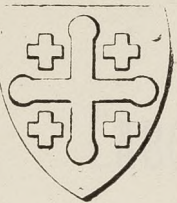


82
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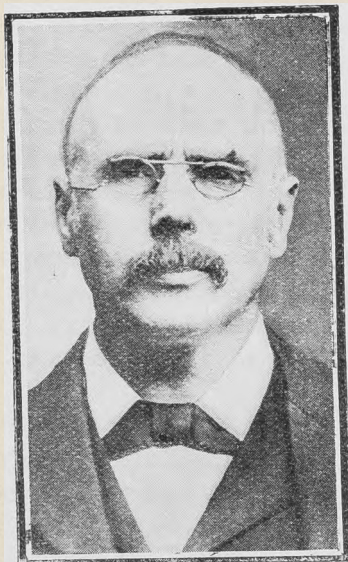
The League of Nations Union.

President - VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODON, K.G.

A British Organisation founded to promote the formation of a World League of Free Peoples for the securing of International Justice, Mutual Defence, and Permanent Peace.

22, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W. 1.

LABOUR TASKS CONFRONTING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.



By the Right Hon. GEORGE N. BARNES, M.P.

22, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W. 1
LONDON

LABOUR TASKS CONFRONTING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

TWO or three years ago, a League of Nations was talked about as an ideal possibility—it is now almost an accomplished fact. Politicians then regarded it as an amiable fad; they now welcome it as a means of deliverance from manifold troubles.

When the British elections followed the termination of the war and the Peace Conference was about to begin, those of us who had advocated a League of Nations pressed for its incorporation in the terms of peace. It is now a part of the Treaty which has been endorsed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

But other Parliaments have yet to endorse the Treaty, and in what follows I want to say nothing which will in any way lessen the chances of such endorsement. I want a more complete document for prevention of war in the future; but I do not want to jeopardise the chances of the Covenant of the present. The League of Nations Covenant is, I know, disappointing to many who looked to Paris for the emergence of a super-force to suppress aggressive war.

STRENGTH OF NATIONALISM.

To the mind of the propagandist the course mapped out years ago for the purpose seemed simple enough. Nations were to pool their forces, they were to apply economic pressure, and then, if that were not enough, they were to subdue an aggressive Power by an international force which was to be ready constituted and mobilisable. Like all pioneers, however, they underestimated the opposing elements. Some of us have been up against them since and we know their strength.

Chief among them is Nationalism. It is a great force, to be reckoned with in our day and generation as the main factor in international relations. **We have got to build internationalism upon nationalism.**

And—a brutal fact—nations are separated most by conflicting material interests. Under these circumstances, therefore, the problem of bringing—and keeping—the nations together in co-operation resolves itself into one of creating a community of interest, or interests, between them.

The horrors of the war have given for the moment a sort of sense of community of interests. Any effort to prevent similar horrors for the future will get at least lip-service for the present. But that will pass away, as the horrors of the recent war fade from memory. Common action in matters of common concern must then become effective in the interests of world peace.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION.

And this brings up a whole crop of questions to which adequate consideration had not been given. International co-operation in practical affairs had not been entirely unknown, but its advantages had not been fully realised. When the League came to be considered, however, as a practical proposition, it became evident that here was a fruitful field for further exploitation, and that the best way of getting the League developed was to get it to function in matters of every-day life and concern to the peoples. Industrial and economic questions are, or have been, disturbing factors in world affairs, because competing and selfish interests have been left free to make them so. There was no authority to control them.

One of the most important Articles, from the point of view of the foregoing considerations, is that by which the members of the League bind themselves together to maintain fair and humane conditions of life.

An organisation of labour has been agreed upon to be established at the seat of the League. There will be a permanent secretariat which will gather information and prepare an agenda each year for the conference of representatives of States, employers, and employed. This conference will draw up conventions or recommendations for submission to the competent authorities of the nations which are members of the League. By these means it is hoped and believed that a most necessary and wholesome check will be given to competition of countries in which labour is sweated and oppressed.

