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ALBERT THOMAS

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ALBERT THOMAS

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by

E. J. PHELAN

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E. J. P.

April 1936.

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Introduction

Albert Thomas was certainly one of the significant figures of our time. It is to be hoped, therefore, that some day a biographer will be found who will present us with a balanced account of his achievements and a vivid portrait of his impressive personality.

Meanwhile those who worked with him can do something in the way of providing or preserving raw material for future biographical use. The present volume is intended to be a modest effort in that direction and it has, perhaps, a special justification. As a journalist, a politician, a Member of the French Cabinet, and an Ambassador, Albert Thomas' work can be appraised against a known background and measured by common standards. As the first Director of the International Labour Office his position was unique, and there are no comparisons that will serve. That his achievement in this difficult post was a notable one is generally admitted, but his real success in this sphere can be only partially measured, if at all, by official records of Conferences held, Conventions adopted, and ratifications obtained. Such records must be weighed, or rather weighted, in the light of the creative effort that preceded them and the difficulties which it had to overcome.

Albert Thomas was, indeed, much more to the International Labour Office than its successful manager. He came, in fact, to be identified with it to a degree which made it difficult for many

people to distinguish between the institution and its Director,¹ and it is possible that the reader may feel that this volume leads him to the same conclusion. If so, it will have succeeded in re-creating something of the impression that Albert Thomas made in life on those with whom he came in contact. That impression was a sincere tribute to Albert Thomas' tremendous and all-pervading personality. But it was misleading and unjust. It obscured Albert Thomas' constructive gifts, and it ignored the rôle and the contribution of certain members of the Governing Body, in particular of its Chairman, Arthur Fontaine, and of Harold Butler, the Deputy Director of the Office. In any history of the International Labour Office their names will inevitably find frequent and honourable mention. In the present volume they appear only incidentally, since what is attempted is a portrait of Albert Thomas and not a history of the I.L.O.

But though others made outstanding contributions to the inception and development of the Office, Albert Thomas' contribution had a special quality and a special value; and it is a sound though inaccurate popular instinct which credits him with its creation. As a matter of fact, Albert Thomas had no hand in planning the International Labour Organisation nor in bringing it into being. Barnes, Butler and Delevingne built the ship, and sound and seaworthy she proved. But Albert Thomas was the Captain chosen to take her on her voyage across uncharted seas. Men keep in their memory Columbus and not the shipwrights who fashioned and caulked the *Santa Maria*. While the name of Columbus inevitably suggests America, it is not from his discoveries that we learn to know and appreciate the man. Albert Thomas' biographer will find plenty of records of cargoes brought safely to port. But he will find little of the

¹I say that without the present Director, in my opinion, this Organisation would be dead' (Mr. Gemmill, South African Employers' Delegate, speaking in the discussion on the Director's Report at the xvth session of the International Labour Conference, 1931).

perils of the voyage, little of the difficulties of navigation, little—and how could he?—of non-existent charts. So it may be of some value to have, in however fragmentary a form, some of the recollections and impressions of a member of the crew. This volume pretends to be no more. To tell the full story of Albert Thomas and the International Labour Office would involve reviewing the social policy and development of half the countries in the world during more than a decade. Nothing remotely resembling such an ambitious task is here undertaken. Neither is any attempt made to give an account of the thirty odd Conventions which the Conference adopted under his leadership, nor the many hundreds of decisions which he secured from the Governing Body. Here will be found only some indication of what he was aiming at, and how he conceived and organised the instrument which was given into his charge. Even within this limited field no claim is made to completeness. All that has been attempted is to show the nature of his effort, the kind of obstacles he had to overcome, and to try to give some idea of his ideals and personality in the framework in which they were made manifest to his staff.

One matter has, however, been dealt with in fairly complete fashion, and that is the story of how Albert Thomas came to the International Labour Office. He told the story himself as follows:

“The Washington Conference had been convened. It was at that moment that my friends, the French workers, came to me and asked me if I would be a candidate for the Directorship of the International Labour Office. They desired to seek support for my nomination among their comrades from other countries and even from employers and governments. They went to Washington with this intention and when . . . the Governing Body met they put forward my candidature. . . . I was provisionally elected by eleven votes against nine. The eleven votes in my favour were the votes of six workers and five employers.

... A telegram informed me of this result, and a telegram from the workers urged that nevertheless I should accept. I accepted. ... The Governing Body met in Paris in January 1920, and on this occasion the governments were pleased to ratify my appointment unanimously.¹

Albert Thomas' account is, of course, correct, but it is more discreet than complete. It was not thus easily that even the first and simplest steps towards setting up an international organisation could be taken, and since it is possible to tell the story more completely, I have ventured to do so. It provides a sample of the *kind* of difficulties which the creation of the new international machinery had to encounter. These difficulties are not easy to describe or appreciate in the more complicated forms in which they constantly threatened every step of the new Organisation throughout its early years. It is worth while, therefore, to be able to see them clearly revealed in connection with one simple issue.

The detailed story of Albert Thomas' appointment also serves incidentally to warn the reader of certain prejudices which require no apology. I came into the international service after some years in the British Civil Service. I brought with me, I hope, some of the qualities which British civil servants are supposed to acquire. I certainly brought many of their prejudices. I did not find it easy to accept other methods which seemed to me repugnant to some of the principles which in the British service were regarded as fundamental. And in particular I had a sane and holy horror of administrative methods which savoured of political inspiration or interference. Perhaps my experience was insufficient to enable me to realise that even in England the greatest civil servants must be to some extent politicians. Perhaps, though more certainly, I did not realise sufficiently the difference between the smooth and perfect running of the wheels of the English service in their well-worn

¹Speech at Bucharest, 1930.

grooves, and the fact that the wheels could not be left to guide themselves where there were no grooves. Perhaps, heretical thought as it would have seemed to me then, in an era of rapidly changing conditions, even England cannot afford grooves, and her tried and proved administrative methods do not represent the last word and a final perfection. Be that as it may, Albert Thomas had very definite ideas of his own as to the administrative methods which the Office should apply. There was bound to be conflict, and, though out of the conflict came concessions on both sides and the beginning of an international technique of administration, the process was neither rapid nor easy. That fact is proof that those of us whose ideas differed from his did not just succumb to his charm, nor wilt before his overwhelming personality, nor surrender before the assaults of his indefatigable energy. If little by little we came to the conclusion that even when he seemed most wrong there was quite a possibility that he might be right, it was that the conviction was steadily born in us that in him the Organisation had found its destined leader, and that his vision of its potentialities was both profound and prophetic. With none more than with those who served under him from day to day is his reputation more secure. In attaching a value to their testimony it should not be forgotten that their tribute is no facile response, such as he could constantly obtain from a great audience, but something that grew out of an original attitude of criticism, misgiving and even sometimes distrust.

Here is one such testimony. That it has taken the form of a rather personal narrative is to be explained in part by the belief that it might thus be rendered more readable, but probably more truly by the fact that it was easier to write that way. It is naturally through the medium of personal experiences that those who worked with Albert Thomas approach his memory. In recounting such experiences I have made no effort to arrange

them in chronological order where strict chronological order is not important. They have been used as they suggested themselves to me while writing, as apt to illustrate either a trait of Albert Thomas' character or a feature of the background against which he worked.

There will be found in the following pages not only some account of Albert Thomas at the International Labour Office but also some discussion of certain problems of international administration. They have been stated in terms which it is hoped will prove easily intelligible to the general reader. They are, in fact, an inevitable element in any attempt to describe or appreciate Albert Thomas' achievement. But the discussion of them, such as it is, should be accompanied by a note of warning. The reader will find French and British procedure sometimes contrasted, and almost always to the advantage of the latter. He must not assume that the description of either is in any sense authoritative. It was in the main French and British procedure which had to be conciliated or welded in the early stages of the Office's existence. Where they are compared in the present narrative the comparison is made on such smattering of knowledge as the author possessed at the time. No doubt authorities on the respective administrative methods of these two great countries might have stated their practice more accurately, perhaps even quite differently. But the problem of conflicting procedures and conceptions of organisation was not laid for solution before experts or authorities. It had to be solved *ambulando*, or rather *currendo*. I have described the difficulties, the apprehensions and the misunderstandings of those early days as my limited knowledge apprehended them. It is only as to what was the practice ultimately evolved that I can pretend to speak with any authority, and even there I can only bear witness to the facts and must not be taken as expressing any final judgment. The problem of the working of international

institutions is still in its infancy. They work, and they work with a high degree of success. But unquestioned and almost automatic methods of administration, giving every guarantee of fairness and efficiency, comparable to those employed in great national government departments where responsibilities are accurately defined and nicely adjusted, will be achieved only when the international organisations have had time to evolve their own tried rules and traditions.

Whatever those rules and traditions may eventually be, there is little doubt, however, that Albert Thomas will be held to have contributed to them with astonishing foresight. In so doing he made not the least of his many contributions to the better and more peaceful ordering of our world.

There is an island among the thousand in the Mälaren peninsula. . . . There are in the middle of the islet, a hundred feet up, a restaurant and a dancing-floor. . . .

*Suddenly on the path beneath us there was the sound of running feet. A girl, dew-spangled as a spider's web, came into the tiny circle of light and paused there like Psyche listening for the god's beloved feet. Presently she heard his step. Light as the mist into which she melted she sprang forward. All gazed; and now, as in the spot-light of the stage, the pursuer vaulted on with the great bound of the immortal Nijinsky in *The Spectre of the Rose*. Like *Discobolus*, he leaned forward in the act to throw, the first lines of his beautiful adolescence as decisive as the last lines of a sonnet. He too heard and, laughing aloud, followed the nymph in flight.*

Albert arose. 'Behold', he said, looking into the misty night, 'our task—to make the world safe for such. That is the everlasting movement of life—saying, "Yes, oh yes." Behind us is the eternal stagnation of death or war, muttering, as it crashes the axe, "No, no, no." We will say "yes" for them and for all like them hereafter. I give you the toast of "yes".'

'Coupled', cried someone, 'with the name of Albert Thomas.'

We rose and drank to 'yes' coupled with the name of Albert Thomas.

HUMBERT WOLFE, *Portraits by Inference*

Chapter I

How Albert Thomas came to the International Labour Organisation

I first saw Albert Thomas in January 1920.

We met in a back room on the first floor of a house in Piccadilly.

It was a rather curious room to find in such an aristocratic quarter. There were no curtains on the window, which appeared to have escaped a cleaner's attention for an indefinite period; there was no carpet; a set of rough unpainted shelves lurched unsteadily against one wall, and several bundles of dust-covered papers seemed in imminent danger of falling to the floor; a cheap, stained table and four chairs completed the furniture. Such light as a gloomy winter's day affords served mainly to reveal the state of the window. It did little to illuminate the room, and the corners held deep and almost palpable shadows through which could be dimly seen fine lines of gilt outlining graceful panels and a glint of more gilding from a distant cornice. Dignity struggled with neglect, as it had done in a hundred similar rooms conscripted to serve as temporary offices for some sub-activity connected with the war. Now the war was over and the room was awaiting its release. In the meantime it and its fellows in the same house had been lent for the planning of some of the hopes of peace.

When I came in there were three people in the room: Harold Butler, the Secretary-General of the Washington Conference; Arthur Fontaine, the Chairman of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office; and a smallish stout man with a brown beard who I knew must be Albert Thomas. Arthur Fontaine introduced me to him. He shook hands and said 'I have heard of you.' I wanted to say that I hoped what he had heard was good, but my French was not equal to the occasion, and I murmured something about being glad to make his acquaintance. Then we sat down: Fontaine at the head of the table with his back to the window: Albert Thomas on his right and Butler on his left: and I at the bottom of the table to take notes of the conversation which was to follow.

I now had a chance of looking at Albert Thomas more closely. I knew, of course, the outline of his record—that he had been the close collaborator of Jaurés; that he had played a great part in securing socialist support for the war; and that as Under-Secretary of State and later as Minister of Munitions he had accomplished something similar to Lloyd George's munitions achievement in England, and had made an outstanding reputation as an organiser and as a person of tremendous driving power. But as I watched him I did not see any obvious sign of these qualities. I saw a stout man who sat easily with his elbows on the table, sometimes clasping his hands together, sometimes playing with a pencil, sometimes caressing his brown and rather silky beard which curled out and upwards at its lower extremity. His head was powerfully shaped; his hair thick with no grey in it. He wore old-fashioned spectacles with small lenses and steel rims, and behind them his eyes were thoughtful. He smiled occasionally: a smile that was attractive and yet had something curious about it. It was only afterwards that I noted that when he smiled or laughed his teeth remained invisible. I was struck by his silence—I had been told by someone that he

was 'a terrible talker'. I wondered if he was silent because he had nothing to say. At all events he said little and left the discussion almost entirely to Butler and Fontaine. But at the same time his presence made itself felt in some way which eluded definition. Perhaps it was his complete ease; it suggested a confidence in himself that needed no advertisement.

I should have painted a very different portrait of him a few months later, as this book will show. But it is important to recall this first impression, not only because first impressions are interesting, but because I happened to see him, as he was rarely or never seen, in a mood of detachment: rarely or never so seen because he was never detached. He was a man whose interests were almost all-embracing, a man who reacted lavishly to every experience. His superabundant energy, his open intelligence, and above all his passionate interest in all the life about him never left him an indifferent spectator to any human activity. He was, I think, a man who could not be bored, not because he would have thought of other things, or analysed his own reactions to boredom or otherwise sought escape: he would just simply have been interested in the bore. In London he was neither bored nor interested, or rather he was interested in something else. He listened to the discussion simply for information; but it was information about details, information which was almost, if not quite, irrelevant. At least that is how I came to read his attitude afterwards.

It will first, however, be necessary to explain why Butler, Fontaine and Thomas were meeting and what was the purpose of their discussion. To do that it will be necessary to refer briefly to events of an earlier date.

At the Peace Conference, after lengthy negotiations, which had been both exciting and complicated, the constitution of an International Labour Organisation had been drawn up and incorporated in the Peace Treaties. The story of those negotia-

tions has been fully told elsewhere.¹ It is sufficient to recall here the main lines of the Organisation which it had thus been decided to create. Its original Members were to be the original Members of the League of Nations, and States becoming Members of the League were *ipso facto* to become Members of the International Labour Organisation. The organs of the Organisation were to be a Conference, meeting at least once a year, a Governing Body or executive council, meeting at more frequent intervals, and an International Labour Office which would act as a secretariat to these two bodies and which was also entrusted with functions of research. So far there was nothing very striking in the plan. But an element of novelty was introduced in the provisions made for the composition of the two representative bodies, the Conference and the Governing Body. In each of them employers and workers were given direct representation. Each delegation attending the Conference was to consist of four delegates, two representing the Government concerned, one representing the employers, and one the workers. These latter were to be chosen in agreement with the most representative organisations of employers and workers in the country concerned. All four delegates were to have equal rights in the Conference, and in particular the right to vote individually and independently. The system has now become familiar by long usage, but it must be remembered that it constituted at its inception an almost revolutionary novelty and an astonishing break with the traditions of official international conferences and the principle of State sovereignty on which their composition and procedure had been based.

A further break with tradition was made by the provision that the Conference could arrive at its decisions by a majority

¹See the *Origins of the International Labour Organisation*, edited by Professor J. T. Shorwell, University of Columbia Press.

of two-thirds. The principle of sovereignty had hitherto required unanimity, and a derogation from this rule was the more extraordinary in so far as the decisions of the Conference were to be in effect draft treaties which, on ratification, would become binding.

In the Governing Body twelve seats were provided for Governments and six each for workers and employers, the latter to be elected by the group of workers' and employers' delegates attending the Conference once every three years.

Another novelty in the constitution of the Organisation was that the work of the Conference was linked up with the national parliaments. Its proposals for international action had to be submitted to the national parliaments for approval or disapproval.

The permanent staff to run this novel machinery, called, as we have seen, the International Labour Office, was to be under the control of a Director appointed by the Governing Body.

Such in brief outline was the structure of the mechanism decided on by the Peace Conference. It had, however, to be created before it could run, and for this purpose the Peace Conference appointed an 'Organising Committee' whose task it was to prepare the first meeting of the International Labour Conference, which had been invited to meet at Washington by the Government of the United States.

So far as could be foreseen at Paris this was a logical and practical scheme. The Organising Committee would prepare the Conference: the Conference would appoint the Governing Body: the Governing Body would appoint the Director: the Director would appoint his staff and set up the International Labour Office, and then the machinery, being complete, could be left to run itself.

The process, however, was far from being as simple as it appeared. Political problems relating to the Membership of

Germany and Austria arose almost immediately in an acute form. It seemed, in fact, at one time as if the Washington Conference would have to be postponed. At last the problem was disposed of by being referred by the Supreme Council to the Washington Conference for decision. Then there was a struggle for the eight non-elective Governmental seats on the Governing Body which had been allocated to the eight States of Chief Industrial Importance. No test of industrial importance had been provided and there were, as might have been expected, more candidates than seats. Moreover, the Council of the League, which was to decide any dispute in the matter, had not come into existence, and there was, in consequence, some doubt as to whether the Governing Body could be brought into being at all.

These political difficulties were further complicated by the attitude of the International Federation of Trade Unions. The International Labour Organisation had been set up avowedly in recognition of the workers' sacrifices during the war. Its constitution had been so framed as to give them a direct voice in all its decisions. The International Federation of Trade Unions threatened to boycott the Organisation unless all States *without exception* were admitted to Membership, and unless the national trade union movements affiliated to the Federation were given the monopoly of workers' representation. As the constitution of the Organisation was now incorporated in the Treaty of Versailles, the Federation no doubt did not realise that it was putting forward demands which it was impossible to meet. In the upshot it was content with the decision to remit the question of the admission of Germany and Austria to the Washington Conference, and did not press its demands for a monopoly of representation or for certain other reforms. But at the time it looked as though a deadlock had been reached, and that the Organisation would have to start on its career without any

workers' representatives from a large number of the most important industrial countries.

In the middle of these perplexities the Organising Committee pursued its work. It did not ignore them, but it could do nothing about them since its mandate was limited to the technical preparation of the Conference. In theory it was the Government of the United States which was responsible for the convening of the Washington Conference, and therefore for solving the political difficulties which that convocation might provoke. But the United States had steadily moved into a first-class political crisis over the Peace Conference at Paris and all its works. President Wilson was engaged in what was literally a death struggle with the forces in the Senate and the country which had become bitterly antagonistic to his international policy. In the middle of that struggle there was little attention and less help to be expected from the United States. The handling of the situation was therefore left to the initiative of certain individuals, and in particular to the Rt. Hon. G. N. Barnes, M.P., who had presented the original British scheme in Paris and who now bent all his energies to getting it put into effective operation. As in Paris, he acted in close consultation with his trusted advisers, Sir Malcolm Delevingne and Mr. H. B. Butler, and in the end the Washington Conference duly met. One other figure played an outstanding rôle in this intermediate period, namely, Mr. Léon Jouhaux, the General Secretary of the French Workers' Federation, and the strongest personality in the International Federation of Trade Unions. On the question of the admission of Germany and Austria his view was diametrically opposed to that of Mr. Barnes, and he greatly influenced Mr. Clemenceau. Mr. Barnes stood for identity of membership of the International Labour Organisation and the League of Nations. Mr. Jouhaux was the spokesman of the International Federation of Trade Unions and insisted that

Germany and Austria must be given their places in the Organisation immediately. Mr. Jouhaux's intervention with Mr. Clemenceau was decisive. At first Mr. Clemenceau was inclined to take the same view as Mr. Barnes and to reply that nothing could be done, but he was disturbed by Mr. Jouhaux's argument that the Washington Conference, once convened, might have its own view of the matter and might proceed to act on it. This consideration and the attitude of the Italian Government, which was favourable to the admission of ex-enemy States, turned the scales against Mr. Barnes, and the Supreme Council came to its decision in the sense mentioned above.

But though the Organising Committee stuck closely to its task of technical preparation its work was far from unimportant.¹ It had indeed two vitally important sets of decisions to take; the one concerned the substance of the proposals which it would make to the Washington Conference, the other concerned questions of method.

It was a small committee of Government representatives only: Mr. Arthur Fontaine, the permanent head of the French Ministry of Labour, presided over its deliberations. Great Britain was represented by Sir Malcolm Delevingne, the United States by Professor Shotwell, Italy by Mr. di Palma Castiglione, Japan by Mr. Oka, Belgium by Mr. Mahaim and Switzerland by Professor Rappard. Mr. Harold Butler was its Secretary. Its reports to the Washington Conference are evidence of the thoroughness with which it performed a difficult task in the midst of many uncertainties.

As the way in which the Committee functioned had some influence on the subsequent situation, a word must be said about the conditions in which it worked. Its international member-

¹A full account of its work has been given by Sir Malcolm Delevingne in *The Origins of the International Labour Organisation*.

ship made it impossible for it to meet frequently. The compilation of technical reports could only be undertaken by a full-time staff and, the main responsibility for these reports had necessarily to be left to the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Harold Butler. The difficulties to be overcome were considerable. To begin with there was no money. When the International Labour Organisation began to work it would, of course, have its funds, drawn either from the League of Nations, or from its own Members. But in the meantime, although the preparatory machinery of the Organising Committee was definitely international, no international funds existed from which its expenses could be paid. Mr. Butler solved the problem by obtaining a loan of money from the British Treasury, and material assistance from other Departments of the British Civil Service, on the understanding that the expenses so incurred would be reimbursed by the Organisation when it came into being. Premises at 53 Parliament Street were lent by the Office of Works and there a small staff was installed. An endeavour was made to render the staff international by asking for the loan of competent officials from the French Government. The French Government, however, was less generous than the British Government, and it was only with great difficulty and after considerable delay that the French Ministry of Labour agreed to detach two of its officials. When they arrived the reports had already been prepared and their task was therefore one of translation only. On the technical side the staff would have been totally insufficient had it not been for the aid furnished by the Factory Department of the Home Office. This was easily obtained through the intermediary of Sir Malcolm Delevingne, whose assistance in this and other respects was invaluable.

Although, as we have seen, the Committee was, strictly speaking, only responsible for the technical preparation of the Wash-

ington Conference, it could not be indifferent to the non-technical problems which arose, and to which reference has been made above. Its members, however, were dispersed and the day-to-day consideration of these difficulties and of their influence on the Committee's work necessarily took place at the seat of the Committee's activities in London. Here Mr. Butler and Sir Malcolm Delevingne could be in daily communication, and here also was Mr. Barnes, who, as a member of the War Cabinet and a Plenipotentiary at the Peace Conference, was in a key position. Thus side by side with the Committee the Labour Section¹ of the British Peace Delegation continued to exist. The Committee was the official body, but it was hampered both by its limited mandate and its dispersed membership. The Labour Section had in theory finished its task, but it could come together at any moment, and it felt that it had a general responsibility to ensure the success of its work at Paris.

This duality led to no confusion or friction since all the members of the 'Labour Section' were working either in or with the Organising Committee. Mr. Barnes, of course, had no official connection with it, but it was known that he would be the principal British delegate at Washington, and Sir Malcolm Delevingne acted in consultation with him throughout. But the result was that the period of the Organising Committee was little more than a continuation of the work of the British Labour Section at Paris. As regards political questions, Mr. Barnes and his colleagues of Paris constituted the only effective machinery: as regards technical questions, technical advice was furnished almost exclusively by British experts: as regards administrative activities, staff, premises and money were provided by the British Government. Thus it was not unnatural

¹The Labour Section of the British Peace Delegation at Paris consisted of the Rt. Hon. G. N. Barnes, M.P., Sir Malcolm Delevingne, K.C.B., and Mr. H. B. Butler, C.B. Mr. Phelan was its Secretary, and later became the Assistant Secretary of the Organising Committee.

that the Organisation should be considered as peculiarly British, and that the British officials who had worked at it from the stage of a plan to the present stage of preparation for its active functioning should be regarded as particularly fitted to guide its future career.

This sentiment was strengthened by further developments. The Organising Committee proposed that Mr. Butler should become the Secretary-General of the Washington Conference when that Conference met, and this proposal was agreed to by the Government of the United States. It fell, therefore, to Mr. Butler to recruit and organise the staff which was to run the Conference. Mr. Butler turned for help both as regards money and personnel to Sir Eric Drummond, and here again, as the League had not come into existence, the expenses involved constituted a loan from British resources. Mr. Butler proceeded to Washington in August 1919. There the increasing acuity of the domestic struggle led necessarily to an attitude of greater detachment on the part of the American Government. It was willing to honour all its engagements, but it could not be expected to display any vigorous determination to overcome the difficulties in the way of a Conference which, it became more and more clear, was not favourably regarded by the dominant American opinion. Mr. Butler's task was thus far from easy, and when the Conference opened there was general recognition that he had performed it with conspicuous success. This favourable opinion of his capacity and abilities grew as the complex machinery of the Conference came into operation, and as it began to be seen that the paper plan of Paris was being transformed into a powerful machine which, in spite of its intricacy and its unprecedented character, was running with remarkable efficiency and smoothness. As rapidly as new problems arose they found a swift and satisfactory solution, and with what was really astonishing speed the Conference worked steadily

through its heavy agenda. Towards the close of the Conference the difficulties concerning the composition of the Governing Body were overcome, and it was possible to call a meeting of that body in order to take such decisions as might be necessary for the future.

