

AN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

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THE 23rd Annual Conference of the Inter-parliamentary Union, held at Washington and Ottawa in October last, marked a rapid advance in the movement for international concord and a better understanding among the peoples of the world. It was the first time that the countries of Central and South America were represented at these conferences, no fewer than fourteen of these States sending delegates. This evidence of the co-operation of these regions meant that the governments and legislatures of the New World might be definitely regarded as permanently linked with the movement.

The Inter-parliamentary Union, designed to bring the legislators of the world into closer contact, owes its origin to the late Sir William Randall Cremer, of England, a man who worked his way up from the carpenter's bench to become a leading member of parliament and an outstanding figure in the world movement for arbitration and international conciliation. Cremer was a Trade Unionist, who as a result of his efforts for settlement of labour disputes by arbitration was induced to essay the larger task of providing machinery for applying the same method to international controversies. His primary conception was for the establishment of this general congress of parliamentarians, meeting annually, and to which legislators from all countries are eligible. Cremer's efforts in this direction won him in time the Nobel prize and, though of but moderate means, he devoted the larger part of this to an endowment for the furtherance of the objects of the organization he had created. At the outset, thirty-five years ago, its scope was limited to promoting international arbitration. But in 1899 its plans were enlarged, and its efforts have since been towards the securing of prevention of war and the growth of international co-operation, as will be seen from the first article of its Statutes, in which the aims of the Union are defined as follows:—

The aim of the Inter-parliamentary Union is to unite in common action the members of all parliaments, constituted into national groups, in order to secure the co-operation of their respective States in the firm establishment and the democratic

development of the work of international peace and co-operation between nations, by means of a universal organization of nations. Its object is also to study all questions of an international character suitable for settlement by parliamentary action.

The Union's Statutes are further elaborated as follows:—

Any Society or Association of Nations must, in the present state of international relations, be more or less an organization of governments, as is the present League of Nations, and by the very nature of their attributes governments are inclined to insist mainly on their national and particular interests. This is legitimate and salutary, but an Association representing the governments cannot fully represent the aspirations of the peoples or of public opinion. Alongside of the governmental organization there is room for a body in which the common interests of mankind may find full and unfettered expression. It is not indispensable that such a representative body should be official; at any rate provisionally, there may be some advantage in its being of an unofficial and private character. It is to this position that the Inter-parliamentary Union aspires.

The Union is at present composed of thirty national groups, each constituted within a national parliament. According to its Statutes, only one group can be formed in each national parliament. These groups are non-party organizations, open to any Senator or member of parliament. Most of the groups are now to be found in European parliaments; outside Europe, groups are constituted in the parliaments of the United States of America, Canada, Japan, Egypt and the Dutch Indies, and take a regular part in the work of the Union. Nearly 4,000 individual parliamentarians are at present members of these thirty groups.

With Cremer, in time, were associated representative statesmen of various countries, mostly European, and annual conferences have been held in various cities from year to year, the recent one being the 23rd of the series. The only time before this that a session was held in the New World was in 1904, the year of the St. Louis Exposition, when it was held in the United States, while the session of 1924 was held at Berne and that of 1923 at Copenhagen. In 1924 some 26 countries were represented, with 211 delegates; in 1925 the numbers were 41 and 371 respectively. As the Locarno conference resulted, about the same time as this inter-parliamentary conference was sitting in the United States, in the adoption of a treaty which it is hoped will solve many of the most serious problems confronting the world, it has been virtually decided not to hold a session next year, but to meet again at Paris in 1927, and then possibly at Berlin a year later, with the prospect that one of the

