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International Congress of Women

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No less an economic authority than Dr. Schäffle also warmly commends its work, in perfect accord with his published utterance—"The housing question involves far higher national interests than does even the universal provision of necessary sustenance in the event of worklessness by means of sickness, accident and old age insurance." Dr. von Bodelschwingh, however, goes further upon this question than the association of his founding. He advances the demand that legislative measures should be taken to afford urban workmen the opportunity of living outside the towns in which they are employed—special and convenient railway conveyance being established for the purpose—so that they may be able to obtain housing suited in extent and character to the cultivation of a healthy family life, land being added as a matter of course for gardening and agricultural purposes. His ideal is an independent house for every married working man—no barrack system of so-called "model-dwellings"—and this house owned by its occupant. Let this man be made his own landlord, and a good deal will have been done to make him a contented citizen, so far as that is humanly possible. Need it be said, the Social Democratic party does not view this experiment with any favour? The Socialist leaders desire social discontent; the cause lives upon it; it is the most important element in the party's "material." I was assured that many of the working men owners of the Bielefeld colony were formerly active Social Democrats, but they are such no longer. There is sound philosophy in that remark of a *Times* leader-writer two or three years ago—a man will as a rule cease to talk about Collectivism directly he has begun to collect a little on his own account. WILLIAM HARBUTT DAWSON

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF WOMEN.

OF the many whose attention was attracted to the meetings of the Women's International Congress last June, few, it is safe to say, were aware of the nature of the body which had convened that Congress. Yet the history and constitution of a society which aims at organising the women workers of all nations, on no less broad a platform than the "application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law," is not without interest if only as an experiment. In 1888 some American women convened, at Washington, a representative assembly of delegates from as many countries as possible, to consider the possibility of organising International and National Councils of Women. Their purpose is explained in the preamble to the Constitution. "We, women of all Nations, sincerely believing that the best good of humanity will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose, and that an organised movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and of the State, do hereby band ourselves

in a confederation of workers to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law." For this purpose the International Council was established.

"(a) To provide a means of communication between women's organisations in all countries.

"(b) To provide opportunities for women to meet together from all parts of the world to confer upon questions relating to the welfare of the commonwealth and the family."

It was arranged that the International Council should meet every five years, when the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Corresponding Secretary and Recording Secretary were to be elected; these officers with the Presidents of the National Councils were to form the Executive Committee. The countries where no National Council had been formed were to be represented by honorary Vice-Presidents "while distinguished women of any country, whose influence and support would be valuable to the International Council, were to be invited by the President and Executive to join the Council as individual members." The National Councils were, in their turn, to be formed of local councils, societies, institutions, &c. Mrs. Fawcett was elected as the first President of the International Council. Only the United States formed a National Council on that occasion, Miss Frances Willard being elected President. For five years after 1888, "the International Council, as such, did not make any definite move forward." The next event in its history occurred in 1893, when the Women's Branch of the World's Congresses held in connection with the Chicago World's Fair invited the International Council of Women to hold its quinquennial meeting in Chicago. On that occasion women workers belonging to thirty different nationalities were present. The Countess of Aberdeen was elected President. At the close "the International Council consisted of two federated National Councils, five elected officers, and twenty-eight Vice-Presidents, pledged to carry on the work and spread the ideals of the International Council throughout the world." The result is to be seen in the late Congress—the third event in the history of the International Council. The National Councils of the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain and Ireland, Denmark, New South Wales, Holland, New Zealand and Tasmania, were represented by their Presidents, while the women workers of Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Russia, Austria, France, Norway, Victoria, South Australia, West Australia, Queensland, Cape Colony, Argentine Republic, Palestine, China, and Persia, were represented by Honorary Vice-Presidents. The National Council of France, it is interesting to note, formed as early as 1892, has ceased to exist. It decided to have no President; "the result seems to have been that the Secretary became such a very autocratic ruler that she declined to summon any meetings whatsoever." A Council was not formed in England till 1897, when the National

Union of Women Workers formally constituted their governing body the National Council of Great Britain and Ireland.¹

In order to appreciate the methods and significance of the late Congress, this account of the history and purpose of the International Council must be borne in mind. The common aim gave to these representatives of twenty-seven countries, and colonies, and perhaps of more opinions, a sense of "solidarity." The absence of propaganda resulted in a scarcity of theories and theorists. The practical character of the federated councils and organisations gave to the Congress practical speakers, experts, many of them, in their own departments. As it included so many subjects, and these from so many points of view, no one subject could be treated with any thoroughness at the Congress. This was the most serious criticism to be brought against its methods. On the other hand, it left a general impression of the conditions under which women work and live in different parts of the world and of the different states of development in the different parts. If the work of the Congress was not thorough or conclusive, it was certainly suggestive and stimulating.