As the discussions at the Washington Conference proceeded, various personalities began to stand out in a certain relief. Mr. Arthur Fontaine as President of the Organising Committee and as head of the French Delegation was, in one or other rôle, constantly before the Conference. Mr. Barnes and Sir Malcolm Delevingne, the two British Delegates, intervened on all important questions, as did also Baron Mayor des Planches and Dr. di Palma Castiglione, the Italian Delegates, and Mr. Mahaim from Belgium. But in addition to these, who had been associated with the work at Paris, new personalities came to the fore: Mr. Carlier and Mr. Hodacz in the employers' group, and their French colleague, Mr. Guérin, whose vigorous independence was exemplified by the splendid isolation (his own phrase) in which he cast a solitary vote against the admission of Germany, and by his ironic proposal on another occasion that a committee should be appointed to discover America. Mr. Jouhaux, Mr. Oudegeest and Mr. Mertens began to stand out clearly as the leaders of the workers' group. Senator Robertson and Mr. Rowell from Canada and Monsignor Nolens from Holland also made a marked impression, as did likewise Judge Castberg, Mr. Sokal, Mr. Baldesi, Mr. Kershaw, Mr. Tom Shaw, Miss Bondfield and a number of others, who were destined to become influential figures in the Organisation's subsequent history. But in moments of difficulty, and more particularly on constitutional and procedural questions, the Conference listened most readily to those who had planned it in Paris, and to none with more attention than to the Secretary-General, Mr. Butler.

As the work of the Conference progressed with unexpected rapidity and success, the vast potentialities of the Organisation became steadily more apparent, and with them the importance of the post of Director of the International Labour Office. The choice, which it was assumed would be made before the Conference closed, became a subject of conversation among the delegates. The name most frequently mentioned was that of Mr. Butler. His part in the original planning of the scheme and his services with the Organising Committee and with the Conference itself made it natural that this should be so.

When Butler was consulted he did not hesitate to point out that a still stronger candidate could be found. 'I am not a candidate', he said, 'if Mr. Fontaine is in the field.'

Arthur Fontaine had, of course, both many and great qualifications. He had been the outstanding figure in the pre-war negotiations on international labour legislation; he had been Secretary-General of the Paris Commission and Chairman of the Organising Committee; and as head of the French Delegation at the Conference he had occasion to display his grasp of the technical questions under discussion, his unrivalled knowledge of labour problems, and a culture and intelligence of the highest order. Mr. Fontaine was approached in his turn, but no definite information as to his intentions or attitude could be obtained.

This, then, was the position as the Conference drew to its end, and the first meeting of the Governing Body convened in a room in the Navy Building in Washington. It was generally thought that the Directorship would go either to Fontaine or to Butler. Neither of them was a declared candidate, but no other name had been mentioned and the choice seemed to lie between them.

The meeting opened calmly and even casually, though it was soon to become dramatic. Only twenty-one members of the

Governing Body were present, as no provision had as yet been made for deputies or substitutes, but they included practically all the outstanding members of the Conference—Fontaine, a little aloof, with the bearded dignity of a gentle and slightly fatigued Olympian; Delevingne, alert as a terrier; Mayor des Planches, gentler even than Fontaine, with a courtliness of another age; Carlier, with a long, square-cut, white beard and a royal appearance that inevitably suggested the portraits of Leopold II; Jouhaux, who combined a thunderous voice and a buccaneer appearance with an acute political intelligence; Oudegeest, hiding an uncommon shrewdness behind broken English and a twinkling sense of humour.

Fontaine was unanimously chosen as temporary chairman, and Butler explained the work that would have to be immediately undertaken, the fixing of the agenda of the next Conference, the preparation of reports for it, etc. Had Fontaine a hint of what was in the wind? He suggested that a small Committee of members of the Governing Body might be appointed to supervise the execution of these immediate tasks, and that the Governing Body should appoint a provisional Director and Deputy Director at its next meeting. Jouhaux was on his feet at once, and there was a note of menace and determination in his great thundering voice. Things were going too slowly. Were the promises to the workers not to be kept? They had been promised an International Labour Office; it was far less than they had demanded; but if it was to be of any use it must take up its task without delay. A *provisional* Director? Why *provisional* if not to hamper the Governing Body's choice at a later stage? Let the Governing Body do its duty and make a definite appointment at once!

There was obvious disarray among the Government delegates. An attitude so determined on the part of the workers was evidently unexpected. Jouhaux was followed by Mr. Guérin,

the French employers' delegate. He proposed an adjournment so that the groups might consult among themselves *and together*. The significance of these last words escaped attention. When the meeting resumed, Jouhaux announced that the Workers' and Employers' Groups had agreed that the Governing Body should proceed immediately to elect a Chairman and a Director. This agreement between the employers and workers put the Governments in a difficulty. Delevingne protested; they had already a Chairman; their whole proceedings were provisional; some of the Governments had only made provisional appointments to the Governing Body. The Chairman took a vote. By 14 votes to 5 it was decided to proceed with the appointment of a Chairman. Jouhaux demanded that the appointment to be made should be permanent and not provisional. Mr. Guérin supported him. Another vote was taken to settle this point. By 12 votes against 9 it was decided that the appointment should be permanent. A secret ballot was demanded. I borrowed a hat and collected the folded slips of paper as each member's name was called. Twenty-one votes were cast, and when counted gave the following result:

Monsieur Arthur Fontaine	-	-	17 votes
Sir Malcolm Delevingne	-	-	3 votes
Baron Mayor des Planches	-	-	1 vote

Fontaine was thus elected permanent Chairman, and by that decision he was eliminated from the list of possible Directors. He had never been openly a candidate, but he had every right to assume that no act of candidature on his part was necessary. If he had nourished a secret ambition it was to remain now undeclared and unfulfilled.¹

¹Arthur Fontaine's tenure of the Chairmanship of the Governing Body lasted for ten years, and he filled that office with the highest ability and distinction.

As he expressed in somewhat halting terms his sense of the honour conferred on him, the implications of the vote penetrated more fully into the minds of the members of the Government group. They sensed the presence of new forces. Up till now these questions of machinery had been a purely Governmental concern: at Paris and in the Organising Committee the Governments had settled these things among themselves: they were disconcerted at finding the machine they had created showing an unexpected tendency to ignore Governmental guidance, and particularly that of France and Britain, whose wishes had hitherto been generally obeyed. When Jouhaux demanded that they should now appoint the permanent Director, Delevingne made a further attempt to stem the tide: the matter was one of the most important decisions the Governing Body would have to take: they had had no time to consider it: they had no names before them.

‘If you have no candidate, we have,’ interrupted the impulsive Mr. Guérin, and the atmosphere became immediately more electric.

‘Myself and other Government delegates are only provisionally appointed,’ urged Sir Malcolm; ‘we have no authority to vote.’

‘Sir Delevingne voted just now for a permanent Chairman,’ thundered Jouhaux; ‘if he has authority to vote for a permanent Chairman how can he have no authority to vote for a Director?’

The tension was growing. Fontaine wisely proposed a vote as to procedure. By 11 votes to 9 it was decided that a permanent appointment should be made. Delevingne and two other Governmental delegates stated that they would not vote. Once more I went round with the hat, emptied its contents at the Chairman’s table and proceeded to open the folded slips one by one. The first slip opened bore the name ‘Albert Thomas’.

When all the slips had been opened and counted the result was:

Albert Thomas - - 9 votes

H. B. Butler - - 3 votes.

Six slips were blank.

It was thus that Albert Thomas made his first appearance in the International Labour Organisation. No great man surely ever made such an unexpected and dramatic entry upon what was to prove so great a stage.

It was clearly an unsatisfactory result, as Delevingne, now skilfully leading a rearguard action, was quick to point out. Nine votes, he argued, was insufficient; it was less than half the number of members of the Governing Body: he knew of Albert Thomas' great reputation: but the Governments must have time to consider their decision: it would not be fair to ask Albert Thomas to assume his responsibilities with only the backing of a minority; nor would it be fair to the Organisation they were trying to build up.

There was undeniable force in these arguments. After Senator Robertson of Canada had proposed that Mr. Butler should be asked to act as Provisional Director, and Mr. Butler had stated that, while he was quite willing to continue the work if he should be asked to do so, he must refuse the title of Provisional Director, which might prejudice the Governing Body's final decision, Mr. Guérin proposed that another vote should be taken to appoint a Provisional Director. The result was:

Albert Thomas - - 11 votes

H. B. Butler - - 9 votes

This was not much more satisfactory than the previous decision. Albert Thomas, it is true, had obtained the votes of a majority of those present, but only just a majority, and it was not a majority of the whole Governing Body, since only twenty-one members out of twenty-four were present. More-

over, the vote for Butler showed that he had a dangerous competitor. Nothing could, however, be gained by further discussion, and there the matter was left for the moment.

The Governing Body met again the next day. It had to draw up some kind of a draft budget to provide for the immediate needs of the Organisation. The proposals were naturally Butler's. He had had the experience of the Organising Committee and of the Conference, and he alone was in a position to suggest the financial provision necessary for carrying on until more definite plans could be made. It was clear that he must be associated with the work during the transitional period until the Governing Body could meet again in Europe, and it was decided without discussion to appoint Fontaine, Albert Thomas and Butler as a Committee to report to the next meeting. The terms of reference of the Committee were to consult with the Secretary-General of the League on the scales of salary to be offered to higher officials in the International Labour Office. As so stated they were extremely narrow, but they were obviously closely connected with the problem of the future organisation of the International Labour Office, a preliminary plan for which had been drawn up by the Organising Committee. Butler, besides being a member of the Committee thus appointed, remained Secretary-General of the Washington Conference, as that Conference did not dissolve after finishing its work in Washington, although its members dispersed. It continued theoretically in being, so that its session might only be closed after the Treaty of Versailles had come into force.

It is this somewhat complicated history which explains the presence of Fontaine, Albert Thomas and Butler in Piccadilly some five weeks later, and why I was particularly curious to see what manner of man this Albert Thomas was.

After the meeting was over he called me aside, and offered me an appointment in the International Labour Office, which I

accepted subject to further discussion as to terms and attributions when the definite plan of organisation should be adopted. I was thus the first appointee to the International Labour Office. My immediate functions were all-embracing. I was empowered to deal with finance, staff and the preparation of the next meeting of the Governing Body, to be held in Paris at the end of the month. Immediately afterwards Albert Thomas left London.

My first official act in my new capacity was to appoint to the staff, in accordance with Albert Thomas' instructions, Mr. Camille Pône. I had worked with Pône in Paris and in Washington and we had become close friends. We were destined to work together in the Labour Office for many years, and the friendship we had formed played perhaps no small part in the overcoming of many difficulties which arose out of the incompatibility of French and English administrative methods, and the inability of those accustomed to the one to understand the other. Our close personal friendship made it possible to discuss with the greatest frankness the traditions and methods of the national administrations to which we had respectively belonged, and these discussions and the mutual comprehension to which they led undoubtedly helped to diminish the difficulties which we were subsequently to meet.

My own appointment made little change in the functions which I was already performing. It produced, however, a personal situation which might easily have become difficult. Butler had been my chief in the Ministry of Labour, in Paris, at the Organising Committee, and at Washington. He was still Secretary-General of that Conference, of which I had been the Principal Secretary, and which had still a theoretical existence.

The work which I had to prepare for the Governing Body mainly concerned resolutions referred to it by the Washington Conference or reports from the Organising Committee. It was therefore by no means easy to distinguish between that part of

my work which related to Butler in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Conference, and that which related to Albert Thomas as Director of the I.L.O. In fact it was impossible to make any such distinction, and the problem of a divided loyalty was avoided by the simple expedient of consulting Butler on every point which arose. As we were always in agreement as to the course to be followed, no difficulty arose.

Some twelve or fourteen days after the meeting in London, Butler, myself and the small skeleton staff which was retained after Washington, crossed over to Paris, and there I had an opportunity of seeing Albert Thomas at work.

On the day following our arrival we all assembled in his tiny study in the rue de l'Université, and he unfolded with clearness and decision the steps he had already taken about the Governing Body meeting, and assigned to each of us one or other task with detailed instructions as to its accomplishment. It was my first experience of his methods, and I was immediately struck by the contrast with the methods to which I had been accustomed. In the first place I did not like the system of convening the whole of the staff. It seemed to me that it could easily lead to subsequent discussions as to what precisely he had decided. In the British Civil Service as a junior official I had been accustomed to measuring exactly the responsibility which I was entitled to take, and acting without hesitation within its limits. I did not relish the prospect of having to discuss my orders with my own subordinates. Moreover, I was accustomed to being left to settle the details of any task assigned to me on my own initiative, and to take the risk of my decisions being found satisfactory when the task was accomplished. Albert Thomas' instructions went into the finest detail. A room had been found for the meeting of the Governing Body. All the instructions I felt I required were 'see that the room is made ready for the meeting'. Instead I was told how many chairs were to be put at the

table, how the members were to be seated, that they were to be given paper and pencils *and blotters*. The blotters were mentioned three times. 'Don't forget the blotters,' were in fact the concluding words of the interview. But to whom were they addressed? I wondered. Was it to me personally, as being generally in charge, or to Mr. Pône, my chief executive assistant, or to Mr. Lloyd, who was in charge of stationery and supplies? And was there not a danger that we might all three be busy seeking blotters from different sources and placing them on the table at different times? It all seemed to me very queer, and I could not but contrast it with the arrangements for the Organising Committee. On that occasion I went to see Butler at Montagu House. The interview was short and satisfactory. In a few brief sentences he explained that the premises at 51 Parliament Street had been placed at our disposal by the Office of Works; that he had authority to spend up to £1000; that I might proceed to engage staff and to organise the office within the limits of this amount, and through the establishment machinery of the Ministry which had been given instructions to act on my minutes.

I proceeded to Parliament Street to inspect my offices, and found them tenanted by some war administration. When I explained that I had come to take possession I was told that it would be some time before they could be vacated. Evidently higher authority must be invoked if they were to be made immediately available. This I considered to be a detail with which it was unnecessary to trouble Butler, and I went at once to the Office of Works. With the aid of the Minister's private secretary, whom I happened to know, the relevant file was discovered and a more urgent instruction was issued which was duly obeyed. I then proceeded to recruit typists, messengers and clerks and to indent for typewriting machines, tables, stationery and other equipment.

It was a week before I saw Butler again, and when I did I could ask him to come and inspect the work done. I should, of course, add that once a messenger and a typist had been secured, files passed regularly to him at Montagu House, and he was in a position to control my various activities and to intervene at any moment if he did not approve.

I was now to experience a different method of working which at first seemed only explicable on the assumption of inexperience. It took me a long time to learn that there was much to be said for it, and that perhaps it was the only way in which an international staff could have been built into a really cohesive administration. But that conviction was to come much later. My first impression was certainly that the methods of the British Civil Service were both more intelligent and more efficient.

Fortunately, as I have recounted, Pône and I had worked together both in Paris and in Washington, and therefore it was easy to avoid friction or misunderstanding. Together we installed offices in the Hotel Astoria (where Butler and I had worked throughout the Peace Conference), together we inspected the room allocated for the Governing Body in an annexe of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the rue François I^{er}, and together we took all possible precautions about the essential blotters.

Then began the preparation of the Governing Body papers. We prepared drafts, and these drafts went forward to Albert Thomas, who appeared for brief periods in his office in the Astoria—he was at this time busy freeing himself from various other activities, and was unable to give more than a fraction of his time to the International Labour Office. On the question of the permanent organisation of the Office we prepared nothing. A report had already been prepared by the Organising Committee and was before the Governing Body awaiting its deci-

sion. This report we assumed would be supplemented by the report of the Fontaine-Thomas-Butler Committee. A provisional budget for a period of six months had been adopted at Washington, and no more accurate budget could be drawn up till the lines of the organisation of the Office had been settled.

Everything therefore seemed to be going normally when one day Albert Thomas asked me to call at his flat in the rue de l'Université in the evening, so that he might give me some details concerning two additional temporary appointments that he wished to make.

I agreed, of course, though I wondered vaguely why, if he had not the details with him he could not just as easily have given them to me the following morning. When I was shown into his study I guessed that the appointments in question had only been a pretext.

Albert Thomas wore an air of sombre concentration. It was a mood in which I was to see him often again when he had some difficult decision to take, and when he gave the impression of calling up all his immense intellectual forces and concentrating them silently on his problem. He settled the matter of the appointments with a few simple instructions. Then, after a moment's silence during which he played with his paper-knife, he began to talk about the questions to come before the Governing Body.

'I have thought very carefully over the scheme of organisation for the Office prepared by the Organising Committee. It is an able document. Men like Fontaine and Sir Malcolm Delevingne are men of great experience, and I have weighed their opinions with respect and attention. But that is not the Office. The Office must be an instrument of action, not just a machine for collecting and sifting information. Now, look, this is how I would organise the Office,' and with a blue pencil he proceeded to draw on his blotting pad. 'First there will be the

Director and his Cabinet. Then there will be three Divisions.' He sketched out three great oblongs on the white blotting paper. 'There would be what I call a Diplomatic Division to deal with all the relations with Governments, to organise the Conference, to look after ratifications and so on; a Division to deal with workers' and employers' organisations which I will call the Political Division; a Research Division to deal with scientific studies; and then a series of smaller technical services, maritime, agriculture . . .'

As he was speaking I was trying to translate his scheme into terms of my administrative experience. There seemed to be much to say in its favour. At the same time I was a little puzzled by this careful and logical exposition of a scheme of organisation which seemed so much in contradiction with his methods as I had seen them in action during the last few days. He did not, however, pursue the discussion of his plan, but turned immediately to another and a graver problem.

'Think it over,' he said, 'and give me the result of your reflections. But there is something more. You know the text of the Treaty. You played, so I have been told, some part in drawing it up. Eh bien! I have read and re-read the Treaty without any preconceived interpretation of it, and I cannot find that the Treaty provides for a Deputy Director. The only reference is the provision that if the Director cannot attend a meeting of the Governing Body he has a right to be represented by his deputy. That I cannot read as meaning that he must have associated with him in the direction of the office a Deputy Director. On the contrary, it is clearly laid down that the Director appoints his staff. No provision is made for any officials of the Office appointed by the Governing Body other than the Director and the appointees of the Director himself. I know that the British Government insist on the appointment of Butler as Deputy Director. I have the greatest respect for

Butler. I know his great record at the Peace Conference, as Secretary-General of the Organising Committee and as Secretary-General of the Washington Conference. I should desire more than anything else to have his collaboration. If the Governing Body accepts my scheme of organisation I will offer him his choice of the three divisions; he will be the senior chief of division; he will replace me when I am away. But I will not have a Deputy Director. If the Governing Body decides at the instance of the British Government that there is to be a Deputy Director I will refuse the post of Director.'

This deliberate and definite statement took me completely by surprise. I knew in a general way that the British Government anticipated Butler's appointment as Deputy Director. It seemed to me a natural and a necessary measure, natural because Sir Eric Drummond had appointed a French Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations, and necessary because it seemed to me that Butler's knowledge and experience were an essential foundation for the building up of the permanent Office. I had assumed that this was one of the questions which was being discussed by the Committee of Three, and that they would arrive at what seemed to me an inevitable conclusion. I was utterly dismayed at the thought that the whole scheme might now be jeopardised over this unforeseen difficulty. Albert Thomas did not seem to invite comments. He seemed still plunged in his reflections. I ventured, however, to urge that I did not think that his powers as Director would be either diminished or endangered by a Deputy Director as the British understood it. In every British Ministry there was a Permanent Secretary, and the demarcation of functions between him and the Minister gave rise to no difficulty. The Permanent Secretary was the administrative head, the Minister the political head, and on all questions the Minister's authority was supreme. This was the system to which Butler was accustomed, and hence, if he

were appointed Deputy Director, it would probably be along these lines that he would envisage his relationship to the Director. In any case, Albert Thomas might count on loyal and effective collaboration. Albert Thomas listened, playing with his blue pencil. 'No doubt the system works in England,' he said. 'I have met some of the British Permanent Secretaries when I was Minister of Munitions.' (It was characteristic of him to render his discussion of the question more vivid by this appeal to his personal experience.) 'But in England it is part and parcel of an administrative tradition. We have no such tradition in France. Attempts have been made to institute such a system on occasion, but with doubtful success. But we have Under-Secretaries of State,' and here his tone became deeper and more menacing. 'I have had some experience and I do not want to renew it. No. My mind is made up. I will not have a Deputy Director.' And on that uncompromising statement the interview closed.

As I left the rue de l'Université it became more and more clear to me that the crisis was a serious one. If Albert Thomas carried his point he would start his career as Director without the full support of the Governing Body, since the British Government would at all events become to some extent disinterested, and, as it had been the prime mover in the whole scheme heretofore, this was a most discouraging prospect. On the other hand, if Albert Thomas withdrew his candidature the situation would be even worse, since the only possible alternative, namely Butler, could hardly be imposed on the Governing Body by the Governments (assuming the British Government secured their support), nor was it likely that he would accept an appointment on such conditions. And yet, if both Albert Thomas and Butler fell out of the picture the prospects seemed hopeless. There would certainly be delay in finding a third candidate, if ever one could be found for whom the general

support of the Governing Body could be obtained; and who was to look for him? The British Government could hardly be expected to go in search of someone other than the candidate of their own choice, nor the workers and employers either. However I turned the problem there seemed no solution to it which would give the Office the chance of a vigorous and healthy start.

But I was faced with a smaller problem which required an immediate answer. How far was I to regard Albert Thomas' communication as confidential? Had it been made to me as his immediate assistant, and only in order to secure my reaction to it? Was I entitled to pass it on, and was it even his intention that I should do so? I was not long in deciding that in any case considerations both of loyalty and of policy demanded that it should be reported to Butler.

It so happened that Butler and I had arranged to dine together that night, and over the dinner table in a little Montmartre restaurant I gave him as complete an account of Albert Thomas' declarations as I could. He was by no means surprised. He had arrived already at a very accurate estimate of Albert Thomas' attitude which my account did no more than confirm. The Committee of Three had not held any real discussions: Fontaine had not pressed for any definite decisions: there had been a general exchange of views, but no report had been drawn up. In other words, the Committee had remained within the narrow limits of securing certain information about the scales of salary which Sir Eric Drummond proposed to institute in the Secretariat. Without any help from Fontaine, Butler could not press the Committee to go further, as these were its strict terms of reference. He anticipated that Albert Thomas would make his own proposals for organisation to the Governing Body, and that there would be no report of the Committee on the way in which the Office should be organised.

This reading of the situation was confirmed next day when Fontaine, Thomas and Butler lunched together. Albert Thomas explained his scheme of organisation. It was significant that he did so at lunch and not at a meeting of the Committee as such. He then stated his objections to a Deputy Director and offered Butler his choice of the Divisions. Butler expressed his readiness to work under Albert Thomas as Director but refused the offer of a Division. His argument was that it would be impossible for him to take charge of the Office effectively in the Director's absence: his normal work would be limited to the sphere of a single Division, whereas the Director's *Chef de Cabinet* would be continually in touch with all questions concerning policy and the general administration of the Office.

It is interesting to note in this story of the birth of an international administration how ignorance and distrust of foreign methods made difficulties on both sides. Albert Thomas could not understand the rôle of a Permanent Secretary, and Butler equally could not visualise the functions of a French Minister's Cabinet. Explanations could not remove the distrust which each felt of adopting a machinery familiar to the other, and therefore a powerful weapon if left in his hands. Butler, in his desire that all the work in Paris, London and Washington should come to final fruition, would perhaps have been willing to accept a post of Chief of Division, confident that his past and prestige would give him in reality a special position in which his knowledge and experience could be effectively placed at the service of the Organisation, if he had not felt that he was likely to be cramped and controlled by this mysterious 'Cabinet' whose name and reputation (based on such fragmentary contacts as we had had with French Ministries during the Peace Conference) suggested methods repugnant to the proper hierarchical traditions of the British Civil Service. Albert Thomas on his side might have accepted Butler as Deputy Director if he

had been able to conceive of a Permanent Secretary who would not be the political rival of his Ministerial Chief. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that Albert Thomas had not been present in Washington, and the figures of that unfortunate vote, in which Butler had received nine votes as against his own eleven, must have suggested to him a political rivalry which, as a matter of fact, did not exist.

Thus the difficulties felt on either side could not be removed by argument or the finding of a formula, and so the deadlock continued and a solution seemed farther off than ever.

It was at this stage that Sir Malcolm Delevingne arrived in Paris as British Delegate to the Governing Body. His instructions were as uncompromising as Albert Thomas' decision. The British Government would only support Albert Thomas' appointment as Director if simultaneously the Governing Body agreed to appoint Butler as Deputy Director. Sir Malcolm himself was deeply perturbed. The dream of a really effective international machinery for the regulation of labour conditions had been in his mind for years before the war. None had laboured more than he at the Peace Conference to make that dream a reality. Scores of times in the Commission of the Peace Conference his alert mind and his amazing skill in rapid drafting had led the Commission over a difficulty. He was as devoted to the International Labour Office as to his beloved Home Office, and it was with a heavy heart that he came to Paris as the bearer of instructions that seemed likely to compromise, if not indeed to wreck, the work to which he had given such unstinted service.

I had hoped that Sir Malcolm might once more, as so often in the past, lead us out of the *impasse*. I had assumed that he would have had a voice in his instructions, and that they would leave him a certain liberty of movement. But alas! the matter had passed on to another and a more dangerous plane on which

the desires and policy of the Home Office counted for little. One of the least edifying aspects of the Peace Conference had been the struggle among the Allies about the division of the spoil. It had been fought on so many issues that it had become almost a habit of thought, and once America was out of the picture France and Britain watched each other jealously lest one or the other should snatch some advantage or perquisite or prestige. In this atmosphere the British Government found it hard to swallow the prospect of a French Chairman of the Governing Body and of a French Director. They reacted as though the French had tried to steal an unfair advantage contrary to the rules of the game. The wires, so rumour had it, had buzzed between Paris and London. The British Prime Minister, so the story goes, had expressed his deep personal dissatisfaction at the Washington decisions to give both the most important posts in the new organisation, which was peculiarly a British creation, to French nationals. Hence the peremptory instructions given to Delevingne. Needless to say, he was not the origin of these rumours. He put up the best case for his instructions that he could, and carefully abstained from any comment or criticism of them. But the rumours were known, and no doubt it was arranged that they should be. The discontent of the British Government was not intended to be hidden but to be manifest.

