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LABOR AFFAIRS IN EUROPE.

(From a Correspondent.)

LONDON, June 22, 1911.

Very few trades are organized so well and so internationally throughout Europe as is the textile industry. The International Federation of Textile Workers Association, with a membership of 430,000, representing England, Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, and even Bulgaria and Serbia, will meet in triennial convention shortly in Amsterdam, Holland. An increased membership of the affiliated unions is reported from France, Denmark and Holland, but the increase is only substantial in the first named. The International Federation is endeavoring to secure the adhesion of other countries, and especially Italy and Hungary in Europe, and, of course elsewhere of the United States.

The organized textile workers of France now number 50,000, an increase of 16,000 since the Vienna International Convention of 1908 and of 45,000 since the earlier international convention at Zurich. The report of the French delegates to the International Convention at Amsterdam is a record of all-around advance. It tells of considerable steps forward in the direction of uniformity and wage advances. A note on the stagnation of organization, however, amongst the cotton-weavers of the Vosges and Normandy puts it down very largely to the local over-large consumption of alcohol. An interesting comment is also made upon the new French workmen's pension law, as follows:

"Today again we are agitating against the ridiculous operatives' pension law, giving to the workers a sum of 330 francs at the age of 65 years, after they have been paying from 15 to 65 years 21 francs per year. It is stated that there are only 10 per cent. of the operatives who reach that age, while 90 per cent. of them would be already dead. For that reason we have in France baptized that law, 'Pensions for the dead!' We wish to change the law in such a way as to reduce the age limit to 60 years, and in having the burden entailed—88,000,000 francs per year—on the succession of the 250,000 families in France who possess 110,775,000,000 of francs."

From Switzerland it is reported that "living is getting dearer every year, and the wages in Switzerland, as in other countries, are still behind. Importation of frozen meat from Argentina has begun. J. J. Moller, the Danish secretary, writes:

"The principal thing which prevents us from getting what we desire is that the employers are always pointing at the lower prices which they say are paid in all the surrounding countries—Germany, Austria, England, Sweden, and Norway, and we are continually having to tell them that the figures they quote are not in accordance with the information of which we are in possession."

Hungary, which country is facing special difficulties, has been unable to pay its contributions to the international funds, and will not therefore take part in the Amsterdam convention. However, a report is presented by the Hungarian secretary, Schwarz, of Budapest, who says his country, up to the present, "has no professional textile workmen. Most of them consider the factories as a means to an end, in which they only stay until they have found better work, or till they return to agricultural pursuits in the spring. It will take a rather long time before our union reaches the number of members which puts the position of the union on an absolutely steady basis."

The biggest union of brass workers in this country opened its annual convention on June 6th at Birmingham. A resolution was passed heartily supporting the government's insurance bill, but suggesting certain amendments. One of these was that the contributions of the state, the employer, and the workman should be equal, which would mean for invalidity 6 cents each, and for unemployment 4 cents each. A deputation was appointed to wait upon the Home Secretary to urge the institution of a public inquiry into the unhealthy and dirty character of metal polishing with the view of prohibiting women and girls from following that employment. It was also resolved "That this society expresses to the Hon. Winston Churchill, M. P., its high appreciation of the service he has rendered to the cause of labor by his manly denunciation of the gratuitous and irrelevant remarks of judges in dealing with labor questions, and assures him that, in the opinion of trade unionists, judges are mostly biased against trade unions."

The triennial delegate meeting of the General Railway Workers' Union was opened at Leeds on June 5th. A. Fox, general secretary of the Locomotive Engineers' and Firemen's Union, was one of those who welcomed the delegates. He said that among the matters which required their special attention was the conciliation scheme in operation upon the railways. It ought to be amended, and then it would be something of service and benefit to all classes of railwaymen.

The general secretary's report stated that "one thing seems quite clear. That is, we shall have to watch with more than ordinary care the changes which the Legislature proposes to bring about, so that we may, along with the Labor members in the House of Commons, secure improvements for the industrial classes, and especially for the railway workers." Referring to the insurance bill, the report declares that the measure was a very bold and far-reaching one, and one which had been looked forward to by the advanced section of the community for many years. It was one more step towards linking up other late measures begun seventy years ago, and "we are certainly attaining a system which will have the kindly eye of the government placed upon us from the cradle to the grave."

The conference of delegates of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union convened to consider the subject of the pro-

posed international strike of seamen, has terminated. Inquiries at Maritime Hall, London, where the conference met on June 5th, show that the business down for discussion occupied a shorter time than anticipated, for it was originally intended to carry the deliberations over until June 6th. The greatest care is being exercised in order to prevent the leakage of information as to what was effected by the conference. Prominent representatives of the men, however, state that their preparations are quite complete, and the strike is to begin upon a pre-arranged signal from the leaders of the movement.

An interesting national convention is that of the Union of Clerks. It must be remembered that the term "clerk" in this country covers such workers as bookkeepers and general workers in offices only. Delegates attended representing 118 branches and the total membership is 3,568, an increase on the year of 1,218. British office workers undoubtedly are a most difficult class to organize. They do not, even where they work together in comparatively large numbers, display the spirit of comradeship that is in evidence amongst other workers. From the chief clerk down to the junior office boy they seem to be waiting and watching for an opportunity of stepping into the shoes of their immediate seniors, that unfortunately appearing to them to be their only hope of bettering their condition. Such an outlook is not calculated to beget a spirit of united effort and fellowship, and the clerk consequently looks upon the grievance of his fellow-clerk with but scant sympathy—an attitude decidedly distinct from that of workers like the mechanic or joiner, who sees in an injustice to one of his fellows a potential, if not an immediate, injustice to all.

A special feature of this convention has been the charges leveled at the other unions with regard to sweating their clerks. Statements were made that clerks employed by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Shop Assistants' Union, and other unions, were being paid at a lower rate than the minimum for which the union was agitating, though the Trade Union Congress had requested them to adopt the minimum scale. Upon this another delegate made a strong complaint of the conditions under which the Clerks' Union's own clerks worked at the head office. Three men and two girls were crowded into a place "little better than a rabbit-hutch." The wretched conditions under which they worked were such that if the clerks were animals the Royal Society would straightway come down upon them and compel them to provide proper accommodation.

The large scale of the German trade unions and the similar combinations amongst German employers are leading to gigantic labor contests in the Fatherland. One of the greatest of recent times was the struggle of last year in the building trade, which ended

in a general gain in wages of about 60 cents per week, accompanied by a decrease in working hours. So great was the struggle that at the end of April, 1910, the number of locked-out working people was estimated at 150,000 to 185,000. In the middle of May, according to a statement by the employers, there were nearly 200,000 employees locked out. The struggle was finally ended by a special court of arbitration, composed of three representatives of employers, three representatives of the workmen, and three disinterested members, both sides pledging themselves to agree by a decision of the court. The decision was arrived at on June 16, 1910. What is particularly interesting in this matter is the great rise in wages which was obtained. It is a tribute to the strength of German trade unions.

UNUSUAL PLUNDER IN SIGHT.

Power sites are valuable pieces of property, and the representatives of the big business interests think that it would be easier to obtain control of them through State Legislatures than through the National Government. Anyway, the matter is being approached by United States Senators with more than usual caution, indicating more than usual plunder in sight.

Pittsburg, Pa., recently had a commission of nine men appointed by the governor to rule the city. Not one is a workingman. Such commission form of government is a step backward. Think of Portland being ruled by nine men appointed by such a governor as Simon's friend Bowerman!

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