large South American countries will be inviting a session in the not remote future. This year's conference contained representatives of forty-one countries, speaking a great variety of tongues and exhibiting every strain of colour, the remotest country represented being the Philippines. The terms of the invitation provided that all the delegates became the guests of the United States group in New York on September 30th, when they joined a train for Washington, with a stop at Philadelphia to see something of that city—the cradle of American independence. During the previous two days, the delegates had been variously entertained at New York—notably with an official welcome by the Mayor at the City Hall, a very complete tour of the harbour on a special steamer with ample guides, and a luncheon by the League of Nations Non-Partisan Society, at which a most lucid and admirably-phrased address was given by State Senator Colby on the reasons why official American participation in the League of Nations is, for the present at any rate, out of the question. But the chief interest was centred in Washington, where the party, numbering 476 persons, including the delegates, ladies and attachés, arrived that evening to begin a busy week. The sessions were held in the House of Representatives, placed at the disposal of the Union by the American authorities, and where the delegates sat in two sections, those of the Old World on one side and those of the New World on the other. From day to day the galleries were flooded with spectators, and it must have been a thrilling experience, for those who could picture the possibilities which this gathering embodied of realizing the poet's dream—"The Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World."

Of the various delegations or "groups", Britain had the largest—forty-three members, Germany coming next with twenty-nine, while France had eleven, Italy eight. Sweden the birth-place of the President of the organization—Baron Adelswaerd—rather swamped the promoters by sending a delegation of twenty-three, whereas Norway sent but eight. Japan had eight also, and China ten. The post-war nations were also represented, but Russia of course was conspicuously absent, and Spain, being under a dictatorship, with its parliamentary institutions not in exercise, was also missing. The American delegates, while numerous in the printed list, were not strong on the floor or very active in the debates; and Canada's representatives, because of the General Election, consisted of ten Senators and one ex-"commoner," But the Latin-American natives sent goodly groups, and played no mean part in the discussions.

The business programme for Washington covered a week, and the sessions were in the main well attended; but there was a large social programme as well, which rather interfered with the work of the conference and caused the directors to admit, somewhat sorrowfully, that the capitals of the first-class nations were not the best places to get real work accomplished.

During all the sessions except one, three languages were recognized,—English, French and German; and summary translations of the original speeches were given on the spot by professors from Columbia University, who, it was agreed, carried out their difficult task most skilfully. The other session, excepted above, was held in the building of the Pan-American Union, in another section of Washington, where Spanish was recognized equally with English, the subjects treated at this session being those which referred chiefly to Central and South American countries and their relations to the United States. One of the facts which this conference, like others recently held, helped to prove, was that French has ceased to be the language of diplomacy and international intercourse, and that English has taken its place. Probably eighty per cent of the speeches made were in the English tongue, and it was noteworthy, in the association among the delegates, that very many who spoke only their mother tongue with any facility had at least a smattering of English as their second language.

The proceedings opened with an address of welcome by the Secretary of State, Mr. Kellogg, which offered the official greetings of the American nation, and was set in a high key. The assemblage responded admirably to it. This was followed by an exhaustive address by Senator Wm. B. McKinley, of Ohio, head of the American group, and one of the enthusiasts of the movement, who was chosen as chairman of the sittings at Washington. In welcoming the delegates, he spoke feelingly of the memories of the last previous conference held in the United States twenty-one years ago, recalling the benefits enjoyed, the choice friendships formed, and the boundless hospitalities received by those Americans so fortunate as to attend the conference across the seas during all the intervening years. He then reviewed briefly the past history and accomplishments of the Union, emphasizing the profound influence exerted in promoting the principle of arbitration of disputes between nations. It had influenced in no small way the calling of the First Hague Conference, and was directly responsible for the calling of the Second Hague Conference by President Roosevelt of the United States in 1904. He also recalled the labours of the Union in behalf of the Third Hague Conference and

of a Permanent Court of International Justice. He characterized the efforts of the Union to develop its own organization as a "veritable romance." He referred to the gratifying increase from year to year in the number of groups represented at the meetings. There had been twelve at Stockholm in 1921, twenty-six at Vienna in 1922, the same number at Copenhagen in 1923 and at Berne and Geneva in 1924, while there were forty-one countries represented at the present gathering. He said that promotion of arbitration and the establishment of universal peace was the unalterable aim and purpose of the union. He enumerated a long list of subjects in which the nations of the world possessed a common interest, and declared that the only agency regularly and permanently organized for parliamentarians collectively to promote that intercourse essential to these high matters is the Inter-parliamentary Union. He closed his welcoming address with an eloquent prediction that the organization will become more and more, albeit unofficially, a "parliament of parliaments", whose function shall be to advance the cause of international righteousness with a firmer purpose and a finer nobility.