There was, however, one weak point in Delevingne's instructions. He could argue, with some show of reason and assumed conviction, that the Treaty provided for a Deputy Director. But he had an impossible case to defend when it came to asking the Governing Body to make the appointment. The Treaty made it clear beyond any possibility of doubt that the Director, and only the Director, could appoint the officials subordinate to himself. There would not be wanting voices in the Governing Body to point out that nobody knew better

than Delevingne that the Governing Body had no power to do what he asked.

I pressed this point with him for all it was worth in the hope that it might lead him to attempt to secure a modification of his instructions. He was acutely aware of its force, though he could not admit it. In the course of the discussion, however, I was led to see a possible compromise, and as it seemed that it was impossible in the circumstances for either Butler or Delevingne to take any initiative, I ventured to put it forward. My proposal was that the British Government should undertake to *propose* Albert Thomas' election as Director, if Albert Thomas on his side gave an undertaking that his first act as Director would be to appoint Butler as Deputy Director, and would agree to announce his intention to the Governing Body immediately on his election.

The arguments in favour of this compromise were many. Albert Thomas would start his career as Director with the public support of the British Government, and, as a consequence, with a unanimous Governing Body behind him. This was something worth while, and something which I hoped would appeal to his instinct as a politician. Moreover, he would secure the assistance of the man best equipped to aid him in what was clearly going to prove a formidable task. The British Government on its side would secure a British Deputy Director, though not by direct appointment by the Governing Body. The major argument, however, was that thus and thus alone could the Office get a fair start.

I asked Delevingne to authorise me to make this proposal to Albert Thomas. He told me he could not, as his instructions would not allow him. I then asked him if he would agree to my sounding Albert Thomas on it personally, and urged that if Albert Thomas could be brought to agree he, Delevingne, could then attempt to get his instructions modified. He replied

that I must act as I thought best, and on that I asked for an interview with Albert Thomas. He had already seen Delevingne and was aware of his instructions and their categorical character. He listened to me very carefully as I unfolded the compromise and advanced the arguments in favour of it. I doubt whether I put them either clearly or convincingly. It was always difficult to put a case to Albert Thomas, because one felt that he had seized the argument before it was half expressed and had thought of the reply. But in this case his quick grasp of the arguments helped my case if it did not facilitate its exposition. Clearly he was impressed. I felt that I had guessed rightly that the prospect of his appointment being proposed by the Government which was rumoured to be hostile to it would appeal to his political sense, and that he was keenly aware of the importance of having a unanimous Governing Body at his back. But though he was, I thought, tempted, he was not prepared to give way at once.

‘What you propose’, he said, ‘is ingenious. But it is just your idea. Will Sir Malcolm agree? What about his instructions?’

‘Sir Malcolm’, I said, ‘cannot say he agrees. He can only say what his instructions tell him to say. His instructions are absurd, but there they are and they prevent him from making any move. But you, you are free. If you were to say to Sir Malcolm that you agreed, I think, in fact I am sure (though he gave me no authority to say so) that he would be prepared to ask for his instructions to be modified.’

Albert Thomas frowned with that look of intense concentration with which I was now becoming familiar, but which never ceased to be impressive.

‘I will think it over,’ he said, in an absolutely non-committal tone.

‘Will you see Sir Malcolm?’ I asked. It was a last desperate throw in the hope that somehow it might give another chance.

'All right,' was the answer. 'I shall always be glad to see Sir Malcolm. Bring him along when you can find him.'

Sir Malcolm was found and brought. It is unnecessary to reproduce the conversation, in which the same arguments were traversed again. Both were wary. Both made reservations, Delevingne as regards his instructions, Albert Thomas as regards the position he had already taken up and from which he could not recede without consulting his friends. This was a new point and presumably indicated that he had given a promise to the workers and employers that he would not allow his liberty of action to be controlled by Government interference. But at the end, in spite of all the reservations, it was clear that so far as they were personally concerned the compromise was regarded as honourable and workable.

'If the British Government is prepared to have confidence in me,' concluded Albert Thomas, 'I think I can give them satisfaction, but I shall have to persuade my friends.'

As a matter of fact this conversation settled the matter. Delevingne communicated with London, and his instructions were modified so as to give him a certain discretion. And in a further interview a gentlemen's agreement was easily reached.

It was now clear that Albert Thomas would be appointed Director. Little more than twenty-four hours remained before the Governing Body was to meet, and we got our first experience of his amazing energy. He now gave himself wholeheartedly to the task of planning his work in the International Labour Office. Butler and I were asked to draw up a new budget on the assumption that the first steps would be taken towards putting into operation his scheme of organisation. We worked on it till the early hours of the morning and then Albert Thomas himself went through it figure by figure. Albert Thomas dictated personally the papers on the organisation of the Office, and on the financial powers of the Director and of

the Governing Body. The style and argument of these papers were somewhat disconcerting. They revealed an outlook to which we were unaccustomed, and it was easy to see that there would be many points on which different traditions and view points would have to be adjusted as the work went on.

To these questions it will be necessary to return at a later stage, when an attempt will be made to explain Albert Thomas' conception of the Office and how he attempted to realise it. For the moment it is only necessary to note the sudden change in his attitude. It seemed as though, up to this moment, he had been reflecting, planning, weighing this and that probability. Now the line was signalled as clear. The moment for action had come. His immense energy was released and he pressed forward as though to make up for lost time. An almost intolerable strain was thrown on our tiny staff in the endeavour to keep pace with him and to get translated and roneoed these last-minute memoranda. But if Albert Thomas sometimes made excessive demands on his staff, he had the gift of securing enthusiastic efforts from them. The lights in the Astoria burned all night, exhausted typists almost fell from their chairs, wild excursions were made in a taxi in the early hours of the morning to find a mechanic to repair a machine that had broken down before its more resistant manipulator, the roneo turned monotonously on, and the papers were ready in time.

The Governing Body met in the rue François I^{er}. As the members assembled and greeted one another—they were nearly all acquaintances from Washington—there was an undercurrent of excitement. The German members had been convened and were known to be coming. The last German delegation that had come to Paris had come to sign a humiliating Treaty little over six months before. Now for the first time Germans were coming to sit side by side at the table with the representatives of the allied nations. How would the Germans and how

should the Allies behave? M. Fontaine as Chairman was obviously more than a little troubled, and consulted anxiously with Sir Malcolm Delevingne. Would the Germans make difficulties, would they question previous decisions and ask for them to be re-opened? The Germans arrived. Nobody quite saw them come in. They did not look more or less distinguished than the other members of the Governing Body, more or less puzzled as to how the contact would take place. Sir Malcolm turned round and found himself face to face with Dr. Leyman, his pre-war colleague in other international labour negotiations. Recognition was mutual. Delevingne held out his hand and Leyman took it. Fontaine followed suit, and the much feared moment was over before any of the principal actors had realised that it had come and gone.

When the item 'Appointment of the Director' was reached Albert Thomas withdrew. Sir Malcolm Delevingne in a brief but effective speech recounted that since the meeting at Washington he had had the opportunity of making Albert Thomas' acquaintance. He was satisfied that Albert Thomas possessed all the qualifications which could be desired in a Director, and he was convinced that if the Governing Body appointed him they would make a most excellent choice. He therefore proposed that his provisional appointment should be made definite, and urged that the election should be unanimous.

Sir Malcolm's proposal was acclaimed on all sides, and the Chairman then declared Albert Thomas elected as Director of the International Labour Office.

Thus at last the uncertainties of Washington and the difficulties that had afterwards supervened were resolved, and Albert Thomas, having been sent for and informed of the result, took his seat at the table with a unanimous Governing Body anxious to second him in his arduous task.

When the question of the organisation of the Office came up

Albert Thomas fulfilled his promise to Delevingne and announced to the Governing Body his intention of appointing a Deputy Director. That appointment he duly made the same evening, and so began that long collaboration between Albert Thomas and Butler which may be said only to have changed rather than ceased when after Albert Thomas' death Butler succeeded to the Directorship.

Chapter II

Albert Thomas at Seamore Place

After the Paris meeting of the Governing Body we returned, a slightly more numerous band, to London. Albert Thomas preferred that the Office, now placed on a permanent basis, should work in London rather than in Paris. It offered him a certain protection against political pressure in French quarters to secure nominations to the staff. He could always say, 'I must refer this to the competent service in London,' and the competent service in London could always be invoked again at a later stage to soften the blow of a refusal.

Once more we took up temporary quarters in the West End, this time in Seamore Place where the front windows enjoyed a glorious view over Hyde Park. It was perhaps significant of the changes that were taking place that the International Labour Office should have begun its official existence in a mansion in Park Lane. It was also perhaps useful that, as the entrance was at the back, its postal address did not suggest, save to well-informed Londoners, so aristocratic and plutocratic a domicile.

Here in the early days of February 1920 Albert Thomas began the work of fashioning the instrument which was ever afterwards to be associated with his name.

The plan which he had outlined in Paris, as recounted in the last chapter, he had laid before the Governing Body, together

with a supplementary note providing for the addition of a Deputy Director. He had told me that he conceived of the Office as an 'instrument of action', and in his explanations to the Governing Body he had made it clear what, in his mind, was implied in this conception. The result had been to shock certain elements in the Governing Body more than a little.

First of all he had laid down the principle of autonomy—*'the International Labour Organisation with the International Labour Conference and the Office, forms a complete whole and has an autonomous existence.'* To this, of course, there could be no objection.

Next he proceeded to define his position as Director in relation to the Governing Body, and here his method of approach was both significant and characteristic. The terms of the Peace Treaty might have been interpreted as instituting a certain duality of control of the Office. Article 391, par. (1), provided that the Office should be under the control of the Governing Body: Article 394 provided that there should be a Director of the Office who, 'subject to the instructions of the Governing Body' should be responsible for its efficient conduct. Albert Thomas made it clear that he considered that the organisation and running of the Office was to be his affair and his alone. He was to be its unchallenged head. The Governing Body should deal with him and him only. They might give him his instructions and he would obey them. But if they were the owners of the ship he was the master. They were not to interfere with his organisation or methods. As he interpreted it, they would have no right to do so, though as a matter of courtesy he would inform them what he proposed to do. *'It is in the spirit of the Peace Treaty'*, he wrote in his memorandum on organisation, *'that to the Director, as being responsible for the Office, belongs the initiative in making the necessary arrangements, but that the Governing Body, to whose instructions he is subject, should know*

the general lines on which he proposes to proceed with the organisation.' This deliberate challenge, curiously enough, provoked no reaction, perhaps because certain members of the Governing Body were satisfied that their control of the purse would in practice destroy any such claims, or perhaps because they were less perturbed by this statement of (in their view, academic) principle than by certain of the detailed proposals which followed.

After having suggested the creation of the usual central services, necessary in every organisation, registry, establishment, supplies and finance, and of a translation service, Albert Thomas' memorandum set out the plan of his three great Divisions. They represented a logical enough scheme—a Diplomatic Division to deal with Governments and the diplomatic instruments which the Conference would produce: a Scientific Division to deal with the research work which the Office was required to carry out under the Treaty: and a Political Division to deal with relations with employers' and workers' organisations. In addition there was to be a number of technical services to deal with special questions such as maritime questions, industrial hygiene, safety, agriculture, unemployment, hours, wages, migration, social insurance, industrial technique, etc.

This scheme, though it had obvious merits, was a further challenge. The Organising Committee had drawn up a different, and incidentally a more modest, scheme which was before the Governing Body, and which had all the weight and experience of Delevingne and Fontaine behind it. It had no doubt been the general anticipation that the Fontaine-Thomas-Butler Committee would report on this scheme with such modifications as their discussions with the Secretary-General of the League might suggest. The Organising Committee's scheme was dismissed politely but definitely in the opening sentences of Albert Thomas' memo. After referring to its existence he con-

tinued, *'it seems to us it would be well to submit at once to the Governing Body a scheme of organisation such as to satisfy the duties laid upon the Office by the Peace Treaty and in due conformity with the spirit of the first Conference.'* Here was another affirmation of his theory—*'the initiative belongs to the Director'*.

But it was not so much this rather brusque brushing aside of their own carefully prepared proposals that upset certain members of the Governing Body as Albert Thomas' description of the functions which he intended his three Divisions to undertake. The British Government had conceived the Office in terms of its own Civil Service. The Office would record decisions: it would transmit them to the authorities with whom lay the decision for action: it would tabulate such information as those authorities might supply of the action taken: it would remind them of any obligations by which they had become bound: it would supply the Governing Body and the Conference with all the facts concerning the matters before them which it possessed or could collect: it would do research. And as for the rest, it was neither its task nor its responsibility.

Albert Thomas' view was very different. The Diplomatic Division was to *'approach the different States (Governments, and where possible Parliaments) in order to secure or to hasten the ratification of the necessary legislation on Conventions'*. Incidentally it was also *'to organise an Inspection Branch'*.

There was, of course, little of a revolutionary character to be proposed in connection with Research, though there was what must have seemed to some members of the Governing Body an undue insistence on the necessity of placing at the disposal of the Trade Unions *'a scientific and impartial organisation capable of helping and supporting them in their efforts towards progress'*. It was in his comments on the third, or as he called it the Political Division, that his general underlying idea became most clear.

So far it might be said that he disagreed with the Organising Committee only on questions of arrangement and of method. His proposed arrangements were new, and some of his proposed methods startling or even revolutionary. Now it became evident that he had a different conception of the scope and meaning of the Organisation. *'The permanent Labour Organisation is not, in fact, merely the result of all the efforts made by the different civilised States for several decades past to establish an international system of Labour Legislation. Its sole object is not to establish or to re-establish amongst the different industrial States an equilibrium which would be destroyed if labour legislation were not equally applied to all. It owes its origin also, and mainly, to the principle solemnly affirmed in the Peace Treaty that "peace can be established only if it is based on social justice"'*.

This was a theme to which he was constantly to return. For the moment its implications were not apparent. Perhaps it would even be true to say that they have not yet been exhausted. All that was clear was that here again was another point of view, an insistence on a principle which the Organising Committee seemed to have ignored. The immediate practical deductions from it were startling enough. *'The strength of the Organisation . . . lies in the fact that it is based to a large degree upon the employing classes and the masses of the workers. It has the duty of keeping in close touch with the organisations upon which its strength depends.'* By so doing it would escape the reproach directed against the League of Nations that it *'was nothing but a meeting of Government delegates with no proper mandate'*. In order that the Office might make these contacts with employers and workers it was to have *'in all important centres'* a correspondent or a branch office. *'This local organisation should be undertaken immediately. The very life of the Office depends on its success.'*

So the International Labour Office was to have its embassies and legations, and even its consulates. Albert Thomas' exact

words were significant. Correspondents were to be established, not in the capitals of the various countries, but 'in all important centres'. This was logical enough, seeing that their task, as he conceived it, was to make contacts with workers and employers and not with Governments. But the scheme was to be made clearer still, and incidentally more unpalatable to Government ears. *'It will be possible, through the medium of these offices, to collect all the information necessary for the work of the Office as regards the economic and social movements of the different countries.'* Well might the Government delegates gasp, particularly as they had already been told that information supplied by national ministries might be regarded as subject to *'political and other influences'*.

The Political Division was to be responsible for these branch offices. To it they would report, and in the light of their reports its duty would be to draw up and define the *'new programme, which has as yet scarcely emerged from the first attempts to formulate it,* and it was made clear that among the subjects to be examined (or included) in this new programme were such controversial questions as the right to strike and the participation of the workers in management.

Here was Albert Thomas' plan for his instrument of action. The Governing Body had no doubt expected something very different, something in the nature of the plan of an ordinary office—a central secretariat, a few technical sections, provision for translators, typists, messengers and so on. They might have been expected to react violently. They reacted hardly at all. Perhaps they felt they required time to digest so audacious a scheme. Perhaps they were lulled by Albert Thomas' own assurance that there could be *'no question of completing immediately and artificially the whole structure,'* and that it could only be built up gradually as fast as he might be able to recruit suitable collaborators. Perhaps they were dumbfounded by a

succession of shocks—a new conception of the purposes of the whole Organisation, an Office which would try to deal with parliaments rather than with protocols, an Office which would have its branches in contact with the citizens of each country, which would collect its own information and might on occasion challenge official statements! Perhaps they remembered their power of budgetary control: perhaps they thought that what was dangerous and revolutionary in the proposals was bound to prove so impracticable that it could never in fact be tried; perhaps also some of them felt a certain pride in being members of the Governing Body of an institution round which one could build so extraordinary a scheme. At all events, they were not prepared to take a decision there and then, and so Albert Thomas' memorandum was referred to a small committee with instructions to report at the next meeting, it being understood that the Finance Committee would make such financial provisions as the Director required for carrying on the immediate work in hand.

It will be seen later how much of Albert Thomas' scheme finally came to fruition. At the moment it startled not only the Governing Body but his own officials, for reasons that have been explained in the Introduction. It was magnificent, but was it possible? After all, it was the Governments who had framed the International Labour Office. It was the Governments who had drawn up its programme in the Preamble and in Article 427—and difficult enough they had found this latter operation. Would they allow the whole scheme to be changed? And was there not enough waiting to be done by the ordinary methods and within the original programme without seeking new fields for more dangerous activities? To all these questions it seemed that there could only be one answer. Albert Thomas was building in the air.

But was he? After all, he was not an anchorite. His active life

had been passed in contact with realities. He had been a Member of Parliament in France (he still was). He had been a Minister, and as such had dealt with Government departments and with foreign Governments. This was not the plan of a man without knowledge and experience. And yet there it was, and it was clearly not only impracticable but impossible.

But Albert Thomas, as we came to learn, was essentially a practical man. He cared most of all for results. Though he had all a Frenchman's ready grasp of principle he never expounded principles for the mere delight of doing so. His plan, as we came to learn, was meant seriously. He knew and appreciated as fully as anyone how much of it was revolutionary and how much of it challenged accepted methods and ideas. He knew it would encounter opposition, and perhaps for that very reason he stated it in the most extreme terms. He was fond of quoting a French parliamentary saying: 'You must get steam up on a locomotive before you can move a pin.' Perhaps, too, in view of the temperature of opinion in the Labour movement, he felt it indispensable to state his idea of the ultimate organisation of the I.L.O. in terms which showed his comprehension of Labour's revolutionary mood. But he was prepared to fight for his plan, and to argue that it was the right plan and that it could be put into operation. Much that he urged was met with an inevitable refusal, and if his plan be taken literally it would seem that it was largely a failure. But if his plan be regarded as no more than a section taken at the angle which would display his ideas most favourably to the Labour opinion whose support he was anxious to secure, it must be admitted that his efforts led to solid achievement. His presentation of his ideas was meant both to attract and to educate. He succeeded to a surprising degree, as this story will show, and in one sense his plan was achieved completely. Where no official machinery was put at his disposal Albert Thomas fulfilled it in his own person. His death

did not lead to the abandonment of his underlying ideas. Many of them have proved their value by experience, and their progressive operation continues under his successor. And when the real utility and functions of the International Labour Organisation are properly understood, something like the substance of Albert Thomas' plan will be accepted as the obvious method for its most efficient working.

This, however, was far from apparent as we turned to our immediate tasks in Seamore Place. There remained a bare four months in which to prepare a series of technical reports for the second session of the International Labour Conference, which was to open at Genoa at the beginning of June. Six weeks were all that were available to prepare for the next session of the Governing Body, and in the meantime the decisions of the Paris Session had to be put into execution.

For these two tasks the tiny existing staff was quite inadequate, and although the general scheme of organisation had not yet been decided, some kind of a skeleton staff had to be got together. As the Office was definitely in being, it was possible to begin to provide for certain essentials which would subsist in whatever scheme of organisation might be adopted. The search for suitable staff, therefore, began, and the institution of a proper accountancy service, a supplies service, a translation service and so on. No special difficulty was encountered, but it all took up a great deal of the time of the few available officials for whose attention a host of other problems were clamouring. As new staff was recruited the house in Seamore Place became too small, and the office overflowed into a second house in close proximity. Two maritime experts, one British and one Norwegian, were found and set to work studying the maritime legislation of the different countries. William Martin, afterwards to become world famous as the political correspondent of the *Journal de Genève*, was brought in from the League to organise a press

service, and Mr. Louis Varlez also came from the Secretariat to begin the investigation of the problem of unemployment. Miss Sophy Sanger brought her unique knowledge and experience to the work of the translation of labour legislation and took charge of the Legislative Series. Mr. H. A. Grimshaw, whose name will always be associated with the problems of native labour, Mr. G. A. Johnston and Mr. Tixier were recruited about the same time.

For finance we were now dependent on the League of Nations, which had come into being with the coming into force of the Treaty of Versailles on 10th January. Its financial machinery had therefore hardly begun to function, and its much harassed Treasurer, Sir Herbert Ames, found it hard to meet the demands made on him. That the International Labour Organisation should be spending money faster than the League itself was to him an anomaly, and he said so in no unmeasured terms. No amount of explanation, pointing out that the International Labour Organisation had started nearly a year ago, had held its first Conference and was engaged in preparing a second, whereas the first Assembly was only as yet on a fairly distant horizon, served to placate him. As I was in charge of the office finances, it fell to me to make constant demands on him for cash. Each time he read me the same solemn warning. Each time I tried to placate him with the same explanations. He remained un-placated, but he paid. How or where he found the money was a mystery, but find it he did.

This question of finance, to which it will be necessary to return, served to illustrate how insecure were the international organisations at this time, and how unorthodox were some of the methods which had to be pursued. On the occasion of my first visit to Sir Herbert Ames I came away with a cheque for five thousand pounds. I had written authority from Albert Thomas to give a receipt for it and for any similar amounts, and

to apply them to the payment of the expenses of the Office. The cheque was made out to me personally. I took it to my bank, a branch of one of London's greatest, and asked if I could open an account in the name of the International Labour Office. I was told I must see the manager, and was shown in to that august personage. I explained what I wanted to do.

'What', he enquired, 'is the International Labour Office?'

I explained briefly. As his attitude seemed somewhat reserved I laid stress on the fact that Members of it included the most important Governments, who, I assumed, would be considered by the bank as admirable clients.

'That will be all right,' he said; 'but have you got an authorisation from your board of directors or executive council? You haven't; well, get one and then we will open the account.'

I explained again. I pointed out that the Governing Body would not meet for another six weeks; that I had got the money and that the money had to be spent in the meantime.

He still seemed curiously unresponsive. I began to think that my story of an Office set up by the Treaty of Versailles and represented by a person with whose modest and usually empty account he was perhaps too familiar must sound like some new form of swindle.

'What have you got?' he asked, 'a cheque?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'a cheque for five thousand pounds.'

I handed it over for his inspection. It was a cheque on the Bank of England. That, I thought, would remove his hesitation. But it didn't.

'I'm afraid', he said, 'we can't open an account without a resolution of your council.'

'But what am I to do?' I asked in bewilderment. 'The cheque is payable to me and I want some of the money to pay salaries. I can't carry the rest of the money about in my pocket and I

shall have further cheques for somewhat similar amounts from time to time.'

'Oh,' he said, 'you can pay it into your account, of course, and draw against it in the ordinary way.'

'But can't I have a special account?' I asked in desperation. The prospect of getting my own money mixed up with the office expenditure appalled me.

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'you can open a "B" account and mark cheques accordingly. But you know it is really most irregular. Do you realise that if you were run over and killed when you leave the bank the money will be the legal property of your heirs?'

I hadn't realised anything of the kind. I had the vaguest idea as to who exactly my heirs might be, and as for my being run over, well, both I and the International Labour Office must take their chance of it. A 'B' account was opened, and that was another problem solved and so it happened forgotten in the midst of a steady succession of others. For six months the whole of the funds of the International Labour Office remained at the mercy of the traffic in London and Genoa until, when the Office at last reached Geneva, proper and regular arrangements were made. It should be added, as a further indication of our financial difficulties, that there were times when, had a fatal accident occurred, any dispute between unscrupulous heirs and the Office would have been over something less than a five pound note.

Albert Thomas at this time was constantly travelling backwards and forwards between London and Paris, where he had still affairs to wind up. He would arrive in Seamore Place as fresh and full of energy as if he had come from a long night's rest and cold bath. It was only later that I learned that he was a bad sailor and had a particular horror of the Channel. As soon as he arrived there would be a 'Rapport'.

This was another strange institution to which we had to become accustomed. It was attended by Butler and the principal officials of the Office. Camille Lemerrier, a brilliant young socialist who was Albert Thomas' *Chef de Cabinet*, took note of the decisions reached. Albert Thomas, in spite of his constant absences, was astonishingly conversant with all the details of our work. His Cabinet sent him by every mail, when he was absent, copies of or extracts from all the most important letters received or letters sent out, and brief reports on the progress of current work. He made his own choice of the subjects which he would raise at the Rapport, and on which he wished to lay down a line of policy, but anybody else could raise other subjects if he chose. Our first critical impressions of these Rapports as a method of work were, however, overshadowed by the spectacle they provided of Albert Thomas' amazing mastery of the subjects which came up for discussion. His memory for and his grasp of detail was astonishing. Equally astonishing was his patience. He was prepared to listen to argument, to reply, to listen again. Sometimes the argument would relate to something remote from the central and urgent problems which kept piling up in such number as to threaten to overwhelm our understaffed institution, and those immediately concerned would be itching to get away and get on with the work. But Albert Thomas could never bear to break off an argument on a disagreement if he could possibly help it. He wanted always to carry his staff with him. He was convinced that he could do so if he could make them understand his point of view. It was extremely rare for him to give an order. Sometimes, when he lost his temper in the face of persistent opposition, he would declare that such and such must be done 'or I will give a formal order'. But such occasions were very infrequent. His desire to persuade was excessive. He never, perhaps, quite understood the attitude of those who, accustomed to a more disciplined method, were

content to state their objections, and once it was clear that their superiors held a different view, were prepared to act on it without further discussion. It would be a mistake to suppose that his method really led to much loss of time. He conducted affairs expeditiously. The impatience which his method provoked was due to the general pressure in this disorganised period.

