

# Social Democrat Rudolf Breitscheid on the League of Nations (1928)

## Abstract

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In this excerpt from a 1928 speech, delivered during the lead-up to Germany's national elections on May 20, the SPD's foreign-policy spokesperson, Rudolf Breitscheid, argued for Germany's continued support of the League of Nations. Founded in 1920 as an international body for peacefully resolving conflicts, the League grew directly out of a set of proposals by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in 1918 for preventing future wars, his celebrated Fourteen Points. The League of Nations initially excluded Germany from membership, and France even threatened in 1923 to quit the organization if it accepted the German application. Over the next three years, however, Germany's relationship with France and its other European neighbors warmed considerably, and the League officially welcomed Germany as a member in 1926. Moreover, it granted Germany a seat on the Council of the League [*Völkerbundrat*], a forerunner of the UN Security Council, further signaling the country's reintegration into the postwar international community. Breitscheid himself served in the German delegation to the League of Nations, using that position to further strengthen relations with France, in particular.

Although Germany's engagement with the League did not emerge as a particularly key issue in the 1928 elections—the SPD's campaign focused instead on social welfare and its opposition to wasteful military spending—Breitscheid's speech nevertheless reinforced the SPD's central commitment to international cooperation and subtly reminded voters of the ways in which that commitment had bolstered Germany's standing on the global stage.

## Source

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Ladies and gentlemen, one of the most important foundations of the foreign policy of European states is the League of Nations, which was created after the World War. Germany joined this organization in 1926, thereby fulfilling a demand that Social Democracy had long since put forward.

We were in favor of joining the League of Nations and advocate loyal and positive cooperation, even though we know that it cannot realize the ultimate ideals of socialism and the international labor movement. It is not really a league of nations, but a league of states, that is, of their governments.

It will therefore only serve to maintain and secure peace to the extent that it corresponds to the wishes and views of the individual governments, especially since unanimity is required for resolutions to be adopted in Geneva.

Therefore, anyone who wants to make the League of Nations a more effective instrument of peace must, each in their own country, work to ensure that governments are in place that are willing and able to replace the violent resolution of international disputes with peaceful and arbitration-based reconciliation.

The current statutes of the League of Nations are still very imperfect in this respect. Although the members undertake to seek a peaceful solution to any disputes that may arise between them, the possibility of war is by no means eliminated by the statutes.

Our efforts must be directed towards ensuring that all conceivable disputes are settled through

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mediation or adjudication. And as long as the provisions of the League of Nations are insufficient for this, individual treaties must be concluded alongside it, which, like the pact between Germany and its western neighbors in Locarno, exclude war as a means of settling disputes.

But even then, peace will not be guaranteed for ever. Treaties and paragraphs are not enough. The decisive factor is the will of the people, which must be directed not least towards eliminating the great danger posed by the maintenance of military armaments. This will become all the stronger the more the influence of the working people in the politics of all countries increases and the more, as a result, the rule of capitalism, which repeatedly provokes international friction, is restricted.

Only the victory of socialism can guarantee lasting peace. But until that is achieved, we consider it our duty to support the work of the League of Nations. The organization of the League of Nations leaves a great deal to be desired. But under the given circumstances, it is the best and safest bulwark against the return of the terrible flood that destroyed so many values and so much happiness in the period from 1914 to 1918 and the consequences of which will continue to afflict the whole world for a long time to come.

Source: SWR 2 Archivradio,

<https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/wissen/archivradio/rudolf-breitscheid-ueber-den-voelkerbund-1928-102.html>

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