and newspaper proprietors throughout the world to realise their immense responsibility. It was difficult to say how this result could best be achieved. He felt sure, however, that the subject should not be approached without a close historical investigation of the effect of Press utterances upon national feelings in past crises and the apparent influence of such utterances on the development of those crises. This was a most necessary undertaking if the League was ever, with the assistance of the Press, to ensure that news should not be published if it were false or, if true, harmful.

In considering this question, the fundamental, and, in his opinion, vital principle of the freedom of the Press must always be borne in mind. Any restrictions placed on the Press would eventually prove more harmful than beneficial. The whole question should be approached with very great care. Personally, he did not think that when the League had come to consider the question of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace there had been any suggestion of imposing control on the Press. In such matters, however, co-operation, unless carefully directed into the right channels, not infrequently resulted in control which was tantamount to restriction.

It was perhaps unnecessary to emphasise the inestimable advantage of a free Press. Those advantages were, however, set off by the disadvantage that some journalists or newspaper proprietors endeavoured to seek publicity or profit by the publication of exaggerated or untrue statements, even when such statements might dangerously inflame public opinion. The most effective manner in which such danger could be avoided was the provision of an ample supply of true and accurate information. The end to be attained was a candid and truthful presentation of news of international concern and it could never be attained without the goodwill of newspaper proprietors and journalists themselves. Provided the problem were approached in the right spirit, a great step forward could, with the co-operation of the Press, be achieved in the maintenance of world peace.

M. VALDÉS-MENDEVILLE (Chile) said that it was obvious that the Chilean Government fully approved the efforts being made to secure the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, since, in 1925, the Chilean delegation had been the first to raise the whole question. At that time the proposal had perhaps seemed to be Utopian. Time had been necessary to allow the question to mature.

The first result of the proposal had been the Press Conference of 1927. The question had since then entered into a second stage. The third stage would begin with M. de Tesson's proposals, which the Committee would discuss later. The importance of the first stage should not, however, be minimised. Many of the recommendations of the 1927 Conference had been carried out, while others were in process of execution; for instance, the Madrid Conference for the Revision of the International Telegraph Convention including the proposal to institute urgent Press telegrams and a deferred Press telegram service.



He fully agreed with Lord Cecil's remarks and believed that in the work of co-ordination the full liberty of the Press must be guaranteed. He hoped that the Press would be able to take spontaneous decisions which would help the matter forward. He would quote the instance of one very small country whose Press had proposed that the International Press Organisations should give a definite undertaking to help. That country, Honduras, had, in another sphere, given an excellent example of conciliation by submitting a very important frontier question with her neighbour Guatemala to arbitration.

He reserved the right to study later the Polish delegation's very interesting proposal, in the light of its various aspects and possible consequences.

M. ANDRITCH (Yugoslavia) said that he had, as his contry's representative on the Committee on Moral Disarmament and its Press Sub-Committee, on several occasions expressed his Government's opinion on the question now under discussion. He need, therefore, merely state that he fully shared the views set out in the Polish delegation's draft resolution. Knowing only too well the dire effects of false news on public opinion, the Yugoslav delegation felt that States should do everything in their power to suppress and combat such news. The campaign, however, could only be carried on with the help of journalists themselves. The only effective action against the newspapers was that undertaken by the Press itself. The Yugoslav delegation shared Lord Cecil's view that all the League's work should be open and accessible as far as possible to Press representatives. Such a policy would be beneficial to all countries and the League itself.

M. DE MARSANICH (Italy) pointed out that the dissemination of false news was not necessarily, as the Empire Press Union had observed, a matter for international action. The remedy might lie in the better education of the public in international affairs. It was necessary to establish much closer contact between the Press and Government Press bureaux by means of more frequent conferences. Stress should be laid on the personal responsibility of journalists. Only trustworthy persons of highest repute should be allowed to engage in the profession. There ought, in every country, to be official registers of journalists such as existed in the case of the legal, medical and other professions. A necessary balance must be struck between the freedom of the Press on the one hand and its responsibility on the other. Liberty had no meaning unless it was counter-balanced by responsibility.

He entirely agreed that the Minutes of the present discussion should be communicated to the Disarmament Conference.

M. DE TESSAN (France) had read most carefully the excellent report submitted by Mr. Clarence Streit on behalf of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, and had listened no less carefully to the observations submitted on the subject by Lord Cecil and other speakers. All through the discussion, however, in which so much had been said about "false information" and its pernicious effects on the various sections of world opinion, no one, so far as he was aware, had explained exactly what was meant by "false information". The supplying of information was an extremely delicate task, since the elements of that information were often fluid and ephemeral and essentially non-stable in character. At what precise point could it be said that news was absolutely correct? News that was true in the morning might be false in the evening, or *vice versa*. A rumour, for instance, that was at first indignantly denounced, might become an article of faith. A journalist working under difficult conditions in the midst of political and diplomatic offensives and counter-offensives found it very difficult to discriminate. He did his best.

M. de Tessan had never known any professional journalist worthy of the name who had deliberately invented a piece of news or published information such as to lead to catastrophic results. When a journalist made a mistake, it was generally because he had been misled himself or because influences brought into play later had distorted the whole affair. M. de Tessan did not deny that there were tendentious campaigns, that pressure was brought to bear on public opinion through the intermediary of the Press, or that there were ways of giving this or that piece of news exaggerated importance by means of the head-lines and typographical lay-out of the paper. There thus existed the possibility of doing a great deal of harm, of arousing passions, of irritating people's minds instead of rounding off the angles and working for mutual comprehension as the spirit of the League demanded. To assert the contrary would be to refuse the Press the influence it enjoyed in varying degrees in different countries. But here again it was not a question of false information unscrupulously manufactured in the interests of some particular cause, but rather of misleading propaganda injurious to good understanding between the peoples.

How then could journalists and correspondents be enabled—so far as that was humanly possible—to avoid the mistakes and to cope with the drawbacks of incomplete information or news that might tend to unsettle people? That was a point which M. de Tessan would like briefly to consider. In his view, the possibilities of improvement were of two kinds—mechanical and moral. Journalists must be given assistance in the exercise of their profession, by facilitating all electrical means of transmitting news, particularly by reducing the telephone, telegraph, cable and wireless rates for long distances. They must be enabled to travel about easily and more cheaply in the pursuit of their enquiries. They should be given access, without irritating formalities, to all means of land and air transport to enable them to carry out their task with the necessary rapidity.

Mr. Clarence Streit's report contained some excellent suggestions on this subject. He suggested—with a view to assisting the distribution of newspapers and giving the Press access

to a larger public, especially in countries suffering from the economic crisis—the reduction of Customs duties on newsprint paper, ink and machinery.

He would add that if such privileges were accorded to the Press, it was not only the newspaper owners or companies that must benefit by them. It was only right that the position of the journalists within the organisation itself should be improved and consolidated. It was for this that the trade unions were fighting. They demanded a better status, adequate pensions and more definite guarantees. Here at Geneva the word “security” was being much discussed. M. de Tessan felt sure he could say without offending anyone, certainly not any technical member of the Press, that journalists were in need of security. In many places, they were not paid as they should be; they could not look forward to a comfortable old age; they did not possess a status such as to protect them adequately or enhance their professional prestige. In order to have good journalists, in order to build up a sound journalistic profession and raise the standard of the recruits, the necessary financial sacrifices must be made. Journalists were anxious that their profession should be in every sense of the word a *liberal* profession, with the material and intellectual independence which that implied.

Lord Cecil had just put before the Committee the ideal of a Press entirely free from pressure. M. de Tessan agreed with him most heartily. But it was rare, in the present day, to find newspapers edited, controlled or owned by pure journalists. Coalitions of interests often weighed on newspapers, or magnates acquired control, preoccupied with their own particular interests rather than those of the general public. It might even happen that in whole regions the Press was in the hands of a trust or was simply a cog in a higher organisation. When the freedom of the Press was thus threatened, it was for the people in every country who still preserved their feeling of independence to react and break down those various coalitions which stifled the spirit of criticism and smothered free discussion. To a Frenchman, the freedom of the Press was an inalienable democratic principle. They rejected the idea of censorship in any form. One of the great French polemical writers said: “You cannot kill ideas with a gun”. M. de Tessan would add: “Neither can you eliminate them with a pair of scissors”. The clash of ideas, it had been said, produced the spark of vision. These generous clashes of ideas must be allowed to occur, and nothing must prevent them.

Further, Governments should supply journalists with entirely objective documentary material and should not seek to influence them, according to their immediate views, by giving them incomplete information. There would be less false news in the world if the Press bureaux were more careful to supply only impartial information, and if persons not holding any actual office but responsible, in point of fact, for the propaganda of this or that State, refrained from giving journalists suggestions in keeping with their own particular wishes. It would be seen how difficult it was for professional journalists to keep a clear head in their work and to insist upon their right of independent judgment.

M. de Tessan would now consider another aspect of the problem. To encourage the release of accurate news was excellent. To give the Press the material means to inform the world without delay was also an excellent idea. But how was it possible to cope with one weapon which was more terrible than all the rest—namely, silence? There were, in truth, regular conspiracies of silence. Useful news was systematically eliminated. Certain problems were jealously kept beyond the reach of discussion. No matter from whence the *mot d'ordre* emanated, silence was reprehensible. To know the truth and not to spread it was worse than to manufacture tendentious news or carelessly to spread abroad a piece of false information. In that last case there was always the possibility of a denial, to act as an antidote for the effects of the poison of noxious information. But what weapon could be used when news which might enlighten public opinion was not allowed to penetrate, news which would permit of contrary views being heard, news which would result in a more rational outlook? Silence constituted the most redoubtable, the most deadly tactical means at the disposal of anyone fighting to prevent *rapprochement* between the peoples.

Whatever the difficulties of the task, the Press must be allowed to co-operate in the work of moral disarmament and the organisation of peace. A number of practical means had been suggested with a view to informing the public more fully, with a view to strengthening the prestige of journalists and promoting the independence of the Press. But the education of the newspaper-reading masses did not depend on the Press alone. Their education might be supplemented by means of the instruments of intellectual co-operation at the disposal of the League. What was being done in the matter of the education of the people—wireless, the cinema—gave ground for hope that the masses would gradually become more enlightened and better prepared to defend their own interests, for which the essential requirement was peace. Intellectual co-operation, as M. de Tessan had already explained, was closely linked up with the action of the Press. The more intelligent readers there were in the world, the more important the rôle newspapers would be called upon to play. The more independent newspapers were, the more effective would that rôle be. Mankind would have everything to gain by this double progression, and there would be cause for real satisfaction when the readers of the important daily papers were in a position to exercise intellectual censorship—the only kind of censorship that really counted—to interpret news accurately, to understand all that the Press told them and even, if necessary, all that it did not tell them.

*The continuation of the discussion was adjourned to the next meeting.*

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## NINTH MEETING.

*Held on Saturday, October 8th, 1932, at 10.30 a.m.*

*Chairman:* M. LANGE (Norway).

### **Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace** (*continuation*).

M. VON WEIZSÄCKER (Germany) associated himself with the excellent speeches made during the previous discussion. He was able to do so the more easily because his country was in favour of any measures by which the unfortunate results of the transmission of false news might be overcome.

He concluded from the documents communicated to the members of the Committee that journalists cared for nothing so much as the truth, and nothing cost them so much as the truth. Obviously, facilities of all kinds which might be offered to journalists, such as a reduction in the cost of transmission, would facilitate the campaign against false news. This campaign would be the more efficacious if a large number of journalists could obtain information by their own means. He observed that the chief questions involved were to be found in the agenda of the World Telegraphic Conference, which was at present meeting in Madrid, and the Wireless Conference.

He pointed out that the cost of Press communications had already been reduced by 10 per cent during recent years. In addition, certain special facilities had already been granted: the transmission of Press telegrams was no longer restricted to certain hours, telephonic communications from journalists had priority without additional charge, etc. The German delegate stated that he had just learnt with pleasure that the Madrid Conference was about to decide that urgent Press telegrams should also be accorded a reduced tariff. That was one more step in the right direction.

The German delegate considered the Spanish delegate's proposal to convene a new Conference similar to the Copenhagen Conference both useful and practical, and would be particularly glad if this Conference could meet in Madrid. International journalist's organisations, such as the International Federation of Journalists and the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League, might consider how technical developments could be utilised to facilitate the work of journalists. Efficacious contact between the Press and the League of Nations would be furthered if the latter association made suggestions as to how the dissemination of false news could be prevented. The spirit prevailing in that association would undoubtedly ensure the utility of such collaboration, and enable further progress to be made.

M. PAPADAKIS (Greece) emphasised the importance which his country attached to the problem of the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, and especially to the question of the dissemination of false news. It had expressed its interest at the time of the Copenhagen Conference, when the Greek delegate had submitted a draft resolution recommending close international co-operation between official, semi-official, and private bodies or persons who could help to prevent the spreading of false news. The events which had occurred in the past year in Cyprus had given the Greek Government an opportunity to take steps which showed that its anxiety to safeguard the truth was not merely theoretical. Many misunderstandings had been prevented by these measures, and considerable undesirable friction had been avoided. Greece had also recently enacted legal provisions imposing very heavy sanctions on attempts to defame foreign Governments. These provisions had been applied in a recent case, and, as a result, public opinion in a neighbouring country had been given satisfaction. The Greek delegate desired to explain, however, that it had rarely been necessary to apply the provisions in question, for the Greek Press had already a profound realisation of the contribution it was called upon to make in moral disarmament.

The Greek delegate thought that, in view of the very interesting suggestions which the journalists' associations had themselves submitted to the League, those associations should be thanked for their co-operation and sincerity. M. Papadakis firmly believed that the programme of reform which these associations had proposed should be studied carefully, although some of its features might perhaps appear rather bold, such as the idea of making newspapers a public undertaking, part of the cost being borne by the State budget. In spite of appearances, several of the proposals were logical and realisable.

The Greek Government had already extended to journalists many facilities, including transport, communications, reduction of Customs duties on paper for newspapers, etc. Material pressure on newspapers was becoming more and more rare in Greece.

It must also be remembered that, when in certain States the Press was subject to regulations compelling it to keep silence on certain questions, that might be due to temporary circumstances; this method might have been applied as an experiment to a Press which sometimes became too violent, and might be part of a system necessitated by the special situation of a particular nation. Care must be taken not to attack the sovereignty of States. M. Papadakis pointed out, in this connection, that, in his country, the Press had complete liberty.

Finally, the Greek delegate stated that he shared the Spanish delegate's doubts as to whether it would be possible for the journalists themselves to organise a new Press Conference in the present circumstances. If Mme. Oyarzabal de Palencia's appeal to her Government were successful, the League would have still more reason to be grateful to the Spanish Republic.

*(At the Chairman's request, M. Valdés-Mendeville, Vice-Chairman, took the chair.)*

M. LANGE (Norway) wished to say, in his capacity as Norwegian delegate, that he had read document A.31.1932 which had been submitted to the Commission with the greatest interest. He had been particularly impressed by the introductory letter from Mr. Streit, President of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League. The whole document was, in his view, one of the most noteworthy that he had ever read since he had attended the Assembly's proceedings as a delegate.

There was plainly one fundamental condition which must exist if the Press was to carry out its true function of giving expression to all the shades of opinion in any country. That condition was that the Press must be really independent. It could not make use of the liberty granted it by law unless it was independent in every sense of the word.

He would recall Mr. Gladstone's statement that all the liberties existing in a country could be suppressed without any great danger so long as the liberty of the Press was preserved. That was a profound truth. For this reason the particular problem under consideration by the Sixth Committee was, in reality, only one factor of a far wider problem—namely, the independence of the Press. The Sixth Committee was not asked to find a solution for this latter issue. It might, however, include among its conclusions certain suggestions as to ways and means of mitigating the evil. It was true that the position of the Press differed in the different countries. It was only one factor in the general situation, but it would be remarked that the Press exercised greater influence in countries where it was independent.

M. Lange had always admired the way in which the British Press devoted a large amount of space to letters to the Editor. Under that system, dissentient opinions found free opportunity of expression, and it should be followed generally. True, it would be illusory to imagine that public opinion in all its shades was favourable to peace. He, however, found satisfaction in that fact when he considered that no great cause had triumphed without passing through the ordeal of public discussion and free criticism on the part of its opponents.

