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The International Labour Organisation.

Its Origins, Development and Future.

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A year has already passed — a year of organisation and creation — a year in which the task set by the Treaty of Peace has been in part accomplished. It has been a year of the meeting of Conferences, the establishment of Commissions — the creation of the new Administration in all its parts — a year of intense effort to make known the need for and the utility of the Organisation, to arouse in all countries and in all circles the sympathy and faith which it requires. Where are we? What future is open to the International Labour Organisation? How far will its work be effective?

The International Labour Organisation has perhaps one great advantage over the League of Nations itself. It has clear tasks. Its initial functions are well defined in extent and in scope.

Two tasks were entrusted to it by Part XIII of the Treaty of Peace. The first was to establish everywhere humane conditions of labour; to institute and apply a system of International Labour Legislation, subject to reservations imposed by the sovereignty of each State and the conditions prevailing therein. All the contracting States, inspired both by considerations of humanity and by fear of unfair competition, undertook to secure better and, as far as possible, equal conditions for all the workers of the world by the adoption of uniform Draft Conventions or Recommendations. Precise constitutional rules were established. The texts of the Draft Conventions and Recommendations are settled by the General Conference, which meets at least once a year. The International Labour Office, under the direction of its Governing Body, prepares the Agenda for the meetings of the Conference, corresponds with Governments with regard to the ratification by each State of the Conventions adopted and will eventually follow up their application. For the purpose it may organise enquiries and undertake inspection and, where necessary, may have recourse to its sanctions:



The efforts carried on during the last eighteen months for the establishment of a system of legislation on an international basis as prescribed by the Treaty of Peace have revealed the urgent need for more exact and comparable information. In what directions, and up to what precise point, can such legislation be instituted and applied? By what methods — uniform or diverse — can the same standard of life, conditions of labour equally humane, the same dignity for the wage-earner in his work, be secured at the same time in industry, in commerce, in transport and in agriculture? In what measure, to adopt the actual terms of the Treaty of Peace, is the careful consideration of “ differences of climate, habits and customs, of economic opportunity, and industrial tradition ” consistent with progress towards more nearly uniform conditions of labour, which is one of the chief concerns of the International Labour Organisation? The efforts being made at this moment to attain this object by the shipowners and seamen prove the difficulty of attaining such equality even in an internationalised vocation. In these negotiations food conditions, the unequal prices of raw materials, the uncertainties of exchange, the output and the cost of labour of various races and similar considerations must be taken into account. Finally, how far can international control be harmonized with national sovereignty? These questions can only be solved by thorough and constant study, and it is necessary that we should arrive at definite conclusions.

The solemn declarations of principles which serve to express the unanimity of the aspirations of humanity have immense value. The first international institutions which the treaties have created for the establishment of a common system of regulations will, it cannot be doubted, make rapid progress possible. But we are advancing into unexplored and almost unknown regions. The instruments at our disposal in these dangerous explorations are very inexact and very fragile. It is at least our duty to test their utility. Whatever the difficulties, foreseen or unforeseen, to be encountered in the sphere of international legislation, however complex this primary task, the International Labour Office has before it a definite programme, on which it has entered with resolute purpose.

The International Labour Office is besides a great clearing-house of information with regard to all labour, industrial and social movements. Its second task is “ the collection and distribution of information on all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of industrial life and labour ”. It is accordingly its business to emphasise the unity of the economic movement of the world and to bring into comparison the experience and results in different countries in the matter of reforms. Part XIII of the Treaty of Peace has given to the International Labour Organisation

a constitution, the principles and working of which have already been carefully and accurately studied. But institutions are living things. All codification is abstract. Jurists have long ceased to confine themselves to studying the mechanical operation of institutions and laws. They seek to discover in each succeeding epoch the social reality which these embody. This method is just as applicable to newly-established institutions as to those which have ceased to be anything but a matter of history.

The International Labour Organisation might act in perfect conformity with all the articles of the Treaty; it might obtain the ratification of every Convention; it might distribute throughout the world abundant information; and nevertheless be nothing but a bureaucratic institution without real authority. Its publications would not be read; its recommendations would be treated with indifference; its life would be purely formal.