Another feature of those early Rapports was his perpetual contribution of new facts or ideas. He read the hundreds of press clippings prepared by the Press Service with avid interest; he followed in detail, so far as they were reported in the press, all social movements and struggles; he had his contacts with the political world—of these we were to learn more later; he found time to discuss with the Webbs and with H. G. Wells the possibilities of the post-war world; and all the flood of information and suggestion that came to him in these and other ways his powerful mind assimilated, ordered and then subjected to a process of selection and integration. What was striking about the operation was that it seemed so effortless.

His arrival always produced a feeling of excitement. What would he produce this time? We were always ready for surprises. The sense of his overwhelming vitality, his incredible freshness of mind, his buoyancy and confidence in the face of all difficulties, his easy assumption of what before his arrival had seemed grave and dangerous responsibilities, were a perpetual surprise in themselves to which long repetition never fully accustomed us.

‘You have heard the news?’ he cried one morning. ‘The Supreme Council wants to steal our thunder. They want the mission to Russia to be carried out by the League of Nations and not by the International Labour Office. I got wind of this from Drummond. It seems it’s an idea of Lloyd George. But they won’t get away with it as easily as all that. Who started the

idea of sending a mission of enquiry into Soviet Russia? Our Governing Body in January. And if the Supreme Council is now impressed with the passionate curiosity of the public as to the real state of affairs in Russia it is because the Governing Body's proposal has given rise to public discussion. We took the initiative and we are not going to be thrust aside so easily as all that. I have written to Lloyd George to tell him so. *Je ne vais pas me laisser faire.*'

Albert Thomas' attitude and methods on this occasion were characteristic. But they were startling to the orthodox Civil Servant mind.

In the first place the Governing Body had taken no decision. A proposal to send a mission of a tripartite character (i.e. composed of representatives of governments, workers and employers) into Russia for the purpose of reporting on industrial conditions had indeed been made by Mr. Sokal, the representative of the Polish Government, at the January meeting. The decision had been put off to the next meeting in March. (It was now the middle of February.) In the meantime the Director was to draw up a possible programme of enquiry, and to report on the possibilities of such an enquiry being actually made.

The proposal was not, therefore, Albert Thomas' own, and it was still only a proposal. Nevertheless, he made himself its ardent champion. He realised that it would strike the popular imagination and that it would help to put the International Labour Office on the map. He secured the services of Dr. Pardo, who had been Butler's Italian assistant at Washington, and who had been in Russia. Under Albert Thomas' impulsion and direction an enormous mass of documentary information had been got together, and a bibliography comprising over 1500 items, and a questionnaire or programme of enquiry had been drawn up which was in itself a complete enumeration of labour and industrial problems, with all their subdivisions. So far, of

course, he was clearly entitled to go, though his idea of the scope of the enquiry and the thoroughness with which it ought to be prepared probably went far beyond the expectations of the Governing Body.

To challenge the Supreme Council seemed, however, to be leading the International Labour Office into dangerous waters. It is difficult in 1936 to picture the status and authority of that self-appointed body. It had dictated the Peace. Governments, Ministers—even Foreign Secretaries of the greatest countries—were small and insignificant figures beside it. Those of us who had worked in Paris at the Peace Conference had a lively recollection of how remote and arbitrary the Supreme Council had been. It was something which could not be argued with or explained to. It took its decisions in secret meetings, and everything else had to be made to conform. Its most powerful member was Mr. Lloyd George, and the idea of the tiny International Labour Office daring to call him to order, daring to warn him off a field in which it had at the best only a doubtful option of priority, was something to make us more than a little uncomfortable. Albert Thomas, however, had no such complex or doubts. He was willing to go up against David more gaily than ever David had gone against Goliath. In fact the stone had already left his sling. He read us his letter to Lloyd George. It was amazingly able. It was also in more than one sense disconcerting. It did not misrepresent or twist the facts. But as they were presented we suddenly saw that the position was much stronger than we had supposed. What was most striking, however, was the tone of equality. The Supreme Council was boldly told that the International Labour Office's rights in the matter could not just be ignored; it was an official and an independent body: and it represented the organised workers and therefore, by implication, possessed that 'popular mandate' which the Supreme Council would disregard at its

peril. Albert Thomas, moreover, had not confined his intervention to this letter to Lloyd George. He had also seen Millerand (he later saw Philippe Berthelot when he learned that the latter was to replace Millerand at the opening sitting of the Supreme Council), and he had written as well to Mr. Nitti, the representative of Italy.

The rest of the story of the Russian Enquiry need not be told here. In the final upshot no Commission of Enquiry, League or Labour Office, ever went to Russia. But Albert Thomas had scored a success in a quite different field. The Supreme Council spent a whole meeting discussing an International Labour Office proposal. The International Labour Office was emerging from its obscurity.

This was an example of the application of a definite policy, though it was only later that this was perceived. But it was not a policy that was purely opportunist. Albert Thomas was accused many times of 'butting in', as Mr. Barnes once said of Mr. Churchill. He did. The International Labour Office sent a delegation to the Genoa Economic Conference; the International Labour Office went to the Reparations discussions at Spa; the International Labour Office appeared at the Council of the League, in the Assembly, in the Disarmament Committee, in the Institute of Agriculture, in the Institute for Intellectual Co-operation. Such 'intrusions' as they were sometimes called—or by harsher terms—did serve a designed purpose of making Governments and the public realise that the International Labour Office was alive and active and to be counted with. But there was more to it than that. A detailed examination of these various interventions proves to any unbiased student that in every such case the International Labour Office had either a real interest to defend or a real contribution to make. Albert Thomas saw, ten years ahead of other opinion, that no international issue could be divorced from its social implications. He

was greeted with impatience and criticism. There are few now that would deny that he was right. To take a recent example—the International Labour Office had its part to play in the problem of the Saar Plebiscite. Its assistance was requested by the Aloisi Committee, and it was publicly thanked by the Council of the League for its services.

But Albert Thomas was not only ready to tackle the great politicians and the great political institutions. The strength of the International Labour Office lay, he was never tired of insisting, in public support. He was keenly sensitive, therefore, to criticism or misleading information in the press. I remember another Rapport at which he brandished a newspaper cutting. 'You have seen this article by Pertinax. Well, it's not good enough. He should know me better than that.' I have forgotten what exactly Pertinax had written. Like all his articles it was brilliant. It was also critical of Albert Thomas and of the International Labour Office. Here again we were startled by Albert Thomas' method. 'I will write to him, and I will insist that my reply be published.' His plump hand stretched out and found a bell push. One of his stenographers entered the room, book and pencil in hand. And then, in a style as succinct and as telling as Pertinax's own, Albert Thomas dictated his letter. He never paused for a word. He seemed to require no time to arrange his thought. Sentence after sentence, admirably worded, came from his lips at the rate of an ordinary conversation and fell into ordered paragraphs. It was an amazing exhibition which we were often to see repeated. But what was more startling to the Civil Service mind was the breach with the sacred Civil Service tradition that permanent public servants must not engage in public controversy. While we admired the vigour of his reply, and still more the mastery of its preparation, we were alarmed at its possible consequences, and more than a little doubtful as to its propriety. It was only slowly that the idea began to emerge

in our minds that the rules which might be well fitted to guide the conduct of national Civil Servants were not necessarily applicable to their international colleagues.

How far did Albert Thomas consciously realise it? At the time I should have answered 'not at all'. I regarded his action as the natural reflex of a politician who was not yet accustomed to a different rôle in which certain restraints must be regarded as inevitable. Now I am not so sure. It is only when one looks back and sees how all these actions of his were co-ordinated to a common purpose, and inspired by a single philosophy, that one wonders how far the reflection of his powerful mind had gone. If we had raised the question, Albert Thomas would certainly have explained and justified his attitude, but on what grounds and principles must remain a matter of speculation. There was no time to pursue principles and theories. We had to get on with the jobs in hand, which became steadily more numerous and more pressing. I am inclined to think now that he had a whole coherent system of action and of conduct marked out in his mind. But in the circumstances it could only reach us in fragments not always understood.

Another example was soon to perplex us. Albert Thomas opened the Rapport in high good humour, an indication that he was pleased—which meant that he had achieved some new success for the International Labour Office. 'I am going to Amsterdam,' he announced. 'The workers have invited me to attend the meeting of the executive council of the International Federation of Trade Unions.' We tried to measure the implications of this announcement. They seemed to be many and dangerous. 'It was not quite spontaneous (ça n'a pas été tout seul),' he added with a chuckle, 'but it's all arranged.'

The Supreme Council was one thing. Nobody could criticise him for intervening there. It had needed courage and a sense of the importance of the International Labour Office which might

be thought excessive, but which could be open to no serious reproach. But Amsterdam was another matter. The I.F.T.U. was, of course, the great international federation of national trade union movements—as such it was natural, and indeed necessary, that the International Labour Office should be in touch with it. But it did not regard its functions as purely trade union or industrial. Its executive council had issued a number of political manifestoes. It had even threatened to use the powerful weapon of the boycott if certain of its manifestoes did not receive satisfaction. It might, perhaps, have every justification for its action, but its proceedings were watched with some alarm by most Governments, and the International Labour Office was an official Governmental institution. Albert Thomas taught us that this was a dangerously narrow interpretation, but we had not yet learnt his lesson. Moreover, was it not the duty of the Director to maintain an attitude of absolute impartiality vis-à-vis the three groups in his Governing Body, governmental, workers' and employers'? Even if he avoided implicating himself in any political decisions that might be taken, he could hardly avoid being involved in industrial discussions which were bound to be highly antagonistic to the employers, and in all probability critical of the Governments.

It seemed that the course he was pursuing was unwise, and likely to damage his position in the Governing Body. But the die was cast; the decision taken; and once more there was neither time nor, as it seemed, utility in uttering our misgivings. We might, of course, have found it a logical and a proper course in the light of his Paris memorandum. But his Paris memorandum, like all our other preoccupations, could now only be taken up fragment by fragment as immediate work involved. Otherwise we might have found for ourselves the sudden comfort we drew from a single remark of Albert Thomas a couple of months later when the point was put to him. 'But why not?' he

exclaimed, in genuine surprise. 'If the International Federation of Employers invite me to the meeting of their executive I shall be delighted to attend.' Of course it was an obvious and unanswerable reply. But, shackled by the traditions of a national Civil Service and being too close to the wood to see the trees, although we had planted them ourselves, we often missed the obvious, and questioned the accuracy of his vision.

Albert Thomas came to be wholly identified with the International Labour Office. The object which it was designed to achieve, social justice, was the ruling and the consuming passion of his life. The great instrument which he directed in such masterly fashion became in some sort a part of himself. As the years went by, and his leadership became more and more undisputed, the identity of the man and the institution became more and more complete. Officials of long standing in the Office, but whose service did not date back to its earliest years, sometimes learnt with a shock that he had not been at Washington. They found it hard to believe that he had had no hand or part in those Washington decisions which he was constantly defending. It was even more incredible to think that there had been a Governing Body at which he had not sat on the President's right hand. It even seemed, though this may be no more than imagination, that he himself did not like to be reminded that the Organisation had been born and taken its first important steps without his aid.

But it was perhaps a fortunate circumstance. The Peace Conference, the Organising Committee and the Washington Conference had followed one another without any interval, and there had been no breathing space for any of the original authors of the Organisation to sit back and see their work in any kind of perspective. Albert Thomas was able to look at it from a distance and see it whole. He saw it, not as a negotiator who knew his way through a patchwork of amendments, nor

as, for instance, Fontaine and Delevingne and Mahaim who saw it as a much improved form of the pre-war machinery for international labour legislation. As a social historian he measured its potentialities against the social movements of a century. As an active politician and a Minister closely in touch with labour and industrial movements during the war, as a socialist delegate to a number of international labour and socialist congresses, he saw the possibility of integrating a new programme of social progress 'which has as yet scarcely emerged from the first attempts to formulate it', and he felt that the International Labour Organisation was an instrument through which that integration could take place on a scale hitherto inconceivable. He sensed the stirring of new forces, a recasting of ideas, a greater response and responsibility of the masses. He was confident that new and more daring methods, having found an almost accidental juridical sanction, could ride safely on that lifting wave against the opposition of prejudice and the drag of accepted procedure. It was a deeper and a wider vision, and it could not be immediately shared. Like Columbus, he saw a world beyond the horizon of his fellows, and he laid his plans and settled his methods on other assumptions than theirs.

But this was not apparent to us at the time. We should, I believe, have described him then as a vigorous, courageous man endowed with a brilliant intelligence, and an arresting personality: we should have said that he was an excellent Director: but we might, I am afraid, have made a mental or, to some close friend within the Office, a spoken reservation that he would be better still when he had more experience and knew a little more about the International Labour Organisation.

If we did not, it was simply that we had no time. Albert Thomas appeared and disappeared, but the furrow made by his passage was immediately obliterated by problems that we had

to solve for ourselves. A simple list of the questions which arose would fill pages. More than thirty of them were sufficiently important to be mentioned in Albert Thomas' general report to the Governing Body which opened on 22nd March, that is to say, barely six weeks after we had come to Seamore House. We worked all day and often far into the night: we worked Sundays and Saturdays and holidays. Further staff was engaged to help us to stem the tide. But there was little chance of giving them any instructions in their duties. By the time they had been found a chair and a table and handed a copy of Part XIII of the Treaty, they would be given some piece of work or other and had to make the best shift they could. It was a difficult test, and when it succeeded it gave a more certain result than any competitive examination. Men like Tixier and Grimshaw came to us in this way, and showed their quality immediately. But it did not always succeed, nor could it be expected that it would. And when it did not there were more problems to be solved. There was a neurasthenic who complained that he was not allowed enough freedom—though it is difficult to imagine how he could have had more. So he abandoned the particular study which had been allotted to him and retired in dudgeon to write a bitter personal attack on Albert Thomas, whom he had only seen once. I think the general atmosphere of tense effort must have got on his nerves. There was another gentle enthusiast who was found to be carrying on official negotiations with the Chinese Minister, whom he had persuaded by an appropriate insistence on the importance of Part XIII—evidently the Chinese Minister was more susceptible than my Bank Manager—to cable the complete text of the Washington Conventions to Peking, and this without a word to anyone in authority. He was waiting, he said, till the negotiations were complete: he was convinced that we were neglecting the Far East, and that it was most important. He was asked who would pay for the cabling.

He replied that matters of that kind could not possibly be introduced into a conversation with a Chinese gentleman, and intimated that that was the least which the Office could be expected to do now that his negotiations had been carried to a triumphant conclusion. He was asked if he realised that the cabling in question would cost at least a thousand pounds. He waved this aside as below consideration. When, his superior's patience being exhausted, he was told that the Office had the greatest difficulty in finding enough money to pay his salary let alone paying a thousand pounds for unnecessary cabling, and that he had better tell the Chinese Minister that he could cable if he wished, but that any question of the Office meeting the bill must be ruled out in the most definite way, he retired in tears. Whether he saw the Chinese Minister, or whether, indeed, he had ever seen him, and, if he had, whether the Chinese Minister understood that any such negotiation had been carried to a conclusion, like many other things, we had no time to find out.

There were further incidents of this kind, though, all things considered, they were surprisingly few, and harassing as they were they brought a touch of humour into our strenuous existence. There were others which were also humorous but had graver and more general implications. Butler was in general charge of the Office. It was natural that he should organise it on the well-known methods which are applied in every British Department. The very simplest and most obvious of these methods were, however, not always understood even by highly intelligent members of the staff. The British Civil Service builds its machinery on the basis of files. A file is a cardboard docket which contains all the papers relevant to a particular question. The outside of the docket is ruled with a number of spaces for names and dates. Every official has on his table a tray marked 'in' and a tray marked 'out'. When he has dealt

with a file and written a minute on it, he writes the name of the official to whom his minute is addressed on the outside, and places the file in the 'out' tray. Periodically messengers enter his room, take away the contents of the 'out' tray, much as a postman collects the letters from a letter-box. The files so removed go to a sorting centre whence they are distributed to their destinations. The messenger system is, in fact, an internal postal system, and a file addressed to Mr. A. and placed in an 'out' tray will automatically find its way to Mr. A.'s 'in' tray. The dates, of course, are a check as to how long an official has kept a file and, if at some subsequent stage there is trouble about the delay with which a matter has been treated, an examination of the outside of the file will show where the delay occurred, and the official in question can be asked for explanations and censured if need be.

The process of opening new files or dockets is performed by the Registry, which is responsible for their permanent custody. All incoming mail is received by the Registry and placed either in a new file opened for the purpose or in an existing file to which it relates. When action has been finished on a file it is marked P.A. (put away), and it automatically finds its way to the Registry shelves, where it remains until some fresh incoming correspondence or some internal initiative on the same subject puts it again into circulation.

No system could well be simpler. To the British Civil Servant it is an indispensable instrument of his work. It was inconceivable to him that a Department could work without a Registry, messengers, and 'in' and 'out' trays. In fact, a Civil Servant was once defined as a person who could always lay his hand on the relevant papers, and the secret of that efficiency is a well run Registry. Without the relevant papers how could decisions be taken with security, how could letters be written based on all the exact facts? It was, therefore, with amazement

that we discovered that the file system was neither generally familiar nor even easily understood.

One morning William Martin entered the Rapport in what was obviously a state of irritation. He was a man who was tenacious of his opinions, and Albert Thomas and he did not always see eye to eye. On such occasions he was always prepared to press his point with almost as much vigour as Albert Thomas himself. We supposed that it was some such difference of opinion which accounted for his attitude now.

When Albert Thomas' programme of questions had been dealt with, Martin's opportunity to raise his point came.

'I wish to protest, Mr. Director, against the conduct of certain officials in this Office,' he declared.

Albert Thomas and the rest of us regarded him with surprise. Was this another case of neurasthenia, or had some unfortunate personal incident developed? We could not imagine against whom his indignant protest could be directed.

He went on: 'We are engaged on serious business; we are all working under great strain: it is intolerable that in these conditions certain officials should allow themselves to play stupid practical jokes on their colleagues.'

'But what has happened?' asked Albert Thomas.

'A great many papers are sent to me,' explained William Martin. 'As head of the Press section I have to be kept informed of all that goes on. I receive an enormous number of papers. I exhaust myself reading them—I have to, because I have not enough assistants. And when I have read them carefully and taken such notes as I require, I place them in the tray marked "out". Well, they all come back. I am being buried with papers and continually exasperated by finding among them papers which I have already read.'

There was a moment's silence. Then we burst into unrestrained laughter, to the indignation of William Martin and

the mystification of Albert Thomas, whose frown had deepened as William Martin unfolded his tale.

What had happened was, of course, that William Martin had neither marked the papers which came to him with the name of any other official, nor with the letters 'P.A.' As his own name remained on them they inevitably returned to him after all the files had been collected and sorted for redistribution. Thus, as almost all files went to him at some stage, the whole of the Registry was invading his room. The picture of his feverish efforts to stem the flood by the futile expedient of filling his 'out' tray, and the indignation with which he denounced what he deduced was a deliberate effort to hamper him in his work, was as funny as a Chaplin film.

If William Martin's trouble was too many files, there were other officials who failed to understand the system because they got too few. They were people who were engaged on research, and who therefore remained outside the full current of circulation. I remember Mr. Louis Varlez, after he had been in the Office for more than a couple of months, once asking me in tones of mild curiosity:

'By the way, can you tell me what all these boys (messengers) do who are continually running up and down the stairs with papers?'

These incidents, amusing in themselves, were, however, only symptoms of how difficult the building up of an international machine was to prove. William Martin and Louis Varlez accepted the system once it was explained to them. But there were others who found it hard to accept it at all, because they were accustomed to another and different method, whereby each official kept all the papers relating to whatever task he was responsible for. To part with his papers seemed to him a most dangerous proceeding. It constituted an invasion of his responsibility. It left him also with an awful sense of insecurity, not so

much lest some other official might procure them and go poaching on his domain, but lest Albert Thomas should suddenly send for him and ask him to produce such and such a letter connected with his work. In such an eventuality he would have to apply to this strange machine called the Registry, and he could not feel any real confidence that the Registry could actually produce any one of the thousands of letters received. Some of them must surely get lost, and why not the particular one for which he would be held responsible? Moreover, the Registry classified all documents and letters on one system, and he had been told that he must not interfere with it without the Registry's knowledge and consent. How much easier it would be for him to keep his own papers, classify them on whatever system appeared to him best, slipping them loose into folders so that the classification could be altered at any time, and locking the collection of folders up in a cupboard in his room where it could always be to his hand and under his eye?

The system had obvious attractions, but to the British Civil Servant it had appalling defects. The number of chances of losing an important paper seemed to be multiplied by the number of members of the Office. And if a paper was wanted urgently, what was to happen if its custodian was ill, or on leave or out at lunch, or if he lost his key? Besides, some papers must of necessity pass from official to official. How would anybody know where they had got to, except the official in whose hands they happened to be? And last, and most important of all, in the absence of files how could it be ensured that any official dealing with a question would have automatically before him the minutes of decisions which must be respected, and how could an outgoing letter be checked and if necessary stopped if it was not in accordance therewith?

One of Butler's first steps had therefore been the institution of a central Registry system, and such a system was set up. Part

of the difficulty of getting it to work efficiently, however, was that Albert Thomas was far from convinced of its necessity. He was not faced personally with the difficulties of William Martin. He did not have to master the mysteries of 'in' and 'out' trays. Papers addressed to him, of course, went to his Cabinet or were brought to him directly by the officials concerned. But he thought the Registry system expensive and cumbersome, and for a long time he looked on it as a British foible. For years he could not be got to write minutes on a file. He dictated notes which were typed on little square pieces of paper, and which circulated independently of the files to which they referred, until some believer in the file system, or a convert thereto, inserted them in their place or pasted them on the appropriate minute sheets.

It will be remembered that one of the elements which had played its part in the difficulties surrounding Albert Thomas' appointment had been the fear of the Cabinet system. This was as strange and unknown to the British as the Central Registry to the French. The first experience of it in Seamore Place was an agreeable surprise. The young Chef de Cabinet, Lemerrier, was a pleasant and in no way a troublesome colleague, who interfered little if at all with the work of the different sections. Nevertheless, a Central Registry had seemed an institution which would afford a guarantee against Cabinet interference and intrigue. Here again, however, calculations failed because they were based on insufficient information. The Cabinet never became a danger, either under Lemerrier or his successors. In any case, Albert Thomas was not the man to be run by his Cabinet or to let it get out of hand. Even if he had been, he kept his Cabinet far too busy to leave it any leisure for operations of its own. On the other hand, the existence of the Cabinet profoundly altered the operation of the Registry system in a way that was totally unforeseen.

The British system of working a Government office may be roughly described as a system in which the work comes up from below. The Registry receives and opens all letters and distributes them with their appropriate files. The officials who receive them deal with them if it is within the measure of their responsibility to do so. If not, they send them higher up. At each stage of the hierarchy a part of the work is liquidated. The files, as it were, pass through a series of sieves and only those requiring decision by the highest authority arrive at the top. It was thus that we envisaged that the International Labour Office would work. It seemed the natural way to run a big office: the only way in which those at the top could find time for the careful consideration of the questions which fell to them. Moreover, it automatically provided that such questions would arrive accompanied by 'the previous papers' and the advice and suggestions of the competent services below.

The French system, it appeared, was the exact reverse. The incoming mail was opened by the *Cabinet*, i.e. the Minister's personal entourage. Important letters were reserved for the Minister's personal consideration. The remainder was distributed to the competent services with comments or instructions from the Cabinet. The current ran downwards and not upwards.

This was the system to which Albert Thomas was accustomed. He was not prepared to accept another under the strangeness of which he was bound to chafe. If he was to give his full value as Director he must be allowed to work in accordance with his habits. We argued. He remained unconvinced, but, as always, he was prepared to compromise. He agreed to the Registry. He agreed that it should open the mail. But a member of his Cabinet was to be present who might abstract any document after its receipt had been registered. If so abstracted, a copy of the document was to be sent to the Regis-

try as soon as possible. Other documents or letters of less but sufficient importance would be summarised for his information before the originals went into the normal registry circulation.

It must be said once again that Albert Thomas was right. A British Director has succeeded him, and there is no question of altering the general lines of the system on which Albert Thomas compromised. What was wrong with the British system was not that it was not French. It was that it could only work in the circumstances for which it was designed, in a British Ministry staffed by British officials. In an international office it would have proved unworkable quite apart from the fact that, as will be seen later, what Albert Thomas meant to make of the International Labour Office was something quite different from the international equivalent of a national ministry.

These struggles about procedure, though they had permanent results of great importance, were, however, only incidents in the current of our work, which was now to be interrupted by the third session of the Governing Body.

It met in the oak-panelled splendour of a palatial chamber in the House of Lords. No attempt will be made here to give an account of its discussions and decisions. But it was instructive to see how Albert Thomas handled it. In Paris he had intervened little. Now he was settling into the saddle, and the pressure of his hand began to be felt. He spoke, and was listened to as one having authority. His views in general prevailed. What was most interesting, however, were his reticences and his insistences. His famous plan of organisation was hardly mentioned. The Committee to which it had been remitted reported that 'the organisation as proposed by Mr. Albert Thomas was approved by the Committee in its broad lines', and the Governing Body adopted their report without discussion and without reservation. What had happened was that certain astute

Government delegates who had grave objections to certain features in it preferred to fight their battle in the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee's report suggested for approval a budget of £250,000 for the financial year 1920-1921, but its detailed estimates contained no provision for the Political Division nor for the branch offices to which Albert Thomas had attached so much importance. Albert Thomas had of course attended the meetings of the Committee and had accepted their report. His retreat, however, was less significant than it appeared. It was tactical and not strategical. On the report of the other committee he had obtained the approval of the Governing Body of the broad lines of his scheme. He knew of course that there was no chance of getting his Political Division immediately so he made an easy surrender in the Finance Committee. But he had secured two points which might be counted as of more than minor importance. One was the form of the Finance Committee's decision which did not close the door on his proposals and the other was a positive concession. The relevant paragraph in the Committee's report, which was approved by the Governing Body, ran as follows: 'No provision has been made for the Political Division as it is understood that this Division will not at present be created, but the provision for the Cabinet has been increased in order that it may embrace the necessary work of liaison which would have been performed by the Political Division.'