M. Lange favoured the method of consulting the heads of the official Press bureaux in the different countries, but he would like the journalists themselves to be consulted as well. He had been glad to hear various speakers endorse Mr. Streit's suggestion in that connection. He considered that the Press might, to a certain extent, be regarded as a public utility undertaking, part of the cost of which should be borne by the State. Further, the profession of journalism should be endowed with a charter. This would engender a feeling of its responsibility, more particularly for truth and justice.

Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, noted with satisfaction that no criticism had been made against the considerations he had offered at the previous meeting. He accordingly concluded that his statement had been accepted in its general outlines.

He agreed with the Norwegian delegate that his remarks covered only part of the general problem of the Press. The Sixth Committee was not the place to deal with these general questions, which must nevertheless be borne in mind.

The United Kingdom was not the only country in which the Press published letters to the Editor, as M. Lange had said. Nevertheless, such letters did provide a very useful safety valve for public opinion.

The Rapporteur had listened with interest to M. de Tesson's remark to the effect that no mention had been made during the debates of the fact that silence might cause an impression no less incorrect than that due to the use of any particular words. It must, however, be admitted that it was very difficult to make people speak when they did not wish to do so.

Two salient points in the discussion were the independence of the Press and the facilities to be given to newspapers to enable them to obtain news more easily. Those were the two main conditions for the real liberty of the Press, and they were therefore the two points to be drawn more particularly to the Assembly's notice.

The Rapporteur would mention in his report the Spanish delegate's suggestion. The carrying out of that proposal would obviously depend to some extent on the Spanish Government's goodwill, on which the League could, of course, rely.

He considered that the proposed Conference might usefully examine certain practical methods for giving effect to the general ideas advanced during the present discussion. He would take account in the report, after consulting the Polish delegation, of the substance of the latter's resolution.

*(The general discussion was declared closed.)*

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TENTH MEETING.

*Held on Monday, October 10th, 1932, at 5 p.m.*

*Chairman:* M. LANGE (Norway).

**Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace (continuation).**

Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, read his draft report and resolution.

M. SZUMLAKOWSKI (Poland) accepted, on behalf of the Polish delegation, the draft report and resolution submitted by the Rapporteur.

M. DE TESSAN (France) thanked the Rapporteur for his impartiality and the masterly way in which he had summarised the Committee's discussions. On behalf of the French delegation, he associated himself entirely with the draft resolution, and expressed the hope that the Press Conference, which it was proposed to convene at Madrid, would take place as soon as possible.

Mme. OYARZABAL DE PALENCIA (Spain) also thanked the Rapporteur, whom she congratulated on the lucidity of his report. She hoped that the Madrid Conference would meet and examine the two principal points mentioned in Lord Cecil's report.

*The report and draft resolution were adopted.*

**Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace: Appointment of a Rapporteur to the Assembly.**

The CHAIRMAN requested Lord Cecil to submit the report to the Assembly.

Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom) accepted the Chairman's suggestion and paid a tribute to the help he had received from the Committee and the Secretariat.

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III.

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE NINTH PLENARY MEETING  
OF THE THIRTEENTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY.

*Tuesday, October 11th, 1932, at 10.30 a.m.*

*President:* M. POLITIS.

**Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace: Report of the Sixth Committee:  
Resolution.**

The PRESIDENT:

*Translation:* The next item on the agenda is the discussion of the Sixth Committee's report on the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace (document A.59.1932, Annex 14).

*(On the invitation of the President, Dr. Lange, Chairman of the Sixth Committee, and Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Rapporteur, took their places on the platform.)*

The PRESIDENT:

*Translation:* Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Rapporteur, will address the Assembly.

Viscount CECIL OF CHELWOOD (United Kingdom), Rapporteur. — The subject that I have to bring before the Assembly is one, I think, which will be recognised to be of considerable importance—the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace. It is a very old observation in these Assemblies that public opinion is the life-blood of the League of Nations, and if that is so, it is of the greatest possible importance that that life-blood should be kept pure and abundant. The co-operation of the Press is absolutely essential if that object is to be secured.

I do not think that the Sixth Committee was of opinion that the danger of actual false news being disseminated by the Press was, in practice, a serious one. That it may sometimes have happened is no doubt true, but the general sentiment expressed in the Committee was that, if it did happen, it happened very rarely, and that it was not the chief danger to be feared.

What was felt was that, quite apart from actually false news, there was a danger of news being distorted; perhaps an even greater danger—as was pointed out by one of the members of the Committee, a member of the French delegation—was the suppression of news. He pointed out, and I think we all agreed with him, that the suppression of news might be just as harmful to the object we have in view—the formation of a sound and vigorous public opinion on these questions—and just as disastrous as the distortion or even the invention of news. That was our sentiment, and we felt the matter to be one of considerable gravity; but we also felt that the remedy was not to be found in some measure of coercion.

In the first place, it was felt that it would be almost impossible to devise any measure of coercion against the suppression of news, and there was a very general feeling that any encouragement to Governments to interfere with the freedom of the Press, even with the best intentions, was probably a grave mistake. There was absolute unanimity amongst those associations which had been consulted—associations of journalists and those connected with the Press—that any interference by Governments was certain to do more harm than good. It is, of course, quite a different matter if journalists themselves choose to take measures for raising the tone or suppressing the evils that may arise in the exercise of their calling, and in that connection we had before us a very interesting experiment—the creation of a Journalists' Court of Honour; but on that matter the Committee did not feel that it was either desirable or practicable for it to express an opinion. In its view, this was entirely a matter which must be left in the hands of the journalists themselves.

The Committee felt that journalism might be and should be, as far as possible, freed from outside control, whether that control was exercised commercially or officially. It considered very strongly that freedom in the exercise of their calling was both desirable from the point of view of the journalists and still more desirable from the point of view of their co-operation in the cause of peace.

The Committee believed that this was likely, not only to promote a free and good supply of news, but also to assist journalists to raise the status of their profession to the height which it ought certainly to occupy as one of the great professions of the world.

Further, the Committee thought that the measure of freeing the Press from outside control was one which should be carried out partly by the Press itself and partly by the nations, if there was an opportunity for national intervention. This is not a matter in regard to which the League itself could usefully take any action, but in another sphere it was thought that the League might do something to help. The Sixth Committee felt very strongly that the great remedy for any evils that might threaten journalism, and consequently journalistic co-operation, was a free and full supply of news. It believed that that was the best remedy for all these difficulties, whether the dangers to be fought were distortion or suppression. It believed that the freeing of news, making good and true news more easily available, would itself combat the less pure sources of news that might exist. The Committee therefore recommends very strongly the increase of publicity in every way. The League should take pains to hold all its meetings in public, not only the meetings of the Assembly, the Council, and the principal Committees, but also all other meetings. The Committee considered that the greater the publicity the greater would be the purity of the news flowing from those meetings.

It was also felt that, where possible, documents relating to those meetings should be distributed as early and as fully as possible, and the Committee recommends strongly that the Secretariat, through its Information Section, should continue to do its utmost to make all League news readily and easily available to the Press.

Again, the Committee thought that something might perhaps be done—as regards the method, it expressed no very definite opinion, in the absence of further information—towards cheapening the supply of news. Some of those who were consulted by the Committee emphasised very strongly that one of the great difficulties of the Press was that the price of the newspaper by no means compensated for the cost of obtaining its contents and that anything that could be done to cheapen the cost of output of the paper would be an advantage, not only from the point of view of the Press, but also from that of the purity of the news, since it would diminish the necessity of obtaining financial resources from other directions. The Committee therefore recommends that everything possible should be done to cheapen news, though, so far as the League was concerned, it could only suggest that the matter should be examined. The League has recently established a great wireless station; the Committee therefore thought it might be worth while to examine—and it urged the Secretariat to do so—whether through the machinery of that wireless station the output of news could be cheapened.

It further recommended that consultations should, if possible, continue on this subject and it finally requested the Secretary-General to keep in touch with all the movements in this field and to report to the next Assembly on any further developments.

I will now read the resolution which is to be found at the end of the report.

*The Assembly:*

1. *Expresses its gratitude to the international and national Press organisations for their views upon the problem of preventing "the spread of false information which may threaten the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations";*

2. Expresses its thanks to the Danish Government for summoning in January 1932 at Copenhagen a Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and representatives of the Press, and notes with great interest the resolution adopted by that Conference;

3. Trusts that, at a further conference organised on similar lines to the Copenhagen Conference, definite proposals may be made to give effect to some of the principal suggestions already made regarding, in particular, the necessity of a greater abundance of accurate information, of true freedom of the Press, and of co-operation between the Press organisations of various countries;

4. Advocates the fullest possible publicity for League meetings;

5. Commends to the sympathetic consideration of the Chairmen of all Committees of the League of Nations the earlier and more complete distribution of documents;

6. Desires that the Secretariat should continue to devote its attention to the development by all the means at its disposal of the swift supply to the Press of the fullest possible information concerning the work of the League of Nations;

7. Invites the Council to consider the possibilities of affording to journalists cheap facilities for communicating to their newspapers information through the League wireless station, due regard being paid to interests affected;

8. Requests the Secretary-General to communicate to the Press organisations consulted and to the Disarmament Conference this resolution, together with the Minutes of the Sixth Committee, and to report to the next Assembly on any further developments which may arise.

The PRESIDENT:

*Translation:* If no one else wishes to speak, I shall regard the draft resolution submitted by the Sixth Committee as adopted.

*The draft resolution was adopted.*

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#### IV.

### ANNEX TO THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTH COMMISSION: REPLIES FROM PRESS ORGANISATIONS TO THE ENQUIRY INTO THE "SPREAD OF FALSE INFORMATION WHICH MAY THREATEN TO DISTURB THE PEACE OF THE WORLD AND THE GOOD UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN NATIONS".<sup>1</sup>

*Note by the Secretary-General.*

To give effect to the resolution adopted by the Assembly on September 24th, 1931, regarding the co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace, the Council, at its meeting on September 29th, requested the Secretary-General to consult the Press organisations previously approached when preparations were being made for the 1927 Press Conference, and such Press organisations as might regard themselves as interested.

The object of this consultation was to collect material emanating from the Press itself on the delicate question of the "spread of false information which may threaten to disturb the peace or the good understanding between nations".

A circular letter was accordingly sent to sixty-four countries,<sup>2</sup> and directly reached more than 130 Press organisations. During the summer, replies were received by the Secretariat from important international Press organisations and from national organisations in sixteen countries.

The present document contains the replies received by the Secretariat down to August 25th, from:

#### *International Organisations:*

International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations;  
International Federation of Journalists.

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<sup>1</sup> Document A.31.1932.

<sup>2</sup> Abyssinia, Afghanistan, Albania, Argentine, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hejaz, Honduras, Hungary, India, Irish Free State, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Persia, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, Salvador, Siam, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia.

*Other Organisations :*

Australia	Honduras	Poland
Austria	Hungary	Roumania
United Kingdom	Italy	Sweden
Denmark	Netherlands	Switzerland
France	New Zealand	Turkey
Greece		

Error is the chosen enemy of the journalist. The Press since it began—*fiat lux* were the first words ever printed—has unrelentingly fought false news. Always we journalists have had to fight for accuracy against heavy odds. Our own human proneness to err has been only one of the obstacles confronting us. We have against us too the speed with which the news must be gathered, written, transmitted, edited, put in type, printed and distributed. Every item we write must, before it reaches the reader, go through many machines and the hands and mentalities of many men unknown to each other, often speaking different languages.

Frequently, we have against us our human sources of news. Many of these fall into two classes of interchanging membership: those desiring to keep us from knowing or publishing news whose publication they consider to be against their interests, and those desiring to get us to publish something partly or entirely false whose publication would help them.

At the other end, we have against us a large group of readers, its membership depending on the item, who are so tender-minded that they cannot see the truth on certain things and still buy the purveyor of it. Moreover, the hasty way in which most readers read the news exposes us especially to the danger all writers run of some or all of their readers getting from their words a false meaning or conclusion quite unintended.

Through all this, we are beset always by a tremendous difficulty that handicaps no other profession or business. It is this. The news, although it is an extremely costly thing to gather and distribute—and the more accurate, the more costly—is the one necessity for which no one anywhere is willing to pay anywhere near what it costs to produce. There is not one newspaper that can live on what its readers are willing to pay for it. To exist, all newspapers are forced to supplement their income from circulation by selling advertising or by receiving allowable or non-allowable subsidies, or by all combined. Only in the newspaper do people anywhere still believe that they can get something for nothing—and that something is the most precious of things, the truth, and the truth almost instantaneously.

Always against great odds, we of the Press have had to fight for accuracy, and always alone, in the sense that we have never had any other organised group upon whom we could always count as an ally. We have found allies, but always with a fluctuating coalition composed mostly of those who had deserted yesterday and those who will desert to-morrow, we have had to manoeuvre against our powerful enemy. If A wants to know the truth about item X, there is B who wants to suppress it and know the truth about item Y which A is seeking to distort. The only man whom one can count on always not only to want to know items X, Y and Z, but to tell all he knows about them to A, B, C and as many others as he can interest, is the journalist.

It should be evident now that our Association welcomes any ally and anything that may honourably and effectively aid the journalist in his fight against the false.

We are very gratified to see the Council interesting itself in one phase of this question, and it is with thanks for the privilege that we answer its kind invitation to express our views on "the delicate problem of the dissemination of false news liable to trouble the maintenance of peace and understanding among peoples". We shall go into what we are convinced are the roots of that problem and we shall suggest how we think it can be solved. First, however, we must clear the ground.

To begin with, we would point out that false news may be disseminated by means other than the Press. Of these we shall mention only two. One is news spread from ear to mouth, the talk of the town, gossip, public rumour. What the Press has done in counteracting such false news is well known. The other might be called, or grouped under the name of, "secret official intelligence reports". Their anonymous authors have little but their imaginations to restrain them. Spies can vent their spite against any public man or journalist safe in the knowledge that they are beyond reach of libel laws and that their victim will never know just what or who is poisoning him. We journalists who are accustomed to doing our work in the open find this other system abominable, and those of us who have had occasion to see how these secret dossiers are produced, or have seen some of their contents, find the credence given them a tribute to the power of glamour and a measure of gullibility. We trust the Council in its investigation will not overlook so mischievous a means of spreading and perpetuating false news as the spy service.

Above all, we must make it clear at the outset that we cannot limit the question of false news in the way the Council has done. We are concerned with false news not because of the effect it may have, but because it is false. We have



no objection to confining ourselves, in the small degree to which it is possible, to one phase of the vast problem of false news, but, for us, that phase must be the problem of false news concerning or affecting international relations—not false news liable to have either a bad or a good effect on those relations.

It is true that, in practice, the individual journalist may be influenced to some extent by considerations of the possible good or bad effect of the publication of a given item of news. The point is that we oppose any attempt to set up any general ethical rule for all to follow for ever.

We would point out, incidentally, that false news may be helpful as well as harmful to peace, and that, in international as in personal relations, the truth may harm as well as help good understanding. In our experience nothing, indeed, is so disturbing or trouble-making as the truth. The victim of false news can at least enjoy the satisfaction of self-pity, outraged innocence and all the other pleasures of honest martyrdom. But when the truth hurts, it hurts doubly, for then one can deny it only by lying himself, and there is no inner consolation in that.

On the other hand, it would seem that only the theory that false news will do less harm to peace than the truth could justify the secrecy in which the Council and the Assembly's Committee of Nineteen have often dealt with the Sino-Japanese conflict, for to prevent journalists from themselves hearing meetings upon which they must report is certainly to help disseminate inaccurate news.

The publicity policy which the League has followed in this conflict has been such, indeed, as to bring out clearly the profound difference between those who are concerned with the effect of news and ourselves, who are concerned with its accuracy. On one day, the Council would be doing all it could to keep the truth about its deliberations from being published, on the ground that this was serving the cause of peace; the next day, it would meet in public in an effort to gain the same peaceful end by bringing public pressure on one or both the parties.