The regular business then began with a consideration of the report of the secretary-general. This was introduced by Baron Adelswaerd, former Finance Minister of Sweden and President of the Council of the Inter-parliamentary Union. His address reviewed at some length the subjects which came within the ken of the organization during the past year, and he paid a specially warm tribute to the work of the League of Nations, maintaining that "without this League the five years since the war would probably not have passed without new wars in Europe." He further urged that "the League is indispensable to the world to-day, and is the main guarantee for the solidarity of mankind and the future of civilization." Herr Paul Loeb of Germany, Dr. Jose Correa of Brazil, Dr. Fernand Merlin of France, Sir Robert Horne of Great Britain and others discussed the report; and Mr. Carl Lindhagen of Sweden moved a resolution inviting the conference to declare itself in favour of (a) a general revision of the Covenant of the League of Nations, so that the covenant may give a true expression of the ideal aims of the League; (b) a friendly appeal to the United States to join the League of Nations; (c) an investigation by the Union's council of the problem of the adoption of a world language by mutual international agreement as a spiritual necessity for a united mankind. This resolution provoked much debate during the ensuing session, in which speakers from various countries took part, and it was ultimately agreed that it should

be referred to the Council for fuller investigation and a report be made thereon at the next annual meeting of the Union.

Other important questions discussed were those of disarmament, which brought about a very torrent of declamation; modifications of tariffs; customs rules and transport hindrances in continental Europe,—respecting which the spokesmen of every country there had some cause of complaint; currency reform and the creation of agencies for the stabilizing of exchange, which likewise proved a serious issue; the revision of treaties, on which it will readily be realized there was a great volume and variety of opinion.

Mr. Ben Riley, of England, made what was in effect a criticism of the United States for its action in refusing entrance to that country to Mr. Saklatvala, a Communist member of the British parliament, to attend the sittings of the conference, because Mr. Saklatvala's opinions were held to be subversive to the established order of government in that country; but the sense of the assemblage was that this was a matter which affected the United States alone, and was not one with which the conference could properly deal. Mr. John Sundby, of Norway, urged action by the Union to curb the activities of international trusts and combines, especially those designed to increase the price of the necessities of life, supporting his thesis by copious quotations from a report of the Federal Trade Commission of the United States and the report of the British Royal Commission on Food Prices. Baron van Hoogland, of Holland, elaborated the difficulties of reconciling national views on many inter-national problems. Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, of Great Britain, raised the subject of international marriage and its effect upon the nationality of women contracting such marriage, instancing the severe hardships imposed upon the woman in many cases, especially in war-time, in such countries where by marriage, she loses her own nationality and is obliged to accept that of her husband. Mr. Validimar Molloff, of Bulgaria, introduced a question which subsequently was specially debated at Ottawa, that of the protection of minorities, and also that of steps to prevent the spread of the doctrines and activities of the Bolsheviks.

Undoubtedly the most important subject discussed was that of the development of international law, with the subsidiary issues of "the declaration of the rights and duties of nations" and of "the criminality of wars of aggression, the outlawry of war." This debate was introduced by the reading of a most illuminating paper on international law prepared by the Hon. Elihu Root of New York, the famous American jurist. It had been hoped that he