Within the framework of the same constitution, on the other hand, it may come to be regarded by public opinion as a beneficent and necessary institution. It may command the attention of governments; its advice and intervention may be sought; its operations may furnish the workers whom it protects and the employers who are anxious to secure organisation and stability with opportunities for a continuous effort. A common spirit may be created which will animate it from within. It may be the centre of a real and intense international life.

What is it in fact intending to become? In regard to the newly-created International Labour Organisation, as in regard to the League of Nations, public opinion is constantly committing a curious error of judgment. People say: "The League of Nations is created. It actually exists. Why does it not speak? Why does it not act? Why does it not apply with authority this or that Article — Article 10 for example?"

Those who reason in this way forget that a magic stroke of a pen — even a pen of gold — though affixed at the end of a Peace Treaty, is not enough to establish, once and for all, international law and international force. The texts exist, without doubt, and they had to be promulgated. But the problem still remains whether there will be in the real sense of the word a League of Nations, whether there will be an International Labour Organisation, that is to say, really living organisations. If the formula so often repeated is true — that peace must be a continual creation — it is in the sphere of international relations that it is most completely true. Not only is every event, every incident, in which the League of Nations or the International Labour Office has to intervene and act, an opportunity for ascertaining in what measure they are already alive, but it is by the action taken

in each circumstance that they will really create their right to exist and their actual existence.

Nothing, indeed, is more deceptive than the capricious and fantastic play of constitutional texts and social realities. The texts often continue to exist when the reality has become something quite different. The contrast, for example, between the French Constitution of 1875, with its almost monarchical principles, and the sovereignty exercised by Parliament within the framework of that Constitution is a familiar theme to jurists and even to journalists in France.

Often, too, an institution originally modest and of limited jurisdiction, sees its authority enormously increased by the requirements of the day. When the first Kings of France appointed certain of their clerks or secretaries, learned in the law, to deal justice in their name, did they dream for a moment that that little company of devoted and zealous servants would become the Parliament of France, capable of conquering and exercising at its appointed hour the right of remonstrance against royalty itself? Within the limits of a nation the vitality of an institution is measured by the sum of aspirations and interests of which it is the common centre, by the sum of social forces which crystalize around it, by the moral authority which it exercises.

And this is even truer in the international sphere, in which all has still to be created, in which opinions are too uncertain to furnish the solid foundation of beliefs and aspirations on which new institutions may be established, and in which interests the most akin have often but little sense of their identity.

What then, to-day, beneath the surface of its formal constitution, is the positive value, *the real and essential character* of the International Labour Organisation? From what moral forces can it draw its vitality?

THE FIRST HOPES.

If the capital of a great institution consists of sympathy, hope and faith, it cannot be said that the International Labour Organisation began its task with an insufficient capital. It was born at a moment when a great stirring of hope quivered in the hearts of all those who cherished a desire for social justice.

About twenty years before the War, the pioneers of the International Association for Labour Legislation had commenced their endeavours with courage and determination, with the conviction that international legislation was the necessary consequence, even the indispensable condition, of national labour legislation in each State. The International Association for Labour Legislation had two fatal weaknesses. First, it could secure the adoption of propositions for the betterment of working conditions only through diplomatic

channels. It took years of work and struggle to effect an agreement through conferences upon a project for labour regulations. Then the regulation had to be referred to the diplomats, who usually had little knowledge or appreciation of labour matters, to juggle with, postpone, reject, or adopt, as seemed good to them. The second fatal weakness came from the nature of the organisation itself. Its Conferences never included accredited representatives of employers' or employees' organisations, or even of Governments, in the sense of representatives with authority to speak for and commit their Governments on the subjects discussed and agreed to by the Conferences. Its discussions took place in the pure, but thin, atmosphere of academic abstraction, far removed from the smoke and dust of practical politics, which may get things smudged, but gets them done. If industrial reforms are to be accomplished, there must be an organisation of all the forces interested — Governments, employers and employees. Failure to include any of these elements is sufficient to make any organisation ineffective.

The War made labour legislation of immense importance. The War compelled Governments to enter into engagements with the workers to remove the "injustice, hardship, and privation," from which the wage-earners in many employments suffered. The War also made the organised workers understand that labour legislation, reaching its full development in the international sphere, was essential to the realization of certain of their aspirations to equalize competitive conditions.

The Treaty of Versailles has been abundantly criticised, and eighteen months of international development have suggested many modifications in the provisions by which it sought to organise the new order of things, but its results are solid and permanent.