This attitude considers the Press not as a medium of information for everyone, but as a weapon or, at best, a sort of searchlight to turn on or off, and this way and that way, as suits policy. It is all too common an attitude. Nearly every powerful body wants to control the Press in this way. However noble the motive and high-minded its executor, nothing, we believe, is more dangerous to the general interest. Had those who believed that the way to the same ideal of peace lay in openly preparing for war (instead of in meeting secretly) completely controlled the Press, none of the facts that have led the world now to believe that the way to war is to prepare for war would ever have been printed.

The individual interest may be injured by publication of certain facts, but that is nothing to the injury it would suffer if all the news that injured somebody's interests were suppressed. The facts that each is interested in getting in his newspaper are infinitely greater than those he is interested in preventing others from getting there. The general interest demands that the facts on everything be at the disposition of everyone. It demands that nobody shall be empowered to sit over the Press and say: This fact shall be published because we believe it would do good, and this fact shall be suppressed because we believe it would do harm. The general interest demands that the newspaper shall be free to print the news, without fear or favour, and let the chips fall where they may. We ask nothing better. When Gutenberg began to print, he began by printing without adjective or adverb: *Fiat lux*. This Association stands to-day where the Press has ever stood, for everlasting daylight on everything and for everyone.

*The Nature of the Problem.* — Before the solution of the problem of false news is considered, the nature of the problem we are dealing with needs to be made clearer. To avoid confusion on one side, it must be kept in mind that the newspaper has two functions—first, to report the news and, secondly, to give its opinion thereon. We are concerned here, naturally, only with its primary informative function. The problem is one of false news, and not the far more delicate one of whether the journalist's comment on the news is sound or unsound, good or bad. The best way to improve the soundness of the comment is, of course, to improve the accuracy of the news; for, although unsound conclusions may be drawn from facts, it is far less likely that sound conclusions will be drawn from unsound premises. We are directly concerned now, however, only with the quality of the premises the newspaper gives the world, not of the conclusions it draws from them itself.

Secondly, false news may be of various kinds. Some would classify it as to whether it was intentional or unintentional and deal with it accordingly. We doubt the wisdom of approaching the problem in this way, for this road is sown with pitfalls, especially if one starts with the Council's purpose of considering false news from the standpoint of its effect on international relations. An unintentional error may do far more harm than an intentional one; the latter may be judged excusable or even praiseworthy, and the former inexcusable or a criminal blunder. It depends entirely upon the case and the judge. What impresses us far more, however, is, first, the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of devising any means of determining justly whether error was intentional or unintentional, excusable or inexcusable, or what not, in the specific cases where such knowledge would be most important, and, secondly, the dangers involved in any attempt to establish machinery for thus sifting all cases.

This is not merely because few laymen seem to realise how manifold are the possibilities of honest error in the news. There is another factor which especially complicates the very phase of the problem—news on international relations—with which the Council is most concerned. The journalist may get the truth on many things, particularly in this field, only if his source is confident that the journalist, come what may, will not reveal the name of his source. It has therefore become the unwritten rule among reputable journalists never to tell who gave them their news, if by so doing they may injure their source.

This code of professional secrecy obviously tends to transfer from the source to the journalist the responsibility, as far as the public is concerned, for the news published through it. It exposes the journalist, moreover, to having his

good faith imposed on by the source, and, unfortunately, this all too frequently occurs. The practice always necessarily involves risk for the journalist, since it is only when it is more or less dangerous to tell the truth or when it is desired to spread with impunity false news that a source does not want to be known.

The journalist is not without his own means of protection against imposition. His memory of those who have taken advantage of his faith in them is long, and his *esprit de corps* such that the news source who imposes on one journalist thereby quickly attains among other journalists the reputation of being untrustworthy or worse, while the good name of those whose honesty and soundness have been proved by experience spreads as rapidly in our profession.

Naturally, the journalist much prefers for his sources to take themselves the responsibility for what they give him, and we take this occasion to urge statesmen in particular to allow themselves to be quoted more often.

But where it is necessary in order to report the news, the journalist will always remain willing to run the risks his code of secrecy involves for him and to decide himself in each case how far it is safe for him to trust in the good faith of his informant and how much of what he thus learns he will take the responsibility of reporting. Much of the important news on international relations reaches the public and, as things now stand, can reach it only through this system, which, it is obvious, makes it extremely difficult for any outside agency to deal justly or profitably with false news by specific cases.

For all these reasons and more, we see no way of safely drawing for practice with specific cases any line classifying or appraising the kinds of false news. We know, indeed, no way of safely drawing a general line between true and false news. In practice, the distinction often appears clear, yet one of the few things that remain true is that what is true for one man is often false for his brother, and what is false for the father is just as often true for the son. At best, the proportion of border-line cases to the whole is enormous, and it is in this debatable zone that falls most of the news affecting international relations.

It is sometimes argued, however, that one obviously false item published at the right moment might conceivably start a war. That would be hard to prove, and even so not worth the proving, for, if proved, it would merely amount to another way of saying that a match will light a bonfire. If the bonfire were not there waiting, the match would be harmless. It is the collection of inflammable materials that is dangerous, and it is with border-line cases—wood untipped with the sulphur of the demonstrably false—that such fires are prepared.

We believe, therefore, that the only wise way of dealing with the problem of false news is to deal with it as a whole and to seek solutions calculated to strike both at unintentional and intentional error. Our fight is to keep the false from entering the news, no matter how nor why nor when nor where, and the way to win it simultaneously on all these fronts is to free and strengthen the Press and raise its standards as a whole. That is our aim.

We propose to divide the measures for the solution of the problem of false news into two classes:

- (1) Preventive;
- (2) Remedial.

We attach by far the most importance to preventive measures and believe there is much that can be done in this regard. Indeed, if the preventive measures we shall suggest are followed, we feel there will be little if anything requiring special remedy. In any event, we are entirely opposed to adding any new punitive measures or laws restricting the Press to those already existing, because such remedies would be worse than the disease.

*Prevention of False News.* — In our struggle against false news we have learned that the essential for preventing it is freedom—and freedom in a much larger sense than is usually meant by the phrase, “ the Freedom of the Press ”. The necessity of freedom in that usual sense goes without saying. The aspects of it that need explanation are two in number. They are Financial Freedom or Independence, and Freedom of Direct Access to News in the Making. Of these the first is much the more essential. If the Press can obtain it, we have no fear of its failing then to obtain the other.

*Financial Freedom.* — By financial freedom we mean a condition in which the individual newspaper is self-supporting in the sense that it can live decently on its income from circulation, supplemented with that from the kind of advertising it can sell without selling itself to any advertiser or to advertisers in general. The newspaper that is financially free is the newspaper that is beholden to no non-journalistic interest for its existence, that can stand on its own feet, that constitutes an independent, autonomous unit.

We are confident that such a newspaper will do of its own accord the best that can be done to keep falseness out of the news. It will because in such a newspaper those who are journalists at heart will be in control.

We hold it to be self-evident that the general interest demands that the best possible results be obtained from each particular field of human endeavour, and that this can be assured only by leaving each field to those with the most inborn aptitude for tilling it. We all profit the most when we have our Darwins directing our laboratories, not our orchestras, and our Beethovens wielding the baton of the conductor, not of the field-marshal. So, too, with journalism. Whatever facilitates the free practice of journalism by those who are journalists at heart will improve the standards of the Press; whatever interferes with this is bad and should be done away with in the general interest. The surest way to encourage the dissemination of false news is to increase the power over the Press of those non-journalists who are interested most in the effect of the news; the only way to discourage the spread of false news is to increase the power over the Press of those who are interested in news for the sake of the news—and they are the journalists. The problem of false news, in so far as it is in the reach of man, is the direct product of outside control of the Press. There is the root evil. The cure lies in removing, not in augmenting, this outside control. The solution of the problem of false news can only be found in the freedom of the Press, in freeing the journalists to publish the truth as each of them sees it.

It is not strange that the complaints of false news come most from those who propose new restrictions on the Press. Nor is it strange that the newspapers most renowned for the standards of accuracy and fairness they have reached have invariably arisen in the countries where the Press has achieved the most freedom.

If we start with the principle that the thing to do is to have the Press in the hands of the journalists, we can immediately isolate the germ of the disease of false news. It is this: *The newspaper cannot live on what people will pay directly for the news.*

The ideal of every journalist is a condition in which the newspaper can live on its circulation revenue alone, on what its readers pay for its service. His natural desire to report the truth as he sees it would then not only be freed, but he would be encouraged in it, since, the truth being to the general interest, this would tend to increase the number of his readers and thereby his means of getting at the truth.

The existing system is designed to handicap the journalist, and to facilitate the control of the Press by non-journalists who are interested in it not as an end in itself—a medium of information—but as a means to their particular ends. That part of the cost of the newspaper which the reader does not pay someone else must pay, and those who pay it want something for their money, too. Through this door comes in, directly or indirectly, the sinister outside control of the Press about which there is so much complaint and from which no one is more eager to free the Press than the journalist. It is this that exposes the newspaper, and therefore the news, to more or less secret pressure from powerful industrial or financial or political or governmental interests.

The pernicious rôle played by this peculiar financial situation tends to grow more important all the time, because the deficit between what a newspaper receives from its readers and its cost of production is increasing, not decreasing. As the world grows smaller for the reader, his need of receiving each day accurate news from all parts of the world on all kinds of things grows greater, and with it the cost to the newspaper of supplying this worldwide news service goes up, while the price of the newspaper to the reader remains the same.

This results in a constant trend toward newspaper amalgamations and chains, toward fewer newspapers and, what is more dangerous, toward still fewer newspapers that are independent units. This means that the paradoxical situation has been reached where the world's growing need for accurate news is operating to increase the number of subjects reported on in the newspaper while decreasing the number of independent eye-witness reports. This is due to two main reasons. For one thing, it is a healthy corrective for any witness to know that the testimony of a number of other independent eye-witnesses to the same event will be given at the same time. Secondly, the human equation is bound to play a large part in such testimony, and especially in newspapers where the witness must cramp his testimony into what is relatively a very small space. The journalist frequently does not have 500 words in which to report a complicated international debate in which 50,000 words were spoken. The journalist, and particularly the one dealing with the voluminous and complicated controversies affecting international relations, must limit himself very closely to what he considers the most important elements, which is to say that his work is to a high degree one of selection based on personal judgment.

Not only may one journalist for this reason leave out or minimise what another one will report, and even maximise, but he will be bound to give a different version, because the truth is a diamond of many facets all of which no one witness can possibly see. The only way of getting an idea of the whole truth is to read the reports of a number of independent witnesses, particularly as regards news affecting international relations. In other words, the way to truth in the news lies in fostering the existence in each country of the largest practicable number of individually independent and prosperous newspapers so that each important thing may be seen and reported from a wide range of viewpoints.

Everyone knows that nothing is more valuable than the truth, but few seem to realise that nothing is more costly. To get the truth, the newspaper must not only try to get the report of the eye-witness, but the eye-witness who is trained to observe and express clearly, concisely and fairly what he has seen or heard. It must keep these trained observers not only scattered about the city and the country in which it is published, but stationed at all the strategic news centres in the world. That is expensive. Then the news must be flashed from the ends of the earth, checked for error, put in type, printed and swiftly distributed to hundreds of thousands—all in each day. Speed is always costly. The higher the news standards of a newspaper, the more the news cost it, and the more money it must waste in the process of gathering and distributing the news.

That is only one side of the picture. The truth is not merely hard to get at and get out, it is often very disturbing once it is out. Pressure of all kinds is brought against its reporter and publisher, not only after but before it is printed, by those who resent or feel injured by its publication. Few if any newspapers have ever been killed by the publication of a news item that was false, even if the fault was deliberate. Many have been ruined because they told the truth. It is a costly business to withstand all those who do not want the truth on certain things reported.

Just as the cost increases as one increases the purity of any product, so the higher the standard of truth in a newspaper, the more it costs to produce. Yet time and again and everywhere it has been proved that the newspaper with the most costly standards must, in order to live, sell its product not only at a ridiculous fraction of what it costs, but at the same prices as the adulterated article, or only a trifle more.

The layman may conclude that the solution lies in putting the entire cost of the newspaper, like most other things, on the shoulders of the consumer by raising the price. This cannot be done. If a newspaper with a circulation of 100,000 at 2 cents a copy found, by dividing its cost with its circulation, that 2 cents represented only one-seventh of the income it needed per copy, it would not be enough for it to charge 14 cents. If it did, it would be lucky to keep 10,000 readers. Then it would have to raise the price to \$1.40 a copy. If it kept 100 readers then it would be still luckier — and it would have to raise the price for them to \$140 a copy. Grant it kept this last hundred, still it would have missed the goal of the newspaper—that of disseminating accurate news swiftly to the masses. Moreover, any general increase in the price of newspapers will tend to reduce the number of independent newspapers, and, for reasons already given, this is dangerous.

Raising the price affords, therefore, no solution. On the contrary, the public interest demands that the price should remain about what it is, and that the newspaper with the highest standards and the widest and swiftest world news service should be easily within the reach of everyone. The news is a necessity to the people, and, as with bread, water, education, the only way each person can be safe is by keeping the purest product at the disposal of all. As a matter of public policy, it is essential that the price of the newspaper remains far below the cost of production.

Moreover, the general interest is better served if one can buy for 10 cents not one newspaper but five.

The problem, therefore, is to sell the newspaper for a fraction of its cost and yet make a legitimate profit enabling the newspaper to be financially independent. It seems impossible, but it can be and, indeed, has been done. It has been done through advertising. Although to be independent it is essential that the newspaper be in a position to be free from influence from its advertisers, this does not mean that advertising is necessarily always dangerous to it. On the one hand, income from certain advertising is safe enough for any newspaper. On the other hand, it has been proved possible for a newspaper to attain financial independence by reaching through its advertising income such financial strength and through its high news standards such power and prestige that the point is attained where advertisers, to do their business, are forced to buy its space whether they like it or not. Instead of the newspapers being dependent on the advertisers, the advertisers become dependent on the newspaper. Experience, however, shows that it is very hard to reach and keep financial independence in this way, even in those few countries where advertising has developed enough to make it possible at all. There is certainly no safe or worldwide solution on the basis of advertising alone. The best one can say is that, generally, the smaller the proportion of its income a newspaper needs to derive from advertising the safer it will be for it to get income from that source.

The problem can therefore be narrowed down to one of meeting the normal deficit between the cost of producing a newspaper and the revenue obtained from circulation and from what we shall call here safe advertising, without raising the rates for either.

The way to the solution lies, we believe, in firmly grasping the idea that the same public interest that demands that the paper be sold below cost demands just as strongly that the paper be financially free. The newspaper is, in short, a public servant. That being true, the burden that the reader does not assume in buying his paper should fall back on him as taxpayer, just as does the cost of the public school which his children enter "free".

If the root principle should be the same for the school and the newspaper, the application of it must differ greatly. To pass the burden on to the Public Treasury as a matter of public interest does not mean that the Government should meet the burden directly, as with the schools, or through subsidy. *We are altogether opposed to anything of this kind tending to give Governments control over the Press. It would be far better to remain where we are than to establish any system which would or might allow a Government to bring any more pressure than it already can on a newspaper.* The dangers of giving Government any financial control over the Press are too obvious to need going into. To give such control would be to defeat, indeed, the basic public interest we are seeking to further—namely, to check the dissemination of false news by helping the newspapers to be financially free and independent, and that means independent of the Government as much as anything else.

Other public services demand central control; the Press is unique in that the degree of its service to the public depends directly upon the degree to which it is divided into independent units. Where the problem with other services is to centralise, the problem with the Press is to assure the independence of each newspaper.

