

NATURE

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THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION AS A SOCIAL FORCE

A SIGNIFICANT passage in the recent report of the Conservative Central Committee on Post-War Problems, "Work: The Future of British Industry", recognizes the importance of strengthening existing institutions such as the International Labour Organization. The recent conference in London of the governing body of the International Labour Office has done something to bring more to the forefront a body the potentialities of which for reconstruction and the re-establishment of world order appeared to be in danger of being overlooked. Mr. Eden and other Government spokesmen have from time to time referred to those possibilities, notably in the debates in Parliament on economic reconstruction last year, but despite an admirable series of reports from the International Labour Office and the League of Nations, there have been few signs that practical steps are being taken to utilize the services of the International Labour Organization and to expand them where required to deal with the problems of relief or resettlement. The reference to the International Health Organization in the report of the sub-committee of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration on policies with respect to health and medical care which has been included in the recently published report of that body* is not satisfying. While it welcomes co-operation with existing international health agencies and recognizes that the Health Organization of the League of Nations and the Industrial Health Section of the International Labour Office have much to offer on the basis of their experience and accomplishments, it does not encourage much confidence that such co-operation will in fact be fostered, or that new organizations will not be established where existing organizations might serve.

The decision that the governing body of the International Labour Organization is to meet and arrange for a full International Labour Conference next summer should dispose of the fear, entertained not without some reason, that the major Governments of the United Nations would allow the International Labour Organization to dwindle away in favour of new *ad hoc* organizations. The decision also represents, besides the preservation of continuity in international life, the formal association of employers and workers, as distinct from their governments, in post-war reconstruction. The bringing together of governments and occupational or technical groups, on which Mr. Bevin laid much stress in welcoming the delegates to the governing body at its opening meeting, may well be of decisive importance to the functional approach to international problems which now finds general favour, as well as in building up a moral force behind international law itself.

* United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Resolution and Reports adopted by the Council at its First Session, held at Atlantic City, New Jersey, U.S.A., November 10 to December 1, 1943. (Miscellaneous No. 6, 1943. Cmd. 6497. London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1943. 1s. 3d.)

Much more indeed may flow from this termination of the neglect of the International Labour Office, for its brilliant studies and reports such as "The I.L.O. and Reconstruction", "Wartime Developments in Government-Employer-Worker Collaboration", "Wartime Transference of Labour in Great Britain" and "Approaches to Social Security", have fairly established its reputation as a leading world centre, even during the War, for research into labour and social problems and for the dissemination of accurate and unbiased information. There must obviously be some adjustment of the relative spheres of, and the co-ordination between, the International Labour Office and the Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the Permanent Organization on Food and Agriculture, and the other economic agencies to be set up. But beyond this, there must be hard thinking on the forms of international organization which the United Nations propose for the general welfare after the War.

If the International Labour Organization is to make the contribution to world co-operation and the elimination or minimizing of those strains in the economic and social structure of the world that tend to international friction and misunderstanding which the reports already referred to have suggested, important work must be done both at the International Labour Conference and before it meets. The growing social consciousness has strengthened the tendency to regard the International Labour Organization as a vital international agency and the desire for closer international co-operation in labour matters. Mr. Bevin asserted that the Organization must become the body charged with the duty of assisting governments by advice to give effect to that article of the Atlantic Charter under which the United Nations seek to "bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement, and social security".

It is true also that functional organizations such as the International Labour Organization are important means by which the smaller Powers can take their place and exert their influence in an international community; further, the method fits the circumstances of the United States, with its readiness to co-operate in practical work of the moment and its reluctance to make formal commitments. Nevertheless, there are important obstacles still to be overcome. The absence of Soviet Russia from the International Labour Organization, due to an old technical quarrel, is one; the attitude of American Labour is another.

To overcome these and other obstacles it is essential that the future status and policy of the International Labour Office should be clearly visualized, and this should be an early item in the agenda of the forthcoming conference. There must be unequivocal decision as to whether the International Labour Office is to be just an instrument for the co-ordination of information, or whether it may become a positive international instrument of co-operation for the improvement of existing laws and conditions, the regulation of labour supply, the protection of workers against sickness, old age, and accidents, industrial

welfare and safety, and labour relations. There have been sharp reminders of the way in which a backward labour policy in even one of the United Nations may hinder the great war effort now demanded of us and delay victory, while in turning to face the problems involved in post-war reconstruction and a full employment policy, we cannot but be aware that the success of measures projected in Britain will depend on social, economic and labour conditions elsewhere.

For all that, a narrow view of the functions of the International Labour Organization is still taken in some quarters, and scientific workers are far from being alive to the extent to which this affects their own direct interests. Few of them have shown much appreciation of the work which the International Labour Office has done in such technical matters as industrial safety and health, accident prevention or the like, and its careful studies of the position of professional workers, of service agreements and like matters, have largely been ignored by their professional organizations. Moreover, the suggestion advanced by Sir Frederick Leggett on behalf of the British Government at the session of the governing body of the International Labour Office on December 18, on joint industrial committees on international lines, can scarcely have its full effect without their participation.

Sir Frederick suggested that the International Labour Organization could bring together employers and workers in the coal, iron and steel, engineering, building and civil engineering, textile and transport industries. He thought that great benefit would result from employers and workers themselves dealing with each other internationally, as they now do in national industry; and Sir J. Forbes Watson, welcoming a resolution for a revision of the constitution of the International Labour Organization submitted by the workers' group, urged that the Organization should not be too conservative. Its machinery clearly requires strengthening to fulfil the mandate implicit in the Atlantic Charter, and if there is to be a wide view of its functions, its machinery must be examined in a constructive and courageous as well as critical spirit.