The British fear of the Cabinet had reduced it in Paris to a private secretariat. Now there was to be for the moment no Political Division but the Cabinet was to have certain political functions under the Director's immediate control. Albert Thomas' tactics may be considered to have been completely successful. His positions were established for the time when he might judge it possible to make another move forward and in the meantime certain positive gains were in his hands.

The close of the Governing Body's session brought us no respite at Seamore Place. The decisions taken, and they were numerous and important, had to be put into execution. Another Governing Body was already in prospect and would have to be prepared. The Genoa Conference was looming ominously near and work on the reports for it was behindhand due to the delay of the Governments in sending in replies to the questionnaires which had been despatched to them.

Moreover, preparations had to be made for the evacuation of Seamore Place and the annexe in Seymour Street. In any case they would not be required since the bulk of the staff would go to Genoa to furnish the secretariat of the Conference, and the remainder it was hoped could proceed to Geneva where an option on premises had been secured. The work had therefore to be reorganised on a new footing, and the staff divided into two groups which for a month or more would operate almost independently. The Conference staff had to be mobilised as a special unit with new and different duties. A special train had to be secured to convey it with its essential equipment, e.g. English and French typewriting machines, from Calais to Genoa. Arrangements had to be made about finance, about leases, about hotels at Genoa, about subsistence allowances, about all the thousand and one things that arise when a staff of some eighty to a hundred has to be transported and set to work in another country. And the ordinary work had to go on at the same time.

Albert Thomas left the actual execution of most of this to Butler, but he knew what was going on as regards every detail and he had to be informed of all decisions. His last act before leaving Seamore Place for Rome, some ten days or so before the despatch of the Conference staff for Genoa, was characteristic. He was much concerned about the Conference Reports. He had asked day by day for information as to their progress.

At last everything was with the printer. Was the printer doing his best? Was he aware of how vitally important it was? he kept asking. It was in vain that I assured him that I had personally visited the printing establishment twice and that I was satisfied that they were straining every nerve.

'I will go and see them,' he said, taking his hat. 'Will you come with me?'

'Of course,' I said, though with no enthusiasm as it meant another hour with files and queries piling up steadily on my desk. So together we drove to the printers and interviewed the manager and the foreman. Albert Thomas appeared slightly but not wholly reassured.

'Write me a letter', he said when we again reached Seamore Place, 'referring to my visit and saying I count on them to keep their promises.' I hastily dictated a letter and brought it to him to sign. 'Keep them up to the mark,' he said as he said goodbye. 'The Cabinet will telephone me every day.' A smile and a warm handshake and he was gone. I put the reports out of my mind for the moment. Everything possible seemed to have been done. Proofs came in day by day and night by night. The printer kept his promise. An almost continuous service of cyclists took the proofs back as soon as they had been read at the highest possible speed. Finally, the reports were out. I went down to the printers a last time and saw them packed in wooden cases ready for transport to Genoa. I thought I had heard the last of those reports. I was to have a rude awakening.

Chapter III

How Albert Thomas brought the International Labour Office to Geneva

I left London two days ahead of the main convoy to Genoa. It was necessary for me to inspect our prospective premises at Geneva so that if the decision to move to Geneva was taken—how it was taken will presently be recounted—I could play my part in organising the transfers of the staffs from London and Genoa to that city. The break was welcome after the last hectic days in London when it seemed that the strain would become intolerable. Now, in retrospect, it appeared only exhilarating. I had a sense of work well done in difficult conditions. Genoa was an attractive prospect though in June it would be hot. Still it was on the sea, and its streets and palaces were by all accounts both picturesque and interesting. There would be the Conference of course but Washington had broken the ground. I expected things to be strenuous but nothing compared to London. There could be no surprises.

In some such pleasant frame of mind, my mission in Geneva accomplished, I travelled to Culoz where the first surprise awaited me, and a disagreeable one it was. The Rome Express thundered through. Four minutes behind followed the special train bearing the Director and the staff of the Genoa Conference, which was scheduled to stop for two minutes. It drew up beside the ill-lit platform—it was about ten o'clock in the evening.

Albert Thomas alighted from the sleeper just opposite to me. He greeted Pône and William Martin, who had been my fellow-travellers from Geneva, and then turned to me with a brow as black as thunder.

'I am very dissatisfied with you,' he cried, in a deep and angry voice. 'You misled me about the reports. You gave me definite assurances I don't know how many times. And now they are not ready. I shall have to appear at the Conference, having failed to prepare its work. You cannot expect me to be pleased at the prospect.'

It is difficult to convey the effect of Albert Thomas' anger to those who have never experienced it or witnessed it. All the man's powerful personality seemed to be focused on the person who had incurred his displeasure, and the result was almost physically overpowering. This was the first time that I had seen him really angry, and I was both overwhelmed and dumbfounded. 'But they are ready,' I gasped. 'I saw the cases packed myself. They should be on the train.'

I wondered if, in spite of my careful instructions, some mistake had been made, but if so it could not be serious. The cases could follow the next day and be in plenty of time for the opening of the Conference.

'No, no,' he interrupted. 'Your cases are on the train. Your *English* reports are all ready. But the *French* editions, the *French* editions, where are they? Not half ready. In a state of complete chaos.'

The station-master hustled us into the train while I tried to recall the complicated methods which had been arranged for the production of the French editions in Paris.

'Well, good night,' said Albert Thomas as we reached the corridor. 'Your compartment is along there. But I am not satisfied with your organisation of the affair. We will have it out to-morrow.'

This was another Albert Thomas, and not at first sight by any means an attractive one. I had serious thoughts of resigning from the International Labour Office. How much more comfortable to work in Whitehall where reproofs were administered with more restraint and more justice, and where anyway one worked in only one language. As far as I could see I had been guilty of no error and had neglected no precaution. For the French reports I had had only a partial responsibility and that I had punctiliously fulfilled. When the Government's replies (which had to be incorporated in the reports) were received they proved to be more voluminous than had been expected; and most of them had arrived late. The French staff in London was therefore totally inadequate for their translation in the time at our disposal. Moreover, the printing of a number of lengthy reports in French could not be accomplished quickly in London. Arrangements were accordingly made to bring out the French edition of the reports in Paris, and as fast as they were written duplicates of the manuscripts were sent to the French capital for translation and printing. The same method was followed as the English proofs came from the London printer, so that any corrections made might be incorporated in the French text.

There were other difficulties. The maritime experts were bluff and hearty seamen, but they had no notion of how to draw up a Conference report. Precious time was lost before this was perceived. The result was an effort *in extremis* by the non-maritime staff which just saved the situation. But it meant of course that the time for translation and for printing was curtailed. Whether the Paris organisation had under-estimated the task which it had been asked to assume and had been overwhelmed by the quantity of English text which arrived by every successive mail—it could have been no easy task to find at short notice a sufficient number of translators capable of dealing rapidly with such technical material—or whether certain in-

structions had been disobeyed—I heard later that after I had left for Geneva a junior official had thought it unduly expensive to send large packets of proofs by air mail and had light-heartedly consigned them to the ordinary post—I never really learned. There was never time ‘to have the matter out’ as Albert Thomas had threatened and as I was more than willing. Genoa proved as absorbing and as exhausting as London.

As the train rolled through the mountains between Culoz and the Mont Cenis I began to realise that Albert Thomas’ anger was not without excuse, though I remained convinced that it was ill-directed. He was about to meet his first Conference. He had already wind of some difficulties, of which at the time I knew nothing, and grave indeed they were. But even if it was to be, as I innocently anticipated, an easy repetition of what had been learned at Washington, there were obvious preoccupations that must have been in his mind. The Conference would be his first great public test. It would be infinitely damaging to his reputation if it were less well organised than Washington. And then, there was the Deputy Director. Undoubtedly Albert Thomas had had some difficulty in persuading his friends of the wisdom of that appointment. Would it not now be said that their warnings had been justified and that the British Deputy Director, in charge of the general running of the office, had of course arranged for the English reports to appear before the French, or at all events, where time and circumstances involved a priority, had decided it in favour of his own language. The English-speaking delegations in any case would be at an advantage. They would have had days to master the reports before their French-speaking colleagues could receive copies. And this in circumstances where the Conference was likely to divide on the great issues before it just along those very lines of nationality. Albert Thomas would be accused of incapacity, and I could imagine how a man of his temperament

must react to the danger of such an accusation in such political circumstances. I had guessed that there was something highly strung in him. This then was just a natural boiling over. It had struck me as the lightning strikes the nearest conductor.

I was to see many other such thunderstorms break out of the clear sky of Albert Thomas' usually radiant personality, though only on one other occasion was I personally involved. When one came to know him better they were less terrible in the impression they made. They were thunderstorms and no more. They never disturbed for long his admirable equilibrium. Sometimes they were indeed thunderstorms to order, part of the tactics of a negotiation. But when they were genuine they were a necessary explosion, the roar of the steam through a safety-valve without which the pressure must become intolerable. It cannot be too often repeated that Albert Thomas had a passion for realisation. He wanted practical results. Papers and procedure and committees and conferences were the necessary steps towards results, but he cared little for them in themselves. Beyond them he saw the concrete progress which through them he sought to achieve. He saw it clearly when others seemed to see it not at all. Sometimes he must have felt as if there was an invisible intervening wall, and then as he redoubled his efforts to surmount or circumvent it his impatience would grow into an angry explosion. The unfortunate recipient of an outburst that seemed out of all proportion to his fault could hardly be expected to realise that it was due to a general cause. He had dropped a brick of ordinary, or even modest dimensions. It did not have the ordinary consequences when it fell on fulminate of mercury.

Albert Thomas' outbursts of anger made him few enemies though they were violent and intimidating almost to the point of being physically frightening. They produced a tension in the atmosphere like a real thunderstorm even when there was

reason to believe that they were only simulated. But as a rule he repaired the devastation they caused with grace and rapidity. His charm was equally irresistible; and most of the time he was charming.

Immediately on our arrival at Genoa there was another meeting of the Governing Body. The Agenda was a heavy one and showed what strides the Organisation had already taken into that wider field which Albert Thomas considered to be its province. It was round the table in the *Palazzo San Giorgio* that the Enquiry on Production was decided. A request from the Government of Hungary that the International Labour Office should send a commission of enquiry into Hungary, in order to establish by an impartial body the false nature of the rumours which were being circulated as to the atrocities committed by the alleged White Terror, was also laid before the meeting for decision and presented delicate problems of competence and procedure. It is not however with these and a long list of other decisions that the present story is concerned. One decision was taken, on an apparently simple administrative point, which in itself entitles the Genoa meeting of the Governing Body to be considered historic.

It will be remembered that Albert Thomas had secured from the Governing Body in London authority to acquire an option on premises at Geneva. The option had been obtained and was to expire on 10th June. In the meantime the Swiss referendum had been held and the result had been favourable to Switzerland's joining the League of Nations. Another international body, the Red Cross, was anxious to secure the same premises and so the option had either to be exercised or abandoned. As it expired on 10th June the Governing Body, which began its meeting on 3rd June, was faced with the necessity for taking a definite and immediate decision.

The situation, however, was politically highly complicated.

Under the terms of the Treaty the International Labour Office had to be established at the seat of the League. Though the Treaty provided that the seat of the League should be established at Geneva, it also provided that the Council of the League might at any time establish it elsewhere. There had been a certain division of opinion at the Peace Conference and it had been President Wilson's attitude which had brought the balance down in favour of Geneva as against Brussels. When, however, it became clear that there was no chance of America's joining the League, an intrigue developed to go back on the decision taken in Paris. The French Government had never been favourable to the idea of Geneva, and new reasons could now be found for urging its unsuitability. The whole matter at the time was kept as secret as possible. There were whispers in high circles; there were rumours in the press; and there were official denials of their correctness. The story is now known and has been told in Professor Rappard's book *Uniting Europe*. But Professor Rappard's account does not include the story of the part played in the ultimate decision by Albert Thomas and the Governing Body.

Albert Thomas was informed of what was going on: he was always well informed of the secret currents of policy. It was a cumulative quality so to speak. He knew so much that those in the know gave him freely of their knowledge in the hope of learning something in return. They were rarely disappointed. They got as it were a dividend, and his capital of information was increased. This was perhaps one of the secrets of his success. In the present case, however, what he had learnt was far from welcome. He realised keenly the importance of giving the Office a habitation and a home. The long succession of temporary quarters, the Hotel Astoria in Paris, Parliament Street, Washington, Piccadilly, the Astoria again, Seamore Place and now the Palazzo Reale, had implied of necessity waste and con-

fusion. No really efficient machinery could be built up in this kind of caravan existence. And there were tasks of the greatest importance to which the Office ought to devote urgent attention and for the successful performance of which it needed to be perfected and completed in conditions of calm and stability. Moreover, as soon as the Conference ended, the Office could not very well stay in Genoa. And equally it could not return to London without finding other premises than Seamore Place, which was now due to return to its private owners. The total staff at this stage numbered over one hundred persons, and it would be no easy task to find temporary accommodation for them in some other city. The information which Albert Thomas had gathered that the question of the seat of the League was being re-opened was therefore of a nature to add to his perplexities and responsibilities.

He might, of course, have hidden it from the Governing Body. It is doubtful if any of its members had heard more than a faint rumour of it, and he had not been informed of it officially. He could have justified silence on the ground that he had no right to use information of so secret a kind, or he might have decided to communicate his information confidentially to the members of the Governing Body. To bring it officially before them was to give it a measure of publicity which would undoubtedly compromise the intrigue in question and, in all probability, to incur the hostility of its sponsors. But Albert Thomas never lacked courage, including the kind of courage which is peculiarly difficult for the politician, nor was it his method or policy ever to conceal information from the Governing Body, even when he was under no obligation to give it and when it might weigh against the decision he wished to obtain.

He placed the matter before the Governing Body with extraordinary frankness. He told them that the 'Secretariat and

perhaps a certain number of members of the Council of the League of Nations, without publicly proclaiming the fact, had the intention not of establishing the League of Nations at Geneva, but, as it would appear, of installing it at Brussels'. 'Conversations', he added, 'with M. Léon Bourgeois and Mr. Arthur Balfour in Rome have shown clearly that this intention existed, notwithstanding the solemn interviews given to the press.'

Albert Thomas might then have turned immediately to our own domestic problem of finding permanent accommodation and left the Governing Body to weigh it in the light of his political information. He would then have put the whole facts as he knew them before the Governing Body, though in doing so he risked the displeasure of the French and other Governments. That was as much as the most devoted international servant could be expected to do. But if he had left it at that there is little doubt what the Governing Body's decision would have been. It would have said: 'We must follow the League and the League must decide.' This would have meant delay and uncertainty for another six months and perhaps more.

The Treaty decision in favour of Geneva as the seat of the League could not be abruptly modified. The scheme was to get the First Assembly, which it had been decided should meet in November, to meet not in Geneva but in Brussels and there the Secretariat would temporarily settle. Brussels would be found a convenient centre because of its proximity to Paris and London. The *provisoire* would become the *éternel*, and in the meantime the International Labour Office would have nowhere to lay its head. Albert Thomas decided that his best defence was attack and he attacked with vigour the whole underlying conception of the scheme. It was the first revelation of him as a great international leader. It was thrilling in its sweep and in its courage.

After pointing out that what was urged to-day were not the

sentimental reasons urged at the Peace Conference in favour of Brussels, but the necessity of close contact with the great political centres of Paris and London, he carried his argument to a terrifying height. *'It may be asked whether the League of Nations is right in wishing to confine itself within the sphere of the Supreme Council, and whether, for the sake of its own future, it should not affirm its life outside and above the Governments of the Entente.'*

He had won our admiration by writing to the Supreme Council a courageous letter in London. But this was an infinitely bigger thing. Here, he was daring to challenge their plans and their policy, condemning the one and the other in the name of a bigger vision and a greater creed. And he followed it up by a cogent argument designed to remind the Governing Body that German representatives sat in their midst, and must some day find a place in the League if it was to fulfil its real international function. *'Further it may be asked whether this change of seat will not alienate a certain number of Powers who had seen in the fixing of the seat in Geneva a proof of a genuine desire for impartiality.'* Then in the firmest possible terms he stated the principle which must govern the Governing Body's decision. *'We declare quite clearly that we cannot sacrifice the very future and existence of the Office to the hesitations, or calculations of the Secretariat of the League of Nations or of the Council.'*

Thus with a strong hand and indomitable courage he led the Governing Body to the stiffest fence of its career. It shied a little, looked around for an easier and less terrifying route, and finally responded nobly to Albert Thomas' superb leadership, by topping the wall without displacing a single stone. Few formal texts will be given in this volume, but the resolution thus adopted deserves quotation. It ran as follows:

'The Governing Body of the International Labour Office, considering that it would endanger the future of the International Labour Office to continue to exist in temporary and

precarious conditions which do not enable it to deal at once with all the duties which have been entrusted to it by the Versailles Treaty and the Washington Conference, decides, while awaiting a definite decision of the League of Nations, to establish the seat of the Office at Geneva as stated in the Treaty of Peace, and to exercise the option allowed for in the contract with Mr. Thudichum.'

It will be noted that the Governing Body decided 'to establish the seat of the Office at Geneva'. Less definite formulas had been produced during a long discussion. It was suggested that the Office might be 'provisionally moved to' or that its 'provisional seat' might be transferred to Geneva. But Albert Thomas stood firm. These amendments were withdrawn, and his original text was accepted in its clear and unambiguous terms.

He could feel that he was a step nearer the setting up of the Office on a solid basis. But he had achieved more than that. He had given proof of his courage and his leadership. He had begun to lay those moral foundations of his authority which were to be the greatest element in the Office's strength.

When the Governing Body was over we turned to the final preparations for the opening of the Conference. They were numerous and involved. It was no easy task to secure in a town like Genoa facilities for printing a daily Conference 'Hansard' in the official languages of the Conference—French and English. The printing of an unofficial Spanish Record had also to be arranged for. Finally, however, as far as human care and foresight could prevail, it seemed that everything was provided for.

The Conference was to open on Monday, 14th June. Albert Thomas announced that he was going to spend the 13th in the country. We all felt that we were entitled to a breather before the Conference began, though personally I had no intention of spending it in any kind of a strenuous excursion. I came down late in the morning to the hall of the Hotel Miramar where I

was staying, intending to go for a stroll and see something of the town. As I turned towards the main doorway I became dimly conscious of the presence of an agitated group. I tried to steal by in the hope that this was some hotel matter which had nothing to do with me but with an instinctive feeling that my Sunday was about to be spoilt. A figure detached itself from the group whom I recognised as an acquaintance in the British Civil Service. He demanded my immediate intervention. The British Delegation had arrived, headed by one of the King's Ministers, and the hotel manager had explained that the rooms reserved for them had been given to others and that the hotel was full. I was introduced to the Minister, who was obviously annoyed. His annoyance, however, was certainly less and much less violently expressed than the indignation of his entourage. I expressed my regrets and, while disclaiming all responsibility for any mistakes that might have been committed, assured them that accommodation would certainly be found. I could understand their indignation though it seemed excessive. They were tired and hot and dusty—travelling in 1920 still suffered from the war disorganisation and was neither rapid nor comfortable. To have arrived at their hotel anxious for a bath and a shave, and then be told that they must go in search of rooms elsewhere, in a city in which all available hotel accommodation had already presumably been absorbed by the influx of other delegations, was enough to try their temper. Moreover, they were acutely conscious that this mishap had befallen not only themselves but one of His Majesty's Ministers whose comfort and dignity it was their duty and privilege to secure and protect.

As I listened to their protests I blessed Albert Thomas' foresight. In some uncanny way he had seemed to guess that this kind of situation might arise and he had refused to allow the Office to undertake to find accommodation for delegations. He

had realised that of course some local organisation would be necessary but he had been careful to have it placed under the sole authority and responsibility of the Mayor of Genoa. The Office had warned Governments that accommodation would be difficult to obtain, had urged them to forward their detailed requirements as early as possible, and had undertaken to transmit them to the Mayor, who would endeavour to give them satisfaction. I offered, therefore, to get in touch immediately with my Italian colleague, Dr. di Palma, who was our liaison agent with the Mayor's organisation, and again assured the indignant arrivals that everything would be put right.

I found di Palma in his office at the Palazzo Reale and told him what had happened. There ensued a machine-gun fire of telephonic communication with the manager of the hotel. I waited for a translation.

'There has been some mistake,' said di Palma. 'Fourteen rooms were reserved a week ago for the British Delegation. The fool of a manager has given them to some other guests. I have told him that he must produce fourteen rooms. He must turn out his other guests. His rooms can be commandeered if necessary. (The Italian equivalent of D.O.R.A. was still in operation.) Will you come with me and help me to explain to the English Minister?'

We drove to the hotel together. The group of British officials was still standing in the hall in silent indignation. Di Palma apologised for the error and explained what would be done. It was no use. Annoyance and fatigue had triumphed over common sense. 'The Minister', we were told, 'will proceed to Rapallo. He considers his reception amounts to little less than an insult. At Rapallo he will consider whether or not he should return to England. In the meantime he will await the apologies of Monsieur Albert Thomas and the International Labour Office.' The incident was taking a serious turn.

Di Palma, with admirable courtesy and restraint, did not attempt to argue. 'If the Minister wishes to go to Rapallo the Italian Government will be only too happy to place a fleet of military cars at his disposal.'

'We have already made our own arrangements for transport,' was the cold and unmollified reply.

Di Palma and I withdrew. There was nothing more we could do. I was not seriously perturbed at the idea that the delegation would return to England. A misunderstanding about hotel rooms, however disagreeable at the moment, would hardly be considered in London as a justification for so serious a step. But I was perturbed at the incident itself. It was to be a maritime Conference. Great Britain was the greatest maritime power in the world. Negotiations were about to begin in which the goodwill and good humour of her delegation would be of the first importance. I knew Albert Thomas' impatience of obstacles. I had of course no responsibility for the incident, but I had been the senior official on the spot and he might, and possibly would, consider that I ought to have prevented it developing to such a dangerous degree. Anyway he would have to be informed and as soon as possible. There was some difficulty in finding where he had gone. In the meantime I set out to discover exactly how the misunderstanding had arisen. If he wanted to 'have it out' this time I meant to be equipped with all the facts. I therefore returned to the Palazzo Reale and with di Palma's help began an investigation. It led to the surprising and wholly comforting discovery that the British Government had never informed the Office of the composition of the British Delegation nor of its requirements for accommodation. The Office had seen a paragraph in *The Times* giving the names of the delegates and advisers, and on the basis of this information the Office, on its own initiative, had taken steps to have fourteen rooms reserved at the best hotel as a desirable precaution in

view of the rapidity with which all suitable accommodation was being snapped up. The delegation itself had sent no information as to its size nor as to the date of its arrival. For once the infallible British Civil Service had been caught napping. I felt that the International Labour Office could pat itself on the back for having covered even this improbability by its scrutiny of the press.

But a greater mystery remained unsolved. The fourteen rooms had been reserved. Of that there was no doubt. We found the written evidence. Moreover, they had been expressly reserved for official purposes. It seemed unthinkable that the hotel manager should have dared to go back on his engagement with the official reception committee which had in fact despotic authority to commandeer rooms if need be. What had become of the fourteen rooms and who were their occupiers?

A series of further bursts of telephonic communication finally produced an unexpected and amusing explanation.

The International Federation of Seamen, which was of course keenly interested in the Conference, had decided to meet at Genoa before it opened. Mr. Havelock Wilson, the President of the Federation, had arrived at Genoa some three or four days previously, accompanied by the other officers of the Federation and members of its Executive Committee. On arrival they drove to the Hotel Miramar and asked for rooms.

‘The only remaining rooms we have’, explained the manager, ‘are reserved for the British Delegation.’

‘But I am the British delegate,’ said Mr. Havelock Wilson, and gave his name. The manager verified his list. Mr. Havelock Wilson’s name duly figured thereon—one of the four British delegates. The manager was satisfied and the members of the Seamen’s Federation were installed without further question.

A letter briefly recounting the incident and its explanation

was sent off to Albert Thomas by car. I saw him next morning. To my relief he was in no wise perturbed and seemed to regard the incident as highly humorous. He sent, however, a polite letter expressing his concern at the mishap which had occurred and his hope that the British Delegation would succeed in securing suitable accommodation. No more was heard of the threat to return to London and in due course the British Delegation returned to Genoa and took up their quarters in the Miramar where room had been made for them as the Italian authorities had promised.

I was still inclined to be a little sore over the matter. The delegation's predicament had been due entirely to its own negligence, and its high-handed assumption that the Office was to blame rankled. A day or two later I learned that a still greater blunder had been committed. The delegation had come without any credentials and had therefore no *locus standi* at the Conference at all. I brought the point to their notice, not without a certain malice, and after witnessing their dismay and embarrassment felt I could consider that the account was even. Moreover, it was comforting to realise that, while we were perhaps too conscious of how inferior our international methods yet were in comparison with those of the great national civil services, those infallible services could trip on such part of the new ground of international collaboration as came within their own spheres.

The arrival of Havelock Wilson and his henchmen at the Miramar did not only disturb my Sunday's rest and the equanimity of the British Delegation. It also disturbed profoundly the political waters on which the Conference was to be launched. It raised in them in fact such a cross and angry sea that for some days it looked as if, should the launch take place, the result must be disaster.

As this was a maritime Conference the workers' delegates

were in general the representatives of the different national organisations of seamen. The International Federation of which Havelock Wilson was the head was a federation of the seamen's organisations of the allied countries. Among all these organisations there was a very strong feeling against the German submarine campaign. Defenceless ships had been sunk and their crews left to take their chance in frail boats far out in the ocean in all conditions of weather. The seamen of the Federation were therefore unwilling to meet the representatives of the German seamen in Conference unless the latter publicly disavowed a method of warfare which, in the opinion of the Federation, no seaman could possibly regard as consistent with the great traditions of the brotherhood of the sea.