The problem thus boils down to helping free the newspapers financially by making the people pay in taxes what they do not pay in buying the newspaper, while avoiding all danger of governmental control of the Press. This is a matter of reducing the cost of production to the newspaper instead of increasing the cost per copy to the reader. Experience indicates that there are several ways in which part of the burden can thus be safely passed to the Public Treasury. A few of them are already being timidly followed. Thus everywhere newspapers are allowed to telegraph news at at least one-half the standard rate. Again, most countries allow newspapers to be distributed through the mails at a specially cheap rate. These services are given the Press by Governments at less than cost, which means that they fall on the Public Treasury. Yet neither has been accompanied by dangerous control of the Press, thanks to the fact that the Press rate is enjoyed by all newspapers indiscriminately. The only trouble is that the aid is not enough. The reasons that make the telegraphic Press rate sound policy suggest that the application of this principle be greatly extended, horizontally and vertically, and, of course, always to all the Press with a deliberate view to giving through it enough aid to allow any well-managed newspaper to live on its circulation and safe advertising. The principle would be extended horizontally by establishing a similar reduction on other items that enter into the cost of newspaper production, and vertically by making the reduction much greater if the Press rate were, say, one-tenth instead of one-half the standard rate, every paper would remain just as free from governmental control and would be more free from the dangers of outside financial control.

As examples of some of the things which might be studied with a view to extending in or to them the principle of the Press rate, we would cite:

1. All electrical means of transmitting news, particularly the telephone and telegraph, cable and wireless rates for long distances;
2. Transportation rates, national and international, on newspapers, particularly the air mail;
3. Transportation of journalists by every conveyance, land, sea or air, now requiring a ticket;
4. Passport, visa, identity-card, etc., fees for journalists;
5. Transportation rates on newsprint paper, ink and newspaper printing machinery;
6. Customs duties on newsprint paper, ink and machinery;

7. Electric power and light for newspaper offices and plants;
8. Direct taxes.

We do not mean, of course, that action need necessarily be taken on all these lines. The object would be to transfer safely a substantial part of the cost of newspaper production to the Public Treasury, and it might be found that this could be better achieved practically by making a greater reduction on a smaller number of items, instead of a smaller reduction spread over a large number.

Certain items, however, recommend themselves for reduction in any case, because they most directly facilitate improving the accuracy of the Press, particularly with regard to international relations.

Take item 1. While the world has been becoming smaller and the nations more interdependent, the need of knowing the news accurately and fully from distant lands has grown apace, yet the cost of long-distance transmission has remained so high that only a very few independent channels for the reporting of such news exist in even the richest countries, and often these are very small. The European agencies and newspapers that maintain any electrical news service whatever with the New World do not number even twenty, and there are not half a dozen of them that can afford what might be called a regular and fairly comprehensive news service from the Americas. Similarly, though there are several thousand daily newspapers in the New World, there are not more than a dozen agencies and newspapers that maintain regular electrical contact with Europe, and, with some notable exceptions in Argentine and Canada, they are all in the United States. The situation is far worse as regards the news relations between the Far East and both the New World and Europe. This is highly significant, because it shows the direct relation between transmission cost and news service, for it costs more than twice as much to transmit news between the Far East and either Europe or the Americas than to transmit it between Europe and America. Existing difficulties between the New and the Old Worlds, and between the Far East and the West, indicate how much it costs everyone nowadays to be badly or insufficiently informed about distant peoples.

Similarly, to reduce the cost of the swift transportation of newspapers is to combat false news, especially in the international field, for the transportation of the newspaper is but another form of transmitting news. To be able to read foreign as well as national newspapers on any international question is to have a very useful corrective at hand. The more foreign newspapers of the same day as the national ones can be obtained, the more valuable the corrective. This becomes a question of reducing the aeroplane rate on newspapers and, as regards distant countries with whom air transport is not yet practicable, of reducing the ordinary rates which are now so high as to discourage even citizens when travelling from buying their home paper abroad—when they can find it. Aviation has greatly developed owing to the willingness of Governments to spend money on it for war purposes. This stimulus could be given just as well for peace purposes if much more of the burden of air transport of newspapers, periodicals and books were taken over by Governments through a sharp reduction in the air postal rate on these products of the press. Such development of a widespread regular air-mail service would have an additional advantage. It would allow more news that now must be sent electrically to reach the newspaper by air mail, thus further lowering the expense of news transmission.

Again, sharp reduction in item 3 is in the general interest, for to make it cheaper for the journalist to travel is to encourage the newspaper, which has to pay his expenses, to send a trained eye-witness to the spot—particularly if this is combined with a reduction in the expense of his then reporting the news electrically to his paper. This is evident since only the newspaper that seeks to improve the accuracy of its news by the eye-witness method can profit by these economies. The same considerations argue in favour of the abolition of all the fees mentioned in item 4.

All these items, moreover, lend themselves particularly to multilateral action through the League of Nations, as does also item 6, where a convention, useful in many ways, might be made establishing free trade in newsprint paper, ink and machinery. There is room in these items, however, for independent national, bilateral or regional action to precede, accompany or follow universal action. Thus, a country that wished to improve the quality and quantity of its news from a certain nation might arrange to accord a specially low transmission rate on news despatches sent direct to it from that nation. One can conceive also of two countries of similar language specially facilitating the exchange of newspapers between them. Likewise, one can imagine a pan-European, or a pan-American, or a pan-Asiatic system of reductions being worked out.

The League wireless station provides another opportunity. Geneva is a centre of information on all kinds of international subjects. It is unique as a clearing house for comparative current data on the world situation as regards trade, finance, industry, labour, health, social questions, armaments, etc. More and more, all the major international controversies are being debated in Geneva. To report this data intelligently and these controversies fairly requires more words than most newspapers, particularly those in distant countries, can now afford. It would be a very useful means of combating false news on international matters if the Governments Members of the League should agree to allow Press despatches dealing with League news to be transmitted everywhere by the League wireless station at an exceptionally low rate. The question of control is not insurmountable. When the Council met in Madrid in 1929, our Association insisted that despatches of its members dealing exclusively with League news should not be subject to the censorship then applied by Spain to Spanish news, and the Spanish Government agreed to this on condition that our members promised not to mix Spanish and League news. The arrangement worked so well that no complaint on either side was made.

These remarks indicate that to approach the problem of false news in this way is to enter a field of many fertile possibilities that require exploration. The wisdom of the extensions of the Press rate in items 1, 2, 3 and 4 that we have just



discussed seems to us so evident, however, that we believe that action on them should not be delayed by the amount of study our proposals as a whole may require. On the most simple of these suggestions fairly quick action should be practicable. In this connection we would urge the Council particularly to arrange a substantial reduction in the rate on Press despatches dealing with League news transmitted by the League wireless, and to recommend to the Governments of States Members of the League who are represented at the Madrid Telegraphic Conference to consider favourably a substantial reduction in the international Press rate.

Valuable as such reduction would be, the proportion of the burden of newspaper cost transferred in this manner would, we fear, at best be small, because these items do not form the major elements of expense with most newspapers. The solution may require broader and more drastic action. We urge that, in any event, the exploration of the field as a whole be started meanwhile with a view to a general solution or programme of action. We therefore suggest:

I. The acceptance, as a working hypothesis, of the basic principle that the way to foster a financially free and independent Press is to extend the principle of the Press rate *in a manner that continues to keep out governmental control of the Press* while allowing more of the cost of the public service the newspaper performs to be transferred to the Public Treasury;

II. The establishment of an impartial fact-finding body, composed of independent, non-official experts, to investigate and report on the best way or ways of applying this principle.

Its investigation could include the following subjects:

1. What are the main items of expense in producing a newspaper, and what proportion of the total expense does each, roughly, represent in each country ?
2. To which of these items can the principle of the Press rate be best extended ? Which lend themselves best to international, and which to national action ? How could the transfer be best effected in those items and countries where the public utility involved is not owned by the Government ?
3. What proportion of the total expense of newspaper production is met, roughly, by circulation income in each country ?
4. Estimates of about how much reduction of existing rates would be needed in the extension or extensions of the principle of the Press rate recommended in paragraph (2) in order to meet, roughly, (a) the whole of the remaining burden of expense, or (b) recommended fractions of it such as one-half or one-third.
5. What data is available on the part advertising plays in financing the newspapers in each country? (This data would not need to be of a precision impossible to obtain to be useful in improving the basis for deciding how much the Press rate reductions should be.)
6. What safeguards, if any, would appear necessary to avoid any danger of governmental control of the Press and to assure that the recommended extension of the Press rate would achieve its aims—above all, that of fostering free and independent newspapers ?
7. What would be the best plan or plans of procedure for achieving the adoption, in stages or otherwise, of any recommended programme or programmes for the extension of the Press rate ?
8. Any other question which the experts found to be relevant.

It would be impossible, of course, to obtain precise data, and happily precision is not necessary. There is no thought of attempting to transfer every penny of the difference between what the newspaper costs per copy and what the reader pays. The ultimate aim would be to transfer enough to allow an honest newspaper with reasonably good management to live on its circulation income supplemented by whatever amount of revenue from advertising it seems possible, from the existing situation in its territory, for it to obtain without great danger of its influencing its news. This is one of those aims that can never be achieved precisely, but only in a broad way and to a certain extent by experimental methods, by increasing or reducing the dose according to the results achieved.

There would be no harm in beginning the transfer in the dark on a small scale—especially in the ways we have recommended—but it would be hoped that the kind of data the experts could supply would allow more substantial steps to be taken prudently. For these purposes it would be very helpful if the experts could answer such questions as No. 3 on the proportion of expense covered by circulation in each country, even in such terms as “ about one-sixth to one-tenth ” or “ ranging from one-fourth to one-fifteenth, with the average for big newspapers about one-seventh and for small dailies about one-fifth ”. Such data should be obtainable. <sup>1</sup>

The report of the experts would, of course, bind no one; its value would lie in its data allowing intelligent action to be taken where desired both in the international and the national fields. Once the broad facts concerning its newspaper production were thus placed in perspective with those existing in the rest of the world, each nation would be in a much better position to work out its own problem.

If, as is probable, the various countries adopted different solutions for the national side of the problem, that would

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<sup>1</sup> An example may make this paragraph clear. Suppose the experts estimate that in country “A” it would be reasonable to expect circulation to cover one-sixth the cost and “ safe ” advertising three-sixths. That would leave a deficit of two-sixths. Suppose they also found that the tariff on newsprint paper accounted for about one-twelfth the newspaper’s total cost of production, and that a two-thirds reduction in transmission rates would cut another twelfth from its expense. Then one could estimate that by abolishing the rates on paper and reducing transmission charges by two-thirds, one-half of the “ deficit ” could be transferred to the Public Treasury.

do no harm and much good. It would amount to the same basic problem being simultaneously tackled experimentally in several different ways, and the comparisons allowed would throw light on what was the best solution.

A country where "safe" advertising was relatively highly developed might find it unnecessary to extend the Press rate as far as another. Again, budgetary reasons might cause one country to begin by transferring one-fifth of the burden where another transferred a-third or a-half. One nation might try to accomplish the transfer through heavy reduction in one or two items, another might spread it more lightly over half a dozen items. None need wait on the others; each could go as far as his desire to enjoy a free, accurate and independent Press impelled it.

The layman may fear that this plan would make the newspaper business too easy and profitable. There is no real danger of this. Any tendency of this plan to make newspapers too rich would be offset in these three important ways:

1. In no business is there a stronger natural tendency to put profits back into improving the plant. There is no business which compares to that of the newspaper in importance in which so few fortunes have ever been made anywhere—and some of the so-called "newspaper millionaires" made their fortunes elsewhere and were even richer before they went in for newspapers. Similarly, there is no profession, except that of teaching, which is so distinguished as journalism by its ability to draw men to it and get devoted service from them without the incentive of great financial rewards. Many men have made fortunes in the professions of the law, medicine, engineering; few have ever entered the wealthy class from the profits of the profession of journalism.

As for the few men who made their fortunes in the newspaper business, all of them have been distinguished by the proportion of the profits they have used to improve the standards of their newspaper as regards quality and quantity of news. No journalist would object to this tendency being encouraged and any danger of newspapers becoming too rich curbed by the taxation of net profits above, say, six or eight per cent. This would certainly cause profits to be used in improving working conditions, raising salaries, training experts to handle various kinds of news such as scientific, diplomatic, etc., extending the news service, developing the means of detecting and correcting errors—which is to say that the profits would be used in helping in various ways to eliminate false news.

The allusion to salaries deserves further remark. Many journalists are now paid much too little, largely because there is so little money in the newspaper business under the present system. The danger in this is great, because of the importance of the rôle the individual journalist plays in the newspaper. The danger, however, is not so much from venality, as many think. It comes more from the fact that the journalist, when miserably paid, has little chance to do the good and careful job that the general interest requires from him.

It is, for instance, an extremely difficult thing to sum up an international debate of 25,000 words accurately, fairly to all viewpoints, and in a manner interesting and intelligent to distant readers, all in 500 words. It requires not only technical training and experience, but it presupposes leisure for the study needed to have the background necessary for an understanding of the subject-matter. One ought to be able to get enough from one such job a day to live on. Many journalists, instead, get so little from it that, to live, they have to dash off two or three reports on it for newspapers in different places, and then write reports on several other different things, and they have to grind away like this every day. This clearly is no way to encourage accurate news on delicate matters; but it is not the fault of the underpaid journalist. He has no chance to do work of the standard he would like to do. The more one knows of the handicaps under which journalists now have to work, the more one is likely to marvel, not at the errors, but at the accuracy of the Press.

To make the newspaper business more profitable is to help end the evils of underpaid journalism. Our item 8 (direct taxes) suggests a more direct means of improving the standards of the Press by tackling these evils in the countries where this is deemed most necessary. In such countries the income-tax is likely to start at a very low level. By exempting from this tax all journalists with an income of, say, less than twice the standard minimum for exemption, and/or by reducing their tax by, say, fifty per cent in the lowest categories, a country could effect an increase in the real income of the worst underpaid journalists without increasing the cost of newspaper production. This, indeed, would be one way of transferring the burden to the Public Treasury.

2. Any danger of the newspapers becoming too rich would also be offset by their tendency to improve their advertising standards as their dependency on individual advertisers decreases; if one looks around him, he will find that, generally speaking, the character of the advertisements a newspaper accepts is a good indication of its financial strength. In other words, as newspapers grow strong financially, they tend to reject voluntarily dubious or objectionable advertisements that one finds in weaker papers. To cite but one instance, a certain newspaper which is renowned for the great financial strength it has achieved through purely journalistic means has indeed voluntarily gone so far as to give special rewards to those of its employees who prevent a dubious or fraudulent advertisement from appearing in it.

Moreover, the ideal of every true newspaperman is to be in a position safely to tell advertisers to go to the devil with their advertisements if they don't like the policy of the paper or want to make their advertising in it contingent directly or indirectly on the publication or suppression of certain news. Frequently, they thus reject advertisements when they are in no position to do so safely. Certainly, the smaller the percentage of advertising income any paper would need, the more it could and would approach this ideal; and the more advertising it would reject or lose, the less would be the danger of falsity entering either its news or advertising columns, or the likelihood of its becoming too rich.

3. Finally, if, even so, newspaper profits should tend to become too high or easy under this plan, this would simply result in encouraging the establishment of more newspapers in each city. That would be a great advantage, for, as we have pointed out, to increase the number of independent newspapers is to increase their diversity and to give the truth a better chance of coming out and being recognised. The importance of our proposals from this viewpoint cannot be stressed too much, nor can the danger that we see in the present trend toward fewer and fewer newspapers in each city—a trend that is due directly to the excessively high cost of producing a newspaper under the present system. There is no danger of causing too many newspapers to be founded, if only for the following reason. The more profitable the newspaper business became under such a plan, the more newspapers would be established, and this competition would tend to

reduce the circulation and advertising revenues of those making big profits while increasing their expense, and thus discourage the founding of more newspapers, so that the equilibrium would soon be restored with the city endowed with more newspapers than it had before. Similarly, any danger of newspapers becoming too huge in size or individually too powerful would be checked by the way this plan encourages the establishment of many and small papers.