Most of the questions discussed at the Congress dealt, directly or indirectly, with the economic side of women's lives: with the professions open to them; with technical education, emigration, the treatment of the destitute classes and the administration of the poor law. In the Legislative and Industrial Section, convened by Mrs. J. R. Macdonald, the subjects for discussion were, "Special Labour Legislation for Women," "Special Labour Legislation for Children," "Scientific Treatment of Domestic Service," "Civil Disabilities of Women," "The Home as Workshop," "Trade Unionism," "Ethics of Wage-Earning," "Co-operation and Profit Sharing," and "Provident Schemes."

One of the most interesting of the discussions was on the subject of domestic service. Miss Clementina Black summed up the situation: servants are not efficient, and the supply does not equal the demand. Domestic service has not yet passed from the feudal stage; the social status of domestic servants is very low while they are shut off from the society of their equals. The speakers agreed that some change was inevitable, and that that change must be in the direction of greater freedom for the servant. "The domestic servant does not want more done for her, but a chance to do more for herself." "All the small and galling traditions of tyranny are connected with domestic service." Many practical remedies were suggested. The founder of the successful Norland Home explained the advantage of trained ladies as nurses. Miss Catherine Webb told of the attempt now being made by the Women's Industrial Council to organise the London charwomen—the home-maker and breadwinner in one. Frau Lina Morgenstern described a successful attempt to found "People's Kitchens" in Berlin.

¹ These facts are taken from the "Papers concerning the International Council."

It was generally agreed that home-making required special training, both in mistress and servant. The same question was discussed from a colonial point of view at the meeting on Emigration. Inferior servants are not wanted in the colonies, and of good ones, the supply was not sufficient for the home market. Lady-helps were said to be in demand in South Africa, where white servants would not mix with native servants. With regard to Canada it was suggested that a successful experiment might be made if ladies, trained as domestic servants, would emigrate to some town, and there, while living together, go out at stated times to help in domestic work. These discussions have shown the need for the scientific treatment of this domestic service problem; they have also suggested some, at least, of the lines on which it might be solved.

On a somewhat kindred subject, "The Housing of Educated Working Women," a paper by Mr. Gilbert Parker was read. Mr. Gilbert Parker has prepared a very carefully thought-out plan to meet the means and needs of this class of would-be "home-makers," based on the study of such successful experiments as the Rowton Houses, the Peabody Trust, and the County Council Houses. "The principles on which it should be run would be practically those of a large private hotel for permanent guests." The expenses for board and lodging would amount, on the average, to 15s. a week.

At the meetings on such familiar subjects as "Trades Unionism," "The Home as Workshop," and "Special Labour Legislation for Women," the papers of the foreign delegates were the chief feature of interest. In the time allotted, only a very general impression could be given, but many interesting comparisons were suggested, and it was particularly stimulating for the workers of the different countries to hear how one country had already taken the step they were themselves contemplating in one direction, another in another. In Canada and New York the shop assistants are already provided with seats; in Illinois home work is regulated and inspected; in Denmark there are no non-Union hands in skilled trades; in Melbourne a minimum wage is established; in Russia men and women have equal rights before the law; in New York an influential Consumers' League has been formed.

At the Trades Unionism Meeting an interesting description of the organisation of tobacco workers in France was given by Madame Vincent; both men and women are included, but the administrative work is left to men. Fru Nelly Hansen told of the rise of Trade Unionism in Denmark and the present lock-out. Mrs. Marland Brodie, Miss Isabel Ford, Mrs. Annie Hicks, and Mr. Herbert Burrows gave some idea of the many difficulties and few successes of the attempt to form Women's Unions in England, and its necessary limitations. On the difficulty of organising the women, in all countries, all the speakers were agreed. But on the question of Special Legislation for Women there was great diversity of opinion. The discussion

mainly turned on a question of fact. Does special legislation tend to drive women out of employment? Further investigation may help in a measure to answer this question.