In the first place, it is a fact which involves far-reaching consequences, consequences which are still imperfectly realised, that workers should participate in the peace negotiations terminating a world war, and that the Treaty should include a number of principles for the protection of labour. Henceforward it will be impossible for nations to deal with economic or even political questions without taking labour interests into their conferences. The principle has at last been recognized and securely established that "no peace can be lasting which is not based upon social justice".

Again, whatever may be the temper of employers and workers to-day, after eighteen months in which their disputes have been renewed, the period of peace negotiations was a period when the desire for justice between classes found unanimous acceptance. A powerful impulse of generous human feeling and genuine desire for social peace brought the International Labour Organisation into being. It is not surprising that from the moment of its inception all had

high hopes for it, not only the labour organisations which were the most directly interested and which saw in the Treaty a victory for themselves, but also the employers' associations and the Government delegates. To-day perhaps these hopes seem contradictory, perhaps they are so in part, but at a moment like that of which we are speaking it seemed possible to bring them into harmony.

First, the hopes of the labour world — the most novel and daring of them all. The trade union organisations were conscious of having acquired in their respective countries a credit, nay, a prestige, altogether unprecedented. They were conscious of exercising upon their governments an influence which they sometimes exaggerated, but which still was undeniable. Their leaders in the Allied countries shared — on the Commissions, at least — in the Peace negotiations. They had joined with the neutrals and even with their enemies of yesterday to reconstitute an international trade union federation, which, before the war, had never existed save in embryo, but which henceforth was to share all the influence acquired by each separate union in its own country. They had proclaimed a charter of labour, the fundamental principles of which were to guarantee to all wage-earners freedom and well-being. And now, thanks to the experience of high officials, men of learning, and statesmen, associated with the work of the Commission on International Labour Legislation, they had secured the introduction into the actual text of the Treaty of part at least of the Charter they had proclaimed.

In their vision they beheld it applying with logical completeness the principles of protection of labour and of justice, securing by the economic co-operation of all nations greater stability in employment, a more equitable distribution of raw materials to all nations, assuring to emigrants equality of conditions in matters of labour and wages, — in a word, creating a complete labour economy, based on the right to work instead of on the pursuit of wealth, on organisation instead of anarchical competition.

It was natural that after all their bitter struggles and perils they should hope for a great social revolution, not the less complete because accomplished progressively and by pacific means.

The hopes of the employers were less ambitious. The renewal of labour disputes in the last years of the war had already created some bitterness. Big strikes had, in fact, already broken out. Even the growth of workmen's organisations caused anxiety to many of them. The spirit of national unity, so noble and impressive a feature of the early period of the war, had lost much of its strength. Besides, employers might complain that they had not been consulted in the preliminary work of organisation.

It is none the less true that many of them sincerely believed in the possibility of a regime of conciliation, an era of social peace. At first reserved and cautious, many of them accompanied their delegates in spirit to Washington, and gave their allegiance to the Draft Conventions and Recommendations. Those who tried to see into the future dreamed that, when the "wave of war-weariness" or "idleness" had passed, a more humane labour system, a system by which wage-earners should participate in profits and perhaps later in management, might revive that joy of production and "industrial enthusiasm" of which the St. Simonists loved to talk, and thus provide a guarantee of continuous and abundant production.

The Governments themselves could not but regard the new organisation with sympathy. On the one hand the International Labour Organisation might dissipate the ever-recurring fear of international competition which threatened the existence of various isolated attempts at reform. Some protection of this nature seemed all the more necessary because after the War, when many parts of Europe were in a state of revolution, the most daring reforms were being introduced, and many States were obliged, under irresistible pressure, to adopt laws like the Eight-hour Law, which before the War was almost universally declared impracticable, or at any rate only practicable if adopted by all important competing industrial States.

In their responsibility for public safety, their preoccupation with the difficult problems of demobilisation, the anxiety caused by the revolutionary propaganda carried out everywhere by Bolshevik Russia, the Governments could not avoid making an attempt to find for themselves some systematic scheme for settling the social disputes which the sufferings of the war had produced. They, too, in spite of the scepticism with which at times the future of the International Labour Organisation was regarded, sometimes allowed themselves to hope for results which seemed to them desirable from the International Labour Organisation.