This was a situation which caused Albert Thomas the most acute anxiety. Once before, the Labour Organisation, then in its initial stage, had found itself faced by what it regarded as impossible demands from the International Federation of Trade Unions, which had decided to abstain from participation in the Washington Conference unless those demands were met. On that occasion Mr. G. N. Barnes had reluctantly but courageously envisaged a conference from which all the workers' organisations adhering to the Federation would abstain. Such a solution, however, was inconceivable to Albert Thomas. In his view the strength of the International Labour Organisation rested on the organised workers, and it was unthinkable that it should function without their collaboration and confidence. Every resource of his personality was thrown into the struggle to find a formula of conciliation. His car bore him over the ill-laid pavé at a reckless speed from one camp to the other. He persuaded, he thundered, he charmed, he drafted text after text, and, time after time, his efforts failed on one side or the other. Havelock Wilson was a determined and an obstinate man and he controlled with almost despotic authority his own

national organisation and the federation in which it was by far the greatest single unit. Condemn the submarine campaign the German seamen must or he and his followers would refuse to discuss with them. The Germans on the other hand could hardly be expected to agree to participate in a public condemnation of their own government. Nor could they be expected to accept responsibility for one out of the many brutalities of the war simply because its victims had been mainly seamen. And if the submarine campaign was to be condemned, why not the blockade to which it had been the inevitable answer? Compromise seemed impossible, but Albert Thomas was determined that the Conference should not break down on a point which had nothing to do with its agenda. In the end he won.

The question of responsibility was allowed to drop. The Germans agreed to join in deploring the losses caused, and the Federation was persuaded to accept positive guarantees of reparation as the most sincere manifestation of regret. On the understanding that the Germans would seek authority from the German Government to make a public declaration to the Conference on these lines, the way was clear for the Conference to begin.

Even so the strain persisted. The workers' group, while waiting for the promised declaration to be made, nominated no German workers for seats on Committees. The German workers protested but the Conference had no power to interfere in the internal decisions of the groups. It looked as though the agreement would be repudiated by the German seamen before a reply was received from Berlin. At last authority to make the agreed declaration arrived. But the German workers' delegate was annoyed by Havelock Wilson's somewhat despotic domination of the group in which his Federation had a predominant influence. He was also personally hurt by Havelock Wilson's outspoken and vigorous criticism of the failure of the German

Government to send any direct representative of the German seamen's organisation. The German workers' delegate was a member of the Executive Committee of the German Federation of Trade Unions. In Havelock Wilson's view the German Government should have sent the head of the German seamen's organisation and not entrusted their interests to the general Trade Union organisation. Only seamen, declared Havelock Wilson, could deal with seamen's affairs. He expressed his profound contempt for and dislike of 'professional representatives'.

'There is', he told the Conference, 'a class of man around the world who wants to represent everybody and everything. It does not matter whether he knows anything about it or not. He has got an idea that he is a born representative and ought to be at every conference in the world. Well, I would advise him, as far as the seaman is concerned, to mind his own business and let us mind ours.'¹

This attitude was certainly not helpful. The German delegate hesitated to make his declaration in the face of what seemed a deliberate attitude of personal hostility. Once more Albert Thomas took a characteristic step. He took the job on his own shoulders, and it was he who read to the Conference the Declaration, signed by the German Government, which ended the controversy for the time being.²

¹These words were used by Havelock Wilson in the Conference after the German declaration had been made. They are quoted out of their proper chronological order to indicate his attitude and the vigour and directness with which he expressed his views. It may be surmised that he used even stronger language in addressing the workers' group at an earlier date.

²The text of the Declaration was as follows:

'We deplore with you the numerous victims caused by the submarine war which Germany in her distress undertook in order to defend herself against the blockade.

'The German Government without raising any objection on this point undertook by Annex 1 of Article 244 of the Treaty of Peace, and more particularly by paragraphs 1 and 2 of that Annex, to make good all the damage

This incident is of interest as illustrating Albert Thomas' peculiar difficulties. He had to deal not only with differences between Governments, but to adventure into the even more dangerous sphere of that complicated web of Trade Union policies and disputes where the threads are known only to the initiated and where any interference from outside is liable to be resented or at best ineffective. It was one of the great contributions that Albert Thomas brought to the International Labour Office that he had the *entrée* to that little-known world and had an intimate acquaintance with its personalities and a comprehensive knowledge of its complexities.

The Conference was now afloat. But our optimistic anticipations that it would navigate safely in line behind Washington was rapidly seen to be an illusion. To begin with, since it was a maritime Conference nearly all the Delegations had a specially maritime character. With a very few exceptions the delegates who had learned the ropes at Washington were absent. It was to all intents and purposes a new and different Conference which had to find itself and which set about doing so in its own way. The atmosphere of a first Conference and the corresponding incentive to sink certain differences in order to give the system a fair trial run was lacking. Moreover, other conditions were not propitious. Hotel accommodation was in many cases unsatisfactory and certain food restrictions were still in force. The disorganisation of the war was still felt in this and other ways. And it was hot, very hot. A tram strike reduced the which the conduct of the war at sea by the Germans caused to the Allied and Associated Powers and their nationals.

'Further, in accordance with information with which we were furnished before our departure, the German Government has already, on receipt of claims from the neutral Powers, indemnified their nationals for the damages caused to them in each individual case where reasonable grounds justifying the claims could be adduced.

'It is not intended to make any change in this practice.

(Signed) WISSELL.'

facilities of communication and dusty delegates tramped back and forth from their hotels in a state of growing perspiration and irritation.

In the Conference hall all these conditions found their inevitable repercussions. If the temperature was high outside it rose still higher within. A strong hand was needed to control a Conference in the circumstances. The usual diplomatic practice had placed in the Chair the senior Italian delegate, Baron Mayor des Planches. He had behind him an imposing record at Paris and Washington. But the Conference he was called on to guide cared little for either. His intelligence was keen and his rulings admirable in their logic and good sense. But though his mental faculties were undimmed, his physical powers were limited. A gentle diplomat of the old courtly school, he was powerless before the turbulence of the excited and often angry delegates. If one reads the 'Hansard' of the Conference his rulings and his grasp of the confused situations that arose appear admirable. But, alas! they were not listened to. The result was that Albert Thomas was constantly compelled to intervene. He and he alone could keep the Conference from getting completely out of hand.

One incident will suffice as a sample of the kind of thing that happened. The Italian seamen's delegate was a tall, vigorous man with thick black hair, a magnificent presence and a still more magnificent voice. His name was Giulietti and his excitable temperament had more than once led to difficulty in the Conference. On this occasion one of his advisers, Mr. Giglio, was acting for him. A delegate can at any time hand over his powers to one of his advisers, and when he has given the proper authority, and until it is withdrawn in the proper form, the adviser so authorised replaces for all purpose the titular delegate.

A storm blew up in the Conference. It was a bad storm, though no worse than many others that the Conference experienced. Mr. Giglio was the centre of it. The President gave a

ruling that was only half heard and that was variously interpreted in different parts of the hall. In a few minutes a dozen delegates were on their feet all talking together while Mr. Giglio tried vainly to make himself heard. In the middle of this scene Giulietti returned. Seeing his substitute apparently about to be overwhelmed he took up his defence. His voice rose above the din in passionate protest. Pandemonium threatened. The President was helpless. Albert Thomas came to his support. He chose his usual tactics of attack. In a voice that dominated the excited delegates and that overpowered even that of Giulietti, he thundered: 'Mr. Giulietti!'—his arm shot out in a gesture of accusation—'you can shout till you raise the roof. It will not alter the fact that you are ABSENT.' Giulietti must have expected some quite different adjective. No doubt he thought he would be told that he was wrong, or out of order, or not speaking to the point. The word 'absent' struck him like a blow from behind in its total unexpectedness. He stopped dumbfounded and bent to consult his adviser. The delegates laughed and the Conference returned, for an interval, to the orderly discussion of its business.

There was another incident where it was Albert Thomas himself who was disconcerted. There was a proposal—it makes no matter what it was—where the support of the Japanese was of great importance. They were willing to take ninety-nine per cent. of it but they had a difficulty on what seemed a very minor point. It did not seem that this difficulty could really constitute an obstacle to securing their vote if they understood that without it the proposal to which they were so favourably disposed would be lost. Albert Thomas sent me out to Nervi to explain the matter to them. I put the case to the best of my ability and was given courteous but indefinite assurances. I pressed politely for something which would give Albert Thomas greater satisfaction. Finally I was told that they would

see what they could do and would send a communication to Albert Thomas that afternoon. I thought I was justified in reporting to him that it would probably be favourable. That afternoon a distinguished Japanese arrived from the delegation and was shown into Albert Thomas' room, where he presented the astonished Director with two costly Japanese dolls.

'But how will you vote?' asked Albert Thomas when he had recovered from his astonishment. The Japanese seemed pained that the question had been re-opened.

'Alas,' he said, 'we are most anxious to meet you, but after considering the question again the most we can do is to abstain.'

A knowledge of the 'official languages', French and English, was evidently not sufficient to enable one to follow all the subtleties of international negotiations.

Albert Thomas' knowledge of languages incidentally was not one of his strong points. He knew a good deal of German and could read it with ease. He could even speak it with sufficient facility if he was obliged. But when he came to the International Labour Office he knew no English. He picked up a little and he made that little go a long way. When documents written in English were presented to him to sign he read them almost letter by letter, running his pencil along the lines and occasionally asking for the exact significance of a word. But it was much more, or seemed to be, an effort of will than of knowledge. For all other purposes he had at his command interpreters and translators. It was only when he came to the United States that the question of the English language presented an urgent practical problem, but of that more in its place. There is no doubt, however, that his lack of knowledge of English, and not only of the language, but of English ways and methods was a serious handicap to him more particularly in the early days of his Directorship.

On the occasion of the Genoa Conference the fact that Albert Thomas did not know English undoubtedly complicated his task. It rendered more difficult his negotiations with Havelock Wilson and it was also an obstacle in the many discussions which of necessity arose with the English-speaking delegations.¹ It may be said of course that there was also a lack on the other side, and that delegations sent to negotiate international agreements ought themselves to be equipped with the linguistic attainments necessary for their task. Perhaps that will be so in a more perfectly ordered world. It was not so at Genoa nor are there any signs that it is yet regarded as a necessity. The result of this linguistic lack on both sides was unfortunate. Easy and rapid contact in moments of crisis was difficult, and Albert Thomas appeared as wholly French in his outlook and methods. His frequent interventions in the Conference were not always understood nor the necessity for them appreciated by the English-speaking delegates. It must be remembered that at this stage the Office had not had time to train the admirable corps of able interpreters which it now possesses. Interpretations were not always accurate and often missed the subtle points which explained or justified a certain course of action. Moreover, in the unruly conditions of the Conference the interpreters could not always make themselves heard. Delegates who had understood a speech in the original language displayed little consideration for their colleagues who were dependent on its interpretation. A buzz of conversation arose which the Chairman could not control. In the excitement of keen discussion delegates forgot that real discussion was only possible if everybody understood what was going on. They too had to become accustomed to the restraints which alone

¹The absence of Mr. Butler, who was unfortunately unable to arrive in Genoa until after the Conference had begun, added to his difficulties in this connection.

can render international discussion possible and profitable. These and other reasons go to explain why Albert Thomas' frequent interventions were not looked on favourably by the British Delegation.

In their view the Secretary-General of the Conference was admittedly a person of great importance. But his function was to be the servant of the Conference and not its leader. He was there to organise its staff and services, to record its decisions and to see to their execution. He stepped outside his province when he intervened on points of order and still more when he attempted to influence decisions. Here again was an aspect of the general problem with which we were becoming familiar, the conflict between ideas based on accepted national practice and the necessities of a new organisation working in an international sphere. It was all very well to urge that Albert Thomas seemed sometimes to usurp the functions of the Chairman and at others to assume the privilege of a delegate. As a matter of fact, such usurpations or assumptions on his part were more apparent than real. He always succeeded with extraordinary skill in placing his interventions on a basis which if need be he could defend as proper to his rôle. But these subtleties were lost in the confusion. He was judged on a general impression and the judgment was unfavourable.

Once more there was no time for explanations and for 'having it out'. The Conference was in full career. It could not be stopped for a theoretical discussion of the exact rôle of the Secretary-General. If it could have been many misunderstandings might have been cleared up. Albert Thomas could have argued with force that he could neither let the Conference break down due to a misunderstanding nor break up in disorder. He could have defended every one of his interventions on one or other of these grounds. But if there had been a discussion it would have gone further than this. It would have

shown that there was a real divergence of view on a more fundamental issue. It would have worked round to Albert Thomas' whole conception of the rights and duties of the International Labour Office, and for that conception other minds were not yet prepared. Something of what that conception was we shall try to explain in a later chapter.

In the meantime his anxieties were growing and his problems were multiplied. The thorny question of Hours of Labour at Sea revealed deep divergencies of opinion between the French and British Delegations, and long and difficult negotiations continued in an atmosphere of increasing strain. Other questions gave rise to unexpected difficulties. One of the most acute and dangerous, because it had a personal aspect and threatened to become envenomed in the heated atmosphere of the Conference, had an origin as mysterious as it was unexpected. At the moment at which the critical vote was to be taken on the most important question—the question of hours of labour at sea—the British delegation was astounded to hear the Dutch Government delegate declare from the tribune that he was absolutely free to vote as he pleased and that he was bound by no instructions. It was made clear that he intended to vote against the British Government's view and this was disquieting to the British Delegates as Holland was a maritime country of no negligible importance. The British Government delegates were not unnaturally surprised at this decision. But they were more than surprised at the delegate's announcement that he was making such an important decision on his own responsibility: they were incredulous. That the Dutch Government might be foolish, or giving way to pressure from the seamen, or about to bring in a national regulation of hours, they were prepared to believe. But that a Government delegate of an important maritime country, and a permanent official at that, should be allowed to decide his own attitude on a question so vitally im-

portant to his country was to them simply unthinkable. His triumphant declaration that not only had he no instructions, but that he would not have come with instructions, and that he intended to vote as a Judge and not in defence of any interest seemed to them a demagogical appeal to the seamen by whom of course it was greeted with fervent applause. The British delegates expressed their incredulity with frankness and force. Unfortunately, they were overheard by the Dutch delegate in question. He maintained that they had spoken within the hearing of a number of other delegates and that, to put it briefly, the British Delegation had accused the Dutch delegates of being liars. He wrote an angry letter of protest to the unfortunate Secretary-General, and a diplomatic incident which threatened to spread far beyond the walls of the Conference began.

How eventually the Governing Body at a much later date gave it decent burial need not be recounted here. What is of interest is its explanation. It shows that so new was the Organisation that not all Governments held the same views as to the part their delegates were expected to play. The head of the Dutch Delegation, who had not been personally concerned in the incident recounted above, was Monsignor Nolens. Though not himself a Minister he was a great, if not the greatest, personal influence in the Catholic party, which held the balance of power in his country. As such he was reputed to have made and unmade Cabinets. He was personally a very progressive man with a passion for social reform. He was also a man of keen intelligence and original mind who was destined to play a considerable rôle in succeeding International Labour Conferences, and even to be elected President of one of its sessions. He remained in fact until his death the Permanent Dutch Delegate to the International Labour Conference and in view of his political position he was able to dictate his own instructions and the

instructions of his fellow Government delegate. The point, however, is that he did nothing of the kind. It has been said that he had an original mind and its operation led him to the conclusion that a Government delegate to the Conference should and could have no instructions. He arrived at his conclusion by the following reasoning. Each Government appoints four delegates; two of these, the Employers' delegate and the Workers' delegate, do not receive Government instructions. All four delegates are equal in powers and status. Hence if the non-governmental delegates are free the Government delegates cannot be bound or this principle of equality would not be respected. It was a very long time before all this became known and by then the incident at Genoa had been forgotten. It is an interesting and perhaps all the better for being an extreme example of how misunderstandings could arise from causes which not even the liveliest imagination could trace.

But it was not only in full Conference that curious things happened. Strange things were done in Committees. One Committee elected as its chairman a member of the staff—and an admirable chairman he proved to be. The measure was hotly criticised as unorthodox but no rule could be invoked against it and the Committee insisted on maintaining its decision. Minor eccentricities of this kind were, however, not important compared with the probability that on some essential points the prospects of agreement seemed steadily to diminish. Meanwhile the temperature of the Conference remained perpetually somewhere near explosion point, and Albert Thomas' burden became heavier from day to day.

He was also not without material anxieties. Our financial arrangements remained on the precarious basis established in London. Sir Herbert Ames had agreed to remit certain stated sums at certain stated times. He had emphatically stated that he would do no more—indeed more he could not be expected to

do. The situation had been complicated by the dispersion of the Office staff into three groups. There was the staff at Genoa, the staff at London, and a small number were already in Geneva preparing the Thudichum building for occupation. This meant three banking accounts, the exact position of which had to be known from day to day so that transfers could be made to meet any sudden and unforeseen necessity at one or other centre. Careful and categorical instructions had been given as regards the dates of certain payments so that there should always be funds to meet them. Mr. F. M. Collins, the Office's Head Accountant, to whom belongs the distinction of having founded the Office's accountancy system, watched over the position with an eagle eye. But no precautions could avoid the sudden crisis which arose and which threatened to throw the work of the Conference into irreparable confusion.

The London staff had been told that it would be required to proceed to Geneva on a certain day, and the official in charge had been instructed that salaries were to be paid on a specified date. The staff, not unnaturally asked for their salaries some days in advance so that they could make certain purchases preparatory for their journey. The official in charge in London thought he was entitled to vary his instructions in this (to him) matter of detail. He signed a large cheque and presented it to the bank. The result was to throw the whole of our delicate financial machinery completely out of gear. In fact it not only went out of gear. To all intents and purposes it blew up.

The London account at that moment was almost exhausted. My cautious bank manager found his worst suspicions realised when a large cheque was presented against a non-existent deposit. He refused the cheque although sums of from five to ten thousand pounds had been regularly paid in every fortnight for a considerable period, and he had seen the League

Treasurer's letter promising periodical payments and stating the amounts. He stated that he could not pay the cheque in question till the next instalment arrived. The cheque was presented again as soon as the London official learnt that the instalment had been paid in. His cheque was then honoured, but *before the date* which had been specified in his instructions. While this was happening in London something much more serious had happened in Genoa. The printing firm which was struggling with the Conference 'Hansard' in French and English found it was a much more onerous job than they had expected. They had to take on more men and work longer hours at expensive night rates. They were short of money, and they demanded a large immediate payment on account, intimating that if it was not received they would be obliged to abandon the contract. In the confused methods of the Conference the daily 'Hansard' was absolutely indispensable. It was only with its aid that the Conference could function at all. At all costs the 'Hansard' must be maintained, even if salaries had to go unpaid and the London transfer to Geneva be postponed for a fortnight. I was satisfied that Sir Herbert Ames' latest instalment was intact in the London bank. I sent for Collins and told him to have it telegraphically transferred to Genoa. All unknown to me it had already been utilised to pay the London salaries in advance, and my bank manager must have received another unpleasant shock when the demand for the transfer arrived. We had at that moment the equivalent of £4 10s. in Genoa to meet the printers' ultimatum. Albert Thomas had to be interrupted in the middle of critical political negotiations to face this desperate situation. He acted with his usual decision. An official was sent to London at an hour's notice with a letter to the bank and a second letter to Sir Eric Drummond to be used in case the bank refused an overdraft. The bank did. But Sir Eric performed the impossible. The instalment promised for a fortnight later was

made available immediately. I have no doubt Sir Herbert Ames fumed and protested, but like all good Treasurers he found the means to meet an unforeseen emergency and the situation in Genoa was saved.

The Conference drew to its end. Committees reported and their proposals were discussed in flurry after flurry. Still positive results emerged. Conventions and Recommendations were adopted. But on the major point of its agenda conciliation proved impossible. The Hours Convention failed of adoption (for which a two-thirds majority was required) by a fraction of a vote. The British Government delegates voted against and this attitude of the greatest maritime power naturally influenced other delegations. The British, however, had been far from opposing the adoption of any Convention on the subject. They had come with their own proposals and very ably both Sir Montague Barlow and Mr. Hipwood had defended them. In the course of the negotiations they had consented to make certain advances. But it had proved impossible to close the gap between them and the French Delegation. There is no question of allocating here either praise or blame. Both sides played their hands as they thought best in the interest of their respective countries and with a sincere desire to arrive at an agreement. Albert Thomas fought for a settlement with untiring energy and with a buoyant refusal to admit defeat. Had he been willing to accept the comfortable theory that as Secretary-General the successes or the failures of the Conference in the matter of its political decisions were none of his affair he might have treated the matter with indifference. He could not do so. He realised that the failure of the Conference on this important question would alienate support from the new Organisation. Moreover, he must have feared comparison with Washington. The defeat was the more bitter in that so little would have been required to turn it into a success—only one more vote would have sufficed.

And the distance separating the two most important delegations was so small that it was easy to imagine that in a different atmosphere it might easily have been bridged. No reproach of negligence or omission could be laid at his door. On the contrary, he had been accused of doing too much. But there was little doubt that he must have been bitterly disappointed and even apprehensive.

If he was he allowed none of his feelings to be seen. Facts were facts and must be accepted as such. There was no use in looking back. The result might, and certainly would, constitute another difficulty to be faced in the future, but towards that future he now turned with determined optimism. In a passage of superb eloquence he made his final intervention in the Conference which had exacted so full a toll of his energy and patience.

'We can be sure that the difficulties which we have not solved on this occasion will be examined in conferences to come. After more struggles perhaps, at one of our early meetings, we shall arrive at their complete solution, and we shall thus demonstrate the vitality of the International Labour Organisation. It is with this hope and with new strength that we are now to separate. Our thanks are due even to those who, like Sir Montague Barlow, have reminded us of the difficulties in our way, who have constantly directed our attention to the obstacles which we may meet, who have led us to calculate with accuracy the forces with which we must count. Tomorrow we shall win through, even on the most difficult fronts. We shall continue our mission—seamen are familiar with such changing conditions—sometimes in the midst of storms, sometimes in the most serene of calms, but like the navigators whose names have been evoked in this hall, like the Genoese, like Christopher Columbus, like the great conquistadores, the seamen who give us their confidence and the shipowners who

accompany us will, as the poet says, "lift from the deeps of the ocean to an unknown sky, new stars".¹

¹The text here given is my own inadequate translation from the records of Albert Thomas' speech, which was of course delivered in French. The translation given by the interpreter at the Conference practically ignored this passage in the speech and in particular omitted any reference to Sir Montague Barlow. This reference had of course a political importance since the seamen's delegates were inclined to put the full responsibility of the failure of the Convention on the British Government delegates. It was therefore important that Albert Thomas' tribute to the service they had rendered by a frank exposition of their difficulties should have been heard. The speech and its interpretation therefore constitute an example of how the Conference suffered in these early days from the inevitable lack of a properly trained international staff. An Office interpreter in 1935 might have failed to render all the eloquence of Albert Thomas' peroration but he would certainly have seized on the importance of the reference to Sir Montague Barlow and would have translated it.

Chapter IV

Albert Thomas at Geneva

Another special train bore the Genoa staff to Geneva via the Simplon and the Valley of the Upper Rhone. Like its predecessor it was a special train in that we were its only passengers. In other respects it fell far short of those comforts which a special train is supposed to imply.

Lake Geneva and its shores appeared delightfully cool and pleasant as we saw them from the windows in the early morning. After the noisy streets of Genoa and the turmoil of the Conference Geneva itself seemed a haven of peace and rest.

There we were met by our colleagues from London and the staff of the Office was once more united. In the course of a few days we had shaken down in our new quarters. There was a difference. Our address had no longer to be specified as being in this street or that Palace. It was just 'The International Labour Office'. The I.L.O. was now a place as well as a group of people. There was an impression of permanence and solidity about that fact.

From this moment the current of our activities steadily widened and it becomes impossible to give any real impression of it as a whole. Only fragmentary glimpses of this or that phase of it can be attempted. Hitherto much detail has been left aside. But from now on any number of the greatest and most important problems which the Office was led to treat must be

left without mention. Only stray episodes which throw a light on Albert Thomas' ideas of international administration or which in one individual memory illustrate one or other aspect of his personality can be recounted. But it must be remembered that as Governing Body succeeded Governing Body and Conference succeeded Conference each presented its special problems, each provided its political and other difficulties, and each left its heritage of decisions to be executed and solutions to be found.

Albert Thomas' first task at Geneva was one of organisation. The desire to be able to mould the staff into an effective instrument, something which could only be accomplished if they could be permanently settled in one spot, had been one of the compelling motives of his appeal to the Governing Body to establish the Office in Geneva without waiting for the decision of the League.

The move to Geneva, however, could hardly be expected to be popular with the League authorities. It created a situation in which the plan for establishing the League at Brussels was gravely compromised. It was one thing to avoid Geneva by a series of skilful moves leading steadily to a *de facto* establishment in the Belgian capital which from being *provisoire* would in time become permanent. It was another and much more awkward thing to have the I.L.O., a 'part of the institutions of the League', settling down in Geneva and, therefore, if the Brussels plan succeeded, having to be uprooted and moved out bag and baggage. To what extent this was a factor in the eventual abandonment of the Brussels scheme is not our concern here. Its immediate effect, however, was to produce important changes in the organisation of the Office.

In London where the staffs of the two organisations had been working in close proximity certain 'common services', such as translation and press services, had been instituted. Even when

the bulk of the I.L.O. staff moved to Genoa these common services were maintained and the officials who composed them were borne on the League budget and not on the budget of the I.L.O.