The Home as a Workshop has also two sides. One described by Mr. P. W. Rolleston and Fröken Ann Hamilton, in the lace and weaving industries of Iceland and Sweden; the other by Mrs. Muirhead, in the home work at Birmingham. To remedy the one by legislation without injuring the other, or any of its future possible developments, is the problem to be solved.

On the Civil Disabilities of Women, and their intimate connection with economic conditions, many interesting papers were read by delegates from Belgium, France, Russia, United States, Canada, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. In none of these countries are the laws in this respect satisfactory or consistent; but it would not be possible to give an account in a short space of the detailed criticism to which they were subjected.

At the meeting on Women Inspectors, in the Professional Section, Mrs. Byles read a paper on their history and work. She showed that future domestic legislation would, to a large extent, be inspired by them. Some women inspectors were present, and took part in the discussion. The keenness of their interest in their work elicited a noteworthy remark from the Chairwoman, the Hon. Mrs. A. T. Lyttelton. She did not attribute the keen interest of women in their public work to the novelty of the situation, but to the fact that with marriage as a probability for most women, only the keenly interested would take up these professions. It was not, therefore, merely a passing phase.

The public meeting on the "Ethics of Wage Earning" was not among the most successful. Perhaps too much was attempted. The "Unpaid Services of the Housewife," "Equal Pay for Equal Work," "The Living Wage," "The Pocket-money Wage," "Legal Regulation of Wages," and "The Ethics of Spending" was rather too large a programme for one evening. We should have been glad to hear more particulars from Mr. Sidney Webb of the effect of the minimum wage on the industry of Melbourne; more from Mrs. Stetson on the different stages in economic development which men and women have respectively reached; more from Mrs. Nathan on the Consumers' League, which failed to take root in England, but has become a powerful means for improving the condition of the workers in New York.

During this Congress the International Council "entered on a new phase of its existence." In passing a resolution in favour of International Arbitration, it for the first time identified itself with a particular movement.

Two questions concerning the future relation of women to economics are suggested by this International Council: "What will be the effect on our economic theories and practices if a body of thinkers start with the home and its needs, with the economic relations of

husband and wife, of parents and child, of mistress and servant, and work out into the organisation of the State?" "And secondly, will the exclusion of women from public life tend to make it easier for them to be pioneers in the interchange of international sympathy and consequent international relations?" F. M. BUTLIN

THE DANISH LOCK-OUT.

THE most widely extended cessation of work which is on record in Denmark has had, at the time of writing, a duration of about three months. At the period of its greatest extension, it is estimated that some 40,000 workers were thrown out of employment, and this number was only reduced by emigration to neighbouring countries on the one hand, and, on the other—and this was, perhaps, a more important cause of reduction—by resort to country districts where, in the summer months, extra hands can be usefully employed. When it is remembered that the total urban population of Denmark, including herein many quite small country towns, does not exceed 800,000, the number of locked-out workmen will be seen to be so great as to represent one out of every five or six households. In some places, as for example in some parts of Copenhagen which are almost entirely inhabited by the manual-labour class, the proportion of families affected directly stood higher, reaching to one in three at least. The trades affected were the building trades and those concerned in iron industries. Hence the comparison with urban population alone is appropriate, especially when one tries to suggest how extensive would be a similar calamity in a country like England, whose population is so much more concerned in manufacturing industries than that of Denmark, with its proportionately large agricultural interests. The dispute in the iron trades of which I wrote in the *ECONOMIC JOURNAL* for December, 1897, was a very important one, but the present dispute is of far greater extent and has certain characteristics which give it an altogether special interest. It is a dispute between two extensive federations, comprising representatives of most varied industries. Federated labour on the one side has been challenged by federated employers on the other, and the matter in dispute has, at bottom, been whether or not the employers should have a sufficiently free control over the arrangement of the work which they direct. A growing discontent with the continued encroachment on this freedom from the side of the labour organisations at last broke out in the order to close all workshops in the trades referred to, and the efforts, which have hardly ceased during the duration of the lock-out, to find a basis for a settlement of the quarrel, have shown ever more and more clearly that the employers considered that they were engaged in a struggle in which was involved a vital principle.