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THE USSR AND DISARMAMENT

1921 - 1932

The Soviet Government from 1921 to 1932 by declaration and participation in international conferences indicated a great interest in the problem of disarmament. At the Moscow Disarmament Conference in 1922, the Fourth and Fifth sessions of the Preparatory Commission for the General Disarmament Conference in 1927-28, and at the First session of the General Disarmament Conference in 1932, the Soviets, led by M. Litvinoff, presented concrete proposals for immediate and partial disarmament.

In the area of political action the Soviet record appears clear and consistent. On every possible occasion, from the Genoa Conference to the Geneva Arms Conference, the Soviets energetically stressed the urgent need for total disarmament. In the area of political thought, however, where one finds those presumed highly inflexible guides and justifications for political action, derived from the dogma of Marx and Lenin, the Soviet Government appears in a different light in respect to disarmament. The Communists state that disarmament is possible only in a socialized world. Thus they say that all proposals stemming from non-Soviet countries should be viewed as hypocritical gestures for the oppressed masses of the capitalistic states, insincere and meaningless. The Communists state further that any Soviet proposal for disarmament should be considered as a sharp weapon to cut away the camouflage and disclose to the world the insincerity of the capitalist states. All of this is clearly presented in the Resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International meeting in Moscow in August, 1928.

Without dwelling on the close connection between Soviet political action and Soviet political thought, and to what extent action rather often deviates pragmatically from the established and approved Party line under a given series of events, the following record is clear.

The Washington Disarmament Conference

On July 19, 1921, the Russian Government voiced its first opinion on disarmament. Chagrined because the proposed Washington Conference on disarmament would exclude the Soviets, M. Chitcherin, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, addressed a telegram to the several governments invited to the Conference stating, "The Russian Government has learned that a more general question, that of disarmament, at least of Naval disarmament will be considered at a future conference. The Russian Government will be happy to welcome any disarmament or reduction of military forces which burden the workers of all countries".

Protocol of Riga - March 30, 1922

Prior to their arrival at the Genoa Conference, the Soviet Latvian, Estonian and Polish Delegates signed the Protocol of Riga which established the principle of working in collaboration

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Disarmament

RESTRICTED
SD/A/C.1/366
RAC Ref 1/2

-2-

at the Conference. Among other things the Protocol concluded by stating that in view of their desire for universal peace, "they would support the principle of reduction of armaments in all states."

Genoa Conference - 1922

When the Genoa Conference opened on April 10, 1922, the delegates awaited with great interest and some curiosity the first address of the Soviet Foreign Minister. This Conference marked the first appearance of a representative of the new Soviet Government before an international group. The Conference had been called to discuss reparations and certain commercial questions. This Conference also marked the implementation of the thesis pronounced at Cannes in January of that year that the West and the Soviets could live side by side and come to mutually satisfactory terms.

M. Chitcherin, in his opening address, at once brought the Conference to attention by stating that because economic reconstruction would be handicapped by the menace of new wars the Soviet Delegation, ". . . intended to propose, in the course of the Conference, the general limitation of armaments and the outlawry of the most barbarous forms of fighting, such as poisonous gases and aerial warfare, as well as the means of terrorizing peaceful populations."

This view of the enlarged scope of the Conference at once brought protests from the French Delegation and Lloyd George, with some effort, was able to hold the Conference together. The technical reason that disarmament was not further mentioned was that it did not appear on the agenda.

The Moscow Disarmament Conference - 1922

In June, 1922, and after the Genoa Conference the Soviet Government invited the signatories of the Riga Protocol and Finland to attend a conference at Moscow on the subject of disarmament. This conference opened in December, 1922 with the Soviet Delegation led by M. Litvinoff. M. Litvinoff immediately proposed in his first speech that if the other states would agree to such a proportional reduction, the Soviet Government would make a twenty-five percent reduction in armaments. However, agreement could not be reached on the actual reduction in terms of the existing army strength because the Soviet Representative accused each state of putting forth an exaggerated figure of existing strength in order that the actual reduction would be smaller than the proposed twenty-five percent. The Conference broke up with no agreements reached.

The League of Nations Committee of Experts

1923 - 1924

In February 1923 the Secretary General of the League of Nations invited the Soviet Government to attend a meeting on the limitation of Naval armaments, primarily called to study the application of the Washington Agreements on the non-participating states.

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states. The Soviet Government replied that "it was interested in any Conference which would contribute to the reduction of armaments." The Conference met in October, 1923 and with its adjournment the Russians accepted in principle certain minor adjustments in fleet tonnage and shore installations.

The Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance

In 1924 the Soviet Government was asked by the League of Nations to comment on the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance. This proposed treaty was an attempt to take care of security as a preliminary step to disarmament. The Soviet Government replied in detail and concluded by stating, "The reduction of armaments is the most serious and immediate task of all governments."

The Preparatory Commission for the General Disarmament

Conference - 1927 - 28

The various disarmament statements made by the Soviet Government up to the arrival of the Russian Delegation in Geneva for the Fourth Session of the Preparatory Commission in 1927 are vague. No statesman in 1927 would have denied the validity of the principle of disarmament. The central question, however, was how to implement the principle. The reciprocal proportionate reduction principle proposed by M. Litvinoff at the Moscow disarmament conference was the only substantial suggestion brought forth by the Soviet Government. All their declarations had simply reflected the popular sentiment of that period.

The Preparatory Commission was established by the League of Nations to prepare a draft convention to be studied by a general disarmament conference. The United States and the Soviet Union, while not members of the League, had been invited because of the vital importance of the subject. The Soviet Delegation however did not arrive in Geneva until the Fourth Session in November, 1927, because of a local disagreement with the Swiss Government. M. Litvinoff led the Soviet Delegation and on November 30 made his first speech before the Commission. He reviewed the failures of the Commission and of the League of Nations up to that time and then declared that the only way to disarm was to disarm totally. He therefore proposed a general and complete disarmament plan which envisaged over a period of four years the abolition of all armies, navies, air forces, fortresses, etc. by all countries. The general reaction of the Commission to the Litvinoff total disarmament plan was that the Russians were not serious but had presented an impractical plan for propaganda reasons. There was some discussion of the Russian plan but a decision was not made until the spring of 1928 in the Fifth Session. At that time the Soviet Delegation presented a Draft Convention incorporating the ideas expressed by Litvinoff. He vigorously defended the Draft Convention but it was rejected by the Commission as being contrary to and not compatible with the security responsibilities of the League members. At once M. Litvinoff submitted another Draft Convention which incorporated the principle of proportionate reduction. This plan was discussed and was rejected in the Sixth Session in 1929.

The Soviet

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED
SD/A/C.1/366
RAC Ref 1/2

-4-

The Soviet Plan for Total Disarmament

Scope

The Draft Convention for "immediate, complete and general disarmament" containing the principles of the Litvinoff declaration of November 30, 1927, was a comparatively short document of sixty-three articles. It proposed to disband all effectives on land, sea and in the air within four years. Ministries of War, Navy and Air, as well as associated military schools were to be abolished. Military budgets were to be abolished. All scientific research directed towards military devices was to be abolished. Certain small arms would be retained for internal police work and certain small craft for patrolling areas of the sea for custom purposes.

The Controls

The controls over the disarmament were to be exercised by a Permanent International Commission of Control, Commissions of Control in each contracting State, and local Commissions of Control. The permanent International Commission of Control was to consist of "an equal number of representatives of the legislative bodies and of the trade unions and other workingmens organizations of all states participating in the present Convention."

Punitive Action

The International Control Commission was entrusted with "bringing pressure by non-military measures upon any state which disturbed the normal progress of disarmament."

Inspection

Article 55 of the Convention was the most far-reaching procedure proposed by the Soviets. Article 55 allowed the International Commission the complete right to inspect the progress of disarmament in all states:

"All the contracting States shall seek to give the widest publicity to the progress of disarmament, and shall afford the organs at the Permanent International Commission of Control every facility for the full investigation of all activities of the State, of public associations and of private persons which are connected with the application of disarmament, or which, in the view of the Permanent International Commission of Control or its organs, give rise to doubts concerning the observance of the undertakings solemnly entered into with regard to disarmament and the discontinuance of all military preparations."

Voting Procedure in the Control Authority

Article 56 stated that the decisions of the International Control Commission were to be by a majority vote and binding on all states. Article 56 gave the International Commission the right to settle all disputes between the contracting states.

Relationship

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SD/A/C.1/366
RAC Ref 1/2

-5-

Relationship with the Existing Security System -
(League of Nations)

It is clear that the above Soviet proposals would have established a completely new and radical inter-state relationship. The right to inspect would have delimited the Sovereign authority of all contracting States and the right to take action by a majority vote would have established a parliamentary procedure to achieve a decision unknown in the modern interstate system. As a point of fact, the Soviet proposals would establish an authority which would have transcended the League structure. This was pointed out by the British Delegation in the course of the discussion.

