

Council/21st Session/P.V.11.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Twenty-first session of the Council.

11th Meeting (Public)

Held on Tuesday, September 19th, 1932, at 4.30 p.m.

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PRESIDENT: M. DA GAMA.

PRESENT: All the Representatives of the Members of the Council and M. Attolico (Under Secretary General).

776. QUESTION OF THE EIGHT STATES OF CHIEF INDUSTRIAL IMPORTANCE.

M. MOTTA (Representative of the Swiss Government) was invited to come to the Council table.

M. MOTTA stated that the interest which the Federal Government took in this question arose from the fact that it was greatly attached to all the institutions of the League of Nations and, therefore, to the International Labour Organisation. Hence it was not a matter of indifference to it that Switzerland should occupy a position in the organisation concerned with the protection of labour. The Representative of Switzerland reminded the Council of the circumstances in which his country was designated as one of the eight states of chief industrial importance and, therefore, represented on the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and how as the result of protests made by certain states the matter had been referred



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to the Council by virtue of Article 393 of the Treaty of Versailles. The Council had charged a Committee of Investigation to advise it, and Switzerland had forwarded a memorandum on the subject to the Secretariat.

Without taking a very definite or precise attitude, in view of the prevailing uncertainty of the general situation, and in view of the difficulties of the task, the Committee of Investigation had decided that it was desirable, in order to decide on the relative industrial importance of States, to make use of two sets of criteria, the one set being absolute and the other relative. These criteria were the following: the industrial wage-earning population, the relation between this population and the total population of the State, the total horse-power, the horse-power per head of the population, the mileage of railways, the mileage of railways per square kilometre, finally the mercantile marine. Certain absolute criteria were to be multiplied by two; for example, the industrial population, the total horse-power and the mercantile marine. On the other hand, the mileage of railways remained a simple criterion. According to this system Switzerland would be transferred to a lower category and would come next after India. The Committee of Investigation had not, moreover, formulated precise conclusions in view of the uncertainty of the statistics and the excessively troubled character of the economic situation of States, which made it almost impossible to find a sure and scientific method leading to satisfactory results.

The Representative of Switzerland then put forward certain considerations which his Government desired to bring before the Council.

(1) Was it desirable for the Council to base its decision exclusively on the method proposed by the Committee of Investigation, since these eminent men of admitted competence, themselves recognised its arbitrary nature.

(2) As Switzerland was one of the oldest industrial countries, of a well-defined and special type in Europe, had it not the right to be considered as one of the States of chief industrial importance?

(3) An examination of statistics showed that Switzerland, contrary to what was often believed, was not principally an agricultural country; her agricultural population did not represent more than 27% to 28% of her total population, the remainder being engaged in industrial, commercial or administrative occupations.

(4) Switzerland had always been in the advance guard of the movement for the protection of labour.

(5) Switzerland had, it was true, not found herself able to ratify certain of the Conventions recommended by the International Labour Conference of Washington; but the fact that she had not taken part in the war, had caused social movements in her case to be less far-reaching than elsewhere; she had always wished, in social questions, to take a middle course; she was the very reverse of a reactionary country and also the reverse of a revolutionary country. At times it required courage to combat certain excessive tendencies; it was incontestable that some of the resolutions taken at Washington had been dictated by the pressure of recent events. Switzerland had resisted being led away by certain political tendencies, and from this point of view she would constitute a particularly useful element in the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Switzerland held to any international engagements which she undertook. She was aware that written documents sometimes led to unexpected results and she did not sign a Labour Convention in order to leave it merely on paper.

(6) The Labour Conference which was meeting in October would doubtless conclude the revision of Article 393 of the Treaty of Versailles. If the new procedure proposed were adopted, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office would be composed differently;

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it would comprise sixteen members nominated by the Governments, eight by the Workers' Organisations and eight by the Employers' Organisations. Amongst the Governmental nominations, six would be reserved for the Great Powers, including Germany. The other ten would be chosen freely. Thus, this whole discussion on States having a greater or less industrial importance would naturally fall to the ground. As the procedure for the amendment of Article 393 had every probability of success and that within a short period, was it advisable for the Council now to decide this question which would cease to have any importance if the amendment were carried?

Switzerland would be glad if the Council would declare that she was one of the States of chief industrial importance and if she were maintained in the situation which she at present occupied.

If the Council were of a different opinion, Switzerland would be grateful if the Council would defer its decision until the procedure for the amendment of Article 393 had been put in motion.

Finally, if there remained only one hope for Switzerland, she desired that at the moment at which the free choice of the States which were considered of chief industrial importance was exercised, it should be remembered that she was one of the States which was the most important industrially and on this ground put forward her candidature.

The Representative of Switzerland concluded by saying that he had intentionally abstained from raising questions of prestige and that his country had full confidence in the equity and in the scientific impartiality of the Council.

Viscount ISHII (Rapporteur) proposed to adjourn the discussion of this question.

The Council agreed.