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Speech delivered by Mr. Motta, Federal Councilor,  
First Delegate of the Swiss Confederation,  
before the Sixth Committee  
on the application of the U.S.S.R. to the League of Nations.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The position taken by the Swiss Federal Council with regard to the application of the U.S.S.R. is generally known. Criticized by some, defended by others, this position must be justified and explained all the more as it is contrary to the expressed policy of the three Great Powers represented amongst us. I shall endeavour to justify and to explain it with the moderation which alone lends arguments their full weight, but also with that frankness which we owe one another.

Switzerland is the only state which entered the League of Nations as a result of a plebiscite, that is of the direct vote of the people and of the cantons. The struggle which took place over this all-important issue was one of the most heated and moving in the long history of our country. The Federal Council, that is our Cabinet, advocated the entry of Switzerland with all the authority at its command and its advice was followed. The founders of the League had shown us their confidence in choosing Geneva as the seat of the new institution. Our public opinion has always been and remains very appreciative of this great honour. One of its consequences, happy on the whole, has been to concentrate public attention on the labours and activities of the League more perhaps than elsewhere. Proximity almost always

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makes for interest.

From the beginning we have been resolute advocates of universality. We have proved it by our acts. Were I not fearful of betraying a lack of taste, I might be tempted to quote the speech I delivered on November 15, 1920, on the opening of the First Assembly. I therein, directly alluding to Russia, expressed the hope that, having been "cured of her madness" and "delivered from her misery", she might some day seek and find in the League the help indispensable for her re-constitution.

In spite of its constant and lively friendship for the Russian people, the Swiss Government has, however, never felt able de jure to recognize their present régime. We are determined to maintain this negative and expectant attitude. Our Legation at Petrograd was pillaged in 1918 and one of its officials massacred. We have never secured so much as a word of apology. When, in the same year, an attempted general strike nearly plunged our country into the horrors of a civil war, a Soviet mission, which we had tolerated in Berne, had to be expelled manu militari, because it was found to have had a hand in the agitation.

As soon as the possibility of admitting the Soviet Union into the League began to be discussed in diplomatic circles, the Federal Council unhesitatingly informed Parliament that it could not, for its part, favour such a step. We realized that an affirmative vote would in fact, if not necessarily in law, lead to the resumption of regular diplomatic relations. That was out of the question. From a proper sense of caution, however, the Federal Council at that time, and until it became

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necessary to take a more definite decision, maintained its freedom of choice between a categorical negative vote and abstention, the latter being, in its opinion, but a more moderate form of refusal.

Since then and as the chances of a Russian application became closer and more imminent, the problem has come to be publicly discussed with an increasing vigour. I shall in a moment explain why and how our public opinion has reacted, but before doing so I beg leave to say a word about the significance and force of public opinion in Switzerland.

Our public opinion is always free; it is also spontaneous. Our press is entirely free. The Federal Council knows nothing resembling a semi-official press. No pressure is ever exercised, no indications even are received from above. At the same time we have many and various patriotic associations which cultivate and stimulate public spirit. We should not be the democracy we are were it otherwise. We are proud of this democracy; it is one of the reasons of our very existence. Without democracy, no Switzerland. If, therefore, on any matter of importance, the press and these patriotic associations take a like stand, irrespective of political party, region and language, we are confronted with the national will clearly proclaimed. The Government must take account of it. They must do so all the more when their own opinion coincides with that thus expressed. Such is the case here.

Holding to essentials and leaving aside all secondary factors, let me now state how the problem of the admission of the U.S.S.R. into the League of Nations presents itself to us.

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Does a régime, does a government which proclaims and practices an expansive and militant communism, fulfill the necessary conditions of admission?

I shall refer neither to the Preamble nor to the literal provisions of our Covenant. The arguments they suggest are very powerful, but they are of minor importance when compared to the fundamental principles of the Covenant, with its main purpose, with that which it does not explicitly mention because it goes without saying and is therefore necessarily assumed.

In every sphere -religious, moral, social, political, economic - this form of communism is the most radical negation of our very vital substance. Most states even prohibit simple communist propaganda, all consider it a political crime as soon as it seeks to pass from the realm of theory into that of action.

Soviet communism combats the ideal of religion and all that is spiritual in every form. Lenin compared religion to opium. Freedom of conscience is but an appearance. All servants of religion and their families are deprived of food cards. Churches are abandoned and fall in ruin. Moscow had five hundred churches and chapels; forty are said to remain! Christian churches the world over feel smitten in the spirit and in the flesh of all those who there profess and proclaim their belief in Christ. A so-called petition for the martyrs was, last year in Switzerland, covered by two hundred thousand signatures!

Communism dissolves the family; it suppresses individual initiative; it abolishes private property; it organizes labour in forms which it is difficult to

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distinguish from forced labour. Russia is afflicted with the sombre curse of famine. Impartial observers wonder whether this famine is a purely natural phenomenon or whether it is the consequence of an economic and social system vitiated in its very roots.

