

Labor and the League of Nations

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London, England.

THE League of Nations Commission on International Labor, appointed by the Council of Ten in Paris, has devised a "Charter of International Labor Legislation," which it is proposed to insert in the Peace Treaty. The Charter bears a striking resemblance to that adopted by the Government Socialists at Berne. We should not be surprised by that fact; it is not a chance coincidence. The approved policy of all Government Socialists, and of the weaker reformist Liberals, is always to find out what the Government means to give and then to ask for that. The Peace Conference Charter contains many of the out-of-date resolutions of the oldest of ancient conferences on Labor. Most of the things it offers have either been obtained here already or are about to be obtained; the most notable exception being "a reasonable standard of life" for the workers, and of course opinions differ acutely as to what is reasonable! The provisions include:—

Children not to be gainfully employed under 14 years of age.

Persons between 14 and 18 not to do work harmful to their physical development, and to continue their education.

Every worker to have a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of life having regard to the civilization of his time and country.

Equal pay for equal work. A weekly day of rest. 48-hour week, subject to an exception for countries where climatic conditions, industrial development, or other circumstances render the industrial efficiency of the workers substantially different.

(That we suppose means that Africans, Indians, and others whose power of protest is but feebly developed, will have to work longer hours.)

Foreign workers to have the same treatment as nationals.

State inspection of factories and workshops.

A poor programme, but all that the League of Nations has to offer the workers, to prevent them turning to Bolshevik Socialism, which will make the workers the rulers of the world and its destiny. Wilson Harris, in *The London Daily News* on March 21st, quoted some personage at the Peace Conference:

"Now Bolshevism, whatever else may be said about it, is a tremendous idealistic force—unquestionably the greatest idealistic force, in my opinion, since the birth of Christ. You may vilify it. You may spread reports of its excesses. You may advocate military measures against it. But there it remains—a tremendous idealistic force. There is only one way to fight an ideal. That is by opposing another ideal to it. And there is only one practical ideal in the world today that can oppose Bolshevism—the League of Nations."

And then the prophet came tumbling down from the heights and forgot all about idealism, saying: "The first weapon of the League must be food. You must have some force—police or military—to guard your lines of transport, but a loaf in your left hand is going to be more important than a sword in your right."

On March 31st this same Paris correspondent states that an investigator, employed by the British Government to make inquiries in Germany, has just returned and has reported that there will be a change of Government in Germany, but that a mere change of Government will not satisfy the country:

"The masses of the people would demand some control over administration, and this, it is submitted, could be obtained by the constitution of a national form of workmen's and soldiers' council as the first Chamber. . . . It is argued that such a compromise between the Soviet and Parliamentary systems is necessary to conciliate the masses. . . ."

There is another admission. Firstly, we are told that Bolshevism is the strongest idealistic force since Christ, and, secondly, it is admitted that the parliamentary system does not give the masses of the people control over the government, but that the Soviet system does. The

League of Nations is put forward as the one force that can stave off Bolshevism! And this is the Charter which the League of Nations offers to the workers as an alternative to Socialism!

The machinery of the International Labor Office which the Council of Ten ("moved," they say, "by sentiments of justice and humanity"), are about to set up, is as unsatisfactory as the Charter. It consists of a General Conference of four representatives from each of the countries represented; two of these four are to be representatives of the Government, one of employers of labor, and one of the workers. Labor is thus placed in a safe minority of one to three! Each delegate may be accompanied by two advisers, and where women's questions are concerned "one at least of the advisers should be a woman." This is to placate the middle-class suffrage societies. Some of them will no doubt feel highly flattered by the idea that the Governments have consented to allow the women to appear occasionally, in the proportion of one to eleven, and that sex barriers in the general League of Nations machinery are verbally removed. The workers' and employers' delegates are to be selected in agreement with the most representative body of employers and workpeople, and the Conference, by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, may refuse to admit any delegate not so appointed—Bolshevik views can thus easily be excluded by a vote of the Government and employers' representatives!

