



## International Co-operation in Social and Economic Problems

AT a time when confidence in the League of Nations is being sadly shaken, the progress of the International Labour Organization, as shown by the recently issued annual report, is a welcome reminder of the realities of international co-operation. The emphasis which the tragic events of the last few years has laid upon the necessity of social justice as a condition of peace, both internal and external, has brought the aims and the potentialities of the Organization into stronger relief.

Beyond question the Organization has emerged stronger, and not weaker, from the slump. Its advisory and information services have been increasingly recognized by countries all over the globe. Its activity has been more than sustained, and there was never a time when a wider prospect of constructive work could be discussed; even in membership, the withdrawal of Germany in 1933 has been offset by the entry of the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Egypt.

The outstanding features of the past year have been the success of the American Labour Conference at Santiago, which has stimulated the publication of a series of valuable monographs on economic and social conditions in South America, the Maritime Conference dealing with hours of work at sea and the World Textile Conference convened at Washington at the end of the year.

Despite all political and ideological differences which impede international relations at the present time, the good will necessary for international agreement is still to be found in the social field. The technical aspects of migration problems are once again receiving attention, and a fresh start is being made in dealing with the social problems of the countryside.

What gives especial interest to the annual report prepared by Mr. H. B. Butler, director of the International Labour Office, however, is the admirable survey which he presents of the international situation as a whole. Avoiding the snare of excessive occupation with the details of the progress of the International Labour Organization itself, he gives us a balanced and impartial discussion of many of the national tendencies and policies, upon the integration of which the future of our economic and social order depends. In the present report, for example, he reviews the extent of recovery from the slump, seeks to indicate certain lessons to be learnt and to emphasize some of the main problems and tendencies at the present moment.

To-day there can be no doubt that a large measure of recovery has been accomplished, but there are widespread doubts as to the attainment of any real stability or equilibrium. Moreover, the recovery has been achieved mainly by the

positive action of Governments and peoples, and this in itself affords an excellent reason for learning from experience of a slump to build barriers against the recurrence of similar catastrophes.

The evidence of recovery afforded by charts of production and unemployment is decisive. It is less convincing in statistics of world trade, and freer international trade remains one of the prime necessities if any real confidence about stability or permanence of recovery is to be felt. Only a beginning has been made in stabilizing currencies and in reducing trade barriers, and in the meantime the growth of armaments and the uneconomic activity which it represents constitute a serious threat to such recovery as has been achieved, all the more in a period of rising prosperity. Mr. Butler's survey should leave no one in doubt as to the menace which recent developments in this field present to economic and social progress until a peace system guaranteed by an effective League of Nations has been organized.

It is, however, in his discussion of the lessons of the slump and of current problems and tendencies that Mr. Butler is most suggestive. Against the uncomfortable realization that prosperity does not of itself move along a straight and even course but is inclined to proceed by upward and downward waves, he sets a firm conviction that the experience of the slump has demonstrated that man is capable of exerting a degree of control over his economic destiny. This is the more important because the buffets of economic misfortune are no longer accepted with the same docility as in the past. In fact, the demand for a national economic policy may become as insistent as was the demand for a public health policy fifty years ago.

The experience of the slump has already revolutionized the traditional view of the unemployment problem. It has disposed of the old fetish that there is no such thing as involuntary idleness, and that efforts to provide work or sustenance for the unemployed are an unjustifiable interference with the law of supply and demand. The positive value of State aid to the unemployed has been demonstrated beyond question, independently of its economic value.

Sir Josiah Stamp's recent plea for investigation of population questions finds further support in some of Mr. Butler's comments on population changes in relation to unemployment. The greater difficulty of reabsorbing displaced workers is not due entirely to the greater impact of technical change on the volume of employment; the decline

in the rate of population increase in all Western countries is a much more serious factor, which aggravates the effect of technological unemployment. Moreover, technical changes mean now not merely new vocations for the younger workers or entrants to industry, but also actual displacement of those already at work. Vocational training to an increasing extent involves the training and re-adaptation of the older workers. This situation is the more serious because, while the changing age distribution in population is increasing the supply of older and decreasing that of younger persons, the accelerating tempo of industry is constantly reducing the age of maximum efficiency and consequent demand for older workers.

