

BOOKS

The League of Nations' failure to protect the minorities

When it was formed, the whole world welcomed the League of Nations with hope. Everybody expected that it would prove a permanent bulwark of peace, the author of the reforms that were so necessary in international relations, and the guardian angel of the minorities. Instead it petrified the unilateral and unjust *Paris Peace Treaties*, made an idol of the status quo, and became the wicked step-mother of the minorities. Nothing was done by the League in the field of promised disarmament, nor did it at all further the cause of peace; on the contrary, partly because of its partiality, partly because of its indifference, it came to be the promoter of new conflicts. Was it any wonder then that the League lost its authority completely, that a part of the nations abandoned it, and that even those who remained faithful lost all the confidence they ever had in it and practically ceased to avail themselves of its cumbrous machinery?

The step-motherly treatment meted out by the League to the national minorities entrusted to its charge contributed largely towards the decline of its authority. The so-called minority treaties placed the nationalities under the protection of the League Council; the *League Council* accepted this flattering task, but it basely abused its authority, in that instead of employing it as a means to protect and enforce minority rights, it made use of it to encourage the States created, or enlarged, by the *Peace Conference* to continue the policy of cruelly oppressing their nationalities.

The books that are being published by *Gustave Kövér* about the negligent treatment meted out to the nationalities by the League of Nations during the past two decades are like the cry of despair of Europe's 40 million oppressed minority subjects. The first of the volumes, "*Non, Genève ne protège pas les minorités*", appeared last year. In it the author describes the tragic fate of every single minority petition and complaint submitted to the League from the date of the so-called Madrid Resolution in 1933 up to 1937. His new book published recently, the title of which is "*Histoire d'une trahison*" contains the equally lamen-

table history of those submitted from 1929 to 1933 and in 1938. In this book he promises a third volume describing the sufferings of the minorities from the formation of the League of Nations till the year 1929. The author considers the *Madrid Resolution* a turning-point, because that document contains the much-vaunted reform of minority procedure introduced by the League Council. In his first work the author sets himself the task of finding out whether the Madrid Resolution was followed by an improvement in the lot of minorities. The text of authentic documents, of official papers lying in the archives of the League of Nations, which he publishes gives a reply in the negative. His second book tells us of the appalling negligence in the field of minority protection of which the League was guilty in the four years preceding the Madrid Resolution. There is yet to come the history of the League's minority policy in the initial years of its existence. We can easily imagine what dreadful disclosures that third volume will contain; for if in recent years, when the world began to pay increasingly greater attention to the sufferings of the nationalities, the League evinced the dreadful indifference that M. Kővér's two books clearly show it to have done — what must have been its minority policy in the golden days of the Paris Peace Treaties after the conclusion of the war, when international opinion was completely under the spell of the victorious Entente States, and the nations which had been on the opposite side in the world war were regarded as pariahs? And it was from these nations that the oppressed minorities were recruited.

It is impossible not to condemn the League's minority policy. From the very outset the League was the persecutor, not the protector, of the minorities and — as *Mello-France* once boasted at a League meeting — its aim was to support the ruthless endeavour of the Succession States to assimilate the minorities. Annihilation or assimilation were the cruel alternatives. When complaints of the League's mistaken minority policy began to grow more clamorous, then to throw dust in the eyes of the world the Madrid Resolution was passed. This resolution had nothing to do with the essential points of the question of minority protection; it contained but a few utterly unimportant innovations in the field of minority procedure: for instance that when a complaint was rejected the complainant was to be notified (till then this had not been the custom) and that a register must be kept of the complaints lodged and the complaints accepted. In one word a ridiculous little mouse (*ridiculus mus*) was born

of all this gigantic travail, and the treatment of the minorites remained as bad as ever. There has been no improvement to this very day, the result of which is that the minorities have ceased to bombard the Council with complaints, knowing as they do, that it would be no use, since redress is not to be obtained by way of the League of Nations.

M. *Gustave Kővér* was a rich landowner in the part of Hungary annexed by *Rumania*. The greater part of his estate was confiscated and he himself was obliged to fly from his native land to escape the danger of assassination that permanently threatened him there. He decided to devote all his energies to the question of the oppressed minorities, to improving their condition and disclosing the abuses to which they were being subjected. He therefore betook himself to Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations, in order to see for himself what was being done about their complaints. In his books he now relates his appalling experiences to the reading public, and we can never be grateful enough to him for the bold way in which he unveils the unscrupulous abuses practised in the groves of the League of Nations and for dispelling the mists that obscured the workings of League machinery.

George Lukács.

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