would have been able to be present to read it himself, but the state of his health did not permit of this, and the paper was read on his behalf by Representative Theodore Burton, the vice-chairman of the American group. It was an admirable review of the state of international law, with the possibilities of its codification and development, and it elicited a series of very excellent addresses from the recognized experts—if one may use the term—of the principal nations—Representative Burton of the United States, Senator Lafontaine of Belgium, Professor Pella of Roumania, Professor Gratz of Hungary, Professor Schucking of Germany, Mr. Dennis Herbert of Great Britain, President Osmena of the Philippine Senate, Mr. Carl Lindhagen of Sweden, Mr. Fraenkel of Norway, Mr. Hjalmar Procope of Finland, and others. An aspect of this question of unusual interest to delegates of the British Empire was raised by Mr. Thomas Johnson, leader of the Opposition in the Dail Eiréann, or Lower House of the Irish Free State parliament. It suggested recognition of the principle that any Dominion of the British Empire might “contract out” in the event of a war between the mother country and a foreign Power, although other Dominions might decide to support the mother country; and that in such an event, the Power at war with Great Britain should agree to regard a Dominion so “contracting out” as neutral territory and refrain from attacking it. He supported this with a speech of some length, to which Sir Robert Horne, on behalf of the British delegates, made a reply. He observed that “this would be a very convenient arrangement for Great Britain, as it would leave that nation so much less territory to protect”, but he could not imagine any belligerent State, which happened to be in hostility with Great Britain at the time, agreeing to a plan by which that State’s course of action and its power of injury to the country with which it was fighting should be so limited. He added that any Dominion of the empire was free to assist Great Britain or not as it may choose, in case of war, but that this would not free them from liability to attack on the part of any enemy who should choose that method.

The question of disarmament, which was also very thoroughly examined by a large number of speakers, had as an incident a proposal by General Spears of Great Britain for demilitarized zones under the League of Nations. This revealed very decided differences of opinion among the members of the British group. The Labourites broadly considered it in an entirely different aspect from the Conservatives, though some members of both these sections in turn marked their dissent from the views of the majorit-

ies. The discussion on this particular matter illustrated very clearly the independence of thought and the wide freedom of opinion which the British delegates showed, in contrast mainly with the groups from other countries, who, it might be said, in a general way spoke and voted in unison.

The special session in the Pan-American building was notable for a very full and informative report on the Pan-American Union by Senator Claude A. Swanson of Virginia, who reviewed the history and achievements of this organization, comprising the twenty-one republics of the western hemisphere, which had been in operation for more than three decades. This review, which described the activities of the Union, showed that these deal with (a) relations between the governments of the American Republics; (b) activities intended to secure closer commercial and financial relations among the republics of America; (c) activities designed to promote closer cultural relations between the republics; (d) activities calculated to promote the progress of public health and hygiene; and (e) activities for special service to the agricultural development of these republics. The report very profoundly impressed the delegates from other countries, notably those from Great Britain, especially by its revelation of the part which this Union was playing in the development of closer trade intercourse between the countries of the western world, and explaining in goodly measure the immense strides which the United States was making in securing the markets of the Latin countries occupying the rest of the hemisphere to the south. Delegates from different American countries continued the discussion until the close of this sitting.

The gathering at Washington was marked by a social event, a dinner to the entire conference given by the American group, at which Mr. Kellogg, the Secretary of State, presided. He delivered a remarkable address dealing with America's attitude towards international problems; but the speech of the evening, in more respects than one, was that of Dr. Joseph Wirth, the ex-Chancellor of Germany and the chairman of the German delegation. It was given in English, and embodied an eloquent plea for co-operation between Germany and France. It contained one or two sentences in French, and was marked by tactful and appreciative sentiments as to the feelings of the gathering on the whole. The speech of the French representative on the other hand, Senator Merlin, was delivered in his own tongue, and was so long that it proved a burden for most of the gathering, mainly unfamiliar with the language, while there was some criticism in various circles that

it was not attuned—like the German speech—to the cis-Atlantic atmosphere.

Other social features of the Washington visit included a reception by President Coolidge, a visit to Mount Vernon, Washington's estate on the Potomac River, the laying of a wreath on the tomb of America's Unknown Soldier by delegates representing the whole British Empire, and various lunches, dinners, dances and sight-seeing tours.

A word from Representative Burton's speech of farewell to the conference at its closing session may not be amiss:—

In many respects this has been the most notable gathering ever held in this city. There has been a representation of different nations, of languages more varied than that which resulted from the confusion of tongues at Babel—various national interests, and different tradition; and yet this gathering shows what can be accomplished by the meeting of representatives of different countries with a common purpose, where there is free discussion and social intercourse. In addition to other benefits, I am sure that international friendships have been formed which will endure as long as life shall last. We trust that you will return to your various homes with some new conception, with quickened interest in the cause for which this Union was organized.