A COMBINED ADVANCE.

This will not only benefit the peoples of these backward countries, it will raise the standard of life everywhere. How often have employers in countries of comparatively high wages urged foreign competition of the low wage countries as one obstacle to improvement? The argument may not have been sound; employers may have had full value for relatively higher wages by relatively greater efficiency. But it has sometimes been effective. Hence the need for concurrent advance in all countries.

If Great Britain advances in its standard of wages only in the same degree as compared with Japan, then British employers are in no worse position as compared with Japan than before such advances. If India raises her starting age of children in industry to the same extent as America, then they both occupy the same position in the world competition as before the changes were made. If women and children are protected everywhere from excessive work and poisonous processes, then no change is made to the detriment of any one country.

This concurrent advance in the matter of social and industrial well-being is what is aimed at in the Labour Chapter of the Peace Treaty. To achieve it is the business of the separate organisation which has been set up under the ægis of the League of Nations, and which will hold its first meeting at Washington in October.

Detailed proposals, framed in the light of information collected in respect to industrial conditions in all countries, will be submitted. These proposals, however, will be submitted to the Governments prior to the conference, so that the Governments may advise their representatives upon them, and will therefore be to an extent morally bound to accept the principles involved in them. This, indeed, may be said to be the feature which will distinguish the conferences of the new organisation of labour from international conferences on labour with which we have been familiar. These gatherings have been, in the main, of representatives of labour only, and they have adopted resolutions of an idealistic character which, whatever their effect on the public mind, have not eventuated in immediate practical results. In future practical results will be achieved by all-round co-operation.

Employers also will be represented. In fact, the new

conditions bring in all interests to work together for the common good.

The new organisation does not enter into competition with any existing organisation because there is no other—and never has been any other—like or similar to it. It is supplementary to other organisations. It is designed to bring humane aspirations into relation with the realities of daily life.

ADMISSION OF GERMANY.

There has been much discussion in respect of admission of Germany. Such admission is clearly desirable, inasmuch as the Conference writ ought to run there as elsewhere. The matter is one, however, for the Conference itself to decide, and is left therefore for decision at Washington, where there is little doubt as to the result. Germany will, I believe, be invited to join, and thereby the door opened for her to enter again into the family of nations. It will be the prelude to her entry into the League.

But now, apart from these activities on Labour matters, which in themselves will contribute to promoting a spirit of unity—how can the League itself function in keeping the peace?

Its Covenant now makes provision for arbitration, but the award may be disregarded after its issue. It is true that aggression without submission to arbitration is recognised as an act of war, involving instant boycott, and it is also true that the submission to arbitration gives time for reflection.

The danger still exists of a self-sufficing Power breaking through and achieving its object before the League forces could be mobilised. Provision must be made against this contingency. The League must be armed with some material force to back its decrees. There is already a condition of things in South-East Europe in which international action would be justified, but which cannot be taken because as yet there is no international force available for the purpose. Small States have flouted the advice of the Allies. The condition of things is becoming intolerable.

A LEAGUE FORCE NECESSARY.

An agitation is on foot for retention of British troops in the Caucasus to protect the Armenians against the two

adjacent republics who have severed connection—for the time being—with Russia. The Turks are near, and are said to be preparing to co-operate in the congenial operation. Massacre is said to be impending in the event of our troops being withdrawn.

But, terrible as is this prospect, the time has come when Great Britain must get relief from some of its obligations. We cannot afford to police the world. The war has settled some problems, but has left—has, indeed, created—others which are essentially international in character, and should be dealt with by an international authority. The League of Nations must become that authority.

I believe that, in order that the League may become a reality in actual affairs of this kind, it should be armed with some force to be applied on behalf of all its members.

No provision is made in the Covenant of the League for the establishment of such a force, but, on the other hand, there is no express condition against it, and I hope that its establishment may be discussed by the League at an early date. Meantime, it is up to those specially interested in the Armenians to show sympathy by practical help and co-operation in their protection.

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To the General Secretary,

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS UNION,

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