THE INTERPARLIAMENTARY UNION

By DR. CHRISTIAN L. LANGE
Secretary General of the Union

The Interparliamentary Union was founded during the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889. Two men who had played a prominent part in the movement for peace and international understanding had taken the initiative. Randal Cremer, a member of the House of Commons, founder of the International Arbitration League, addressed himself to M. Frédéric Passy, who was the leader of the peace movement in France, and suggested that they should invite to a preliminary meeting in Paris in 1888 some members of Parliament from the different countries who were sympathetic to their ideas. Just about this time there was a movement on foot for the conclusion of permanent arbitration treaties between the United States of America and Great Britain. Randal Cremer had obtained signatures from 234 members of the House of Commons, of some prominent members of the House of Lords, and some leaders of the trade-union movement in favor of such a treaty, and had carried this address across the Atlantic and submitted it to President Cleveland in the White House. At the same time Frédéric Passy had called the attention of the French Parliament to this movement, and this was how the two men got into touch with each other. At the preliminary meeting in 1888 only French and British parliamentarians were present, but they decided to organize a meeting to which members of all parliaments should be invited, during the exhibition, in the following year. Then 96 parliamentarians, representing nine different countries, met in Paris and founded "The Interparliamentary Union for International Arbitration."

The interesting thing is how the two founders and the institution which they called into life centered on a limited object of a constructive nature—the advancement of arbitration in international affairs. It was a happy thought. It is doubtful whether hard-headed statesmen would have affiliated with an institution having a very general character of rather a moral and sentimental nature. Up till that period the peace movement had had a pronouncedly moral and even religious character. The friends of peace were, so to speak, a small sect, rather despised by so-called practical men. It was the thin edge of the wedge which was introduced when arbitration was put to the front by the interparliamentarians, and soon very important results were obtained.

During the next years interparliamentary conferences were held in quite a number of European capitals. The meetings became more and more representative and attracted attention in wider and wider circles. Just to show how quite unexpected results may sometimes come from generous initiatives, the following story may be told; it is a matter of history which has quite recently come to light:

After having, during the very first years, advocated the conclusion of permanent arbitration treaties, the interparliamentarians from 1892 concentrated their efforts on an attempt to create a permanent Arbitration Tribunal. This was due to the initiative of the Hon. Philip Stanhope, a young member of the British House of Commons, who later became still better known as Lord Weardale. He suggested that a special committee should be entrusted with the task of elaborating a draft international convention for such a tribunal, and in 1895, at the fifth conference, which sat at Brussels, this draft was discussed and put into shape. The following year the conference met at Buda-Pest, in Hungary. This conference was followed by the Russian Consul-General in the Hungarian capital, M. Basily, and his secretary, M. Priklonsky. On the proposal of the well-known Hungarian statesman, Count Apponyi, who from that time onward was one of the leaders of the Interparliamentary Union, the conference paid the compliment to their distinguished Russian visitors of suggesting that non-parliamentary countries might also be represented at the interparliamentary conferences if so authorized by their governments. The Russian Consul wrote a report to his Foreign Office about the conference and its discussions. Soon both he and his secretary
were called home to St. Petersburg, where a new Minister of Foreign Affairs had taken office. In 1898 the Russian War Minister proposed in the cabinet a large vote for the acquisition of new artillery, in view of the extensions which the Austrian Government had made to their armaments. The Finance Minister, Count Witte, protested on grounds of economy, and during the discussion the idea of an understanding with Austria that both countries should abstain from increasing their weapons was mooted. This, however, appeared difficult of execution. On hearing about this, M. Priklyonsky prevailed upon his chief, Basily, to lay before the Foreign Minister the idea of a general understanding in favor of a limitation of armaments. He reminded him of the conference which had met at Buda-Pest and of the growing importance of the peace movement in general. Basily asked his secretary to draw up a memorandum on this matter, and the Foreign Minister, Count Muravieff, consented to submit this memorandum to the young Czar, Nicholas II. Nicholas at first absolutely refused to comply with such a suggestion, but after some time, through the reaction characteristic of irresolute natures—he himself said, on that occasion, that he had changed his mind under the influence of the Czarina—accepted the idea, and the consequence was that the famous Muravieff manifesto was launched upon a startled world in August, 1898. It will be remembered that this manifesto suggested a meeting of an international conference which would have to discuss the problem of the limitation of armaments.