*In connection with the general question of safeguards, we cannot stress too strongly than an indispensable element in the principle of the Press rate, as we conceive it, is that it is granted to all newspapers without distinction as to their character or policy. Only this element allows the transfer to be made without danger of governmental control of the Press.*

To assure further the achievement of the aim of fostering a free and independent Press, it might be necessary in some cases to accompany with further safeguards a thorough-going plan of transfer, effecting a substantial reduction in the cost of newspaper production. To make our thought clearer by a general example, we would add that such a safeguard might be a stipulation to this effect:

The reduction shall be granted to all newspapers, without distinction, which agree to publish annually in their columns a statement containing the following information, certified to by a recognised public accountant:

- (1) The number of copies sold, the price, and the revenue therefrom;
- (2) The amount of advertising sold, the rates, and the revenue therefrom;
- (3) The amount of capital, and the total expenditure, divided to show clearly the amount spent on the news service, printing and publishing, distribution, administration, etc.;
- (4) If the expenditure exceeds the revenue from circulation and advertising, a full explanation of how this deficit has been met;
- (5) The name of the publisher of the newspaper, the names of those holding more than one per cent of its bonds, the names of the officers of the publishing company and of the members of the board of directors if there is one, the name of the editor chiefly responsible for the whole newspaper, the name of the editor responsible for editorial policy and the name of the editor responsible for the news service. Any changes in any of these names during the year is to be noted.

Two possible objections to our proposal may be touched briefly in concluding this subject. It may be argued that certain newspapers that appear to be financially independent do not have as high standards as some that are weaker financially. It is true that there is no way of guaranteeing that a big extension of the Press rate will improve the standards of all newspapers equally, or end all false news. Nothing can. The best anyone can hope to do is to achieve improvement in a broad way, by and large, to make a net advance. We are confident our plan will do this. The only sound way to look for proof of this is to compare, not the standards of individual papers here and there, but the standards of the Press as a whole in the countries where it is least free, financially or otherwise, with its standards in the countries where it has achieved the most independence. Such comparisons should leave no doubt that the best way to increase falseness in the news is to diminish the freedom and independence of the Press, and the surest way to diminish falseness is to increase the number of self-supporting papers. If there is still doubt, then let one consult those very papers which, though weak financially, have high news standards. It will then be learned how much higher they believe they could raise those standards if financially they were stronger.

Finally, it may be objected that a substantial transfer would cost too much. Such objections are quite unfounded. They are due simply to a lack of imagination. Let no one delude himself longer that all he now pays for his newspaper is the penny he puts on the counter, which covers only a small fraction of the cost of one copy. There is no way of getting something for nothing, even in newspapers—there is only the illusion of it. What the reader does not pay directly for his paper, he pays indirectly many times over and in many ways—in the price of other goods he buys, in bad and wasteful and corrupt government, in the preparation for and waging of war of all kinds, financial, economic and murderous. It is far cheaper to pay the rest openly in taxes, if it is done openly in a way that fosters an independent Press. This is not merely because only a small part of what the world now spends on war would be needed to free the Press. It is because it can never be an economy, even for the poorest man, to let the burglar feed the watchdog.

*Free Access to News in the Making.* — To provide free access to news in the making is clearly to make for accuracy and against falseness. It facilitates obtaining, not merely the report of the eye-witness, but of a trained eye-witness. It eliminates the necessity of the journalist having to rely on sources which must be kept secret and the danger of such sources deceiving the reporter who confides in them. It also reduces to a minimum the influence of the shyster journalist who would deliberately and maliciously spread false news, for his report is then subject to the control of the mass of honest reports. It is so clearly in the general interest that the journalist should have free access to the news that it would seem to go without saying. Yet nothing perhaps shows better than the record in this matter that the only ones whom the world can rely on to fight always against false news are the journalists themselves.

At great expense and frequently at great hardship or danger to the journalist, the Press has throughout its history sought, in and often beyond the measure of its financial and political power, to disseminate the eye-witness report of every event, and, if possible, the report of the trained eye-witness. Thus the Press, once dependent on hearsay or travellers' tales for its foreign news, has, out of its own inherent desire to tell the truth, developed a vast network of trained witnesses all over the globe who can be relied on to make every effort to see if possible for themselves the event—whether fire, flood, riot, battle, plague, conference or investigation—and, if this is not possible, to collect, compare and sift the reports of as many of those who have been eye-witnesses as they can, or, where this is not possible, to get



the next best thing, and collect, compare and sift with still greater care the reports of those who have talked with actors or eye-witnesses. One need only look about him to see that the stronger any newspaper anywhere becomes financially, the more it always spends to have its own staff correspondents scattered around the world.

In so far as governmental affairs have been opened to the public, it has been due most of all to the insistent desire of the journalist to see and hear for himself, and achieved most often against the strong opposition of the governmental organ concerned and the apathy of the general public. Nearly everyone now agrees that the freedom of the Press is in the interest of everyone. Yet how many men who are not journalists or writers have been imprisoned, mutilated, burned to give mankind this boon? How many men to-day who are not journalists or writers can be depended upon to guard vigilantly the maintenance of this boon?

So it has been too with publicity of governmental affairs. No one would think now of allowing a Parliament to sit in secret, yet that practice was insisted on by the members of the Mother of Parliaments, condoned by the public and broken down after an arduous struggle only because the Press attacked it. All the reasons advanced for treating national affairs in secret, and more, were later advanced by Governments to show that it would be fatal to treat international affairs in public.

Despite all the discredit into which secret diplomacy had fallen in the holocaust into which it led a blindfolded world, despite all the fervour for open covenants openly arrived at, the Governments, when they drew up, in secret, the Covenant of the League of Nations, made no provision in it that any of its meetings should be public. When this League began, only twelve years ago, all its meetings were secret. What publicity there is now has been achieved because the Press was always there, insisting on seeing and hearing for itself what it reported. We recall with pride that one of the very first acts of our Association was to send its first President and Secretary-General to the Council to insist that the meetings of the League be opened to the Press. It has been, is, and always will be (because it is bred in the bone of the journalist of every country) the standing policy of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations to do all it can to enable journalists, whether its members or not, to see and hear for themselves what transpires in every League meeting they need report.

Everyone prefers to hear news from the eye-witness; everyone demands (for 2 cents) the truth on everything everywhere to-day from his newspaper to-day, and still the Press has always had to fight at one time or another every member of its vast constituency—officials, business men, financiers, etc.—merely to be able to witness for itself what was really going on in each domain. It is the noble record of the Press that no one has ever invited it to eye-witness an important event—whether from the air at the North Pole or on foot in darkest Africa, whether among flying bullets or sterile words—and it has failed to answer "Present!" Often the Press has been barred out, never has it refused to enter.

Since the phase of the problem of false news which we are now dealing with is that concerning international relations, we cannot too strongly remind the Council of the standing policy of this Association. We are glad to acknowledge that the League has attained a position as regards publicity that is not only far ahead of anything in the past but of any of the international meetings that have taken place since its foundation outside its walls.

There is, however, still room for improvement in the League in this respect. There are still far too many meetings held in secret. Several times this year our Association has had to protest, formally or informally, against this. We are happy to record that, as one result, the Disarmament Conference has set a new standard by deciding that all its committees, except small ones such as drafting committees or committees of jurists, shall meet in public. We do not, however, believe that even these exceptions should remain secret in principle. We see no reason why jurists, men trained to speak in public, should not discuss a point of public law in public. As for drafting committees, we have often noted that public disagreements on questions of substance are transferred to their secrecy to be "settled" in an ambiguous formula that means all things to its authors and nothing to us. If the committee is dealing with matters of substance, we want to be able to be there; and, if it is really only drafting, our experience suggests no reason why anyone should seek to keep us out. Still less do we see why the Bureau of the Assembly or of an important conference should meet in secret, especially when it is to discuss controversial matters of great interest.

We hold that the only sound public policy is for the League to throw open to the Press all meetings, without exception, so that each journalist is in a position to decide for himself whether a given meeting is of interest to his public or not. This is the principle that we would urge on the Council as an excellent means of preventing the dissemination of false news; certainly the Press has no responsibility if it reports inaccurately things it has been forbidden to witness, though, even so, it will do its best to get at the truth.

We would especially urge the following points:

1. That the meetings of the Financial and of the Economic Committees and of their subsidiaries be opened to the Press. Just as the war discredited secret diplomacy, so the depression has discredited the secrecy which still persists for business and finance. All agree that at least one root of the trouble lies in the lack of public confidence in business and financial leaders, and we must respectfully point out that no journalist desirous of keeping the confidence of his readers can keep what confidence he had in the reports given him of the secret meetings of economic or financial men. We fail to see why questions of financial or economic policy should be treated in secret when the far more delicate thing of armament, the instrument of all policy in the end, can be and is discussed in public.
2. That the Mandates Commission should meet in public and that its Minutes and its reports should be published as soon as possible. The present practice of waiting with them until the Council meets gives the public no opportunity to consider them in time to influence the action of its governmental organs.

3. That all reports to the Council or Assembly should be released to the Press when they are sent to the Members of these bodies, not held back until they are received by these Members. The present practice often results in parts of the reports leaking out and reaching the public first in a way or in a form that for one reason or another is unfortunate. The risk of the first public impression of such a report being based on inaccurate news would seem too high a price to pay for the extension to such public documents of the courtesies that apply to private letters.

4. That the verbatim texts be immediately supplied the Press, not only of Assembly and plenary Conference sessions, but also of meetings of the Council, and of bodies of the character of the Assembly's special Committee of Nineteen, and the Disarmament Conference's General Commission.

*Remedial Measures.* — By remedial measures we mean those which seek to cure the evils of false news by providing new means of dealing with specific cases that arise. The most prominent of the methods proposed by those who approach the problem in its international phase from this angle are plans involving a Journalists' Court of Honour, and schemes for assuring a right of reply to false news. These proposals seem, at first glance, to have very attractive qualities, but our experience has been that these qualities are more than offset by others discovered on further study and which give us pause.

We may mention, in this connection, that, in 1929, the Committee of this Association, in a letter to the International Federation of Journalists, made the suggestion that the idea of constituting a *Conseil de l'Ordre des Journalistes* be studied. That Federation (of which we are not a member) has since worked with praiseworthy zeal on this idea, but individually, without our collaboration. Last year it established at The Hague an International Court of Honour for Journalists, an institution differing appreciably from the one our Committee had in mind. Meanwhile our separate consideration of the fundamental problem has led us to the views expressed in this whole statement.

We have come to doubt seriously the wisdom of attempting to provide remedial measures, in the sense defined above, certainly at the present stage of newspaper and international development. We are convinced that attention should be concentrated now on preventive measures. We believe that, if preventive measures along the lines that we have recommended in this statement are adopted, there will be little if any need for special remedies. If there is, there will be plenty of time then to deal with them according to the needs of the situation; to begin with them now is to put the cart before the horse. We fear that at best these remedial measures will do more harm than good; and we fear this especially if they precede instead of follow eradication, or at least treatment of the root evils.

The fact that no other profession—the law, medicine, engineering or even those such as diplomacy which were concerned with international affairs before there was a Press—has yet developed an International Court of Honour is certainly in itself no reason why journalism should not take the lead in this regard. It does, however, strongly suggest the wisdom of going slowly and prudently, especially since some of the other professions have gone further than journalism in establishing means of dealing with their ethical questions within national or, more often, city limits. Whatever the merits or demerits of courts of honour, it would seem reasonable to establish their authority on a national basis before entering the even more delicate international field.

An international professional court of honour, moreover, presupposes a code of honour or ethics that is internationally recognised. Though we believe that journalism has gone further than some other professions toward at least an unwritten international code of this kind, still we fear it would be an exaggeration to say that journalism had already made enough progress in this regard for international court action to be wise.

Before nations turned even as much as they have to an International Court, they first not only established within their own territory the custom and authority of courts, but they gained some practice in settling international difficulties by mediation, conciliation and arbitration. It would seem prudent to follow their example in the delicate field of journalism, and at least begin at the same beginning on the international side by confining efforts at this stage of its world development to "political" as distinguished from "legal" procedure. We feel, indeed, that the specific cases which the supporters of the remedial measures we are discussing have most in mind—complaints that certain items in a newspaper have endangered peace or good international relations—are by their nature to be assimilated always with "political" instead of "legal" disputes, and to be treated therefore with the supple methods of conciliation rather than the rigid formalism that attaches to court or legal procedure of any kind.

If the plaintiff will begin by assuming that the item of which he complains is not necessarily due to the ill-will or stupidity of the journalist; if he will keep firmly in mind that there can be at least as much honest error and misunderstanding in work that must be done at high speed as in that which is done leisurely; if he will make sure that his own house is not of glass, and if he will then address himself courteously to the foreign journalist or newspaper in question and limit himself to reasonable requests; if the plaintiff will begin by seeking satisfaction in this manner, we believe there will be very few cases in which he will not get all the satisfaction he deserves. If, however, this leaves the plaintiff still wanting satisfaction, we believe the best way for him to get it is to ask the competent Press association to use its friendly offices in straightening out the matter. We doubt that this conciliatory method would fail to settle any legitimate and reasonable complaint.

We are the more inclined to think that the attempts to remedy specific complaints of false news by new legal machinery are premature, because we find they are based on far too little fact-finding. Essential elements are still obscure. If the above conciliatory method were loyally tried and the complaints that it failed to settle registered—with the text of the item involved, the names of the plaintiff and the journalist or newspaper, the correction desired, the efforts made to get it, the reasons given for refusing, etc.—then after a few years we would at least have some facts to go on. Then one might know if there were any real need for new machinery, and where, and one could fit the machinery to suit the actual need. The only sound way to proceed in these matters, we are convinced, is to begin with fact-finding.

Finally, the principle at the bottom of this whole method of attempting to remedy false news by dealing after the event with specific cases raises our doubts. Many are attracted by what seems to them the justice in schemes for forcing

newspapers to give an international right of reply and for bringing a complaint about a journalist before an international court of honour. But analysis shows that these methods, in so far as they seek to solve the problem with which we are concerned—that of false news—really depend almost completely on fear as a deterrent. We would not easily grant that fear serves truth more than falsity; but, granting that fear of punishment or of being forced to give space for a correction or reply may deter false news in some respects, this is offset by the way these methods encourage falsity in other respects. We suspect that about the only kind of cases that would reach an international court of honour in the present state of the world would be the very kind involving and encouraging bitter controversy—for otherwise they could and would have been settled without it. We suspect that these cases might at least occasionally include attempts to find a scapegoat or otherwise satisfy public passion—and one dramatic affair of this kind would be enough to do harm for a long time. As for forcing, however indirectly, the insertion of a “reply” in a newspaper, this also is to invite its ill-will and encourage controversy, especially if done internationally. If fear deters the false, certainly ill-will and passionate controversy and bitterness do not promote the truth—to say nothing of peace and goodwill among nations in behalf of which these methods also are urged.

One way to test such theories is to look back to the international incidents that started them and ask two questions:

If the proposed machinery had then been functioning, would it have assuredly done more good than harm merely in these cases? Would it have discouraged or encouraged passionate international controversy?

Has the fact that these cases escaped such remedy, through lack of machinery, actually resulted in lowering or even affecting the standards of the Press, or in doing any real harm to peace?

As long as it is uncertain, not only whether the remedy will kill or cure, but whether there is any need, commensurate with the dangers involved, of running the risk at all, it would seem wise to trust in nature rather than in medicine even when scientifically prepared.

We welcome the same test being applied to the preventive measures we recommend.

Was or was not the period which has the most evil name for false news precisely the period of the world war, when Governments enjoyed the greatest control of the Press, and journalists were the least free?

Is or is not the general standard of the Press, and especially its accuracy and its tone in dealing with international affairs, the highest where it is the most free and financially self-supporting, where it is most in the hands of professional journalists?

Have or have not these standards risen where freedom of access to the news has increased?

For us, there can be no hesitation. There is, to say the least, no assurance that the problem of false news can be solved by negative attempts to punish those who, in nine cases out of ten, are themselves the victims of an unsound system. There is every assurance that it lies in positively freeing the fertile elements and basic forces that make for truth. The problem of false news is a problem not of restricting but of liberating the Press.

For the Committee:

(Signed) Clarence STREIT,  
President.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS.

[Translation.]

Paris, June 8th, 1932.

The International Federation of Journalists has taken note of the documents regarding the publication of Press information which were communicated to its constituent associations and to its own Secretariat by the League of Nations.

At its meeting at Rouen on May 19th and 20th, 1932, its Executive Committee heard reports on this subject submitted by the delegates of various national organisations. On the basis of these reports and of the subsequent debates, the Federation has drawn up the following proposals and suggestions for submission to the Assembly of the League of Nations:

(1) The responsibility of journalists cannot be regarded as complete so long as the freedom of the Press is, in actual fact, limited by considerations of every kind, particularly those of an economic nature, to which the papers they contribute to are subject.