Perhaps in many minds these feelings are no longer so prominent. Some perhaps would be disposed to disavow them altogether. No one can study the debates of the Washington Conference, analyse the psychology of the delegates, and recall the environment of hostility and indifference in which they had to perform their task, without being impressed by the daring confidence of their faith and without forming some idea of the atmosphere in which the International Labour Organisation came to birth. A spirit of youth and freshness breathed on the world of wage-earners and employers. It was a time for daring and adventure.

FORCES OF OPPOSITION.

Now we have left Washington and are establishing the Office; the first meeting of the Governing Body is taking place at Paris. The plan of construction seems vast. Yet misgivings are few, approval is unanimous, so strong is the feeling that the enterprise in its entirety is indispensable.

Even in its first session the Governing Body is not content with fixing the Agenda of the Seamen's Conference, promised at the time of the Peace negotiations. It insists on considering in addition the programme for the succeeding General Conference. It is anxious to establish the universal character of the new organisation. It wishes to lose no time in putting its new powers at the disposal of the world for the furtherment of social progress. It accepts the idea of an inquiry in Russia. In March the scheme is definitely arranged. Since that time the Governing Body has undertaken a large number of new schemes. The International Labour Office has shown its interest in every question appertaining to conditions of labour. It has endeavoured to show itself ready to assume responsibilities in any sphere where it could be expected to render useful service.

No one can reproach the International Labour Office with having neglected any of its tasks or with letting slip opportunities of proving its existence. Rather has it been criticised for its ambitions. But when everything is taken into account and the work is judged as a whole in its proper proportions, who will wish that the opposite kind of criticism should be provoked? Is it not better to be criticised for doing too much than too little? What human organisations require at their birth is a little daring and a little faith.

Almost within a year of its foundation, the International Labour Organisation has had an opportunity of learning where it must expect opposition and of watching hostility develop in various quarters. It has had to reckon with the possibility that a limit may temporarily be set to the high hopes which have been placed in it. A year has elapsed, a year of invaluable experience, in which the vision has become a reality, a living reality, struggling with other realities.

First there is a fundamental difficulty, the difficulty of creating, whether in the domain of labour or in any other, a really international life. The mechanism of national life and all the ancient traditions which enshrine it no longer allow individuals to remain isolated. The acts of the collective national existence have become the necessary and natural acts for each individual. International activity, on the other hand, still remains an artificial and voluntary matter. The tender plant can with difficulty strike root in the stony ground of the shell-swept battle fields, and, similarly, in the

world at large, the ravages of war have not left soil enough for the new international organisations.

It was easy to foresee that the ratification of Draft Conventions and the application of Recommendations by means of legislative measures would be retarded and thwarted by the delays of officialism, by the inertia of public opinion, by the indifference of statesmen preoccupied with the daily party struggles or with the pressing demands of national life. Everyone with experience of Parliamentary life knows the difficulty, especially at times like this, of getting bills relating to labour introduced. It has often been necessary to wait years to obtain the passage even of bills bearing directly on the economic prosperity of the nation — mining development, building of railways, etc. Even supposing that the initial confidence had been maintained, even supposing that everyone remained loyal to the spirit of Washington, the daily task by itself was still a heavy one.

But this is not the worst. A reaction has set in, a reaction against the spirit of Versailles and of Washington, a reaction against all enthusiasm for social conciliation and generous reforms. The workers in their Conferences have denounced in a brief phrase the European "political reaction". It is not for us here to measure the reality lying behind such a phrase. But to grasp the situation it is sufficient to follow (as is part of our function) the evolution of public opinion and Parliamentary measures in matters concerning the eight-hour day.

Certain reservations, it is true, have been expressed : fear of diminished production, fear of the effects of excessive leisure, fear of social indiscipline and novel experiments. But the general idea had everywhere been that means would be found of reconciling the needs of production with the advantages of the short day. At Washington all members of the Conference — Government, employers', and workers' delegates — except one, voted for the proposal. But for a year past the universal and it would seem irresistible movement in favour of the eight-hour day has undoubtedly suffered a check. Opponents of reform have organised public campaigns and exploited the fear of under-production and of a strike of consumers against high prices. Bills in its favour are no longer brought forward. The ratification of the Convention, which seemed, in certain States, to be a mere formality, has been delayed. Other States, in spite of the votes of their delegates, have declared themselves opposed to ratification.