The world was not only startled; it was largely also scandalized. The celebrated German historian, Theodor Mommsen, said that the conference was an "error of printing" in the history of the world. As a matter of fact, limitation of armaments proved impracticable at that moment, and even the Russian Government foresaw, before the meeting of the conference, that it could hardly succeed in this field. Again the Russians followed on the lines indicated by the interparliamentary conferences. To the object of disarmament a second circular, laying down a detailed program of the conference, added the suggestion of developing international organization in favor of arbitration, and when the conference met at The Hague, in 1899, the draft elaborated by the Brussels Conference, four years before, was taken as the basis of discussion. The Belgian Senator, Baron Descamps, who had presided over the Interparliamentary Conference at Brussels, became the rapporteur of the special committee of The Hague Conference, and under the inspiration of Andrew White, head of the American delegation; Lord Pauncefote, then British Ambassador in Washington, head of the British delegation, and Léon Bourgeois, head of the French delegation, the famous Hague Convention on the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes came into being, which exactly followed the lines indicated by the interparliamentary draft of Brussels in 1898.

Thus the seed deposited by parliamentary friends of peace grew fruit, even more important than any of the initiators had expected. The international work of The Hague was started and an important step taken in the direction of the organization of international relations.

It goes without saying that the interparliamentarians were encouraged by these results. At the same time the Union had perfected its organization. It had founded a permanent office at Berne, in Switzerland; groups had been formed in different countries; some individual Americans had been present at the conferences held at the last years of the century, and among them was Congress-man Theodore E. Burton, who is still an active and interested member of the institution. In 1904 a National Group was formed in the American Congress, and it at once showed its vitality by inviting the Union to hold its conference that year at the St. Louis Exhibition. Here a new and important initiative was taken. On the basis of a report read by Theodore Burton, the conference decided to ask President Roosevelt to call a second Hague Conference, and Roosevelt, with characteristic promptitude, at once accepted it. The American Government had, however, for reasons of diplomatic etiquette, to stand aside and leave the convocation of this conference also to the Russian Government. Because of the Russo-Japanese War, the meeting could
only take place in 1907. For this conference, too, the interparliamentary conference prepared material. At one of the most important meetings of the Union, the conference held in London in 1906, during the first year of Campbell-Bannerman’s administration, a draft model treaty of arbitration was hammered into shape. The following year it became the chief object of discussion at The Hague Conference. While at the first conference only 26 States had been represented, this second conference could legitimately be called a Parliament of Humanity. All the States of Latin America were represented there, the full number of delegations being 44. The result of the deliberations at the Hague on this central question was, however, negative. In diplomatic conferences the principle of unanimity has to prevail, and because of the opposition of the German Government and of some other European countries the world treaty of arbitration failed.

The interparliamentarians realized that though they had succeeded in inspiring action of the States along the lines which was theirs, the Union was as yet not strong enough to carry full victories. The lesson was taken to heart, and during the following years the members of the institution concentrated their efforts on the creation of a more efficient organization. Lord Weardale was the heart of this effort. He had prevailed upon his own government to give the promise that if and when the Interparliamentary Union created a better organization for itself, the British Government would be prepared to give an annual subvention toward the expenses. At the conference held in Berlin in 1908 important decisions were, therefore, taken. The Union had for some time been led by an Interparliamentary Council composed of two delegates from each group. This was a rather cumbersome organization. Now an executive committee of five was put at the head of the Union and a permanent office, with a paid secretary-general, was created. The example of Great Britain was soon followed by other countries, and the finances of the Union were thus put on a better basis. By contributing toward the expenses of the Union, the governments recognized the usefulness of its work and implicitly engaged themselves to take account of its recommendations. During the next few years the efforts of the Union were directed toward the preparation for the Third Hague Conference, which was expected to meet in 1915 or 1916. The most important draft prepared by the parliamentarians during these years was a proposal for a Permanent Court of International Justice.

Then, in August, 1914, the World War intervened. The preparations for the next conference, which was the nineteenth in the series, had just been finished. It was to meet at Stockholm, and more than 20 parliaments had announced their participation in great numbers. All the preparatory documents had been printed and were being distributed. The conference was to discuss, among other important subjects, a detailed plan for an International Court of Justice. The following year the Union was to meet at Washington, where Congress had extended a cordial invitation and voted an important sum for the reception of the parliamentarians. The year after that a conference was to sit at Madrid. The outlook then for the work of the Union had been bright and hopeful.

Now everything was cut short. The Interparliamentary Bureau, which for the last years had been located at Brussels, had to leave that city and was transferred to Norway. The activity, properly speaking, of the Union could not continue. One single object remained to be looked after: the maintenance of the organization and of the relations between the central office and the different national groups. The task was not easy, and during the war several of the groups died of anemia, so to speak. Nevertheless, a sufficient number, particularly in the States neutral during the war and in the two Anglo-Saxon countries, were maintained and developed a certain activity. They not only remained in touch with the central bureau, but some of them worked with success for the preparation of an international organization to be created after the war. It is said that the famous French revolutionary leader, Abbot Sieyes, was asked after the terrorism what he had done during that period. He simply answered, “I managed to live.” The In-
terparliamentary Union might have said the same thing after the war.