(2) Journalists reject unanimously any idea of a super-censorship, whatever arguments there may be for an international supervision of news.

(3) It is desirable to define the terms used by the authors of the various motions submitted to the League of Nations, and to distinguish between the facts to which they refer.

(a) *Incorrect News.*—These words appear to refer to news which the journalist honestly believes to be in accordance with fact, but which has been communicated to him incorrectly. In such cases the journalist is free from all responsibility. His only obligation is to correct his statement.

(b) *Tendentious News and Campaigns.* — This can only refer to the utilisation of news for the support of a special point of view. In the opinion of journalists, the honest expression of any opinion, whatever its nature, is legitimate, and any censorship, however correct in its intentions, is in practice invariably unsatisfactory and cannot be admitted by journalists.

(c) *False Information.* — This refers to the deliberate distortion of news, or any other dishonest practice, such as the forging or fabrication of documents. This is the most serious professional fault of which a journalist can be guilty, but professional journalists are alone in a position to come to a sound and equitable decision regarding the commission of the fault or its gravity. In such cases they reject the intervention of any disciplinary authority whatsoever, apart from that set up by themselves for dealing with such cases, namely the International Journalists' Court of Honour.

(4) It is beyond question that incorrect or false information comes into existence and obtains circulation chiefly, and, indeed, almost entirely, in places where the information available is inadequate and incomplete. Correct news is the antidote for false news. Everything possible should therefore be done to facilitate the professional work of the journalist, to furnish him with an abundant supply of carefully verified and accurate news, and to give him access to those circles in which he can carry out his own enquiries and come into direct touch with the facts.

In this connection the suggestion may perhaps be made to the League of Nations that its own methods might with advantage be revised. Those methods, in spite of appearances to the contrary, are still marked by certain leanings towards secrecy. Experience has shown that nothing but good can come from the publicity of debates, and it is to be hoped that this practice will be adopted by certain commissions which deliberate in secret, and concerning which such information as leaks out is not invariably true. Secondly, properly accredited journalists should be granted ready access to the offices in which are to be found the original sources of information, and they should be sure of obtaining from them that authentic news which it is their chief interest to secure. Finally, they would regard it as quite unexceptionable that, in the event of incorrect or false news being published, the League of Nations should immediately issue a correction, not in the form of a vague, anonymous and more or less furtive communiqué, but as an official statement. Every newspaper would undoubtedly regard itself as under an obligation to publish such statements.

It might even be possible for the League to appoint in the various capitals professional journalists for the purpose in the capacity of information agents, who would also ensure the publication of these statements. It is, however, essential that the Press services of both the League of Nations and the various Governments should not invade the professional province of journalists, and should not go beyond an appeal to their undoubted goodwill or, should circumstances so require, to that of the professional organisations.

A method by which publicity could be secured for such rectifications would be to broadcast them in the different languages of the countries concerned.

Similarly, it might be possible to grant to any country which regarded itself as injured by the publication of news in which facts were distorted or misrepresented to its prejudice a right of reply similar to that granted to private individuals, a right which might well be introduced into certain countries where it is not yet recognised. The freedom of the Press is limited, as well as guaranteed, by law; it would otherwise lead to intolerable abuses. The proposed procedure would extend to international relations the provisions originally introduced for the protection of individuals.

It would be for the League and for the representatives of each nation to enquire into the methods of applying this right of rectification which, without limiting the freedom of journalists to give news or to express opinions, would bring a note of sincerity and truth into international relations. The professional associations of journalists are ready to give their assistance in this enquiry.

(5) Furthermore, it is not possible in this connection to pass over in silence certain occasions, which there is no need to specify, on which tendentious, incorrect or even false news has, for political ends, been put about, hinted or supplied by authorities ostensibly beyond suspicion. The journalist who, in good faith, collects and disseminates such information is the victim of machinations which are beyond his control. It is cases such as these which would call for the immediate and definite intervention of the League, and which would, in consequence, justify investigation by the Court of Honour.

(6) No one realises better than journalists themselves the importance of getting rid of journalists of dubious character. The possession of the "international card" originated by the International Federation of Journalists should in every case be insisted upon as proof of professional status, a requirement very justly recognised by the Copenhagen Conference. Cards or letters of introduction supplied by the newspapers do not in themselves provide an adequate guarantee, as experience has shown that they are too frequently granted out of mere friendliness, and do not provide any reliable evidence of the character or qualifications of their holders.

(7) Finally, stress should be laid upon the importance of establishing good relations between journalists and Government Press bureaux and between these Press bureaux themselves. In this direction, the Copenhagen Conference indicated an extremely important advance which should be carried further.

Such are the observations which the International Federation of Journalists desires to put forward in response to the considerations expressed by the League of Nations. The adoption of the practical suggestions contained therein would do more than any measures of compulsion to ensure the sincerity and reliability of news, at least so far as this depends upon the work of professional journalists.

For the Bureau of the International Federation of Journalists

and by order:

(Signed) Stephen VALOT,  
General Secretary.

\* \* \*

In transmitting this note, the General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists added that it was submitted in the name of the journalists belonging to the following organisations, which were present or represented at the Executive Committee of Rouen (May 19th to 20th, 1932):

Reichsverband der Deutschen Presse, Berlin;  
Australian Journalists' Association, Melbourne;  
Reichsorganisation der Oesterreichischen Journalisten, Vienna;  
Union professionnelle de la Presse Belge, Brussels;  
Association of Sofia Journalists, Sofia;

Federacion de la Prensa-Catalano-Balear, Barcelona;  
Associação Brasileira de Imprensa, Rio de Janeiro;  
Association of Danish Journalists, Copenhagen;  
Union of Estonian Journalists, Tallinn;  
Suomen Sanomalehtimiesten Liitto, Helsinki;  
Syndicat National des Journalistes, Paris;  
National Union of Journalists, London;  
Union of Athens Newspaper Editors, Athens;  
Nederlandsche Journalisten-Kring, The Hague;  
Magyar Ugsagirok Egyesülete, Budapest;  
Latvja Rakstnieku un Zurnalistu Arodbiedriba, Riga;  
National Association of Polish Journalists, Warsaw;  
General Association of the Roumanian Press, Bucharest;  
Association générale de la Presse Suisse, Berne;  
Union of Czechoslovak Journalists, Prague;  
Reichsgewerkschaft der Deutschen Presse, Prague;  
Association of Yugoslav Journalists, Belgrade;  
Organisation of Lithuanian Journalists, Kaunas;  
Verein der Auslaendischen Presse zu Berlin, Berlin;  
Association Syndicale de la Presse étrangère en France;  
Syndicat de la Presse étrangère en France;  
Foreign Press Association of the Netherlands;  
Foreign Press Association of Czechoslovakia;  
General Association of Russian Authors and Journalists.

### 3. AUSTRALIA.

#### AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION.

Melbourne, March 16th, 1932.

The Federal Executive of the Australian Journalists' Association recognises the great danger that may lie in an untruthful or sensational presentation of international news, and the responsibility that rests upon the Press in this matter.

As to the possible steps to be taken to avoid this danger, we are of opinion that the most effective lies in the education of journalists and proprietors of newspapers to a fuller recognition of this responsibility. As possible means to this end we would suggest:

(a) Close historical investigation of the effect of Press utterances upon national feeling in past crises, and of their apparent influence on the development of those crises. Publication of an historical work embodying the results of this investigation. This would, we believe, be gladly undertaken by some university, if not by the League itself;

(b) Representations to universities and schools of journalists for the dissemination of this knowledge through the usual educational channels;

(c) Circularisation of newspaper proprietaries and of journalists associations setting forth the views of the League of Nations.

This Federal Executive recognises that it is impossible to ensure that all journalists and all proprietors shall be reached, or, if reached, shall be influenced, by such means as are here suggested. With the inestimable advantage of a free Press there goes, almost inevitably, the disadvantage that some journalists or some proprietaries will seek popularity or profit from the publication of exaggerated or untrue statements, even when these may dangerously inflame public opinion. If, however, even a single daily newspaper in each country steadily resists this temptation, and ensures for its nation the opportunity of ascertaining the truth, something is gained; and we believe that the measures here suggested might result in such an attitude becoming more general.

Secondly, in view of the impossibility of entirely preventing the danger in question, this Executive would urge that steps might be taken to disseminate unbiased news. By this we do not mean the mere contradiction of falsehoods that have already been published. When an untruth or an exaggeration has been widespread, it is always difficult to overtake it, and the act of contradiction might involve the League in undesirable consequences. A far more effective means would be

(1) An international journal to which the world could look with increasing confidence for a candid and truthful presentation of international news;

(2) Similar dissemination of news daily by wireless;

(3) Dissemination of news in existing newspapers through an international agency. At the least, we would suggest the establishment of a simple organisation for the exchange among nations of any mutually friendly comment

appearing in each other's Press and literature. This step was originally suggested by Mr. J. W. Hamilton of St. Paul, U.S.A., who truly points out that, whereas criticism or abuse of one country in the Press of another is likely to be immediately reported in the Press of the country criticised, this is seldom done where the comment is appreciative.

(Signed) H. J. CURWEN,  
*General President.*

(Signed) Sydney E. PRATT,  
*General Secretary.*

#### AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPER CONFERENCE.

Melbourne, March 15th, 1932.

Resolution unanimously adopted by the Conference:

" Recognising the supreme importance, in the maintenance of world peace based upon international goodwill, of the accuracy and the understanding nature of all information published of an international character, the respective Australian capital city daily newspapers will cordially support any action taken that will ensure this, and will, through their news-gathering organisations, co-operate in any practical measures that may be feasible in this direction without impairment of the necessary freedom of the Press. "

(Signed) A. C. C. HOLTZ,  
*Chairman.*

#### NEW SOUTH WALES INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISTS.

Sydney, March 8th, 1932.

The Council of the Institute of Journalists of New South Wales recognises the difficulty of exercising control over the publication of news that may either be false or, even if true, be harmful if released at a time of national crisis; and also recognises the possible danger of such publication. It has every sympathy with the League in its endeavour to find some solution of the problem.

The Council cannot support any suggestion that would tend to place any further restrictions than are now extant upon the Press generally, or that would subject it to the absolute control of any outside authority; and is of opinion that, even in times of crisis, such restrictions or control would, in the final result, prove harmful rather than beneficial to the public of the countries concerned.

The Council suggests that, as there are at the present time societies affiliated to, and working in the interests of, the League of Nations in nearly every large centre throughout the civilised world, the aims of the League in the particular direction under consideration might well be furthered by seeking the assistance of these societies in an endeavour both to check the publication of false or harmful news and to mitigate the effect of such news after issue by the publication of the necessary contradiction or explanation.

(Signed) J. E. DAVENPORT,  
*Honorary Secretary.*

#### 4. AUSTRIA.

" VEREINIGUNG DER BERICHTERSTATTER DER REICHSDEUTSCHEN PRESSE IN WIEN " (ASSOCIATION OF GERMAN PRESS CORRESPONDENTS IN VIENNA).

[Translation.]

Vienna, April 29th, 1932.

1. If the League of Nations is to be entrusted with the task of exercising control over false news of a nature to disturb peace and, when necessary, of correcting and denouncing such news, and if, further, as would appear from the speech delivered on September 10th, 1931, by M. Lerroux, Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and from the draft resolution adopted by the Council of the League on October 2nd, 1931, it is proposed, with this object in view, to invite the co-operation of Governments, it is essential that the Committee of the European Nationalities Congresses, which is the competent representative of almost all the minorities of Europe, should be allowed to take part in the same way in this co-operation, and that information supplied and enquiries carried out by this Committee should be granted the same publicity as that given to other bodies co-operating in the work of maintaining peace. This claim is of particular importance in connection with the maintenance of peace in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, in that the situation there as regards nationalities provides abundant possibilities of conflict.

2. In the interests of world peace, no armaments industry and no business connected therewith should be permitted to be the owner of a newspaper or of a telegraphic agency, or to subsidise directly or indirectly newspapers or telegraphic agencies.

(Signed) KARL LAHM,  
*Chairman.*

## 5. BRITISH EMPIRE.

### EMPIRE PRESS UNION.

London, April 26th, 1932.

My Council are, of course, most willing to assist the League in any way within their power. They feel, however, that the problem referred to is not one which assumes, or seems likely to assume, formidable dimensions in either Great Britain or in the British Empire overseas, with which alone they are concerned. Indeed, no serious and deliberate instance within the British Empire of the kind referred to occurs to my Council's recollection. Any abuse of the freedom of the Press which exists within that Empire, be it by calculated or by reckless dissemination of "false news", would be condemned severely by public opinion, and, if it were repeated, would, under the conditions of competition which generally prevail there, gravely prejudice the offending journal or news agency. (These observations do not include minor questions, such as irresponsible attacks upon internal order.)

My Council, therefore, scarcely consider themselves justified in canvassing potential methods of prevention within the British Empire, which, in the absence of widely acknowledged reasons for them, would be difficult to reconcile with British conceptions of the rights of free publication of news and free comment. They would, however, always be glad most sympathetically to consider any concrete proposals which might emanate from the League.

My Council, I may also add, believe that, in matters of the kind under consideration, the most practical safeguard lies in further education of the public in regard to international affairs.

(Signed) H. E. TURNER,  
*Secretary.*

### NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS.

London, May 2nd, 1932.

In my opinion, were the Press of the world resolutely and unanimously determined not in any circumstances to support a war policy or any policy provocative of war, then peace would be assured.

That, however, is too much to expect at the present time. But there are more practical methods of achieving something less than the ideal. One is to be found in the Court of Honour for Journalists, which was established by the International Federation of Journalists at The Hague in October 1931. The purpose of this is to punish pressmen who knowingly and maliciously give publication to falsified, forged or garbled news relating to foreign affairs. Such journalists may be expelled from their organisations and denounced as unfit to be journalists. The effect of this should be salutary, since wars are due in some measure to national antagonisms created and fostered by unscrupulous journalists.

What more can be done is a difficult question. I suggest, however, that the League of Nations itself might consider the propriety and practicability of establishing a news agency with headquarters in Geneva. This agency would have incorruptible representatives in each capital city. They would send to Geneva all information relating to matters with an international aspect. This would be distributed to the Press of the world. If newspapers would agree to publish news emanating from the League with the same prominence as is given to news relating to the same events from other agents, or from their own correspondents, such publication would act as a check upon the publication of tendentious news, and would therefore be beneficial. It would, of course, be necessary to appoint expert journalists of known international sympathies to such posts. The cost should not be excessive. Naturally, I have not gone into the question of expense or organisation. It does seem to me that a project of this kind is worth serious consideration.

(Signed) H. M. RICHARDSON,  
*General Secretary.*

### NEWSPAPER SOCIETY.

London, April 9th, 1932.

In the opinion of the Society, the best method of endeavouring to prevent the dissemination of false news is for the fullest possible facilities for news gathering and investigation to be placed at the disposal of responsible journalists accredited by recognised news agencies and responsible newspapers.

(Signed) Edward W. DAVIS,  
*General Secretary.*

## 6. DENMARK.

### "DANSKE PRESSES FAELLESRAAD" (CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE DANISH PRESS).

[Translation.]

Odense, March 16th, 1932.

The "Danske Presses Faellesraad" associates itself with the point of view adopted by the Press organisations at the Press Conference which was held at Copenhagen in January 1932. It is of the opinion that the problem of incorrect

news is primarily a problem of the supply of information, and the best way of preventing such incorrect news is to see that the Press and journalists are in every case able to obtain complete, early and exact information. The Copenhagen Conference showed that it fully understood this delicate problem by including in its resolutions all the recommendations and all the points of view put forward by the representatives of the Press organisations and of the great telegraphic agencies.

(Signed) S. P. QUIST,  
*President, Editor of the Fyns Tidende.*

## 7. FRANCE.

“ FÉDÉRATION NATIONALE DES JOURNAUX FRANÇAIS ” (NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FRENCH NEWSPAPERS).

Paris, May 26th, 1932.

The Executive Committee of the National Federation of French Newspapers has enquired into the problem of the spreading of incorrect news of a kind likely to disturb the maintenance of peace and good understanding between nations.

