

The atmosphere of the Conference as a whole crystallized the growing change which the individual observer has been able to sense for five years past in the attitude of the State towards the units of society. Conference discussions were necessarily confined to broad principles, but even in them it was clear that the individual member of society had now received universally not merely the recognition of his right to live, but also his right to live in reasonable material comfort and economic security.

No opposite view was expressed at the Conference. If any different view was held it relied on the silence of the vote for expression. The new sense of social duty appeared to be accepted as a matter of course, and any difference of opinion was between those who regarded social justice as sufficient concession to the times and those who desired to see bare justice garnished with a degree of grace and generosity. Probably the decisions which emerged from the always friendly conflict of these elements, and which are expressed in the Conventions, recommendations, and resolutions attached to this report, did not wholly satisfy either faction. But they each give concrete expression to some advance in international thought, and will undoubtedly be themselves superseded in later years by still more enlightened decisions.

The fact that Draft Conventions are written and published to the world from an International Conference builds up a code of social and industrial ethics which becomes increasingly difficult to ignore.

After a newcomer to the Conference has overcome an initial impatience with the unweildiness of an international gathering and his first fears of the hopelessness of persuading some countries (who are not always the smallest ones) to acceptance of any reforms, he becomes reconciled to the longer view that this gradual process of creating written standards of social and industrial ethics, step by step, as each year shows areas of new ground made firm by reasonable accord of international thought, is probably the most useful purpose served by the organization. When each reform is adopted by the Conference it usually has before it the experience of some country or countries more advanced than others in that particular field, some additional ones follow when the seal of a Draft Convention has been placed upon it, and the process will continue, however slowly, until eventually those countries which have not adopted that particular reform are left in an isolation as noticeable as was the temerity of those which took the first step forward. It is, of course, a long stage between comfortable obscurity in the crowd to uncomfortable prominence in the rear of progress, since it depends on the rate of advancement of the majority; but, as the crowd thins out round the laggards, the Convention alters in character from being to them merely an academic ideal to being a constant reproach to their backwardness.

These considerations, after practical experience of the Conference, force the conclusion that the Governing Body is wise in limiting the agenda to a small number of items, and that no discouragement need be found in the fact that not all of the few Draft Conventions submitted each year secure adoption by the Conference. The organization exists to promote world progress, and can move only so fast as the consensus of world opinion in sociology will permit. It is sounder policy for it to adopt each year as universal standards a few progressive measures which have reasonable prospects of practical application throughout member States than to force the pace beyond the natural progress of world thought.

The existence of the organization is no hindrance to faster progress within the boundaries of those of its member States whose local political and social conditions permit of a more rapid rate of development. Such States, in whose company New Zealand can still aspire to travel, serve as experimental areas from which data and example can be taken when the time is ripe for movement in the wider international sphere.

A backward glance across the eighteen years that have elapsed since the first International Labour Conference was held in 1919 shows up proof of the material progress that can be made in small steps by sustained effort over a long period of time. The agenda of that first Conference included items relating to the application of the eight-hour day or of the forty-eight-hour week; women's employment during the night, and in unhealthy processes; and the employment of children during the night and in unhealthy processes. These were quite advanced questions in that day, but to-day would be regarded as elementary. Further indications of the progress made can be seen in the summaries given in this report under the heading of "Director's Annual Report" of social laws in various countries.

New Zealand could not therefore, without disregarding its wider duty to assist progress in countries less fortunately situated than itself, hold itself aloof from the International Labour Conference on the score of having nothing much to gain from it. The better attitude for a country like the Dominion to adopt is to consider how much it can assist in giving to other countries by its attendance at the Conference.

Mention is made on page 27 under the heading of "Method of New Zealand Representation," to the fact that under the Treaty of Versailles, member States of the International Labour Organization are required to pay the travelling and subsistence expenses of non-Government delegates and their advisers to the annual Conferences. No doubt it was contemplated that those delegates would in turn observe their obligation to use their attendance at the Conferences in a constructive manner. In this connection importance attaches to a declaration by a British employer member, occupying the position of Vice-President of the Textile Committee at this year's Conference, made at the third meeting of the Committee, that apart from the employer members of the United States of America and of France, the employer members of the Committee would refrain from discussing, from taking part in the drafting of, or from voting on any single article as it came up for examination. The New Zealand employers' delegate was not a member of this Committee.