The Soviet Draft on Partial DisarmamentScope

The Second Draft Convention presented by the Soviet Delegation was considered as partial disarmament preliminary to total disarmament. This draft was based on the proportionate reduction principle proposed in the earlier Moscow Conference. All states were divided into groups. Group A maintaining armed land forces over 200,000 men, Group B maintaining armed forces of over 40,000 and Group C consisting of States inferior to Group B, and Group D consisting of states disarmed after World War I. The Convention then fixed the co-efficient of reduction by requiring Group A to reduce by one-half, Group B by one-third, Group C by one-fourth and Group D would be treated separately by the Conference.

Control and Inspection

The control measures were similar to the total disarmament Convention and were in fact more rigid. Article 43 states:

"With a view to ensuring genuine control, the Permanent International Commission of Control shall be entitled to carry out investigations on the spot in the event of reasonable suspicion of a breach of the present Convention and of the subsequent supplementary Agreements on the reduction and limitation of armaments, and to appoint for this purpose special commissions of enquiry."

It should be pointed out that both Draft Conventions establish a theory of representation on the Control Commission quite different from the conventional Western conception of geographic and population representation. The Control Commission contained representatives of functional groups, workers organizations, trade unions, and certain legislative representatives from the various states. This type of representation, of course, was the Soviet theory as applied in Russia.

The Second Draft Convention was rejected, as mentioned above, by the Commission on April 20, 1929 when it was decided that the criterion of reduction should be related to the security of each state and not based purely on an objective and proportionate reduction principle.

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The General Disarmament Conference - 1932

The General Conference for Disarmament opened in Geneva on the 11th of February 1932. A Draft Convention had been prepared by the Preparatory Commission and was submitted to the General Conference as a basis of discussion. M. Litvinoff again led the Soviet Delegation and after criticizing the tentative Draft before the Conference, presented the Soviet general and complete disarmament plan. This was the same Draft Convention that was rejected by the Preparatory Commission. The Soviet Convention again was rejected as being impractical and contrary to the principles of the League of Nations. On April 11, 1932 Litvinoff introduced the Second Draft Convention on partial disarmament. This Draft was the same as the earlier partial disarmament plan with a few minor modifications. On the 20th of April the Conference rejected this plan, and the principle of proportionate disarmament as contained in the plan, with the decision that the subjective, rather than the objective, principle should be used in the reduction of armaments; that is, the principle of reduction "consistent with national security."

The First Session closed on July 23, 1932 with no part of a Soviet proposal accepted by the Conference. The contribution of the Soviet Government in the following Session was mainly that of persistent criticism of the fruitless efforts of the Conference. M. Litvinoff summed up the Soviet position in both the Preparatory Commission and the General Disarmament Conference in a speech before the Conference on February 11, 1932:

"The political and economic differences existing between various States, which have become considerably intensified since the great war and owing to the crisis, are inevitably and rapidly leading to a new armed conflict between nations. This conflict, owing to modern improvements in the weapons of destruction, threatens humanity with incredible disasters, unprecedented devastation. The impending menace of war is causing universal alarm and arousing universal suspicion.

"This alarm and suspicion, together with the burden of taxation imposed upon the people for the maintenance by States of huge armed forces, are nourishing and intensifying the present economic crisis, which is felt in all its weight first and foremost by the working classes. In these circumstances, the task of the hour is not the repetition of any attempt to achieve some reduction of armaments or war budgets, the realization of which is bound to come up against tremendous obstacles, but the actual prevention of war, through the creation of effective security against war. This task can only be carried out by means of total and general disarmament.

"The Soviet delegation will move a resolution to this effect, convinced as it is that there would be no external obstacle to the carrying out of general disarmament if the Governments here represented show their readiness for it."

Communism and Disarmament

The appearance of Litvinoff at the General Disarmament Conference and the rejection of the Soviet proposals closes the

period

-7-

period covering the USSR interest in disarmament. From 1921 to 1932 the record of the Soviet Government appears clear and the Soviet proposals forthright. This period must be examined, however, in the context of the Communist ideology. The relationship between the Soviet Government and the Communist International in this period is well known. The Communist International which met in Moscow up to its last formal Congress in 1935 examined all international problems and then passed resolutions which established the Party line of action. The Sixth Congress of the Communist International met in the summer of 1928 only four months after the Litvinoff proposals were made in the Preparatory Commission. This Congress is of particular importance because by Thesis 58 in Chapter 4 of the Final Report of the Congress, the question of "the proletariat's attitude toward the question of disarmament and the fight against pacifism" was discussed.