As you point out yourself, this problem is one of a very complicated and delicate nature, inasmuch as it concerns the freedom of the Press.

It is clear that the professional training of journalists is a primary element in the solution of this important question. It would appear that the efforts of responsible persons in all countries should be directed towards this point.

Furthermore, the Executive Committee notes that French penal legislation provides penalties for the publication of false news when such publication disturbs the public peace.

Such a provision undoubtedly supplies certain safeguards as regards the problem with which we are dealing. The French Press would be glad to see such legislation in force in all countries.

(Signed) H. SIMOND,  
*President.*

## 8. GREECE.

“ ENOSSIS SYNTAKTON ” (ATHENS UNION OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS).

[*Translation.*]

Athens, April 30th, 1932.

The Athens Agency and the Union of Editors approve the statement made at the Copenhagen Conference by M. Kimon Diamantopoulos, Resident Minister and Director of the Press Bureau at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at Athens.

You are no doubt acquainted with the proposals submitted to the Conference by M. Kimon Diamantopoulos, which appear in the official records. We would make precisely the same proposals.

(Signed) V. VEKIARELLIS,  
*General Secretary of the Union of Editors  
and Director of the Athens Agency.*

The following is the text of the proposals submitted by M. Diamantopoulos at the Copenhagen Conference:

“ The Conference,

“ Taking note of the goodwill which inspires all those concerned with the creation and maintenance of an atmosphere of peaceful co-operation and neighbourly feelings between the various countries;

“ Recognising that, in this field, the Press can exercise a decisive influence;

“ Considering that the dissemination of false news by the Press might seriously hinder the work of organising universal peace:

“ Expresses the hope that the League of Nations will take such steps as it considers advisable to ensure:

“ (1) Periodical meetings between all those, including directors of newspapers, who may be in a position to prevent the dissemination of false news;

“ (2) Direct co-operation between official Press bureaux, such co-operation to be effected by the exchange of as complete information as possible on the state of public opinion in the various countries, more particularly in the sphere of foreign politics;

“ (3) Close and constant co-operation between the telegraphic agencies already associated on an international basis; the aim of this co-operation would be to prevent the publication of news likely to disturb good relations between States, pending a request for confirmation or denial addressed to the telegraphic agency of the country concerned. Furthermore, if news of this nature, whatever its origin, is published in the Press, the agencies would be required to ask for explanations from the agency of the country concerned; in this matter the telegraphic agencies might also obtain the co-operation of the Legations of the country involved;

“ (4) The strengthening of the moral authority exercised by the Court of Honour over the international Press, and in connection with any disciplinary measures which it may be called upon to take. ”



## 9. HONDURAS.

### “ ASOCIACIÓN DE LA PRENSA HONDUREÑA ” (PRESS ASSOCIATION OF HONDURAS).

[Translation.]

Tegucigalpa, May 20th 1932.

Our Association read with great interest the draft resolution adopted by the Committee comprising the proposal of M. Lerroux, delegate for Spain, and I am entirely in agreement with the conclusions of the above-mentioned draft resolution.

I consider that this same draft—with a few elaborations—might be incorporated in a kind of Universal Journalistic Code, which could be presented for discussion and adoption to a World Press Congress, which should take place under the auspices of the League of Nations. Once this code had been approved, the newspapers would be morally obliged to keep to the path they themselves had traced by means of the said code.

A special Press Office within the League could exist for the purpose of calling to attention any newspaper which might violate the principles or resolutions adopted in the aforementioned Congress.

This would not imply an interference with the liberty of the Press, since it would be the Press itself which would have set up the standard for its actions in the field of international political journalism. Its own code having been approved, the newspapers would have to fulfil their undertaking to work for world peace and good harmony between the peoples of the earth. The mission of the special Press Office would be to see that the code was respected.

We have achieved something similar to this in Honduras with a certain amount of success. In 1930, I was responsible for the meeting in Tegucigalpa of a Congress of Journalists, in which all the papers of the Republic took part. Certain resolutions were approved and all the papers undertook to abide by them. Among these resolutions appears the following:

“ The journalists of Honduras will be the watchful, faithful, constant and true and impartial factor with regard to events which may occur in the Republic, publishing and condemning such occurrences as, involving a transgression of the law, would tend to destroy the natural harmony which should exist between the citizens of this country, as a basis of peace.”

Another of the resolutions says:

“ The Honduras Press, when dealing with matters of an international character, should bear in mind its obligation to contribute to the *good understanding between the peoples*, the culture, peace and common well-being.”

If at any time a paper has departed from these principles, it has been called to order and reminded of the solemn vow made before the Congress of Journalists presided over by the President of the Republic, and a fairly praiseworthy result has been achieved.

I understand very well that the situation of journalism in the large countries, and especially in Europe, is very different from what it is in a small country like Honduras. But if in a Press Congress under the auspices of the League an undertaking were freely signed by all to work for the better understanding between the peoples, I see no reason why such an undertaking could not be fulfilled in the majority of cases, if not in all. That would represent an important step along the right road.

As to the “ diffusion of false news ”, this is precisely the origin of subsequent editorial comments which create friction between the nations. In the Congress of Journalists which would take place under the auspices of the League, this point should be discussed, and the agencies of world news should take part in the undertakings signed. The papers could undertake not to comment on any news likely to cause friction or bad feeling until such news had been confirmed; and, even in that case, any comments which were made should be in conformity with the resolutions adopted by the Press Congress.

The experiment made in Honduras has produced very good results. I will quote a concrete case. Commissions of Honduras and Guatemala are at present meeting in Washington in order to arrange by arbitration the old dispute of frontier lines between the two Republics. Previously, when there was a question of coming to an agreement, the Press of both countries published aggressive comments on the actions of the other party. Now the matter is only discussed in extremely courteous terms, and complete harmony reigns between the two countries. And yet this same Press, some three years ago, by means of passionate comments, was on the point of causing grave difficulties in the relations of these two sister States.

There is no doubt that all conscientious journalists in the world—no matter to what country they belong—are interested in maintaining good understanding between their own countries and the rest of the world. The day that there exists between them an agreement tending to avoid the stirring up of the people, that agreement will act as a restraint and will prevent the overflowing of passion which finds its expression in the columns of the newspapers. That day a great step will have been made along the path of universal cordiality.

(Signed) Mario RIBAS.

President.

## 10. HUNGARY.

### “ BUDAPESTI NAPILAPOK TESTÜLETE ” (ASSOCIATION OF BUDAPEST DAILY NEWSPAPERS).

[Translation.]

Budapest, May 28th, 1932.

There is no doubt as to the desirability of preventing the spread of false news likely to disturb the maintenance of peace and good relations between the nations, especially as the measures to be taken would in no way affect impartial

journalists acting in good faith. No country has been more exposed to campaigns of false, tendentious and malicious news than Hungary. It is therefore to our interest that a stop should be put to these regrettable abuses or that steps should be taken to deal with the offenders. The Association of Budapest Daily Newspapers, however, thinks it would be wrong to generalise on this subject. A distinction should be made between: (1) newspaper articles (leaders, etc.) and (2) news or reports.

As regards the former category, we shall be violating the fundamental principles of the freedom of the Press if we admit that a journalist may be prevented through fear of the consequences from publishing information based on his own experience or impressions or obtained from official conversations. Moreover, it would be very difficult to find an authority competent to decide whether a political article published in a newspaper is correct or not. In addition, such articles are signed by the writer or are published on the authority of the newspaper, so that there can be no doubt as to where responsibility rests. This category also includes interviews, the responsibility for which rests with the person interviewed, since it is for the latter to take the necessary steps to ensure that his statements are correctly reproduced. The publication of such matter, like any other discussion of political events in the Press, cannot be brought before any international tribunal.

The Association of Budapest Daily Newspapers takes an entirely different view of the problem of false news. Reports reach the newspapers either from official, semi-official or private telegraph agencies or from the newspapers' own contributors or correspondents. If some of these reports are false or deliberately invented, or are even presented in a tendentious way, the problem of rectification necessarily arises, since totally incorrect news regarding events in a given country may be disseminated throughout the entire world by ill-disposed neighbours or by enemies for the sole purpose of injuring the country. We regard this as a case for international action.

Unfortunately, the contradiction of an erroneous report is not a cure for the evil; there is no doubt that, for every hundred thousand persons who read the false news, only a thousand will read the denial. The Baltic States alone have endeavoured to guard against this evil; they have agreed not to publish news regarding one of their number unless it comes from the country concerned. This arrangement is far from perfect. On the one hand, it is not possible in the international Press service. On the other hand, it would destroy the impartiality of journalism; if the position in a country constituted a danger to its neighbours, and if foreign newspapers were debarred from describing the situation except in accordance with the news received from the country concerned, it would be impossible to protect the interests of the other countries. Such a country would have every reason to hide the true state of affairs and, by instituting a strict censorship, it might only release incomplete or untrue news.

Some other means must therefore be found. In the opinion of the Association of Budapest Daily Newspapers, publications which are obviously inspired by ill-will or the desire to harm or mislead or which spread rumours regarding imaginary events should be laid before a sort of international tribunal composed of absolutely impartial persons and set up for each particular case. The tribunal should examine the matter and, in case guilt was established, pronounce a moral condemnation. The judgment should be published by all the newspapers parties to an agreement for the purpose and should contain a short explanatory statement, so that the public might understand the facts and itself be in a position to pass judgment on the guilty parties.

The members of such a tribunal would not therefore be elected once for all, but for each case that arose. They should be appointed from among the journalists of States not concerned in the matter, so as to ensure the fullest possible impartiality.

The problem is, however, difficult and complicated, and should be approached with the greatest tact and all possible precautions. The Hungarian Press would never tolerate any interference with the firmly established principle of the freedom of the Press.

(Signed) IVAN DE PRAZNOVSZKY,  
*President.*

## II. ITALY.

### “SINDICATO NAZIONALE FASCISTA DEI GIORNALISTI” (FASCIST NATIONAL SYNDICATE OF JOURNALISTS).

[Translation.]

Rome, May 25th, 1932.

The problem of finding means for preventing the spread of false or tendentious news likely to disturb the maintenance of peace and good relations between nations would appear to be difficult, if not impossible, to solve, since the very delegation which raises the question states that “it will never agree to any restriction being imposed on the freedom of the Press, even if the only alternative is to endure the evils of freedom”.

There are in practice only two ways of preventing the spread of false or tendentious news—either by a State monopoly of international information or by a preventive censorship. Both ways inevitably involve restrictions on the freedom of the Press. Obviously, therefore, the publication of news of any kind cannot be prevented if the freedom of the Press is to be preserved intact.

Moreover, the delegation which makes this proposal thinks that there should be no control or action of any kind before the news is actually published.

I venture to point out that, at the time when the news is published, all the evil intended has been produced. A denial (which in any case cannot be given immediately, unless it emanates from the Government of the State attacked, and will therefore not always be effective) invariably comes too late; if, as would appear to be the case, this denial is to be issued by an organ of the League of Nations, it will be impossible to prevent replies and counter-replies which will involve the organs of the League of Nations in serious difficulties.

I think the suggestion made by M. Lerro, the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, cannot be carried out. He said that “this vast field of international information, this task of clarifying and purifying the sources and the channels

of the distribution of news, seem to belong naturally to the League of Nations". This can only mean an international journalistic monopoly at Geneva which, apart from political difficulties, would run counter to the interests of the journalistic world.

M. Urgoiti's proposal "to constitute an exclusively professional international body to which the national journalists' associations would be responsible" would not appear to be practicable. The associations cannot be responsible to anyone for the professional conduct of individual members; they can merely strike off their lists any members found to be at fault in carrying out their professional duties. More cannot be demanded.

The only way to obtain practical results is that adopted in Italy, where journalistic work is entrusted under suitable laws to persons of recognised honesty, education and sense of responsibility. Special lists (*albi*) are prepared, and, if any person fails in his difficult duty, his name is struck off the list and he may not continue to exercise a profession for which he has shown himself to be morally unfitted or without the necessary political sense and responsibility. In other words, the adventurer and the ignoramus must not be allowed to engage in the profession of journalism merely out of regard for the fetish of liberty.

In view of the above remarks, I think the Danish Government's proposal to convene the heads of the State Press bureaux is of some value; but such a meeting might give better results if the heads of the national journalistic organisations also took part.

(Signed) Ermanno AMICUCCI,  
Secretary.

## 12. NEW ZEALAND.

### UNITED PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED.

Wellington, March 24th, 1932.

While our association has every sympathy with the desire of the League of Nations to eliminate the spread of false or misleading news, it has, at present, no suggestion to offer, feeling that the present system, which has stood the test of many years, meets its requirements as far as reliability and authenticity are concerned.

(Signed) A. B. LANE,  
Manager.

## 13. NETHERLANDS.

### "KATHOLIEKE NEDERLANDSCHE DAGBLADPERS" (ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF ROMAN CATHOLIC NEWSPAPERS).

[Translation.]

The Hague, May 3rd, 1932.

We are deeply interested in the question of the "dissemination of such false information as may hinder the maintenance of peace and good understanding among the peoples".

We are gratified to note the very excellent work which the League of Nations is doing in this connection. The ideal of Catholic journalism, which our association sets before it, implies at the same time the ideal of peace.

In considering how the circulation of false news can be prevented, we feel that, in the first place, it is absolutely essential to obtain an accurate idea of the extent of the evil. The League of Nations could, we believe, set up a body to explore the little-known field of false news.

A body of this kind under the League's patronage, especially if it could be based on a federation of associations of newspaper directors and if all complaints of false news could be referred to it, would be able to make very definite proposals after some little time.

Finally, we take the liberty to point out that most civilised nations have found in the right of reply a means of combating the abuse of the freedom of the Press. We feel that if this right were recognised in international law it should prove an effective remedy against the evil, which must be dealt with at all costs.

(Signed) Alf. POTT,  
Secretary.

Chairman.

### "NEDERLANDSCHE DAGBLADPERS" (ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS).

[Translation.]

Haarlem, April 14th, 1932.

We believe that in some cases where false information is disseminated the Press is entirely innocent. This is so when it is able to obtain its information only from official sources, as in war-time, and the official communiqués are influenced by considerations of the national interest.

We again observed this regrettable state of affairs during the recent dispute between China and Japan.

We agree, however, that, in peace-time, there are also numerous instances of the dissemination of false information which could be prevented. It is beyond question that many misunderstandings between the nations are due to the absence of relations between the newspapers of the different countries. We are convinced that such relations could be established on a solid basis by an international organisation consisting of the associations of newspaper directors.

It is true that there are international ties between the journalists' organisations. But this is not sufficient.

We are convinced the time has come to set up an international organisation of the newspapers themselves; this would be in conformity with the spirit of international understanding represented by the League.

The international newspaper organisation should have a permanent office which might deal, not only with technical professional questions, but also with editorial questions. This central office might organise an exchange of special articles and news calculated to improve international relations. It might also arrange that, if false news is published concerning any country, the newspapers of that country shall have an opportunity of expressing their views.

We are of opinion that such an international Press organisation would help to promote peace, and we have the honour to ask the League of Nations whether it could not take steps to convene an international conference of organisations of newspaper directors for this purpose.

(Signed) J. W. HENNY,  
Chairman.

(?)  
Secretary.

#### 14. POLAND.

##### “ POLSKI ZWIĄZEK WYDAWCÓW DZIENNIKOWICZASOPISM ” (POLISH ASSOCIATION OF EDITORS OF NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS.)

Warsaw, April 9th, 1932.

1. The problem of preventing the circulation of false news can only be solved with the co-operation of all those who are in a position to influence, directly or indirectly, the activities of the Press.

2. It can only be dealt with on an international basis.

3. For its solution, a special body will be required. This body should consist of national elements organised on an international basis.

Following this line of argument, we feel bound to point out that newspaper editors, who are capable in this capacity of exercising a most important influence on the activities of the Press, have hitherto found no satisfactory form of international organisation.

In view of these facts, we think it desirable to make the following suggestions:

(1) A general international Conference of Press experts should deal with the problem. All the organisations and persons concerned should also take part: (a) The League of Nations, (b) Government Press Bureaux, (c) telegraphic agencies, (d) Press associations, (e) newspapers editors, (f) journalists.