But these characteristics of communism, which I have sought objectively to define, still do not give a true picture of Russian communism. There must be added another essential and distinctive trait which still more completely puts it into opposition with the most necessary and most universally recognized principles prevailing between states. Russian communism seeks to strike root everywhere. Its ambition is world revolution. Its nature, its aspirations, its inner urge, all make for foreign propaganda. Its vital law is expansion beyond political frontiers. For communism to abandon these aims would be to deny itself; but by pursuing them, it becomes our common enemy, because it threatens us all. It would be easy for me to base each of these statements on authoritative texts drawn from official bolshevist literature, but I would spare you superfluous quotations. We are faced with undenied and undeniable truths.

But I perceive the first objection. We hear it said: let us not confuse the communist party with the bolshevist state.

This objection is none. The bolshevist state, the communist party and the Third International to which it owes its birth, are all morally one. The bolshevist state was founded to carry out the program of the communist party. Lenin had united in his person the functions of head of the state and of the party.

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The present general secretary of the party, without being the nominal head of the state, is its true master.

The bonds between the state and the party are indissoluble. The party issues orders, the state carries them out.

I perceive a second and more important objection. Let me formulate before examining it.

Attention is called to the fact that the U.S.S.R. is an immense territory of a hundred and sixty millions of inhabitants. Facing Asia on one side and Europe on the other, astride in a way on two continents, it cannot safely be ignored and deliberately left aside. The League of Nations is but a new form of international cooperation. It is not an institute of ethics, but a political association whose principal aim is to prevent wars and to maintain peace. If, by admitting Russia, we can serve the cause of peace, we must repress our fears, our scruples, the repugnance which governments may feel. May we not hope that continuous cooperation with other states within the League will promote an evolution beneficial for all and for Russia itself in the first instance?

Ladies and gentlemen, you would rightly be surprised if I denied these considerations all value. The governments of France, Great Britain and Italy have already placed similar views before the Federal Council through the ordinary channels of diplomacy, that is through their representatives in Berne. The conversations which, as head of the Political Department, I was privileged to have with these gentlemen, were pursued in a spirit of friendship and confidence. I never had

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the impression of any even indirect pressure. Let me make that clear in this place in order, in the general interest, to dispel any possible misunderstanding.

If, however, we have understood the points of view of other governments, and particularly those of the three Great Powers, we are obliged to adopt another for ourselves. A country like Switzerland, which is neither able nor willing to play a part in high international policy, must necessarily pursue its own conceptions. In certain cases we must deny ourselves opportunism, even of the highest and most legitimate order. We can emulate other countries only in the arduous pursuit of moral values.

Now, we cannot believe in this evolution of the bolshevist régime which we hope for as you do. We cannot sacrifice to the principle of universality the idea of a necessary minimum of moral and political conformity between states. The League of Nations is or should be, in our view, one of the greatest of all human conceptions and realizations. When, on May 16th, 1920, the people and the cantons of Switzerland, overcoming all the obstacles of their historical traditions, decided that the Confederation should join the League of Nations, they generously obeyed the call of an ideal.

Today the common feelings of all the patriotically and nationally minded Swiss is that the League is embarking on an hazardous undertaking. As we see it, it ventures to wed water and fire. If Soviet Russia all of a sudden ceases to insult the League of Nations, which Lenin had defined as an institution of brigandage, we read the explanation of this novel

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attitude in the fiery letters of the Far Eastern sky. We have no confidence. We do not feel to cooperate in an act which will confer upon Soviet Russia a prestige which it had not heretofore enjoyed.

But the dice have been thrown. Alia jacta est. We hope the future may show that our misgivings were excessive. We count on all the other states to help us in preventing Geneva from becoming a centre of dissolving propaganda. We will be vigilant. That is our duty. For the present it suffices that Soviet Russia may not be admitted to the League of Nations by an unanimous vote, in the oblivion of its past and with laurels of triumph.

When she will have been admitted, the Council and the Assembly will be faced with several open questions. The resolution of the Assembly relating to the independence of Georgia will not sleep the sleep of death. Armenia, Ukraine, other countries, will still enjoy the interest of men of good will. Let it not be said: these questions will no longer be raised. The sympathies of civilized mankind will follow the heroes who defend their life and their liberty. No statute of limitations will deny their claims.

And above all, when the Soviet delegates will be in Geneva, we hope that voices may be raised here to demand explanations of their government on behalf of the conscience of mankind. These voices will denounce this antireligious propaganda which is without precedent in the annals of humanity and which plunges into grief and tears Christendom and, with Christendom, all men who believe in God and who invoke justice.



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I have finished. I have endeavoured to lend expression to the immense majority of the Swiss people, without any intention of preaching to others. It has been my will to speak freely. Had I refrained from so doing I should have been unfaithful to my trust.

It is to the honour of the Assembly that the procedure of admission, however delicate, has been followed in a calm and serene atmosphere. The Swiss people will take cognizance of the decisions of the majority with cool composure and with that wise democratic discipline which it owes its secular traditions.