The decision of the Governing Body to establish the I.L.O. in Geneva was communicated to the Secretary-General on the 11th June. He no doubt felt that it was directly contrary to the policy of the Council and that therefore he could not countenance it in any way. He accordingly 'brusquely intimated' (so Albert Thomas described his communication to the Governing Body) that the arrangements as regards common services must be regarded as at an end. This meant that certain services, which were necessary to the proper functioning of the Office, must either cease or the Office must organise them for itself at its own expense. As the money for the Office's expenditure was furnished by the Secretariat, it may perhaps have been thought that in this way a certain amount of financial pressure could be brought to bear and that the Office would hesitate to put its decision into operation. If this was the calculation it seriously misjudged Albert Thomas' courage and determination.

When it was found that he intended to incorporate in the I.L.O. such officials from the common services as had given satisfaction a hasty offer to examine the possibility of re-establishing the common services was made. But it was too late. It should be added that this sharp struggle cleared the air, and that once it was over relations between the two organisations resumed their original cordial tone. It had, however, important results. It made clear once and for all the autonomous character of the Office and the necessity for constituting it as a self-contained unit.

The 'common services' had been an experiment which when examined was seen not to have given satisfactory results. League translators and interpreters could not be expected to

know or to master the subject matter of labour problems and social legislation. Especially when translations had to be done at high speed, ludicrous and even dangerous mistakes were frequent. In one document setting out the functions of the Office 'la prevention du chômage' (the prevention of unemployment) was translated as 'the prevention of strikes' and as the Office was constantly being accused of being a capitalistic instrument designed to enslave the workers, the political consequences of mistakes of this kind could hardly be exaggerated. So it was probably inevitable that the Office should have been led to train its own corps of interpreters and translators and the incident arising out of the transfer to Geneva only hastened a process which would have taken place in any event. At the moment, however, it added considerably to Albert Thomas' responsibilities.

There was a distinct difference to be observed in his methods after our arrival in Geneva. In London he had not really taken the whole affair under his personal direction. He knew what was going on; he gave general instructions; but he left the execution of them to others. Now he had finished the liquidation of most of his other preoccupations (though he still remained a Deputy in the French Parliament, paired—or the French equivalent) and he was free to give the Office his whole attention. Moreover, his experience of the various organs of the Organisation was now complete, and might be compared with that of his collaborators who had had the experience of Washington. He had dealt with three meetings of the Governing Body and with a difficult Conference. He was ready now to carry his plans a stage further.

As regards internal organisation a double and, at first sight, a contradictory process took place. There was at once a greater decentralisation and at the same time a greater centralisation of control in the Director's hands. Butler as Deputy Director took

over all questions of finance, establishment, internal and commercial questions—in commercial questions were included such questions as printing contracts, sale of publications, etc. I was thus set free to devote my attention to the organisation of the Diplomatic Division, of which I had been appointed Chief in March, but which so far could hardly be said to have achieved a separate and distinct identity. Dr. Royal Meeker, late United States Commissioner for Labour Statistics, arrived to take charge of the Scientific Division. A number of the Technical Services provided for in Albert Thomas' scheme were also set up and in particular Dr. Luigi Carozzi began his long and remarkable work as chief of the Industrial Hygiene Section.

All this was not only according to plan but in accordance with the generally known explicit approval of the Governing Body. What was astonishing was Albert Thomas' decision to proceed immediately to the creation on a considerable scale of the network of branch offices to which he attached so much importance. It will be remembered that when he brought forward his general plan of organisation in Paris its consideration had been postponed, but it was understood that he would be given financial resources for carrying on the work in hand. The Finance Committee therefore drew up a temporary budget and this included money for 'one or two persons to be located in Paris'. Since the Office was to be temporarily located in London, and Albert Thomas was compelled to spend much of his time in Paris, this was a reasonable provision. These 'one or two persons' became the germ of the Paris Office. It was on them that we had relied for the translation and printing of the Reports for the Genoa Conference, the unfortunate sequel to which has been related in the last chapter. In March the Finance Committee had refused money for the Political Division but had allowed an additional sum on the vote for the Director's Cabinet in order to provide for the necessary liaison services

which the Political Division, had it come into existence, would have provided. It never occurred to us that Albert Thomas interpreted this as an authorisation to institute local offices. True, he could argue that there was no decision, nor even suggestion that these liaison officers were to be located at the headquarters of the Office rather than in immediate contact with those bodies or countries with which they were intended to supply a link. And further the Governing Body had approved 'the general lines of his plan of organisation' and the only reservation formally made had been as regards the creation of the Political Division—obviously a headquarters unit.

But Albert Thomas did not seem to think that any argument was required. He acted. Not only did the Paris Office emerge from its modest anonymity 'of one or two persons' into the much more definite form of Mr. Mario Roques, who had been Albert Thomas' *Chef de Cabinet* when he was Minister of Munitions, but a further 'small number of persons' left in London after Seamore Place closed down blossomed into the London Office under Mr. J. E. Herbert, late Labour Correspondent of *The Times*; and before the Conference left Genoa arrangements had been made to set up an office in Rome under Mr. Angelo Cabrini, who had been one of the Italian Delegates at the Commission of the Paris Peace Conference. The Paris and London Offices arose naturally as it were out of our peregrinations. The Italian Office was a more definite application of his plan. Its institution was based on reasons of policy and policy only. The Italian Trade Unions, which were very much to the left, had refused to collaborate with the Office and Albert Thomas was anxious to be in permanent contact with every development in their movement. He took an even bolder step on the arrival of Dr. Royal Meeker in Geneva to take up the post of Chief of the Research Division of the Office. After consulting him, he set up an office in the United States—a

non-Member State—under Mr. Ernest Greenwood, who had been Deputy Secretary-General of the Washington Conference.

Thus a vital part of his plan was suddenly brought into operation and he cheerfully left it to the Governing Body to approve or disapprove. He was satisfied that he had obtained from the Governing Body the necessary authority. Some of his assistants were less confident. They felt that perhaps certain of the members of the Governing Body had not scrutinised their own proposals with sufficient care and had failed to make the reservations on the Report of the Committee on Organisation which their known opinions would seem to require. On the other hand, Albert Thomas' desires had been made perfectly plain to them, and on the terms of the decisions they had taken he was entitled to assume that he could go ahead.

The idea of Branch Offices, and more particularly the functions which it was proposed to confide to them, had undoubtedly startled the Governments when they were first put forward and, if they had failed to make their opposition clear in connection with their previous decisions, there seemed to be every reason to suppose that they would now make it distinctly felt. We could not therefore altogether share the tranquillity with which Albert Thomas waited for the Governing Body's verdict. As usual he hid nothing from it. The full details of all the measures taken were set out in his report. When the relevant passage was reached he went out of his way to draw attention to it. We waited for protests, or at all events for strong reservations against any further extensions. To our amazement no one said a word and the Governing Body passed on to the next question. Whether private conversations had intervened, and, if so, by what arguments Albert Thomas had gained his point, we never knew. We could only conclude that he knew the Governing Body better than we did and was a better judge of its reactions and of his own freedom of decision.

Concurrently with these various measures of decentralisation the internal working of the Office was deliberately centralised more and more in Albert Thomas' own hands. Instructions were issued with regard to the signature of letters. They were long and detailed but they might almost have been put in one sentence: the Director will sign all letters. And he did in spite of the labour it involved. There were times when he signed steadily for an hour or more on end without a moment's respite.

The process of signature was organised so as to involve the least possible waste of time. A member of his Cabinet stood by his side to blot each bold signature and to remove the signed paper, exposing another paper awaiting signature immediately below. He had thus only to manipulate his pen, but it was no mere mechanical act for he read carefully everything he signed. To those of us with the Civil Service tradition of anonymity it was a matter of indifference whether we signed or not. Albert Thomas found this difficult to appreciate and seemed to feel that he owed us some excuse. 'When I sign I know what is going on in the Office,' he used to say. That was true. Now and again as he disapproved of a letter he would throw it aside and its defects would be pointed out and instructions for its re-drafting given at the Rapport next day.

In this way he was able to exercise a steady influence on the way the Office dealt with its correspondence and to create slowly a certain attitude of mind among all members of the staff who had to draw up replies to letters of one kind or another or draft letters on their own initiative. He was anxious to root out any tendency to routine or officialese. He had a profound antagonism to what he called bureaucratic methods, and no sympathy with the idea that simple rules could be laid down for simple cases and such cases disposed of rapidly by junior officials, leaving their superiors more time for the consideration

of more important questions. A request would come in for, say, a copy of Part XIII or a copy of one of the Office's publications. In Albert Thomas' view the unknown writer represented a possible supporter of the I.L.O. He must receive not a short and formal reply sending the required publication but something much warmer. He must be made to feel that the Office did not regard him as a mere cipher or a nuisance. Every such letter, if it gave any opening at all, was utilised as an opportunity of getting the Office known and securing support and sympathy for it. Professors wanting material for seminars, students seeking material for theses, social workers, and still more any form of trade union organisation, were to be made to feel that the Office would do anything reasonable to help them. Of course some curious requests were received. One correspondent wrote to say that having read that the Office was interested in Anthrax he wished to suggest that it should also take up the question of the protection of the Albatross which otherwise was in danger of becoming extinct. I could not swear that we replied but I think it is quite likely that he received a long letter explaining exactly what the I.L.O. was, regretting its inability to afford practical assistance in his noble effort to protect the Albatross, and suggesting that anyone enlightened enough to desire to protect wild birds must also be sympathetic to efforts in a somewhat different but no less meritorious sphere.

Albert Thomas, however, got more out of his labour of signature than just a knowledge of what was going on in the Office or the possibility of altering the style of its scribes. He had an amazing memory. Everything he read and signed he remembered. When he met, even at a considerable interval of time, someone to whom he had written, or rather signed, a letter, he seemed to be able to recall the correspondence to his mind as if it were spread before his eyes. Many were the occasions in discussions in the Governing Body when he might be

heard to refer to correspondence months or years old, and nothing was more dangerous than to attempt to make a debating point against him by a carefully chosen quotation. Without the slightest hesitation he could supply its context and destroy its effect.

The same extraordinary memory served him on his journeys. He seemed able to shuffle a kind of mental card index and to bring before his mind all the correspondence with a particular country, whatever its subject and its date.

What, however, was more disturbing in this method of correspondence was his refusal to accept mere formal replies from Governments. Just as he objected to our sending acknowledgments he objected to receiving them. They always conveyed to his mind the idea that his communication had been, or would be, pigeon-holed, and that it was not receiving the attention it merited. We thought he had no conception of the efficient national machinery with which we were familiar, in the intricacies of which his letter was being minuted, and referred, and submitted, and was slowly working its way to the stage at which it would receive a full and authoritative reply. Perhaps he had not, but he had an experience, or an instinctive sense, of more imperfect national administrations in which nothing so admirable was likely to happen. And there is no doubt that in numbers such administrations far exceeded the more perfect ones with which we were acquainted. So he insisted on what he called 'letters of principle' in which the duties of Governments were carefully set out and a method for their performance suggested.

Such letters were difficult to prepare. To the Civil Service mind it seemed dangerous to reproduce the fundamental obligations of Membership in a hundred different official ways, and it demanded a vast amount of laborious drafting to do so without too great a risk of making fresh interpretations of them

every time. In our view the Treaty was the Treaty and it must be assumed that Governments were capable of reading it. Albert Thomas refused to make any such assumption. The Governments must be told what they had to do, and told in terms, so far as possible, of their own constitutions and methods. It must be said that he was right and that the instinct or intelligence which told him that a special technique was required in the early stages of the creation of an international organisation was justified by results.

Albert Thomas' control of the Office was by no means limited to its correspondence. He saw practically all files: he saw all scientific studies at different stages of their preparation; he read all the memoranda which were prepared on one subject or another: and for many years he read personally in proof all the office publications—no final proof could be passed to the printer without his initials.

His observations, instructions, praise or blame, arising out of all this examination of the Office's work took the form of notes dictated to one or other of his private stenographers and typed on small square sheets of white paper. It has already been recorded that it was long before he could be brought to use minute sheets in the ordinary way. These 'notes' were not initialled or signed. They bore only the typed capitals 'A.T.' as a signature. This also seemed an unduly frivolous way of recording the highest decisions taken. But the system certainly saved time. And apart from the fact that he had, and with reason, complete confidence in his stenographers, the possibility of a forged instruction, which of course immediately appalled the Civil Service mind, was eliminated for all practical purposes by the fact that these notes as a rule were followed by a personal interview or called for a reply.

The number of such notes was fantastic. The rapidity and ease with which he dictated has already been noted. Some year

or so after the Office moved to Geneva members of the staff organised an evening's entertainment which included a short topical play written by one of its number. The scene was laid in a room in the Office where a member of the staff was interviewing a new recruit. At a certain moment the door at the back opened to admit a messenger and through the open door could be seen a stream of large white paper flakes, swirling down the passage.

'Oh! I say,' remarked the recruit, 'how quickly the weather changes here. There's a violent snowstorm.'

'Oh! no,' was the indifferent reply, after a glance at the blizzard; 'that only means that the Director has arrived.'

Albert Thomas' control over the Office was also exercised in a third way. He would at any moment call for any official. Such summons cut right across and through all the internal organisation. Albert Thomas thought in terms of persons, not in terms of services or sections or divisions. If he wanted some information on a point, or to give instructions as to how some question should be handled, he would send for the official known, or supposed, to be dealing with the nearest related matter. It seemed to him the obvious and the quickest method, and he was always impatient of administrative delays. Although he had decreed the organisation of the Office into divisions and sections he could never be got to think of the individuals in it other than as a personal staff. This system of personal interviews also helped to keep him in touch with the detail of the work and enabled him to co-ordinate it. In particular it gave him the opportunity to explain to officials the place which their work occupied in the general scheme, and how one or other social reform was related to social policy in general. But it was a method which produced, to begin with, great disorganisation, and protests from the responsible chiefs were not lacking. His reply was characteristic. 'I must know *a person* who is responsible. If any-

thing goes wrong; if the job is not done properly, the responsibility would otherwise be distributed over these impersonal sections and divisions. No single person would be responsible. I cannot hang a division.' He was told that he could hang the Chief of the Division, but the argument did not appeal to him. He seemed to think that he would be hanging the wrong man and that was contrary to his sense of justice. On the other hand, his system was contrary to our sense of sound and disciplined administration.

As a matter of fact, it was not based solely on his idea of individual responsibility. Later on he agreed not to interview a subordinate official without calling in his chief at the same time, nor to send his 'notes' other than through the proper hierarchical route, though they continued to be addressed to minor officials by name. His fundamental idea was that he wanted to create a personal link between himself and every official. Officials must know that the Director did not consider them as obscure cogs in a vast machine, but as collaborators with whose work the Director was personally familiar, and with whom, when occasion arose, he would discuss the work they were performing. Thus, and thus only, in Albert Thomas' view could a real loyalty to the Office be built up. And thus too could he be confident that if he demanded, as he sometimes did, a special effort, an all-night struggle to complete a translation or to get out some urgent report, he would get a willing and effective response inspired by personal devotion as well as by a more abstract *esprit de corps*.

He extended this idea in two other ways. First of all, every member of the staff, from the lowest cleaner upwards, had a recognised right to a personal audience with him. In the middle of his innumerable interviews with Ambassadors, Ministers, Deputations, Members of the Governing Body, Delegates, Experts and distinguished visitors, of Rapports and other con-

sultations with this or that group of officials, he always found time for these audiences. He listened to complaints about rooms, about salaries, about the dull nature of the work or its unsuitability to the complainant's capacities and ambition, even about domestic problems or difficulties. He listened and he gave advice. Sometimes he sympathised, and sometimes he scolded. But always the member of the staff came away with an increased admiration and gratitude. Many of them I think demanded these interviews for no other reason than that he seemed to be able to pour some of his superabounding energy and confidence into them. They brought him their discontents and worries and depressions and went away with lighter hearts and lighter steps and the feeling that though perhaps they had obtained no substantial satisfaction they had a powerful and an understanding friend.

This interest in the troubles or complaints of the staff was more than a mere gesture. He took considerable pains to understand and appreciate them, and harassed chiefs were sometimes more than a little irritated at having to give a detailed account of the work confided to junior officials under their orders and to explain why they could not make it more varied or more interesting.

One general complaint in the early days arose out of the position of the Office itself, some half mile or more uphill from the nearest tram-line on which there was an infrequent service. Albert Thomas decided to investigate for himself how far such complaints had a real justification. He abandoned his car and chauffeur one morning and a gratified staff watched him with discreet amusement as, perspiring profusely, he propelled himself up the long slope of the Route de Prègny on a borrowed bicycle. The experience was conclusive and led to the establishment of an autobus service which delivered the staff from that fatiguing climb.

His second method was his practice of meeting the whole staff. In the early days at monthly intervals, and, later on, less frequently, but whenever an important event occurred, he would convene the whole staff and explain the situation of the Office, his policy and the special nature of the effort required. He would give them almost as complete a review as he gave to his Governing Body and he would end with a fervid appeal that each and all should give of their best to help the Office to surmount its difficulties. He never hid from them his defeats or his disappointments nor the perils of some coming struggle. He wanted the humblest copyist or clerk to realise that in spite of the monotony of her work she was an indispensable unit in an organisation towards which a tormented and bewildered world was turning for assistance in its distress. And he wanted the staff to understand that the Organisation itself could never fulfil the hopes placed in it by the masses unless it pursued a bold and even a dangerous policy. With what later seemed a gift of prophecy he warned them that the I.L.O. could be no sheltered and comfortable bureaucracy. Its staff must have something of the spirit of crusaders, ready to face perils and discomforts under the banner of Social Justice.

Thus in these different ways, by his control of their individual work, by his personal interest in their individual problems and through his frank exposition of his own burdens and difficulties, he succeeded in developing in the staff a devotion to an ideal and a willingness to make sacrifices for it. It would have been difficult in many cases to distinguish that devotion from a purely personal loyalty evoked by affection and admiration for his personality. But the result was the same. In the midst of a crisis his whole army was an 'old guard' from whom he could demand the impossible. He not infrequently did demand it and when he did it was forthcoming.

A distinguished journalist, speaking of Albert Thomas after

his death, said that 'he could make time'. It certainly seemed that he had more of that precious commodity at his disposal than many far less busy men. One explanation is to be found in his habit of organising his day's work. He mapped it out beforehand in great detail, quarter-hour by quarter-hour, and it was only with the greatest reluctance that, in the face of some unforeseen necessity, he would depart from his programme.

On a typical day he would arrive at the Office shortly after 9 a.m. carrying under his arm a 'serviette'—that clumsy and inefficient substitute for an attaché case to which the French cling with strict conservatism. In Albert Thomas' case the 'serviette' might have been defended on the ground that it could hold much more than two normal hand bags. It was correspondingly heavy but he never seemed to have the least difficulty in keeping it tucked under his rather short arm. Once in his office his interviews would begin. Ministers, Delegates, Members of Commissions, Trade Union leaders, League Directors followed one another in a long series which would be interrupted by the Rapport at 11 a.m. In between two interviews he would see an official for a couple of minutes on something urgent, or he might telephone to the wife of a member of the staff away ill to enquire as to his progress. The afternoon he passed in much the same way in a series of interviews with visitors or officials, interrupted perhaps by one or more official conferences. At 6 p.m. he would start his laborious task of signing letters.

Lunch and dinner offered no respite. He was always either a host or a guest and often a speaker. At 11 p.m. one, and frequently, two of his private stenographers had to be on duty at his flat. He would then open his enormous 'serviette', by this time filled with files and memoranda which he had accumulated during the day and on which he was ready to dictate instructions. The notes so dictated constituted the blizzard which would issue from the Cabinet the following, or rather the

same, morning. Dictation finished he would turn to his *lecture*, the reading of papers, press summaries, memos, office proofs and other documents, and certain of these would go to fill the empty serviette for use during the coming day's work.

It would appear from this description that Albert Thomas could never have had a minute to himself. The description is not exaggerated, but the conclusion so easily drawn from it is incorrect. He was devoted to his wife and had a happy family life which he intensely enjoyed. He found time to play with his children and to hold long talks with his mother, for whom his affection was deep. He found time, too, to read widely on subjects not directly connected with the work of the Office. The cinema delighted him and he was, if not a frequent, at all events a faithful patron of it. He took a keen interest in the French theatre, and was something of an authority on its modern development. How he found leisure for these activities is a mystery. But it was part of his system to do so. 'Always have some other interest than your work,' he said once, 'otherwise your work will master you and you will go stale.' He encouraged his staff to follow his advice, and he found more time to read their novels, or theses, when they were proudly presented to him. Of course he could not always read them at once. They found their place in some category of the enormous piles of books and papers that were awaiting *lecture*. Weeks or it might be months after the astonished author would receive a typed note conveying carefully qualified praise and criticism which showed that his work had been read.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume from the foregoing that Albert Thomas' activity was restricted to getting things done in the way he wanted. He also contributed to the work of the Office himself. The Director's Reports to the Governing Body for example were almost entirely his personal work. I have a vivid recollection of the preparation of the first

financial report. The Constitution of the International Labour Organisation contained few references to finance. Until the League came into existence the Members of the Organisation were to be responsible for paying its expenses in the proportion of their contributions to the Universal Postal Union. Afterwards the expenses of the International Labour Office were to be met 'out of the general funds of the League'. This provision had been based on the assumption that Membership of the League and the Labour Organisation would be co-extensive, an assumption which was immediately falsified by the admission of Germany and Austria to the latter body although they remained outside the League. This same provision might have been interpreted as giving the League some control over the policy or activities of the Labour Organisation on the principle that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The other provisions of the Constitution made it clear, however, that the Organisation had complete authority to decide on its policy and action.

There was thus an apparent contradiction between the right of the Organisation to decide on any measures which it pleased, within the sphere of its competence, and the obligation of the League to pay for activities of which it might disapprove or which, since it could hardly be considered competent to form a judgment as to their desirability, it might consider unduly expensive. It has already been noted that the Treasurer of the League found it hard to swallow the fact that the expenses of the I.L.O. were greater than those of the League, and that he refused to admit the justice of the argument that the Labour Organisation, with two Conferences behind it, was in the full flood of its activity whereas the League was still waiting for its first Assembly. His view was likely to be shared by diplomatic representatives at the Assembly, and there was a danger that the Assembly might attempt to exercise a political control over the Labour Organisation on the occasion of the discussion of the

first budget. That any such danger was avoided was due to Albert Thomas' masterly handling of the situation. In the discussions at the Fourth Committee the bases of a *modus vivendi* were successfully laid and on them has since been built a system which, while leaving the Labour Organisation its complete independence, yet provides all the essential financial guarantees. But at the first Assembly discussions were, inevitably, confused. Contradictory theses were put forward, withdrawn, modified, renewed in a perfect chaos of ill-defined implications; the only thing that was really clear at the end was that the Assembly had accepted the I.L.O. budget.

I was in Albert Thomas' room one evening when, after dealing with another affair, he said, 'Then, there's the report to the Governing Body on the Assembly's discussion of the budget.' I agreed and was preparing to tell him that I was struggling with the shorthand report of the meetings in an attempt to piece together an intelligible account of the proceedings and to extract from their confusion some clear elements of principle which the Governing Body might approve. Albert Thomas' finger, however, had already pressed his bell and a stenographer entered the room. 'I'll just dictate a draft,' said Albert Thomas. 'Just listen and tell me if I go wrong.' And straightway with no papers before him he proceeded to dictate, threading his way through the maze of legal, financial and procedural difficulties without the slightest hesitation. I found no occasion to interrupt or to question. At the end I could only ask that the document when typed should be sent to me so that I might go over it carefully and compare it with all the relevant texts. The most careful checking revealed no flaw in it and it went forward to the Governing Body practically unchanged.

Albert Thomas' skill in dictating went far beyond this ability to give a lucid and orderly account of an involved political and juridical situation. It was something more than

long practice and intellectual grasp. It was more, too, than the journalist's command of a straightforward narrative style or the expert use of clichés. Albert Thomas could use dictation where words had to be employed on their most delicate tasks and where even the most skilled artists might hold a hesitant pen. I remember once during a Rapport when a telegram was brought in to him announcing the death of Branting. Branting had been an old friend of his and he was deeply affected. 'I must write immediately,' he said. And then to the stenographer who had entered the room he dictated first a series of telegrams and then a series of letters. The letters were addressed to members of Branting's family, to the Swedish Government, to the Swedish Socialist Party of which Branting had been the leader, and so on. Albert Thomas dictated them one after the other without a pause. Each letter was a model of the kind of letter which the circumstances required. The letters to the family expressed in moving personal terms his profound sympathy: those to the authorities summarised in a series of admirable sentences Branting's great services to his country and to the cause of international peace: those to the members of his party took up the same theme but on a less formal note. None of the letters repeated a phrase used in one of the others: no phrase was hackneyed: every letter had a literary distinction and a deep sincerity.

It should be added that there was nothing theatrical about this astonishing performance. Dictating, to Albert Thomas, was as natural an act as pressing a bell to summon a messenger. His reaction on this occasion was simply that here was something which had to be attended to immediately and personally. It was in no sense meant to impress us. Such an idea would have been quite foreign to his nature, and in any case we had heard him dictate so often before that there could have been no reason for trying to impress us again. As a matter of fact, while

he dictated we simply ceased to exist for him. He could without apparent effort direct the full force of his intelligence from one question to another instantaneously. During the sittings of the Conference, when as Secretary-General he could not leave his place at the President's right hand, he got through a great deal of work totally unperceived by the delegates in the hall. His capacious serviette would be open on the table before him and a stenographer would be seated unobtrusively at his side. When he had listened to a speech in French he would extract paper after paper from his serviette and dictate in a whisper his comments or instructions. As soon as the interpretation was finished he would stop his dictation and listen to the next speaker—he might even be the next speaker himself if he had decided that it was the Secretary-General's duty to intervene. And then the next speech listened to, or his own intervention made, he would turn again to the stenographer and continue his work of dictation as though no interruption had occurred. Nevertheless no argument or incident in the Conference ever escaped his attention. And on the other hand, none of the letters or minutes dictated during its sittings bore the slightest trace of haste or any indication that they had not been prepared in conditions of the most complete tranquillity.