(2) The object of the Conference should be clearly defined—namely, to prepare a plan of international Press co-operation, as stated in the draft resolution of the Polish delegation, which the Press Sub-Committee for Moral Disarmament adopted on June 29th, 1932.

If the Conference is to succeed, we think it essential that it should be preceded by a careful consultation of national and international Press groups, to examine directly the question of such a system of international Press co-operation.

(3) It would be most desirable, independent of any steps to convene a Press Conference under the League's auspices, to set up an international association or organisation of newspaper editors on a professional basis. Permanent contact between national organisations of newspaper editors within a corporate international association could contribute effectively to the solution of the problem of the “ dissemination of such false information as may hinder the maintenance of peace and good understanding among the peoples ”.

In connection with this last point, we are in complete agreement with the proposal of the “ Nederlandsche Dagbladders ”, which would appear to be of the greatest importance for the successful “ co-operation of the Press in the organisation of peace.”

(Signed) Stanislaw KAUZIK,  
Director.

#### 15. ROUMANIA.

##### SINDICATUL ZIARISTILOR DIN BUCURESTI (UNION OF BUCHAREST JOURNALISTS) AND ASOCIATIUNEA GENERALA A PRESEI ROMANE (GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF THE ROUMANIAN PRESS).

[Translation.]

Bucharest, August 25th, 1932.

Being of opinion that it is the duty of the national Press organisations, besides seeing that the profession of journalism is exercised conscientiously and correctly within their country, to do their best to prevent in the international field the propagation of inaccurate news harmful to good relations between the peoples, the two principal Roumanian Press

Associations are prepared to take part in a conference of the professional organisations of all countries, to be convened under the same conditions as the Conference of Press Experts held in 1927, with the object of discussing this problem.

While endorsing Resolution B in Chapter I of the Copenhagen Conference (and the General Association of the Roumanian Press, which accepted the Statute of the International Court of Honour, also endorses Resolution C in the same chapter), the two above-mentioned organisations desire to submit the following observations:

The means for preventing the propagation of inaccurate news may be divided into two categories—(1) preventive action; (2) repressive action.

## I.

The preventive means to be recommended are the following:

1. Prompt, complete and honest information supplied to journalists by the Government Press Bureaux. The inconveniences found to exist at present might be largely removed if Governments were to enforce the resolutions of the Conference of Press Experts concerning the free transmission of news and the technical and Press rate facilities to be granted, and give effect to the proposals submitted at Copenhagen by the Committee of Press Representatives.

2. Closer co-operation between the Government Press Bureaux and between the telegraph agencies belonging to the international cartel might also help to prevent inaccurate news and its propagation, since these bodies represent the chief source of Press information in each country. The Press bureaux and semi-official agencies should warn one another of inaccurate rumours in circulation, which are generally the basis of false news, and should then apprise the accredited representatives of the international Press. The chief condition for the success of such action is obviously the *bona fides* of each individual journalist.

3. Means should be found for utilising the services of the Information Section in the League of Nations Secretariat and the services of the great international organisations for the prevention of false news. This should not, we think, be impossible in view of the interest taken by the League and the organisations in this matter.

4. Having regard to the close connection between the problem of inaccurate news and that of moral disarmament, the regional Press understandings, which have, among other objects, that of furthering the cause of moral disarmament, provide a useful means of combating false news. The professional organisations of the Roumanian Press draw attention to the resolutions adopted on this subject by the Conference of the "Petite Entente de la Presse", which was held at Belgrade from May 13th to May 15th, 1932, and to that of the *entente* between the Polish and Roumanian Press held at Bucharest from June 13th to 15th, 1932. The resolutions read as follows:

(1) "The Conference of the 'Petite Entente de la Presse' calls the national committees' attention to the false news spread from time to time by interested parties concerning one or another of the countries belonging to the Little Entente, and considers that it is the national committees' duty to take steps to see that the Press in their respective countries exercises the greatest circumspection in dealing with such news and establishes its origin so far as possible, in order to prevent such news in future.

(2) "The Conference of the Polish and Roumanian Press draws the attention of the two national committees to the malicious campaigns launched and the inaccurate news circulated from time to time by interested parties concerning one or the other of the two countries, and considers that it is the duty of the national committees to recommend to the Press of their countries the greatest circumspection in dealing with such news, and, so far as possible, to establish its origin in order to prevent such news in future.

"The Conference considers it absolutely essential to continue the efforts initiated under the auspices of the League of Nations for combating the propagation of inaccurate news which might disturb the maintenance of peace and good understanding between the peoples. The solution of this problem, which is closely bound up with that of the disarmament of the Press, should be examined at an international conference of Press experts convened to work out a system of international Press co-operation which might be based on the idea of the Optional Clause relating to compulsory arbitration."

Similar regional understandings might be concluded between the professional organisations of other countries.

## II.

With regard to repressive action, the Roumanian Press organisations consider that the resolutions on false news adopted by the fifteenth Plenary Assembly of the International Federation of League of Nations Unions held at Budapest from May 24th to 28th, 1931, contain certain valuable suggestions which might be examined at a general conference of Press representatives with a view to framing suitable proposals for submission to the League Council.

The discussion should cover the following points:

(a) International professional jurisdiction. The results achieved so far by the foundation of the Court of Honour should be taken as the starting-point for such discussions.

(b) Professional penalties. The professional penalties applicable to journalists found guilty of an offence and the necessary safeguards for preventing abuses and injustices in the enforcement of such penalties should be determined.

(c) International right of reply. The discussion of this question was mentioned by the Conference of Press Experts held in 1927 as a matter for examination at a later Conference.

(d) Consideration of the possibility of unifying the national systems of law in regard to the problems of false news and moral disarmament.

In submitting these observations and suggestions, the above-mentioned Roumanian professional organisations, which have always regarded the defence of the freedom of the Press as one of their essential aims, desire to state that the need for safeguarding the freedom of the Press should at no moment be forgotten in the investigation of the problem under review. The prevention of abuses must not lead to any restriction, in however limited a measure, of freedom of judgment or of the obligation to supply the public with information, since these are the principal functions of modern journalism.

(Signed) MAVRODI,  
Chairman of the Union  
of Bucharest Journalists.

(Signed) BRANISTEANU,  
Chairman of the General Association  
of the Roumanian Press.

## 16. SWEDEN.

“ SVENSKA TIDNINGSGIVAREFÖRENINGEN ” (SWEDISH ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS).

Stockholm, May 3rd, 1932.

The International Press Conference held at Copenhagen in January 1932 declared that the most effective method of preventing the circulation of false information would be to see that, as far as possible, the Press was able rapidly to obtain full and accurate news. At the same time, no measures adopted to prevent the dissemination of false information must ever restrict the freedom of the Press, which implies as a necessary consequence the responsibility of the journalist.

The Conference also pointed out that it was desirable to develop co-operation between the official Press agencies and to extend it by an exchange of information, and in other ways. It further supported the wishes expressed by the 1927 Geneva Conference with regard to Press telephonic and telegraphic messages.

The “ Svenska Tidningsgivareföreningen ” desires herewith to state that it accepts these views.

(Signed) Roeck HANSEN.

## 17. SWITZERLAND.

### FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION IN SWITZERLAND.

*Translation.]*

Geneva, April 15th, 1932.

#### *Observations.*

(1) In the opinion of the Foreign Press Association in Switzerland, it is important to note at the outset that, with regard to the publication of false news, the journalist's personal responsibility is, in point of fact, very rarely involved. For reasons which we do not desire to set forth here, it only too often happens, when a journalist applies to a Government organ, an official Press bureau or a political personage, that the information he succeeds in obtaining with reference to any particular question is incomplete or tendentious or of an *ex parte* nature; this is due purely to considerations of political expediency. As a result of this state of affairs, the information thus received by the journalist, however high his moral standing, is in most cases distorted at its very source. This fact is implicitly recognised in paragraph 3 and 4 of Resolution A adopted by the Copenhagen Conference on the proposal of its Committee of Heads of Government Press Bureaux.

(2) The same is true of the comments or criticisms which a journalist may make in connection with news of a political character. Although this question comes within the sphere of moral disarmament rather than that of the propagation of false news, we think that the attention of the League of Nations should be drawn to the fact that, in such matters, the responsibility frequently lies much less with the journalist than with the management of his paper, which gives him only such general instructions as are dictated by the Board of Directors of the paper or by the proprietor himself.

(3) Observations (1) and (2) above lead us to think that it is useless to expect that the adoption of a journalists' Code of Honour and the setting up of an International Court of Honour for journalists will bring about any improvement in a state of things which may well be regretted, but for which the managers and proprietors of Press organs are sometimes responsible.

We would add an expression of our regret at the fact that the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, which includes in its membership the chief journalists specialising in international politics in all countries Members of the League and which took the initiative in regard to the setting up of such a Court of Honour, was not even invited to participate in the constitution of the Court and was therefore unable to recognise its authority.

It is clear from what has been said above, not only that the authority of the Court of Honour is not recognised by a certain number of important journalists' associations, but also that its authority does not extend to persons who may be equally responsible for the inaccuracy of certain news—here we have in mind the Press bureaux and other official information services—or to persons who are directly responsible for the tendency and tone of articles appearing in certain organs of the Press—and here we have in mind the managers and boards of directors of such organs.

In conclusion, the Foreign Press Association in Switzerland is of opinion that the freedom of the Press should be preserved intact, and that abuses in the matter of the publication or supplying of news should be dealt with in accordance with local custom and by the national courts.

#### *Proposals.*

The Foreign Press Association in Switzerland considers that the question raised by the Spanish delegation, with the support of the Polish and Danish delegations, as to the possibility of finding a practical remedy for the publication

and dissemination of false information which may threaten to disturb the peace or the good understanding between nations, calls for a solution, not only in capitals where there are Government Press bureaux, but also at the centre where all the great Assemblies, Conferences and Committees meet under the auspices of the League of Nations or of the International Labour Office.

With this object, and in the spirit of Resolution A adopted by the Copenhagen Press Conference, the Association proposes that Governments should take measures to ensure that journalists of all nationalities accredited to the two great international institutions at Geneva should be able to find at the headquarters of each delegation—as they should also find in the Press bureaux of the different Governments in their own capitals and in the information services of the League and the International Labour Office at Geneva—all the information, news or particulars of a non-confidential character which they may require in the discharge of their duties.

For this purpose, it would be desirable that, at the opening of each important meeting of the League or of the International Labour Office, journalists should be informed as to the person or persons in each delegation responsible for supplying the Press with information, and the time and place at which journalists may obtain such information each day.

It should be understood that, though a political personage is entitled, at his discretion, to grant or refuse an interview to any particular journalist, the latter should always be guaranteed the right of access to the headquarters of any delegation with the object of obtaining from the person appointed for the purpose any news or information he might require. It is clear that every delegation remains the sole judge of the expediency of supplying or withholding the news or information sought.

(Signed) R. GÉRARD.  
*President.*

“ SOCIÉTÉ SUISSE DES ÉDITEURS DE JOURNAUX ” (“ SCHWEIZERISCHE ZEITUNGSVERLEGERVEREIN ”).

[Translation.]

Zurich, May 17th, 1932.

The Swiss Press has always recognised the fundamental importance of this problem and has therefore followed with steady interest the various steps taken by the League of Nations with a view to preventing, as far as possible, the propagation of tendentious news.

We shall not pause to consider whether it is preferable to adopt a direct method by making the propagation of false news difficult, if not impossible, or whether it is more expedient to resort to an indirect method by publishing, as quickly as possible, accurate news concerning any state of tension and thus combating tendentious news by means of authentic news. In either case, the loyal co-operation of journalists, telegraphic agencies and official Press bureaux is highly desirable.

It has seemed to us, however, that hitherto no attempt has been made to ensure the co-operation of factors which have a very great influence in the Press—viz., the managers, publishers and proprietors of newspapers. It is they who, in the last resort, decide the question of the admission or exclusion of news likely to affect relations between the different countries.

In reply to your letter, we venture to submit the following observations:

Since the war, there have been great changes in the methods by which news is supplied. Services for this purpose have been enormously extended and have, at the same time, become much more rapid. This very speeding up is doubtless the chief source of errors in the news supplied. On the other hand, the means for verifying news have, particularly since the beginning of the world crisis, decreased both in number and in effectiveness. Formerly, there were many telegraph agencies whose activity ranged beyond the national frontiers and, by subscribing to several of these services, newspapers secured a fairly effective check. In addition to these big agencies, there were large numbers of special correspondents and correspondence offices serving one or more papers. There are now, in effect, only two great agencies which are really international, while many newspapers have been compelled to reduce the number of their representatives abroad. At present there are enormous areas in the world the news from which is of a purely *ex parte* nature and cannot, therefore, be verified.

How can we obtain the check previously afforded by the large number of agencies in existence? In our opinion, this might be done by the technical organs of the League of Nations. News published in Geneva might, through its impartiality, to a great extent counteract the effects of inaccurate or tendentious news.

We realise that we are raising a big problem, for the interests of the League of Nations and of its Members would have to be reconciled with the requirements of the Press. We are, however, convinced that accurate news would constitute one of the best agencies for the maintenance of peace and good understanding between nations.

*For the Swiss Newspaper and Periodical Publishers' Association:*

(Signed) E. RIETMANN,  
*Manager of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung,  
President of the Swiss  
Publishers' Association.*

(Signed) Ed. CHAPUISAT,  
*Manager of the Journal de Genève,  
Member of the Central Committee  
of the Swiss Publishers' Association.*

## 18. TURKEY.

“ TURK GAZETECILER BIRLIGI ” (ASSOCIATION OF TURKISH JOURNALISTS).

[Translation.]

Ankara, April 28th, 1932.

1. The number of information offices regarded as reliable sources of international news is relatively very small. Most telegraphic agencies in search of sensational information have acquired the reprehensible habit of publishing unconfirmed news.

(2) Correspondents and editors of newspapers and telegraph agencies describe events that take place under their eyes according to the suggestions of the official circles with which they are in contact, or in conformity with the requirements of the particular interests that they represent. The influence that their articles may have upon peaceful international relations is often for them only a secondary consideration.

3. At the present time, when meetings between representatives of various countries have become so frequent, agencies and newspapers often serve as methods of propaganda for Governments desiring to secure at such meetings the accomplishment of their particular ambitions.

4. The excessive discretion which political and Government circles often think it necessary to observe in regard to the Press leads sometimes to the spread of news or suppositions that give an entirely false picture of the activities or intentions of such circles.

Without endeavouring to decide whether the intentions underlying the evils that we have here endeavoured to summarise are in themselves good or bad, we are merely anxious to give expression in all sincerity to our scepticism as regards a section of the Press which, thinking first of its own profits and of the accomplishment of certain aims—selfish rather than national—will still for a long time be unable to perform its true mission—to struggle for the maintenance of peace and cordial relations between States. This doubt, however, must not prevent us from taking effective measures to stop the spread of false news. These measures, of which we regard our list in no way as exhaustive, would be the following:

- (1) Organisation of an International Press Union attached to the League of Nations;
- (2) Press organisations, newspapers, telegraph agencies, editors and correspondents who wish to join the Union, should approve of its objects and methods of work;
- (3) Any newspaper, agency, editor or correspondent found to have published matter contrary to the aims of the Union should be deprived of membership; the infliction of this penalty should be published in all countries, including that of the member expelled;
- (4) Organisation within the League of Nations of an Information Section under the officers of the Union, and representation of this section in various countries by Press formations affiliated to the Union;
- (5) Organisation by the Information Section referred to in No. (4) of a telegraph agency for the purpose of verifying news received from its representatives in various countries and of contradicting by telegram false news; this agency might act as a controlling centre of international information;
- (6) Publication by the office of the Union of pamphlets founded on documents and written impartially in regard to all matters forming the subject of disputes between nations.

We are firmly convinced that these measures, which might usefully be supplemented and reinforced as need arose, would be of considerable value in the campaign against the spread of false news. Our Association will always be ready to help towards the success of the movement for the prevention of the spread of false news, so detrimental to good relations between peoples.

*Secretary-General.*

*President.*

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