The governing body of the International Labor Office is to consist of 24 members: 12 representing the workers' delegates. Thus Labor is placed in a minority of one to four!

The International Labor Office will collect and distribute information concerning international Labor, and will publish a periodical in English and French.

If any country fails to fall in with the agreements made concerning Labor, a commission of inquiry shall be chosen by the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, from a panel consisting of three representatives of the Governments, three representatives of the employers, and three workers' representatives. Any of these representatives, "not deemed to be fully qualified," may be rejected by a two-thirds vote of the governing body. Thus, again, the Government and employers' representatives may together veto any of the workers' representatives to whom they may object. The offending State may appeal from the Commission of Inquiry to the "Permanent Court of International Justice" to be created by the League of Nations, the findings of which will be final! The offending State may have passed upon it "an economic sentence." We suppose this means that it may be blockaded and boycotted, and that its people may be starved. *The London Times* states that "the British Dominions and India will have the same rights and obligations as if they were separate high colony of any signatory which the Executive contracting parties, and this will apply to any Council of the League of Nations admits to be fully self-governing." But how can this be? India is not "fully self-governing." She has not even a semblance of self-government; the mass of the Indian people are absolutely without political rights. We wonder whom the British Government will choose to represent

Indian Labor; indeed, we can hardly believe that they will allow the masses of the workers and peasants to choose their own representatives, though they might safely do so, since Labor in all countries is to be placed in a hopeless minority.

Labor in all countries should refuse to have anything to do with this scheme. It places Labor in an insulting minority. It brings Labor into the international machinery set up by the capitalist Governments to fight Socialism. It is the coping to the national machinery by which the Governments are seeking to divert Labor from the direct, independent action, in which it is daily growing more powerful and successful. In direct action the wire-pullers and negotiators take second place, and the rank and file are the rulers. By direct action the Russian working classes, the industrial workers, the peasants, the soldiers and sailors, established a government and abolished landlordism and Capitalism. By direct action the miners won the minimum wage and the eight-hour day; by the threat of direct action they have won the promise of a seven-hour day; by direct action the Glasgow women won the Rent Act.

In the political field Labor's gains are infinitesimal; any concessions made to Labor during the war, and for years before that, were made in fear of strikes outside. The pleadings of Labor men in Parliament fell on deaf ears.

In the committee room at the conference table Labor, always carefully placed in a minority there, is denied that which it is entitled to demand; and what is more, its spokesmen are too often bamboozled into accepting the denial with thanks, as "an instalment of justice," urging the rank and file to accept it, in order to avoid conflict.

In the international Labor machinery Labor will always be kept in a minority of one to three, or even one to four; and the Council of Ten, by giving to the employers' and governments' representatives the power to reject any of the Labor nominees of whom they may disapprove, will secure that even this representation shall consist of thoroughly tame and subservient people. Evidently there will be secrets to be learnt at the International Labor Committee with which Capitalism can only trust selected individuals who are warranted not to tell! Moreover, Labor must be held in complete subjection on this body, because this is the international body which is to act as a drag on all the Whitley Councils set up in the various trades; a drag on the National Industrial Councils in the various countries; this International Council will be like the Local Government Board, which surcharges Poor Law Guardians who relieve too generously, and either refuses to approve, or continually delays, the various housing schemes and schemes for municipal trading put forward by local bodies. Even on the Whitley Councils, Labor will be in a minority, for the Chairman appointed by the Government can always cast his vote on the other side. Moreover, when it comes to legislation, the Governments will only adopt the recommendations of these various councils as, and when, it chooses. In the case of the coal inquiry one report was signed by three employers' representatives, one by two employers' representatives and the Chairman, one by six workers' representatives. The majority report was therefore the report of the workers' representatives; but the Government has chosen to act on the report submitted by