

## What is the International Labor Office?

### What is its Purpose?

The International Labor Office is the outcome of a demand for the part of the working class.

The International Trade Union Conference held at Leeds in 1916 urged the creation of an International Labor Commission with the object of "controlling the application of legislation on social insurance, hygiene, labor and emigration, hours of labor, hygiene and protection against accidents." The same conference demanded the co-ordination and development of statistical studies and inquiries into the condition of the workers by means of an International Labor Office.

The Stockholm Conference of 1917 associated itself with that demand.

The Bern Conference of 1919 urged the drafting of an International Charter of Labor, to be applied by an International Labor Office.

It was, then, under the steady pressure of the working classes that the statesmen and diplomats drew up Part XIII of the Treaty of Peace, the part dealing with Labor.

The treaty proclaims that "just and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice."

It proclaims that there exist conditions of labor "involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled."

It proclaims that "an improvement of those conditions is urgently required; as for example, by the regulation of the hours of work, including the establishment of a maximum working day, and week."

The prevention of unemployment.

The provision of an adequate living wage.

The protection of the workers against sickness, disease, and injury arising out of his employment.

The protection of children, young persons and women.

Provision for old age and injury.

Protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own.

Recognition of the principle of freedom of association.

The organization of vocational and technical education and other measures.

The treaty also states that, the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labor is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve conditions in their own countries.

The Treaty of Peace has therefore proclaimed that the necessity of a lasting world peace and the dictates of justice and humanity require that all nations should assure the physical, moral and intellectual well-being of the workers.

It is for the realization of this programme that the International Labor Organization has been set up by all the signatories of the Treaty of Peace.

The Functions of the International Labor Office are Two-Fold:

1. It has to insure the drawing up, passing and enforcement in all states of an international labor legislation, which, subject to differences of climate, habit and custom, should aim at being uniform throughout the world.

2. By this means unfair competition will be prevented. By this means those states which are anxious for progress will not be hampered by states which exploit their workers.

The office is charged with the duty of making every endeavor to better the condition of the working classes in all countries by its studies, enquiries and propaganda. It has to aim at making men more free—better able to think for themselves—at making men educated and happy. It has to contribute towards the creation of that higher

form of civilization which alone can insure peace.

### How Does the International Labor Office Work?

The International Labor Office convenes at least once a year, the general conference of the representatives of the members, i.e. the states belonging to the organization. Forty-eight states belong at the present moment to the organization. The only great states outside it are the United States of America, which has not yet ratified the treaty, and Russia, still in the ferment of revolution.

All states, whether large or small, have equal rights at the conference. Each is represented by two government delegates, one employer delegate, and one workers' delegate. The employers and workers' delegates have to be chosen in agreement with the industrial organizations which are most representative in each country.

In practice at the conferences which have already been held, it is the central trade union bodies (Confederations du Travail) which appoint the workers' representatives and their advisers.

Two conferences have already been held: one at Washington in November, 1919, and the other at Geneva, in June, 1920, specially devoted to marriage questions.

This "Social Parliament" cannot pass legislation. Each country remains jealous of its sovereignty, but the Labor Conference votes on resolutions, by which states undertake to observe strictly certain regulations, and recommendations, which should be taken as guides in passing national legislation or in issuing administrative orders. These may, it is true, vary in different countries, but they have to conform to one and the same principle.

The Washington conference adopted six draft conventions:

1. Application of the principle of eight-hour day and a forty-eight hour week.

2. Quotation of preventing or providing against unemployment.

3. On the employment of women before and after childbirth.

4. On the employment of women during the night.

5. Minimum age of employment of children in industry.

6. Concerning the night work of young persons employed in industry.

The following six recommendations were also passed:

1. Concerning public employment exchanges.

2. Concerning reciprocity of treatment of foreign workers.

3. Concerning the prevention of anthrax.

4. Concerning the protection of women and children against lead poisoning.

5. Concerning the establishment of Government health services.

6. Concerning the application of the Berne convention of 1906, on the prohibition of the use of white phosphorus in the manufacture of matches.

The Geneva conference adopted three draft conventions:

1. Fixing the minimum age for admission of children to employment at sea.

2. Concerning unemployment insurance.

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