

## Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs.\*

TWO important pamphlets concerning the measures taken by the League of Nations in preventing illicit traffic have recently been published. One of these deals with the documents regarding the working of the system of import certificates and export authorisation, while the other is the report on the work of the Permanent Central Opium Board.

The Central Opium Board of the League of Nations is constituted to scrutinise the international trade in dangerous drugs as laid down in the Geneva Convention of 1925 and the Limitation Convention of 1931. The Board is empowered, where excessive stocks of any narcotic accumulate in any country, to take steps to overcome the danger.

In the year under review, the Board held four sessions. In the report the Board states that, while they have been able, by the application of the Articles of the Limitation Convention, to reduce greatly illicit traffic, they have been unable to end the traffic. The reason for this failure is the complicated mechanism of the administration of the powers of the Board. Forged certificates of import and export and also the different interpretations placed on the Articles of the Convention by the different governments have been mainly responsible for the continuance of illicit traffic.

From a study of the ways of the trade as stated by the Board, one comes to the conclusion that unless the international governments subscribing to the Convention wholeheartedly co-operate in ensuring the successful working of the Convention and take rigorous steps to restrict import and export of narcotics, the League of Nations Board will be ineffectual in its functions. After all the Board's authority is only moral and very little can be done unless a universal sense of morality prevails.

In the report the Board has discussed the difficulties of a strict application of the Articles of the 1931 Convention. A number of pages are devoted to statistics of the quantities of different narcotic drugs manufactured in the world. A few important facts that can be gathered from these tables are—

*Morphine*:—The quantity manufactured decreased in Germany, the United States and France by about 25 per cent, while it increased in Belgium, Poland, Hungary, Italy, Sweden and Czechoslovakia by about 86 per cent.

*Heroin*:—The quantity manufactured generally decreased everywhere except in Poland, Russia and Belgium. Nearly half the world's output of heroin comes from Japan.

*Cocaine*:—The decrease in the manufacture of this drug has not been so general. Five countries, namely, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Belgium and the United States show an increase.

There is a movement in the manufacture of

morphine and cocaine from old centres to new. No comparison could be made about figures for codeine and dionin as this is the first year of report on these drugs. It is found that the world's total output of heroin and cocaine is in excess of the requirements laid down in the Limitation Convention. More than a thousand kilograms in excess of the world's requirements have been manufactured during the year.

A glaring example of illicit traffic in opium is found in an instance where more than 5,000 kilograms of opium have been shipped from Turkey to Panama, Argentina, Ethiopia and Paraguay under forged certificates. The Board has drawn the attention of the Turkish Government to the matter and the latter has prosecuted some of the offenders and has undertaken to take the necessary action on others. This instance only emphasises the fact that countries dealing in these commodities should exercise great vigility in authorising import or export and that no restriction can be considered too rigorous to prevent fraud.

The Hague Convention of 1912 regulates the import and export of raw opium and aims at limiting the import and export of morphine, cocaine and their salts to persons granted by their respective governments authorisation or permits for the trade in narcotic drugs.

The Advisory Committee, at its first meeting in May 1921, took up the question of giving effect to the above-mentioned provisions of the Hague Convention. After a lengthy discussion, it adopted a system of import certificate, import authorisation, export authorisation, and export certificate, copies of which have to be transmitted to the importing authority, exporting authority, the import and export traders and the Customs of the two countries.

In the Geneva Convention of 1925 this system was improved upon by limiting the period within which a transaction should be completed and by adding cocoa leaf and Indian hemp to the list of raw materials and by increasing the number of substances that come under the purview of the Geneva Convention.

In 1928, the Committee drew up a Model Code of Administration which it has recommended to the several contracting governments to adopt.

In the present report, the Committee recommends the adoption of a uniformity of forms by the various authorities concerned in the trade as discrepancy in this has led to forgeries. It recommends also the use of either English or French as language in these transactions to avoid administrative delays. The Committee emphasises very strict control and scrutiny of the import and export trade. A few recommendations regarding the number of copies, the possibility of using special paper for these certificates and the disposal of import and export certificates are made to ensure a vigilant control over the trade.

There is no doubt that, if all the governments involved in the trade adopt these recommendations in their administration, it will be possible to greatly reduce the illicit traffic in dangerous drugs that is so prevalent in the world and also provide the Central Opium Board with better means of gauging the situation.

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\* League of Nations Publications Series, 1935. Vol. 11, No. 8. Permanent Central Opium Board: Report to the Council on the work of the Central Board during its 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th meetings. Vol. 11, No. 11. Advisory Committee on Traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs: studies and documents regarding the working of the system of import certificates and export authorisation.