Such a wide view of the functions of the International Labour Organization and revision or extension of its organization does not mean an extension into the high politics of economic affairs. The line may be hard to define at times, and in the economic and social sphere technical matters often tend to pass into the political sphere. None the less, in the future as in the past, the International Labour Organization will make its best contribution to the promotion of social justice and the adoption of humane conditions of labour as envisaged when it was first established, if it keeps so far as possible within the technical field, and contents itself with purely advisory functions when political action by governments appears to be necessary.

If, however, those technical functions are to be exercised most effectively, the full support of all scientific and technical workers will be essential. That contribution must be made in the main, through their professional associations, and it is to

be hoped that in approaching the problems of post-war reconstruction, as some of them are now doing, they will take a much wider view of professional activities and responsibilities than in the past. It is not merely that past neglect of the work of the International Labour Organization in the professional field must be remedied; there must also be a much clearer and more realistic view of the functions of professional associations than has characterized them in the past. They have a distinctive technical contribution to offer, which has sometimes been as readily thwarted by political proclivities as it has been by the innate conservatism of all professional associations. The meeting of the governing body of the International Labour Organization and the forthcoming conference give a direct challenge to professional workers for the creative thinking which must precede both the re-shaping of the Organization itself and the effective functioning of technical and scientific workers in a democratic system which will adequately serve the changing needs of the post-war world.

CONTROL OF CIVIL AVIATION

International Air Transport

By Brig.-Gen. Sir Osborne Mance, assisted by J. E. Wheeler. (International Transport and Communications.) (Issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.) Pp. x+118. (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1943.) 7s. 6d. net.

UPON agreements among the nations of the world on the future development and organization of civil and military aviation may depend the very existence of civilized progress and freedom as we know them. Upon agreements among the nations of the world, by which they yield up some part of their national sovereignty to an international controlling body, may well depend a world organizing for peace. The failure to arrive at such agreements, the demand by each nation that its national sovereignty must be kept intact in the air, on the sea, and on the land, will ultimately lead to another world war, far more disastrous in its effects than the present one—one from which, indeed, the world may not recover for many generations.

These are strong statements to make, but a little reflection will lead to the conclusion that there is some justification for them; and very little knowledge of the past and possible future developments of air transport will convince those who acquire that knowledge that there is a very serious justification for the statements.

"International Air Transport" is an important book, for it supplies in a condensed, authoritative, logical and readable form just that information which all those who have not studied deeply the implications of air transport should have in their possession before they attempt to form public opinion, or worse still, take part in the laying down of air legislation. In its twelve chapters, the book contains the most concise, and documented, summary of the development of civil aviation, its failures and successes and its political repercussions, which has yet appeared.

The difficulty of arriving at a solution of international air traffic and control is nothing like so great technically as it is politically. In the past, civil

aviation has been used as an instrument of policy, often closely linked with military aviation, and civil air lines have been used to give military pilots intimate experience of routes over which they have to fly in war. To quote from the book:

"Perhaps the most striking and extensive use of aviation for economic, political and military penetration was made by Germany in Latin America. Partly through the direct action of the Lufthansa, partly through numerous highly subsidized companies under Lufthansa control thinly veiled by national façades, partly through the grant of extensive long-term equipment loans to these virtual subsidiaries, and to other local companies when in need of financial assistance, German control of aviation extended to nearly every South American country. A large proportion of the technical and flying personnel were either Germans or Germans who had been nationalized in a South American country for expediency's sake. . . . An attempt was made to secure a contract from the Ecuadorean Government to operate a service to the Galapagos Islands which could have no possible commercial justification, but the Islands happen to lie in a highly strategic position just off the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal . . . since the outbreak of war, German air activities in America have been largely eliminated by expropriation and other measures".

Now it could quite easily have been argued that this South American development on the part of Germany was purely the altruistic one of commercial expansion, and it may be a difficult argument to combat.

In the past, two methods have been suggested to control civil aviation with the view of abolishing also the chances of air warfare. One has been by international regulation and supervision of the manufacture and export of aircraft, and the other international organization of air transport. Attempts to carry out both these methods have failed; largely because it was believed that there was not enough difference between military and civil aircraft, and that any nation allowed to construct the latter could easily adopt them for the former. This reason is far less strong to-day than it was. Any present-day civil aircraft would make a poor military aeroplane for fighting and bombing purposes. But the danger still remains that civil transport machines, of the many varieties which will be developed, could be used for the transport of troops, munitions and guns.

It is becoming increasingly clear that only by some world-wide authority, overriding that of any particular nation, and provided with the necessary power to enforce its decisions, can the menace from the air be prevented; that is, the formation of an international air police force which would supervise the observance of civil air regulations and decisions regarding aircraft construction. As the authors point out, this police force would be quite different from whatever international military force may be created for protection against aggression.

The world stands at the cross-roads of aviation, and upon which road the nations decide to take may well depend the future of the world. It is to be hoped that the United Nations have already prepared the basis for an international co-operation and control which will prevent any nation becoming aggressively active at the terrible speed which aviation will enable it to be.

This is a book which should be widely read.

J. L. PRITCHARD.