The above resolution is a literal interpretation of Lenin's definition of the modern state as presented in his book "The State and Revolution". The modern state, according to Lenin, is an instrument of the Capitalist class. The organs of the state exist to maintain the Capitalist class. Therefore the armed services are instruments devised and used by the Capitalists to maintain their domination and, in this imperialistic age, to implement their deterministic need for foreign markets. The future Socialist state, according to Lenin, will need no armies, navies, or any state organ which exists now only to oppress the proletariat. Thus, with the advent of the Socialist classless society, the state and its organs of oppression will no longer be needed and therefore will "wither away".

However, Lenin states further that the first step in this process toward a Socialist world comes with the Communists establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat. This is necessary in order to break by violence the hold that the Capitalists have on Society. To do that many of the existing state organs can be turned against the oppressors and utilized to protect the proletarian revolution and the proletarian state against the remaining Capitalistic world. But until the internal contradictions of the remaining Capitalistic states provoke imperialist war and violent revolution and eventual world socialism, the Soviet state must remain strong and use the "Communized" armies to defend the Socialist Fatherland.

The above dogma is well known and appears basic in Communist thinking on war and peace, and is the essence of the resolution approved by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International to answer the specific questions on disarmament, the League of Nations, and pacifism. This Congress, in Thesis 58, insisted that the capitalistic-imperialist realizes that the masses are instinctively hostile to war and for that reason imperialism is compelled to make its preparation for war under the cloak of pacifism.

"Herein lies the objective significance and the fundamental aim of the disarmament proposals and conferences initiated by the imperialist states and particularly of the work of the League of Nations in this sphere; the discussion on 'security'; the proposal to establish arbitration courts; the pacts for the outlawry of war. The purposes of all these pacifist schemes, treaties and conferences are: (a) to camouflage

imperialist

-8-

imperialist armament; (b) to enable certain great powers to maneuver against each other for the purpose of securing, by treaties, a reduction in their rivals armaments, while at the same time increasing their own military power; (c) to enable the great powers to reach temporary agreements guaranteeing their domination over the weak and oppressed countries; (d) to carry out ideological and political mobilization against the Soviet Union under the cloak of pacifist slogans, or a direct preparation for war."

Referring specifically to the Soviet participation in the Preparatory Commission in Geneva, the report states:

"The aim of the Soviet proposals was not to spread pacifist illusions, but to destroy them; not to support capitalism by ignoring or toning down its shady sides, but to propagate the fundamental Marxist postulate, that disarmament and the abolition of war are possible only with the fall of capitalism ... it goes without saying, that not a single Communist thought for a moment that the imperialist world would accept the Soviet disarmament proposals ... after the Soviet proposals for complete disarmament were rejected the Soviet Delegation in March 1928 submitted a second scheme which provided for partial disarmament and for a gradual reduction of land and naval forces. This was not a concession to pacifism, on the contrary, it served to expose more completely the attitude of the great powers toward the small and oppressed nations. The Soviet Government's position on the question of disarmament is a continuation of Lenin's policy and a consistent application of his percepts."

The Communist Party line on disarmament as clearly stated in the above quoted thesis has never been repudiated. It can be summarized briefly. Disarmament is only possible in a Socialist world. The existence of Capitalistic states makes war inevitable. Disarmament proposals stemming from Capitalistic states are purely gestures to satisfy the oppressed proletariat in those states and actually conceal the maneuvering of the Capitalistic powers in preparation for war. The Soviet suggestions and proposals on disarmament are sincere, insofar as they hope to expose by their presentation the hypocrisy of the Capitalistic states, but were never proposed with a serious belief that they would be accepted. The Communists, therefore, believe that the Capitalistic states of necessity need arms and therefore any proposal to reduce total armaments radically would never be accepted.

The above statement should be supplemented by Lenin's Thesis that the Communists must use certain arms themselves against the Capitalistic class in order to bring about the revolution. The proletariat required to bear arms for the Capitalist must be in a position to use these arms at the proper time against their "masters". The Communists therefore need arms to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and to maintain and defend it against the Capitalistic world.

Thus in light of the Communist viewpoint on disarmament, the political action of the Soviet Government from 1921 to 1932 should be viewed as a series of tactical moves in order to (1) place non-Soviet countries in an embarrassing, psychologically difficult position, and (2) emphasize their belief that disarmament is possible only in a socialist world.

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