As soon as the World War had come to a close a new situation presented itself. A League of Nations was created as an outgrowth of many efforts, those of the Interparliamentary Union not being the least important. When the Council of the Union met for the first time after peace had been concluded, in October, 1919, at Geneva, it was quite natural that the first question to be discussed was whether it would be possible and natural for the Interparliamentary Union to continue its work. Some voices had been heard saying that after the League of Nations had been created the Union had no serious mission to fulfill. This, however, was not the feeling which prevailed among parliamentarians themselves. They realized that any governmental organization, whether the League of Nations, or the Pan-American Union, or the International Labor Office, or any diplomatic conference whatsoever, was exclusively, and could only be exclusively, a representation of the governments. The Union, through its parliamentary character, would still remain a valuable element in the international life of the world.

Besides, as to the most important institution in existence, the new League of Nations, it was to be expected that for some years to come it would not be of a universal character. There were among the members of the Council who met at Geneva different views as to the present character and the future of the League. Most of them cordially supported the institution, though there were divergent views as to its proper line of development. Others were rather opposed to it. It was unanimously resolved that the Union was to go on with its work and at the first conference held after the war, at Stockholm, in 1921, the important question of the relations between and the relative importance of the League of Nations and the Interparliamentary Union was discussed. It appeared then that, particularly among the American members, but also among the European ones, there was considerable doubt as to the future of the League. The conference laid down its views in the following two resolutions:

I

The 19th Interparliamentary Conference cordially approves the principle of an association of nations with the aim of organizing the world for the maintenance of peace, which the conference is entitled to consider as an important aspect of the work zealously pursued by the Union for a long period of years, and, recognizing that forty-eight different nations have already joined in the existing League of Nations, registers as its opinion that it is both urgent and necessary that such an association should attain an all-embracing character, which will render it able to exercise that high mission with which it must naturally be entrusted.

II

Always anxious to devote itself to useful and practical work, the conference is of the opinion that the Interparliamentary Union must increase and strengthen its activities in the field of international co-operation, to the end that the burden of armaments may be reduced and the peace of the world may be attained.

In these resolutions it was implied that the Interparliamentary Union was to go on with its work as an independent organization.

Since the war three conferences of the Union have met—at Stockholm in 1921, at Vienna in 1922, and at Copenhagen in 1923. This year the conference will meet in Switzerland, and for next year an invitation has been received to meet at Washington, where the Union would have sat ten years before if the war had not intervened.

The progress of the organization has been considerable during these years. Twelve groups were represented at Stockholm in 1921; now 27 national groups are in full working order. This is not nearly as great a number as it should be. Considerable efforts have been made to attract parliamentarians from other countries, particularly from Latin America. The Stockholm Conference passed a resolution expressly inviting these countries to join the Union. So far, only Chili has been represented, at the Conference of Vienna. It is the universal desire of the members of the Union to have with them, as soon as possible, an important number of Latin
American politicians, and it is hoped that the Washington Conference next year may see this wish fulfilled.

Which are the questions in the forefront of interparliamentary discussions at the present moment?

First, problems of an economic and financial nature. The Union has worked with all its might for the liquidation of the war system of seclusion and suspicion. It has tried, and partly obtained, satisfaction as to the abolition of the passport system; it is going this year to discuss particularly the problems of international railway traffic and its development toward more normal conditions. Last year, at Copenhagen, a most important debate took place on the closely related questions of reparation for war damages and of interallied debts. This debate is illuminating in so far as it shows the particular usefulness of an interparliamentary discussion. There was no lack of opposite points of view. The American viewpoint as to interallied debts is absolutely different, not to say opposed, to the European one. Frenchmen and Belgians on the one hand, Germans on the other, do not look in the same way on the reparations problem. The debates were, therefore, lively and sometimes heated; nevertheless, it was possible to arrive at a unanimous conclusion recommending a solution of the problem along international lines. It may be said that the creation of the committees of experts was the first step on the way outlined by the Copenhagen Conference, where more than 400 parliamentarians from 26 different countries were present.

