

APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE COVENANT.

In accordance with the decision taken at the preceding private meeting, the representative of Chile was called to the Council table. The Council was required to consider the importance of obtaining, as occasion offered, such observations and suggestions as States non-members and States which had announced their withdrawal from the League might see fit to put forward in regard to the application of the principles of the Covenant. This is our old friend the universality of the League of Nations in another guise, a matter on which representatives of Chile have been prominent in debate in the Assembly, the Council, and the Committee of Twenty-eight. The representative of Chile spoke, and he was followed by the representative of Peru. To their speeches I refer you. I do not think that there is anything new to be said on the subject. Questions of high policy are involved, and there is a cleavage of opinion. The Committee of Twenty-eight was due to meet in two days, and no useful purpose could have been served by prolonging discussion in the Council. The representative of Peru proposed that action should be postponed until the May session of the Council, since, in his own words, "We shall see more clearly and our views will be more definite as to how all the parties concerned conceive this recasting of the Covenant, which seems calculated to modify the very spirit of the League." The Council agreed to this proposal.

At a private meeting of the Council held on the 31st January the Secretary-General referred to an appeal which had in a previous session been brought under the Council's notice by certain former members of the Secretariat who had been stationed in the Saar. The appeal was for a reconsideration of the grants which had been made to them after they had severed their connection with the League, a severance due to the result of the plebiscite and the reoccupation of the Saar territory by Germany. The representatives of France, Sweden, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were in favour of the Council's taking action which would arrive at a more satisfactory solution, whereupon the Secretary-General stated that as soon as he had obtained all the information he required he would place proposals before the Council.

The Council met for the last time on the 2nd February, first in private and afterwards in public, to consider the Appeal of the Chinese Government. Exception was taken by some members of the Council at the methods which had been adopted in examining this item of the agenda, and their grievances were ventilated at the private meeting. During the earlier part of the session the subject had not come up for formal discussion by the Council, nor had the ordinary procedure been adopted—i.e., no Rapporteur had been appointed, nor had the matter been referred to a committee of the Council. Nevertheless, there had been consultations in which the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and of China herself had taken part, and the Council was faced, at short notice, with a draft resolution which the framers apparently hoped would meet the situation. It was eventually passed by the Council with two abstentions, and I quote it for convenience of reference :—

"The Council—

"Having taken into consideration the situation in the Far East,

"Notes with regret that hostilities in China continue and have been intensified since the last meeting of the Council,

"Deplores this deterioration in the situation the more in view of the efforts and achievements of the National Government of China in her political and economic reconstruction,

"Recalls that the Assembly, by its Resolution of October 6th, 1937, has expressed its moral support for China and has recommended that members of the League should refrain from taking any action which might have the effect of weakening China's power of resistance and thus of increasing her difficulties in the present conflict, and should also consider how far they can individually extend aid to China,

"Calls the most serious attention of the members of the League to the terms of the above-mentioned resolution,

"Is confident that those States represented on the Council for whom the situation is of special interest will lose no opportunity of examining, in consultation with other similarly interested Powers, the feasibility of any further steps which may contribute to a just settlement of the conflict in the Far East."

Now, as I have observed before, there had been considerable criticism on the methods adopted for discussing the question outside the Council chamber, and some organs of the press had been somewhat outspoken. The spokesmen of the States represented on the Council for whom, in the words of the resolution, the situation was of special interest, made quite a good case. They had no intention of flouting the Council. The delegate of China had approached them, and this the delegate of China himself confirmed. Apparently one reason for acting in such a manner was to avoid any semblance of involving elements not represented in the League and to follow logically the decision, or perhaps we should say want of decision, of the Brussels Conference. It was regrettable that occasion should have been given to critics to voice their disapproval, and in ordinary circumstances we might allow the matter to rest there. The debate in Council was opened by the representative of China, Mr. Wellington Koo, who gave an account of recent happenings in his country and examined the implications of Japanese policy towards China. He accepted the resolution, but he confessed that it did not go nearly so far as China would have wished, for China looked for positive results on the part of the League.

Mr. Wellington Koo was followed by the representative of Ecuador, who stated that on the instructions of his Government he would vote in favour of the resolution, the last paragraph of which he proceeded to interpret as involving no action by the League without further reference to the Council. (Of course, no other interpretation is possible.) In view of the varying attitude of States