Here is an unmistakable sign of the change of temper. At the time when Part XIII was accepted, it appeared that nations were anticipating the principle inserted in its preamble which guarantees labour reforms by the adoption on the part of all nations of more humane labour systems. They were separately and spontaneously deciding to secure such a

system for their citizens. They had not waited for others to take the lead in enacting, for example, the eight-hour day or the prohibition of night work for women. But to-day the dominating sentiment is once again the fear of competition.

And so, to consider merely the ratification of the Washington Conventions, difficulties have increased from day to day. Yet the only points at issue here are reforms explicitly promised by the Peace Treaty, expressly mentioned in its text as the Agenda for the first Conference, — generally by large majorities if not unanimously.

Since October the Governing Body has been directing the attention of the Governments to this situation. The Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions, which met in London in November, expressed the impatience of its members to get the first measures of international labour legislation ratified. It will need much resolute perseverance to apply in the case of every nation the complete system of procedure provided for in the Treaty.

New objections, more fundamental and more vigorous, are being raised to the Conference of 1921. This Conference is due to take place at Geneva in October next. Its Agenda had been drawn up, almost without any objection being raised, a year ago. To-day in agricultural circles hostility is becoming manifest. Not only are the principles of the Washington Conventions in question, not only is objection made to the *adaptation* of the eight-hour principle in agriculture; not only that, but the very right of the International Organisation to deal with agricultural questions at all is questioned. Thus the very principles of the reforms whose benefits the Treaty of Peace wished to secure to the wage-earning class are put in question. In certain circles the view is growing that the Organisation should limit its work to the application of the reforms which have been proposed, that it is impossible to advance further and that it is stupid to pretend, as an eminent statesman has said, "to impose a system of international legislation every year."

The International Labour Organisation, like every international organisation, may appear to be, even by its very existence, a danger to national sovereignty. Mr. Léon Bourgeois has taken pains to show in many speeches that the League of Nations, and even more its International Labour Office, cannot pretend to be the super-State of which people have dreamed. He has taken pains to show that the powers of the International Organisations can rest only on the spontaneous agreement of States. Every initiative taken by a new organisation, however legitimate it may be in itself, and however far it has secured agreement in advance, runs the risk of seeming indiscreet or irritating. For the International Labour Organisation the situation is particularly delicate. The reproach has sometimes been made that those who founded the League of Nations did not place in the forefront of the

Covenant a general declaration defining the fundamental principles of the policy of the League. Part XIII of the Peace Treaty, on the other hand, includes such a declaration. Its preamble and Article 427 determine the principles which ought to guide, in the realm of labour, the policy of the League of Nations.

In the document, the High Contracting Parties have, so to speak, engaged themselves to respect certain general rules with regard to the protection of labour; for example, the right of association, regulation of the hours of labour, an adequate living wage, and so on. The world of labour, which inspired by its claims this charter of labour, is very naturally ready to turn towards the International Labour Office to request it to secure respect for these rules, whenever it considers that they have been violated. In the view of certain workers' leaders it would seem that the Office ought to become a kind of moral power, comparable to the Papacy of the Middle Ages, able to intervene and impose peace in social conflicts, as the Papacy intervened in the struggles between Princes. Thus, from age to age, the same aspirations towards unity and peace recur.

The truth is that the Permanent Labour Organisation cannot accomplish its tasks and that it cannot acquire the moral authority which is necessary, unless it retains the support of the public opinion of the world, and unless this support becomes from day to day more complete and more considered. This is a view which Lord Robert Cecil strongly expressed in the first Assembly of the League of Nations. International action is only possible if it has the support of public opinion.

In accordance with its constitution the International Organisation is called upon to address to public opinion a kind of permanent appeal. The Labour Conference includes among its members not only the representatives of Governments but also the most representative of the employers' and workers' groups in each country. It ought, therefore, to seek their support. As has been said above in giving an account of the origins from which the Office sprung, the only satisfactory legal protection is found in the co-operation of the interested parties. To this initial co-operation are due the first successes of the International Labour Organisation.