The problem of minorities is a most vexed one in the old continent of Europe. It will be generally recognized that great progress was made through the settlement after the war by the liberation of nationalities, such as the Poles and the Czechs, who had for centuries been under foreign rule. Besides, an organization was created giving protection to racial and religious minorities, in the States of Central Europe; but at the same time these reforms have given rise to new problems. Social conditions have changed and large communities of highly civilized people find themselves in a very difficult position. The League of Nations, which exercises a sort of supervision in this field, has not been able to give satisfaction to all parties concerned. The advantage of discussion of these difficult problems before the interparliamentary conferences, as compared to the Assembly of the League of Nations, is that while in the latter only governmental representatives can meet and speak, the Interparliamentary Conference also gives an opportunity for accredited representatives of minorities to be present and to voice their views. A most interesting proposal has been mooted in this connection. It is due to a Swiss politician belonging, then, to a country consisting of three or four different races, but which has been able to create a system of mutual tolerance which should be an example to be followed by other countries. The proposal tends to create, in countries where minorities exist, round-table conferences to settle local questions. It is to be hoped that some States may act upon this suggestion. It would present the great advantage that some questions might be eliminated from an international discussion before the League of Nations.

It will be impossible in this short article to enumerate all the problems submitted to discussion within the Interparliamentary Union, such as the control of foreign policy, the publicity of treaties and institution of open diplomacy, or the different questions in the field of social politics, or colonial problems, particularly the interesting innovation of colonial mandates under the Covenant of the League.

Some words should, however, be said as to the chief problem, perhaps, in the international field at present—the problem of a limitation of armaments. The conference to sit at Bern in August will take up for discussion and push toward practical realization some questions as to ways and means in this field. In the first place, it will discuss the question of the private manufacture of arms and munitions and the control of the traffic in such merchandise. It is hoped that the co-operation, within the Union, of Americans, on the one side, and representatives of the League of Nations States on the other, may prove fruitful of practical results. In the second place, a most important question for the relations between France and Germany will be put forward, that of
demilitarized zones on exposed and dangerous frontiers. In the third place, some plans for a reduction of armaments on the basis of budgets or on the basis of peace effectives of the States will be submitted for consideration.

It is interesting to note that the discussion on the problems of disarmament will take place at Geneva itself, in the hall where some days later the League of Nations Assembly will sit. That Assembly will be remarkable through the presence of some of the new leaders of European governments. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and M. Herriot have just declared that they intend to be present. Perhaps they may find in the proposals of the Interparliamentary Conference food for thought and action.

It will be seen that the field of action of the Interparliamentary Union has been considerably extended since its foundation, thirty-five years ago. It does not limit itself exclusively to the question of arbitration. It is becoming more and more a sort of "Parliament of parliaments," where all questions of international interest can be raised. On the agenda for the Conference at Washington next year it is to be foreseen that particularly the question of an extension of international jurisdiction and the preparation of a codification of international law will form the main subject of discussion.

It is characteristic of the conferences that all political parties are welcome and admitted. Only one group can be created in each parliament, but this group is not exclusive; any member of parliament may join. The voting rules within the conferences are such that the different points of view can be represented through a proportional system.

The Interparliamentary Union is working along three lines of action: It tries, in the first place, to suggest and inspire new measures. Governments are proverbially slow to move. In the Union new ideas are brought forward for the consideration of the governments—now for action to be taken within each country, now for discussion when they meet in common council.

In the second place, the Union helps toward the realization of international reforms as soon as they have obtained the sanction through one or other of the international conferences. It must be remembered that a conference, either in the form of the Assembly of the League of Nations or of a meeting of the Pan-American Union, or of any conference, whatever diplomatic form it may take, can only submit draft conventions for the ratification of the governments. Repeatedly the Interparliamentary Union has acted and is still acting through its national groups in order to obtain the necessary ratification of such drafts from the governments. A case in point is its action with regard to the Naval Conference at Washington two years ago, which obtained the cordial approval of the Vienna Conference in 1922. In so far, the national groups may be considered as executive organs of the Union.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, is the personal contact and the open discussion between political men from different countries, even from different continents, which is made possible through the annual meetings of the Union. Thus ties are created which have proved fruitful in the past and which may contribute, perhaps, still greater results in the future.

A governmental or diplomatic assembly must needs be dominated by national and exclusive interests. Anxiety for these interests is quite legitimate, and the Union has never overlooked or forgotten them. There is, however, a danger that they may assume supreme importance, to the exclusion of other considerations. Side by side with the representatives of national and political interests, there should also be representatives of the common interests of mankind. In the world today, there are great political, economic, and humanitarian movements which are not confined within national boundaries and which seek to obtain international sanction for their efforts, such as, to quote only a few: international social reform and improvement of labor conditions; the principle of free trade; protection for the rights of national and religious minorities; the advancement of intellectual interests, and the efforts directed against intemperance and moral depravity. These movements will find a suitable channel for the expression of their views in an unofficial
body such as the Interparliamentary Union, which has at its disposal a wider and more elastic organization than an exclusively official institution composed of States, such as the League of Nations.

The Union, therefore, still has important work to do. In accomplishment of this work it appeals to all men of good will throughout the parliaments of the world.