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Book Review

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION, ed. by Alice S. Cheyney. (Vol. 166 of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.) Philadelphia, 1933. Pp. viii, 239.

The editor of this little volume, which appeared in March of this year, and the contributors to it, cannot have realized fully the timeliness of their work while it was under way. The "New Deal" was just over the horizon, with its coordinated effort to raise the standards of American labor. This effort was to give rise to the fear, first voiced publicly by Mr. Bernard Baruch, that improved American standards would intensify the problem of competition from abroad in the American market and thus necessitate still higher tariffs. It is curious that in this situation no wider publicity has been accorded to the International Labor Organization, as a means of minimizing inequalities in the labor standards of different countries. Yet, as the volume under review clearly brings out, the whole purpose of the International Labor Organization is to equalize as far as possible, through international agreement, the standards of labor in different countries, to the end that advanced nations shall not be compelled by reason of the competition of backward countries to lower their standards. A larger measure of success in this endeavor than is generally recognized in the United States has attended the work of the Organization.

The International Labor Organization, of course, was created by the treaty of Versailles as an independently conducted branch of the League of Nations. It had forerunners, notably the semi-official International Labor Office at Basel, and the International Association for Labor Legislation. The Treaty, however, gave formal recognition to maintaining decent social conditions throughout the world as essential to satisfactory international relations. For the promotion of such conditions the Organization was created, with a permanent staff, a Governing Body to formulate policies, and an annual Conference for the purpose of discussing vital problems and framing proposals for dealing with them. The Conference consists of four representatives from each member state, two being representatives of the government, one a representative of employers and the fourth a representative of labor. Out of the several conferences have come thirty-two separate conventions, or multilateral treaties, which have been ratified by varying numbers of the nations of the world, including in many instances the important industrial nations of France, Germany and Great Britain. These conventions, as Miss Cheyney clearly brings out in the paper which concludes the volume, have in some respects established standards which are higher than those prevailing in the United States. This fact, when added to the probability that American standards of welfare during the depression have been lower than the standards in the important nations of western Europe, makes the assumption commonly indulged in this country, that the standards of

American labor are far higher than those prevailing elsewhere, seem rather ridiculous.

The volume under review, however, is in no sense propagandist, and it contains more than a statement of the central purpose of the Labor Organization and the degree of success which has attended its operation. The Organization is a research agency as well as an agency of international coöperation, and its studies and reports are an invaluable source of information for students of economics and of labor everywhere. Some of the contributors, moreover, point out the weaknesses in an organization whose efforts at control are limited to proposing treaties and listening to complaints against non-enforcement by nations which have ratified. It is pointed out, furthermore, especially by Felix Morley, that it is impossible to segregate the labor problem from the economic problem as a whole. Thus the International Labor Organization has been compelled to broaden the scope of its studies and to coöperate with the League of Nations in dealing with the problems of the depression. It remains, however, the most competent international organization for continuous effort in the betterment of economic conditions. Until a greater degree of uniformity of labor standards has been achieved, it is of course true that nations will have to proceed somewhat independently of each other in improving labor conditions and employing tariffs to protect their markets. There is no reason, however, why they should not at the same time engage wholeheartedly in international efforts directed to the same ends. The narrow and uncompromising attitude of the United States toward the International Labor Office, in common with the World Court and the League of Nations, cannot be modified too soon. It is impossible for any one with a sense of realism to perceive any surrender of national independence through membership in the Organization.

Interestingly enough, one reason for American non-participation in the Organization has been the supposedly exclusive competence of the States in labor legislation. It was felt that signature by American representatives of conventions whose sole effect would be the proposal of legislation to the States would be a rather futile performance. Now, however, as a part of the "New Deal," Congress has boldly legislated with reference to wages and hours—as, indeed, it might have done years ago pursuant to treaties. The imaginary constitutional bar to effective participation by the United States in the Organization is now non-existent—unless, of course, the Supreme Court should unexpectedly undo what Congress has just done.

RALPH F. FUCHS.