It is impossible to overlook or to deny the disturbed and unhappy state of mind of the world of labour. Even if there is no need to dread manifestations of violence in countries with an old civilisation in which democracy rules, it must be recognised that at present, perhaps because of certain delays in reform or reconstruction, a spirit of doubt is growing. Many ask if the hope of a great peaceful transformation in the industrial sphere by the collaboration of all is still justified.

The great national organisations, and even more the International Federation of Trade Unions, after thorough discussion and with full knowledge of the facts, have affirmed

their confidence in the fruitfulness of the work undertaken by the Labour Office.

For a year all these difficulties have accumulated as a natural result of life itself. An organism lives only in so far as it provokes, whether involuntarily or not, conflicts and disturbances. It is necessary to overcome these conflicts. Bureaucratic and parliamentary delays, retrogression in public opinion, hostility on the part of interests which find themselves threatened, the anxieties of Governments, the impatience of the masses; all these have to be considered.

Will the work that has been undertaken be performed in all its universality? Is there not a risk that its results will be incomplete and precarious? Is it not even exposed to sudden changes of opinion? Are not the sceptics right? Are not the most enthusiastic and the most ardent believers most subject to haunting doubts?

THE POSSIBILITIES.

There is no reason either to despair or to doubt. If the limitless hopes in the midst of which the Office was born are deceived by hard contact with reality, if generous and confident impulses have changed into the hostility either of interests or of ideas, there is no reason to close one's eyes to the possibilities of the future.

General Gallieni used to like to say, "great generals are pessimists". The hazards of great social experiments, like the vicissitudes of war, tend to engender pessimism.

In hours of difficulty one thing alone matters — to adopt a clear policy, a method of action clearly defined and based on full examination of the difficulties and the possibilities of the situation.

The International Labour Organisation is a necessity; a necessity of which the world has been aware for 50 years, and which the harshness of war has made fully evident. Whatever obstacle it meets, whatever resistance opposes it, it will live.

A journalist asked me the other day, "Do you think that the International Labour Office can live?" "But", I replied to his surprise, "it has already existed 20 years". The International Labour Office continues the work of the Office of Basle, of the International Association for Labour Legislation. Provided with new resources, with the support of public opinion throughout the world and the possibility of recourse to sanctions, it will not only live but will attain a growth and influence we are not yet able to foresee.

The reconstruction that has come with peace, the new situations which have arisen, the relations between the various peoples, have one and all increased the necessity for knowledge. Uniform methods of observation and procedure in investigations,

standardised principles and practices in statistics, are more than ever indispensable. Every day requests for needful information stream into the International Labour Office and replies are sent out. When the Scientific Division is adequately staffed and is able to deal with these inquiries promptly and fully, it will be impossible to overthrow the new Organisation.

At the present time international labour legislation is by no means at a standstill. Certainly, ratifications of the draft Conventions come but slowly. Parliamentary procedure is tediously long. Undoubtedly, too, future attempts to promote international legislation, to make it more complete, to extend it to other fields, will meet strong opposition or will have to encounter an inertia which is the more to be feared inasmuch as it is less premeditated.

Yet, in spite of the fact that the Conventions for the time being will only be applied in a limited number of countries and will thus come short of the universality which is desirable, the practical progress thus made in the course of a single year can by no means be considered negligible.

To begin with, there are always the definite pledges made by the States which signed the Covenant. In a way they are sanctioned by the social consequences of the war. The mere placing of a draft Convention before a Government necessarily compels it to consider the question of social legislation. Under the new Organisation international legislation can neither be ignored nor smothered.

Assuming that the state of public and political opinion is not such as to cause the draft thus brought before Parliament to be embodied in the labour legislation of the country concerned; assuming that the decisions arrived at by the Conference result in tangible reforms for only a very limited number of countries; assuming that at some future time it may be necessary to follow the sound advice given by Mr. Barnes and limit Conventions to reforms that have already been adopted by most of the chief States and which would consequently obtain their votes; even then, whether considered group by group, category by category, or industry by industry, the partial results thus obtained would nevertheless make for the well-being of the workers. Moreover, if the progress which has already been made by the more advanced States is crystallised in the form of international Conventions, an undoubted guarantee is given to the working classes. The submission of the eight hour day in an international Convention renders more likely its successful adoption by the national Parliaments.