The difficulty of finding employment for middle-aged workers of all types is enhanced by the natural prejudice in favour of young men and women, even in the newer and growing occupations for which middle-aged men are quite suitable, and one of the gravest dangers at the present time is that the 'hard core' of elderly unemployed will continue to grow, with serious consequences to the whole economy of social services. Fortunately, the experience of the slump provides welcome evidence of the ability of social insurance as an institution to meet the exceptional and unprecedented demands upon it and even to extend its operations. This fact, however, stresses the necessity for close attention to the effect of the changing technique of industry on the character of the insured population and to the biological changes in the composition of almost all Western populations. Only by careful investigation of the problems thus presented can we hope to secure the stability of our social insurance systems under growing pressure.

It is remarkable, in some ways, that the depression has led to increasing recognition of the value of the minimum wage, and that the dogma that the most effective way of combating depression lay in the reduction of wages has largely been refuted. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that incomes, not wage rates, form the foundation of living standards, and considerable progress has been made in raising the standard of civilization by supplementary methods such as family allowances, educational allowances or social insurance. Equally remarkable is the fact that the problem of leisure has been accentuated, not retarded by the slump. The tendency has been towards shortening the working week and not lengthening it, as in previous slumps. The problem of leisure, whether from the point of view of

holidays with pay or education, forms part of a general demand for a better and wider life which is the present trend of social progress.

Mr. Butler makes pertinent comments upon the importance of monetary policy in its international aspects, but even here he can point to evidence of the beginnings of a new monetary technique, which may assist in dealing with some of these social and economic problems in accordance with the ideal of social practice. Moreover, in the extension of Government intervention in the economic world he sees further possibilities of progress, if only the horizons of thought are widened and not limited to nationalist boundaries. He recognizes that it is almost inevitable for nations to attempt some degree of national self-sufficiency, clearly as he recognizes the dangers and disturbance to progress caused by the voluntary isolation of so large an economic unit as Germany. He reiterates the importance of foresight and planning in connexion with armaments and avoiding another depression,

and the necessity for developing an adequate technique for this purpose in time.

No reader of this report can be in any doubt as to the seriousness of the consequences of certain tendencies in national policies in economic and social affairs at the present time, or to the imperative need for thorough scientific investigation of population and allied questions. Nor does Mr. Butler leave us in any reasonable doubt as to the efficiency of existing international co-operation in social and economic questions. Even the few examples he cites of recent experiments at control within national boundaries indicate how hopeful the future might be if public opinion could be stirred to demand the necessary investigation and co-operate planning. This latest report gives us a most encouraging prospect of the possibilities of social control at the very time when scientific workers have come to consider, on a scale more widely than ever, just what might be done to elaborate an adequate programme and technique.

## Offence and Defence in Gas Warfare

### Chemicals in War :

*a Treatise on Chemical Warfare.* By Dr. Augustin M. Prentiss. With Chapters on the Protection of Civil Populations and International Situation, by Major George J. B. Fisher. Pp. xviii + 739. (New York and London : McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1937.) 45s.

THE author's intention in the publication of this comprehensive work is to present to the public an authentic account of a much misrepresented and misunderstood subject, to give the American point of view on chemical warfare and to trace its development from its beginning in the World War to the present time. He is well qualified to undertake such a task, as he served in the War as assistant to General Fries, who was chief of the Chemical Warfare Service of the American Expeditionary Forces, and he has been on continuous duty in the American Chemical Warfare Service ever since.

Colonel Prentiss describes in full detail all the chemical agents that were used by each of the nations engaged, and also their method of manufacture and their comparative success, and he discusses the probabilities of their future employment as well as post-War developments. He refers to the sensational articles which appear from time to time about some new super-gas, a few hundred

pounds of which, dropped from aeroplanes, could destroy New York. These, he says, are invariably the figments of the imagination of writers who have neither technical nor professional knowledge, and they are found to be, when analysed, without the slightest foundation of fact. But this does not mean that there may not be much more effective chemical agents in the future, though there is little to be gained in finding them while the full possibilities of those already known remain unexploited. For example, an average of only 33 casualties resulted in the War from the use in battle of 1 ton of mustard gas, whereas it has been proved experimentally that there is enough potential poison in this quantity to kill 45 million men!

The evolution of the tactics employed in discharging gas clouds and artillery and trench mortar gas projectiles is traced, and the opinion is expressed that gas troops were more highly developed and more extensively employed by the British (the Special Brigade) than by any other nation. He also confirms the opinion held in Great Britain that the use by the French of prussic acid gas in their shells (of which four millions were filled with the substance) and by the Germans of their Blue Cross shells (of which fourteen millions were filled) were two of the major errors in the gas war. Far too many chemical agents were used in the field, and there were long delays in their