I am enthusiastic about the objects of this Union and what may be accomplished. Our martyred President Lincoln set as an object to the world for the restoration of the Union that government of the people, by the people and for the people might not perish from the earth.

Let us have faith, faith the sheet anchor, faith that in a troubled world rent by dissension, suffering from depression, and sometimes from poverty, there is a better future ahead, better not only than the present, but better than all the days of the past, and to this great object let us all devote our efforts.

From New York the party were conveyed by train to Niagara Falls, where after a day's stay they were taken over by the Canadian group for a tour covering a day each in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec. At Ottawa a session of the Conference was held, at which the question of the treatment of national minorities was very thoroughly discussed. This issue elicited the greatest number and variety of speeches of the whole conference, practically the whole day being devoted to it, with a time-limit of five minutes for each address, which the chairman, Senator Belcourt, effectively enforced. The problem was presented from every point of view, but the general feeling was that it was one which should be left to solve itself in the atmosphere of toleration and co-operation which the Locarno pact, agreed upon two or three days previously, suggested as possible.

Another problem was intended for debate, that of the regulation of the international traffic in noxious drugs, with special reference to the opium question. This was an outgrowth of the international conference on the latter subject last year, (which was wrecked by the insistence of the American delegates on an impossible procedure), and it would probably have resulted in an acrimonious discussion and an exhibition of strong feeling. But as very little time remained in which to deal with a question that would require hours, if not days, of debate, the proposal of Sir Robert Horne that it be postponed to the next conference was accepted by the gathering generally as the most sensible, though on this the only division of the entire conference was taken, with the result that the British stand was supported by a goodly majority.

At Ottawa another large banquet was given, at which speeches in the same tone as at the previous ones were made, and after this session the first substantial dispersal of the gathering was noticed, many of the members not proceeding to Montreal and fewer still to Quebec. The conference came to a close in that city on the night of October 15th, the various members finding their ways to their homes by such avenues as seemed best to them.

The question has been asked frequently whether a conference of this character effects any really valuable results, and the answer will necessarily be one respecting which there is a diversity of opinion. Undoubtedly a peripatetic parliament, with those attached thereto numbering nearly four hundred in all, and speaking a great variety of tongues, attempting to deal with questions of world import in a few hours, is at a serious disadvantage; but on the other hand the opportunities which such a gathering affords for representative men of different countries to rub shoulders, exchange ideas, acquire new points of view, and form new friendships, is a very real gain. In addition, the recent conference achieved a very notable success by bringing together, in the chief cities of the United States and Canada, people from every part of the globe and largely from countries less advanced in material progress, since this could not but have a beneficial effect as showing what might result from the spread of the movement for the preservation of the peace of the world. Some of the British visitors were critical of the conference and sceptical of its value, but to my mind they are the last who should take this attitude, because in point of attendance at the sittings there were no worse offenders than themselves. Without indicting golf either as an institution or as a hobby, I cannot refrain from expressing the opinion that it is productive of much dissatisfaction as practised by English members

of various conferences with which I have had to do. At the Imperial Press Conference which crossed Canada in 1920, the insistence of English delegates on having their game of golf, regardless of the effect thereof on the programme arranged for them by their hosts, provoked much complaint, and at one or two places almost an outbreak of protest. Similarly, during a visit of British parliamentarians to Newfoundland the past summer, a discussion on trade problems had to be cut short because several of the visitors wanted to play golf; and on the Saturday afternoon at Washington, when Mr. Johnson's motion to enable a British Dominion to "contract out" in the event of a war was being discussed, there were only six out of the forty-three British members present, the rest having gone golfing, tennis, motoring, etc. Some of us from Newfoundland and from Canada sat in with the British group with the object of helping to make it show at least a respectable bulk; but the impression created on the delegates from other countries could not have been a favourable one. Personally, I think people attending conferences of this sort, should be required to sign an agreement to refrain from golf while the sittings are in progress.