The international codification of a reform which has already been adopted by some States tends to impel others to bring conditions of work in their own country up to those prevailing in States which have adhered to the general agreement. Moreover, allowance is made in the Conventions for such States, particularly those with tropical climates, so

as to make the reform less sweeping in nature, while yet representing a first step in the direction of progress. Yet again, should they not wish to ratify a Convention as it stands, they are nevertheless constrained to introduce legislation as some proof of their willingness to join in the general movement. For instance, a State desiring special conditions or further exceptions with regard to the prohibition of night-work for children in certain industries might not ratify the Washington Convention, but might nevertheless pass a new law, excluding the two or three industries which for the moment it wishes to leave unaffected, but prohibiting night-work in all others. Such progress would be ascribable, indirectly, but none the less certainly, to the International Labour Organisation.

Finally, to take the worst possible case, suppose that the most moderate Conventions are not adopted. It might happen that the various States would reject in their own legislative assemblies even the very mildest type of reforms. Yet the effort towards international legislation thus begun might nevertheless result in the continuation of negotiations between the various parties and end in the adoption of a direct agreement of a conciliatory nature, which, although precarious, although concluded for a short time only, would yet be better than the bitter struggles between workers and employers which are so disastrous to social and economic well-being.

The sequel to the Seamen's Conference at Genoa is well-known, and need not be referred to again. The part taken by the Office in this matter is, most undoubtedly, one of the strongest proofs it has furnished of its influence and usefulness.

At the last Session of the Governing Body certain of its members, disturbed by the difficulties which might arise as a consequence of the activities of the Office in various spheres, drew attention to the necessity of limiting these activities and keeping them strictly within the bounds defined by the Treaty with regard to international legislation. The advice is good. The many and varying conditions and circumstances arising day by day may well arouse the attention and interest of a new and energetic organisation. But even if the Office is able to confine itself strictly to its duty of promoting legislation, if the Conferences forbear to exercise such rights as they may possess to give it further mandates, the mere task of promoting labour legislation will necessitate the most intense and continuous activity.

The idea envisaged by the framers of the labour clauses of the Peace Treaty was immense. They had primarily in mind the conditions of labour in the great industrial countries. Nevertheless economic traditions, time-sanctioned customs, the special circumstances brought about by climatic and natural conditions, were all taken into consideration. The task they set the International Labour Organisation was that of using all means at its disposal to defend human labour throughout the world.

The world to-day is strangely troubled. The bitterness of war is not yet allayed, the misunderstanding, the differences of mentality, the suspicion and hatred, which divided one nation from another during hostilities are still rife. Yet at the same time the economic interests of nations are more than ever interdependent. France wonders with anxiety whether the reconstruction of German industry, which is indispensable if the reparations programme is to be carried out, will not some day menace her own industrial progress by renewed competition. Germany, on the other hand, is fearful at the thought that during long years her working population will be reduced to something resembling economic slavery. America sees herself driving towards a formidable crisis in which problems of labour are closely connected with problems of finance and exportation. Never before, perhaps, in the chaos of foreign exchanges, has international competition appeared more important, and after a period of seeming hesitation, it is quite possible that many states will now demand international labour legislation more insistently than ever.

Moreover, post-war social problems no longer present themselves in the abstract simplicity which they sometimes assumed before the war. It is no longer possible to separate them from the whole economic question. This is keenly appreciated by employers, who understand to what extent reforms in labour legislation frequently affect not only profits but also production. The workers, too, realised this energetically if not so clearly, when their trade union organisations demanded an independent voice in the conduct of public affairs. It seems certain that henceforth the continuity and efficient management of labour will depend on the general administration and policy of the various governments.

The Governing Body appreciated the truth of this when it approved of an enquiry into production in connection with the 8 hour day, and decided to attempt to appreciate the various factors which affect production.

Nowadays during unemployment crises, it is not merely relief or employment that is demanded, but the whole system of organisation of industry, distribution of raw materials, and foreign exchange is called to account.

Although the Office devotes itself strictly to the task of promoting legislation along the lines and by the methods laid down by the Treaty, nevertheless by force of circumstances it must necessarily touch on the whole social and economic question. By abstaining from premature and dangerous interventions it will show the regard due to the principles written into the Peace Treaty ; by international legislation, by the application of conventions, it will make these principles realities.

