



## The International Trade Union Movement and the Labour Office.

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As in the case of all events of world importance, it is not yet possible to draw up a balance sheet of the war which has just ended after having desolated the world for so many years. We still feel the smarting wounds produced by the scourge which has lashed humanity ; ours is a generation which for scores of years will be undermined by diseases and infirmities of every kind, a humanity demoralised and an economic life thrown into disorder, without the possibility of knowing for the moment the means of remedying the situation or even of bringing the slightest relief in the near future.

What is the percentage of productive energy lost through this war ?

Not only have millions and millions of men, and those the youngest and strongest, died on the field of battle, but those who have come back from the war to resume their intellectual or manual labour have lost much of their capacity for work. Men who have had to live underground like beasts for four years and a half, exposed to privations of every kind, no longer possess their full aptitude for work, with the exception of an insignificant minority endowed with superhuman strength. Those who are called upon to resume productive labour have lost a great part of their physical vigour, of their nervous resistance, and of their aptitude for reflection.

Those who have not acquired lassitude and repugnance for work, during the years in which they have been employed only in murder, are heroes such as the history of the world has never known before, and if there are any who have not suffered physically or morally their constitution must be quite exceptional. This violence has resulted in an enormous loss of the productive capacity of the world. Moreover, the world is face to face with an alarming shortage of products, owing to the fact that for years millions of men who were formerly engaged in production have been engaged in the work of destruction, while continuing to consume.

These facts are hardly encouraging for the future. In default of extraordinary measures, the result will inevitably

be an impoverishment without example in recent centuries. Some bright points, however, stand out against this background of misery.

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At the time of the foundation of the League of Nations, the Governments considered particularly the state of the working classes in the various countries; the immediate consequence was the institution of the Permanent Labour Office set up by the Treaty of Peace.

Another subject for rejoicing is the fact that the workers of the different countries have so quickly come together again, so that the Labour Office lends support to and receives support from the International Federation of Trade Unions which was re-established last year at Amsterdam.

The principles laid down in Chapter XIII of the Treaty of Peace and the measures agreed upon in the same Chapter regarding the right of the workers to more favourable conditions of work in factories and work-shops, particularly in the countries in which trade union organisation was still defective, have certainly a real importance.

Of still greater importance is the provision in virtue of which the first indication of the international organisation of nations was to be the constitution of an annual Labour Conference for discussing labour problems, which would open the way for agreement between the Governments and the producers of all classes. The most important article of Part XIII is, perhaps, that which requires the workers' and employers' delegates to the annual Conferences to be chosen from the most representative organisations of each country. The consequence of this is that the most living and energetic part of the population is called upon to collaborate in this work for the protection of those who participate in production.

From the point of view of the history of our epoch, it is undoubtedly interesting to observe that the initiative in this direction was taken by the leaders of the workers' organisations themselves. They were the first to call public attention to the necessity of taking measures on a large scale, with a view to re-establishing and, if possible, increasing the productive capacity which had been so greatly impaired by reason of the losses sustained by the working class. It was they, too, who founded the new Trade Union International, and made it in a short time a living and life-giving force in the world, just as the Governing Body of the International Labour Office has made that institution so vigorous in the course of a few months.

Formerly Governments reached their decisions without consulting the workers' organisations. The war has shown the Governments the power of these organisations, a power which, properly utilized, may cement the whole economic

system and safeguard our well-being and civilization, but which, if neglected, will inevitably become a force overwhelming all others.

The Supreme Council has recognised this influence by its appeal to Labour on behalf of the reconstruction of the world, and as the Labour movement has responded to its appeal, it would be dangerous to obstruct its collaboration in that reconstruction and to force it to choose other ways, whether the obstruction comes from the Governments or employers.

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The reconstitution after the war of the International Federation of Trade Unions by the workers of the different countries is a fortunate event also from another point of view.

In addition to the support which it can give to the International Labour Office, it is capable of working in other ways for the reconstruction of the whole world by the guidance which it is able to give to the workers' organisations and by keeping a watch on the measures for the protection of Labour taken by the Labour Office.

The foundation of the International Labour Office would, perhaps, have been possible without the existence of workers' organisations. Its working, however, is possible only with the active assistance of these associations. That is to say, the introduction of good social legislation in all countries, the making of enquiries, the collection of the necessary information for the purpose of finding the right way to reconstruct the economic life of the peoples, would certainly be impossible without the support of these organisations. It is a fact that the International Federation of Trade Unions and the International Labour Office are in a great measure predestined collaborators.

It goes without saying that this collaboration will not fetter the International Federation of Trade Unions in any way. In working for social legislation in collaboration with the International Labour Office, the Federation retains the right to apply the ordinary methods of the labour movement for attaining its objects, that is to say, to endeavour to improve the position of the working class, if possible without force or coercive action, but also, if it becomes necessary, without shrinking from the most energetic measures.

In spite of the serious imperfections presented by the new institution of the League of Nations, the organised workers see in it one means for serving their interests, while they reserve the right to do all in their power to remove those imperfections.

They do not forget that the number of their Delegates at the Annual Labour Conferences and on the Governing Body of the International Labour Office is insufficient in proportion to that of the representatives of the Governments;

neither do they forget that the designation by the Treaty of Peace of the countries considered of the greatest industrial importance is one-sided and has no value as a criterion of the importance which a country has in the society of peoples; neither do they forget that the system of annual Conferences and of the method of work at such Conferences is susceptible of considerable improvement, and that the Resolutions of such Congresses should be binding on the Governments.

In spite of these imperfections, they accept this new institution, convinced that its defects can be remedied by their influence, and that the removal of those defects is the *conditio sine qua non* of the development of the International Labour Office.

We have already spoken of the danger which the Governments would incur by any departure from the road on which they have set out. This reflection is suggested to us by the obvious indolence with which more than one Government is setting to work to apply the Resolutions of the Washington Conference, which induces the belief that they are collaborating against their will with the International Labour Office.

In that case the collaboration of the International Federation of Trade Unions will be of even greater value to the Office, in view of the formidable power represented by 27 million workers united for a common end. For, though the International Office can only press the Governments for the loyal execution of the Resolutions adopted at the annual Conferences, the International Federation of Trade Unions can rally the national centres to an effective struggle for the application of the Resolutions; if the necessity should arise, the Federation will not fail to act.

So long as the International Labour Office continues to be animated by the spirit which has animated it since its foundation; so long as that Office remains under the present intelligent direction; so long as that Office continues to serve Labour faithfully, by heartily supporting the interests of the workers; so long as the Office aims at increase of production whilst safeguarding the human forces of production; so long as it shows its determination to protect the life and health of the workers, and to take all possible measures for the reconstruction of our disordered economic world, — that Office may count upon the support of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

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