Besides, the work has only just begun. The first

Conventions will come into force in such countries as have ratified them as from the 1st July of this year. Others will not take effect until 1922. All the problems in connection with their application — reports, inspections, inquiries, complaints, and ultimate recourse to the Permanent Court of International Justice — will then present themselves. Then alone will a system of international labour jurisprudence be established. Then alone will the labour laws of the various countries begin to resemble one another in their every-day application. Then alone will this international legislation really commence.

Who can predict what the position of the International Labour Office will then be ?

Already two great "peoples" have to a certain extent recognised the large part the Office can play in conciliation and protection. First of all there are the shipowners and seamen, a truly international "people", who are in continual communication with the Labour Organisation, and who on all occasions are anxious to secure its presence and authority to help solve their peculiar problems. Then there is the immense "people" of emigrants, the masses who, uprooted from their homelands, ask for some measures of security and protection applicable to all countries and supervised by an international authority.

Some governments have of their own initiative asked for such intervention for the purpose of obtaining an international ruling concerning labour questions arising between ex-enemies. Article 312, by which a Commission appointed by the Office is entrusted with the task of settling questions concerning social insurance in districts transferred to new states, provides an opportunity which is not to be neglected.

Thus, the possibility, or rather the necessity, for action appears clearly in spite of all opposition. Some courses are clear and certain and cannot be disregarded.

Are these possibilities much removed from the intentions of the originators of the Organisation? At first sight it would seem so. In reality, however, it may prove otherwise. In any case there is an obvious connection. The application of the solemn principles laid down in the labour charter may yet seem far off and uncertain. As a matter of fact they are already beginning to be applied.

To those who still doubt; to those who, having hoped, now anxiously wonder whether this hope was justified; to those who are tempted to lose faith in an organisation which has been in existence for hardly a year; the questions may be put: Do you know of any other methods which have proved effective? Have you any means of realising practically the high ideal of justice laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations?

Has Bolshevism, which exercises a powerful fascination for the masses, shown itself capable of doing anything more than

organising a Jacobin dictatorship on the one hand, and of causing discontent and poverty on the other? To what constructive work can it point? Has it really secured for men, women and children the hours, wages and hygienic conditions provided for in the labour charter, or even the conditions of life which the traditions of labour legislation promise to the world?

As a result of Bolshevism the former socialist International has been broken up. Its numerous fragments spend their time in discussions of principle, while most of the various national groups of which it is composed have not sufficient influence to affect legislation or state policy.

Even if from the point of view of policy they are thinking rightly, what immediate hopes of betterment do they offer to the wage-earners?

Certainly, in spite of loss of influence, in spite of various checks, in spite of the internal dissension threatened by extremist propaganda, the great trade union federations of the industrial countries are still a living and essential force which makes for the development and application of international labour legislation.

For two years the International Federation of Trade Unions, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all delay and opposition, has continued to declare the necessity of an international labour organisation. In spite of hostile suggestions it has striven to obtain the maximum of activity from the existing Organisation.

Even if the International Labour Organisation should only be a scientific information service at the disposal of all employers, workers, and students, who are seeking the social justice which is the guarantee of international peace, even if the Office only registers the progress made in various countries, even then the International Labour Organisation would be an invaluable cog in the machinery of social evolution. Even then it would still be worthy to hold the attention and to utilise the activity of men who would still keep in their hearts a more daring ideal, but who, in the present confusion, see no other effective means of ameliorating poverty immediately or of hastening the advent of a juster world.

To conclude: during that unique period dating from the Berne Congress to the Washington Conference, workers, governments, and employers believed in the possibility of creating an organisation which would be able to minimise the injustice, poverty and privation suffered by the great-mass of wage-earners. This thought they had in common.

The International Labour Organisation is, as it were, the outcome of that remarkable time. The spirit which should still animate it may have been dulled by the resumption of social warfare. Its powers nevertheless remain intact. Conventions embodying even a half-hearted justice are none the less possible. The first foundations remain firm.

It was during such moments of intense and unanimous faith that the communes of the Middle Ages decided to build their cathedrals. Then, often enough, the violent, bloody struggles of party against party, class against class, would recommence. Yet, slowly, through the course of centuries, the cathedrals rose stone by stone, as it were the visible witness of that first act of faith.

Similarly, on the bold plan of its first builders, the International Labour Organisation will also rise.