His greatest individual contribution to the material work of the Office was the Director's Report to the Conference. He had had to fight first of all for the right to present it at all and consent was only wrung from a reluctant Governing Body after much argument and persuasion. The Governing Body had accepted his predominant part in their own discussions. There they were dealing in the main with administrative questions on which it was inevitable that the Director should have his say. But the Conference was another affair. It was a legislative body with special powers defined by the Treaty. Albert Thomas' interventions at Genoa had, as we have seen, aroused a certain

hostility. The prospect of his making a Report to the Conference and thus initiating discussions on questions of general social policy was therefore unwelcome to certain Governments and even more so to the employers. As usual Albert Thomas got his way and the discussion of the Director's Report at the Conference is now a recognised part of its programme and something which has given the Conference an additional interest and an increased authority.

When the principle had been agreed to we began to consider how the Report should be drawn up. The Conference clearly ought to be informed of the application of its previous decisions and of the general progress of the work of the I.L.O. The Report would therefore be lengthy and, as it would be carefully scrutinised by Governments, it would need to be drafted with care. We had in mind, therefore, something rather like the Report presented to the Assembly of the League by the Secretary-General—a careful and scrupulously exact review, or rather catalogue, of all decisions and activities.

Albert Thomas' view, however, was very different. He explained his plan. He meant to make what he called a 'living' Report, a Report which would survey all the problems which confronted the Organisation, not only those which were already before it in one form or another, but also those which were fermenting in the whole social cosmos. He meant to use his Report so as to lead the Conference to an examination of the social problem in all its aspects, in other words, to begin the consideration of what he had described in his initial Paris memorandum as the 'new programme which has hardly yet emerged'. It was an idea fraught with many risks and dangers. But what worried us most was the problem of its preparation. The task of preparing a careful review in the sense in which we had understood the scheme was already formidable enough. If we were to discuss social problems at large the

problem became infinitely more complicated and seemed indeed insoluble.

Albert Thomas outlined his scheme at a meeting with all the Chiefs of Services and asked each of them to make a contribution concerning the sphere of knowledge or activity that came within his recognised competence. As I was responsible for the preparation of documents for the Conference I ventured to put in a plea that, in preparing such contributions, each Service should endeavour to put its contribution as nearly as possible into the form in which it could be used, by which I meant that they should attempt to draw up their contributions with an eye to the suitability of their publication as part of an official report. I was dismayed by Albert Thomas' emphatic 'No! no! Never mind about the form. Put down everything. And not only facts but ideas, even the boldest and the wildest ideas.' I was horrified. However would my small Conference staff ever succeed in bringing order and propriety of presentation into such deliberately provoked anarchy? But I was relieved and astounded by the next sentence: 'As for the problem of how the material shall be presented to the Conference, I shall take that on myself. It is the Director's Report and the Director will write it.' And write it he did, or rather dictate it. He was supplied with some thousands of pages of material on every conceivable subject. He read and digested it all and out of it produced his Report, a volume of some 400 printed foolscap pages.

After several years, during which the Director's Report achieved an international reputation, and came to be eagerly awaited by all interested in social questions, he abandoned the preparation of the more technical parts of it to the Office. He could feel that he had trained us to his method and thus now we could relieve him of part at all events of the weight of his task. He read, however, all the proofs, and the conclusions and

commentaries he continued to write himself. At a still later stage the technical parts which had become a veritable social encyclopaedia were published separately and became eventually the I.L.O. Year Book, while the Director's Report became a much smaller document devoted almost entirely to a discussion of general social phenomena and policy.

It may be hoped that the above description, incomplete though it necessarily is, will convey some idea of a personal activity which for its intensity can find few parallels. It by no means, however, represents the totality of the burden which Albert Thomas had to carry. It was combined with other activities of which more will be said in a moment, with constant travelling, and above all with a load of anxiety which would have appalled a weaker man. When Albert Thomas had told his staff that they could look forward to no comfortable bureaucracy but that this new international service involved risks, his uncanny foresight unfortunately perceived only too clearly storms of which we had no presage. He realised that in order to secure the future development of the Organisation he must push forward as fast and as far as the initial momentum which he had achieved would allow. But he was aware that the reaction would come, that he would have to fight for his gains before the real importance and utility of them had been realised, and that, to use a military metaphor, either some of his outposts would be driven in or he would be forced to shorten his front. The offensive came with stunning force.

He was suddenly met with a financial ultimatum. In 1922 he was told that he must abandon practically the whole of his proposals for additional staff in his 1923 Budget, proposals which corresponded to the normal growth of the Organisation. And this was followed up by a still more drastic demand a year later, to the effect that he should reduce his 1924 Budget by no less than a million francs.

The circumstances in which these demands for economy were made need a word of explanation. There was, of course, what we should now regard, in the light of subsequent experience, as a minor economic crisis. The immediate post-war prosperity had received a check and Governments were beginning to be concerned about the economic situation. Moreover, contributions to League funds began to show alarming figures of arrears. It was therefore natural that international expenditure should be closely scrutinised with a view to economy. In the case of the I.L.O., however, the proposals made went far beyond that and an axe rather than a pruning knife suddenly threatened to fall with devastating effect.

In addition to the general urge towards economy, there was a fear in some quarters that the I.L.O. was growing too rapidly and extending beyond its proper field. In other quarters, where its growth had been accepted, the necessity for and nature of its new activities was insufficiently understood. The danger, and in part the explanation, of these views was to be found in certain changes in the Membership of the Governing Body. The I.L.O. had as yet behind it neither a tradition nor a record, and a break in the continuity of representation in the Governing Body was therefore liable to throw into question the wisdom or utility of many of its past decisions. Discontinuity of representation is incidentally one of the greatest obstacles in the way of orderly international development, though often of course it is inevitable. For example, such a break occurred just about this time in the representation of the British Government in the Governing Body. The unique place occupied by the British Government in the history of the International Labour Organisation, its creative contribution and its steady and understanding support of the Organisation's first tentative steps has already been related. It was therefore particularly unfortunate that, just at the moment when Governments were becoming pre-

occupied with the economic situation, Sir Malcolm Delevingne, who had been closely associated with every step hitherto taken, should have ceased to be the British Government's representative. His successors have maintained with distinction the British Government's record, but it added undoubtedly to the difficulties of the moment that the change should have been made just at this time. The new representative of the British Government was unfamiliar with the past work of the Governing Body, and his direct knowledge of the I.L.O. and of its Director was confined to the stormy and in many ways unsatisfactory meeting of the Genoa Conference. Albert Thomas was less successful in gaining the confidence of the British than of other people. They were slow to understand him and the barrier of language was a permanent obstacle. Those who did not know him well were afraid of his domineering energy and by no means sure that he was leading the Organisation along the right road. They could not compete with him in persuasion, but, themselves unpersuaded, they held in the last resort the power of the purse and this power they now decided to exercise. They were of course completely within their rights, and there is no doubt but they believed they were acting in the best interests of the Organisation. But it is perhaps permissible to think that if they had known Albert Thomas better their attitude on this occasion would have been less drastic.

Albert Thomas did not of course give way without a struggle. But the Governments followed the lead of the most powerful of their number, and against the Governments' determined refusal to supply the sinews of war all his arts of persuasion and appeal were powerless. Three courses were open to him. He might have resigned. I doubt if he considered that alternative save in an abstract review of all the possibilities. He might have said to the Governing Body—make your reductions how and where you will and take the responsibility for

them. This is what the staff expected him to do and he incurred a certain temporary unpopularity with some of his most devoted friends by choosing a different and a much more onerous course. They thought that he might have outmanœuvred the Governments by dividing them, and indeed it would have been easy. If the activities of the Office had been put up for discussion one by one each of them would have found some Governments strongly opposed to its suppression, and in the final upshot the total economy secured would in all probability have fallen far short of the figure demanded. Albert Thomas' refusal to follow this line seemed like a betrayal of his own budget. It is only in retrospect that can be clearly seen the reasons of a higher order which led him to shoulder with remarkable courage the odium of a more statesmanlike, but infinitely more disagreeable policy. He placed the interests of the Organisation *in the long run* before any other consideration. He had, as we have seen, very definite ideas of the responsibilities of the Director and of the line which separated them from the responsibilities of the Governing Body. He believed that the Director's sphere of personal leadership must be as wide as possible, since unambiguous leadership from a mixed body such as the Governing Body could not be expected, and without definite leadership the new Organisation could not hope to find or fulfil its mission. To abandon to the Governing Body the choice as to which services were to be suppressed or reduced was to hand over to them a vital part of the Director's constitutional prerogative. That, in his view, was a consideration far outweighing a budgetary restriction. Moreover, if the full economies demanded were not secured one and perhaps several States might have become, if not hostile to the Organisation, at all events constant critics: they would in all likelihood have opposed every fresh advance or extension of its activities until after successive struggles their

financial demands had been met. And lastly there would be a direct and dangerous conflict between them and the workers which might lead to the weakening, if not to the destruction, of such confidence in the Organisation as was slowly being built up in the workers' organisations.

For these reasons Albert Thomas decided to follow a third policy, the most dramatic incidents of which may be summarised as follows: he took the characteristic line of shouldering the whole burden himself. He stated to an astonished Governing Body, in the hearing of a no less astonished staff, that he had decided to reduce his own estimates. He withdrew his original estimates, which therefore could not be discussed, and replaced them by estimates which met the demand for economy. It thus became practically impossible for anyone, even the workers, to propose an increase since the majority of the Governing Body (and there would have been a majority for a compromise figure) could scarcely force on the Director money which he himself implicitly declared that he did not want. At the same time he demanded, and of course secured, complete authority to use the diminished budget in the way in which he considered would least diminish the efficiency and efficacy of his organisation. If for lack of supplies the disposition of the forces in the field had to be modified the General in command was to be the sole judge of the positions to be held or abandoned.

The operation of course involved the dismissal of staff. It must be remembered that at that time no pensions fund existed, that the staff in joining the Office had accepted the discomfort and loss involved in expatriation, and that their work had not been in the nature of an easily performed routine but something which demanded far more personal effort than could have been required of them in a long-established institution. A more unpalatable and unpopular task than that which had now to be assumed by Albert Thomas can therefore scarcely be imagined.

He had to choose the victims of the sacrifice, and he did not shrink from the disagreeable task of informing them individually of his decision and his reasons for it. He then discussed with each of them his future plans and prospects and promised his assistance. The result was that few or none of them left with feelings of hostility to him personally nor to the institution which had treated them with rather scant consideration. No doubt the Governments which had supported the demands for such drastic reductions felt grateful to the Director for having taken so unpopular a responsibility on his shoulders and for having in consequence diminished, so far as lay in his power, the hostility which their action excited in other quarters, and particularly in the workers' group. But his general policy was not appreciated and the general view was that he had suffered a decisive defeat. In reality it was no more than a strategic retreat before overwhelming forces, and Albert Thomas' reward was the sense that he had acted in the true interests of the Organisation and the slow recovery in later years of the ground so painfully lost.

Though this was the most serious and the most dramatic of Albert Thomas' financial struggles, there were many others. Finance, indeed, was a perpetual battlefield requiring his vigilant attention and personal intervention practically all the year round. In the Finance Committee and the Governing Body the ground on which he advanced or retreated was, at all events, solid beneath his feet. Before the Supervisory Commission and the Assembly his foothold was precarious: an uncertain legal situation and the perpetual danger of precipitating a constitutional conflict increased his difficulties a hundredfold. His defence of his budget before the Fourth Committee of the Assembly became an annual event which attracted a considerable audience. There his powers of eloquence and persuasion, his grasp of administrative detail, his readiness in debate

and his skill in handling a Committee were shown to the full.

The attitude of the League Treasurer towards the I.L.O. budget and its apparent disproportion to the budget of the Secretariat tended to be shared by numerous diplomats ill-acquainted with the nature and importance of the International Labour Office's activities. Albert Thomas might have relied on the vote of his Governing Body, pleading that the Government representatives thereon, who were familiar with the technical questions involved, had given a verdict which delegates less technically competent could hardly reverse. He preferred, however, to use the Fourth Committee discussions as an occasion for securing a wider and a better comprehension of the International Labour Office's work, and his endeavour was directed to securing the adoption of his budget on its merits. This incidentally had the advantage that the debate tended to be directed away from the constitutional issue, discussion of which could not be helpful.

He encountered, however, some opponents whom it was not easy to convince and whose frontal attacks were couched in language that startled more than a little the professional diplomats accustomed to more gentle argument. In Albert Thomas' view this was all to the good. It drew attention to the International Labour Office and secured him a still wider audience for his defence and explanation of its activities.

He was happiest when his opponent was a parliamentarian and he was prepared to give as good as he got, and usually a little better. The hard hitting of Mr. Hambro, one of the Norwegian delegates, whose strong personality and utter frankness of speech rapidly made him an outstanding figure at Geneva, was his special delight, and the record of the Hambro-Thomas discussions can still be enjoyed by anyone who has a taste for political debates in which quarter is neither asked nor given.

'The taxpayers cannot afford the money which is asked for this over-swollen institution,' cried Mr. Hambro in effect, 'and they would be opposed to paying for it if they knew more about it. The employers don't want it. We are told that the workers do want it and that we must be careful not to offend them. Well, all I can say is, speaking for my own country, that the Norwegian workers have refused to have anything to do with it.'

'Will Mr. Hambro deny', was Albert Thomas' reply, 'that he would be a great deal happier if the Norwegian workers did collaborate with the I.L.O.?'—a shrewd thrust, since the workers' movement in Norway was at that time showing extreme communistic tendencies with which Mr. Hambro as a conservative leader could hardly be expected to sympathise.

Mr. Hambro's unsparing attacks must be read of course for what they were, political arguments used in a financial debate to achieve a limited purpose. It would be unfair to take them as representing his attitude to the I.L.O. as a whole or to the person of its Director. As so often happens, these two public antagonists developed a real respect for one another and each appreciated the other's honesty of purpose and courageous frankness. Moreover, they had one close bond of sympathy and that was a concern for the conditions of the staff and for the political independence of the international official. There were to be later occasions when the weight of Mr. Hambro's personality and eloquence was effectively thrown in favour of some item of the I.L.O. budget which he thought was wrongly attacked.

In these discussions in the Fourth Committee Albert Thomas' resource was amazing. His knowledge of social conditions and movements in the various countries enabled him to particularise his general arguments with convincing effect, and his memory for details time and again served to obtain the vote of an opponent.

On one occasion the amount asked for publications had been criticised by many delegates as excessive. It was argued that the Office's publications were not read and should be cut down. This view was supported by the Australian delegate, who gave as a reason that he had never seen or heard of any of these publications in his own country. Albert Thomas called over one of his assistants. 'We had a letter six or seven months ago from Australia complimenting us on our publications. We have had several letters from the Federal Government and from Provincial Governments asking for additional copies. There are other letters from Trade Unions, Members of Parliament, etc. Get them for me.' When the time came for Albert Thomas to reply he was able to take up these letters one by one and read extracts from them. The Australian delegate immediately apologised for having spoken with insufficient knowledge and expressed his intention of voting against any proposal for a reduction.

Another of his opponents was Sir William Meyer, the delegate of India. Sir William, like Mr. Hambro, was a man of strong character, and he defended India's point of view with an obstinacy and a resource which made him one of the most redoubtable figures in the Assembly. One of his complaints about the League budget was that there were no Indians on the staff and he returned to the same point in the discussion of the I.L.O. budget. Albert Thomas was quick to reply pointing out that the I.L.O. unlike the Secretariat (at that time) had engaged an Indian official and had chosen an ex-member of the Indian Civil Service.

'Humph,' interjected Sir William, 'an Englishman I suppose?' India was pressing for the appointment of Indians as Albert Thomas well knew, just as Sir William knew who the I.L.O. appointee was. But Sir William for all his astuteness had walked full into Albert Thomas' dialectical trap.

'Is it Sir William's argument', asked Albert Thomas in his most honeyed tones, 'that Englishmen cannot represent India?' The Committee roared with laughter and for once Sir William was at a loss. It should be added that he too ended with the greatest respect for Albert Thomas and became one of his warmest supporters in these budgetary debates.

Much more could be told about Albert Thomas' work in the Fourth Committee and in particular of his successful struggle to secure the funds for the erection of the building in which the I.L.O. is now housed. Something, however, must be said about another series of problems not less absorbing and of even greater importance, for so indeed may be described the problems concerning the competence of the Organisation and its right to deal with certain categories of workers. Might the Organisation deal with the conditions of what is commonly called native labour, and with the special problems of men disabled in the war? These were questions raised by Albert Thomas at what many thought an unduly early stage, though few will now deny that he was wise to establish the I.L.O.'s competence in these spheres in its formative stages. The great battle on competence was fought, however, on a wider and unexpected issue. No doubt had existed in the minds of the authors of the Organisation as regards its right to deal with problems of agricultural labour. Long discussions had taken place in Paris as to the representation of agricultural interests. Hungary, to whom the Treaty of Trianon had been communicated, had specifically raised the question and had been told in the name of the Peace Conference, over the signature of M. Clemenceau, its President, that the Organisation was competent to deal with all types of labour, including agricultural labour. It is an interesting study to follow through a series of official documents and statements how a position so definitely established came to be challenged by the Government whose

representatives had most clearly affirmed it. The history of that evolution and the arguments which were found to support the new attitude, or which had to be stated in opposition to it, need not be recounted here. All that need be noted is the vital nature of the challenge that occurred when the French Government decided to ask the Council of the League to seek an advisory opinion from the Permanent Court of International Justice,¹ as to whether or not the International Labour Organisation had the right to deal with the conditions of labour of agricultural workers. An Organisation with a competence limited to certain categories of workers would evidently be a very different thing from an Organisation competent to deal with the conditions of all workers, however much for reasons of expediency it might limit its activities at any particular time.

The problem of competence was therefore fundamental but the incidental problems to which it gave rise were equally fundamental in a very different sphere. The French Government would presumably argue before the Court the case against agricultural competence. Certain other Governments would be likely to do the same. Was it to be left to chance that still other Governments would, in the interests of the Organisation, argue the case on the other side? And, even if they did, they would have no title to speak for the Organisation as a whole. When a question vital to the life and character of the Organisation was being decided was the Organisation as such to utter no word? To Albert Thomas the thing was inconceivable. On the other hand, the Governing Body was divided. It was likely to be more divided still if it were asked to discuss the propriety of the Director assuming the function of the Organisation's spokesman. Albert Thomas took his usual

¹The constitution of the International Labour Organisation provides that any question as to its interpretation is to be decided by the Permanent Court of International Justice.

courageous decision. He decided to ask to be heard by the Court, and to settle accounts with the Governing Body afterwards. That decision demanded in fact much more than his ordinary courage. He was not only Director of the I.L.O.; he was also a Frenchman and an ex-Minister. There are occasions and issues when French opinion does not easily distinguish between the French Government and France. It was no light decision which Albert Thomas had to take. But, as ever, he put personal considerations aside in favour of what he deemed to be the duty of the Director of the International Labour Office.

His request to be heard was granted by the Court in spite of a letter addressed to it by one member of the Governing Body stating that the Governing Body had given the Director no authority to appear and arguing that therefore he could not be heard. Albert Thomas' action on this occasion constituted a clear example of the nature of the loyalty which an international civil servant owes to the institution which he serves even in the painful circumstances in which his loyalty to his own Government must be put aside. It was an example too of the difficulties which an international civil servant may meet in the performance of his duty when he finds himself faced by the open opposition of a member of the representative body to which he is responsible.

Once he had taken his decision Albert Thomas fought for his thesis as strongly as he had ever fought for his budget against Mr. Hambro or Sir William Meyer. The first skirmish took place at the Council of the League. It was clear that the Court's reply might be influenced by the exact wording of the question put to it, and Albert Thomas' suspicions were aroused by a last minute substitution of a new formula. He expressed them with an energetic frankness that somewhat startled the Council. Mr. Léon Bourgeois protested. 'I hope', he said, 'that Mr. Albert Thomas will moderate his language and will not compel the

representative of France to withdraw.' The age and eminence of Mr. Bourgeois lent additional weight to these serious words, and the other members of the Council were visibly alarmed at the possibility of so grave an incident. Albert Thomas was, however, by no means dismayed.

'I should regret', he said, 'to say anything which would lead the distinguished representative of France to withdraw, but I have the right to express my surprise . . .' and he continued his argument unperturbed.

When Albert Thomas decided to ask to be heard by the Court we had not at first realised that he intended to plead in person. We had thought that he would hand over to an international lawyer a task so remote from his other activities and which must of necessity involve an enormous burden of work. The French Government we knew would be represented by M. de Lapradelle, the distinguished Juriconsult of the French Foreign Office, who might be expected to make up his brief with all a French lawyer's thoroughness and with all the resources of the Quai d'Orsay behind him. Albert Thomas, however, was anxious that the Court should not lose itself in technical issues. Like the Fourth Committee and the Assembly it must be brought to know the Organisation on whose fate it was deciding as a real and living thing and not as a constitutional abstraction. This was something which he felt, and rightly, he could perform better than anyone else. Here is not the place to reproduce the speech in which he fulfilled completely and effectively, and with the happiest results, his self-imposed task, but as this chapter is mainly devoted to giving some idea of his methods of work it may well close with a description of him at the Hague.

I had been helping him with the preparation of his brief and it was arranged that I should join him at the Hague the evening before he was to be heard. I arrived tired and dusty at about

5 p.m., after a wearisome journey from Geneva. Those were still the days when sleeping cars and restaurant services had not yet been fully restored on the railways. As I got out of my taxi at the hotel I was looking eagerly forward to a drink and a bath. Alas! I was told that Albert Thomas was impatiently awaiting my arrival. I found him surrounded by papers and after a word of greeting we set to work. The scheme of his speech was unfolded to me, my suggestions were discussed, accepted or rejected. Albert Thomas' remarkable memory continually suggested a search for this or that document or statement and, with a brief interval for dinner (the best the hotel could supply), the work went on till 3 a.m. No speech was written. The speech consisted of a series of dictated notes and the classified documents for quotation. At 3 a.m. it was not quite finished. 'We'll go on at 7.30 a.m.,' said Albert Thomas with a twinkle in his eye, 'if that's not too early for you.' (I had no reputation as an early riser.) We worked from 7.30 a.m. till 9 a.m., a copious breakfast not being allowed to make any serious interruption. At nine Albert Thomas dressed and, leaving me to finish looking up one or two further references, set out to pay a round of official calls on Dutch Ministers and the Diplomatic Corps. At 11 a.m. we met at the Court and, after the Judges had filed in to their places with the usual impressive and simple ceremonial, he began his speech.

It was a fascinating performance. The legal arguments put forward by the French and other Governments were discussed and replied to with an ease and clarity that visibly held the close attention of the Court. Quotation after quotation fell into its appointed place, not as dull and heavy citation, but as aptly as an epigram that delights an after-dinner audience: the transition from argument to argument seemed to be as natural and inevitable as the rhymes in a sonnet: and all of it was given a rich substance by the charm of the speaker's voice and personality.

One felt that, like *Oliver Twist*, both bench and bar were eager for more and that he could hold their concentrated attention as long as he liked. He spoke the whole day, never hurried and never diffuse. At 6.30 p.m. he finished and the Court rose. We took a taxi and drove to Scheveningen for a breath of air which consisted in a rapid walk to the end of the promenade and back. Albert Thomas seemed to have cast his speech behind him and was full of sly humour. We passed near a monument erected to the Dutch soldiers who died while mobilised during the war. I asked him what it was. 'That', he said with a twinkle in his eye, 'is what some of our soldiers would call the Dutch monument to the Unknown Non-Combatant.'

We dined in Scheveningen and drove back to the Court. There by the courtesy of the Registrar, Mr. Hammarskjöld, arrangements had been made to allow Albert Thomas to see and approve the transcript of the shorthand notes of his speech before he left the Hague. It proved a lengthy operation. The staff of the Court had only just been organised and this I imagine was their first experience of so long and complicated an exposé for which no manuscript could be handed in. They could no doubt have produced a complete and accurate record during the following day but then further delay would have been involved in submitting it for Albert Thomas' approval, and so it was arranged that they should produce their transcript of the shorthand notes of the impromptu parts of the speech as rapidly as possible and leave us to complete them with the necessary references and quotations. As the sheets came from the typists Albert Thomas read them through carefully and made his corrections. I carried over his corrections on to the corresponding English sheets, found and verified all the quotations made and, wherever it was possible to deface a duplicate publication, cut out the relevant extracts in French and English and pasted them in their appropriate places.

Round about midnight the task was barely half finished. Albert Thomas stopped and enquired how many people were being kept at work. The night porter was despatched in search of wine and sandwiches and by some miracle, for the Hague goes (or went) to bed early, succeeded in producing a welcome and stimulating collation in which everyone from the messengers up readily shared. The last page was passed. The two bulky piles of manuscript, one English and the other French, were given a final check to see that nothing was missing in either version, a taxi was found, and we returned to our hotel.

'Would you mind', asked Albert Thomas, 'if I gave you some papers for Geneva, as I shall be leaving by an early train?'

I went up to his room. From the papers lying in piles on the chairs, on the bed, and on the floor, he picked out a number and gave his instructions and decisions.

'I think that's all,' he said, and then he turned to his secretary. 'At what time have you arranged for me to be called?' he asked.

'At 7.30,' was the reply: 'The train leaves at 8.30.'

I looked at the clock on the wall of the room. It was five minutes to six.

'Eh bien,' said Albert Thomas. 'I shall get into pyjamas. It's always a rest to get one's clothes off. Good-bye till we meet in Geneva.' And so ended a twenty-three hours day.

I do not suggest that it was a normal day. It is an extreme example of the intensity with which Albert Thomas worked, and how little he spared his own effort when he felt that something had to be done. It may be taken for granted that he gave himself no compensatory rest the next day. The next day's programme would not be modified: the series of papers to be dealt with in the train would be produced from his serviette at 8.30 and I have no doubt that when I finally got up for lunch at the Hague he had already behind him a long morning's dictation somewhere in Germany.

Chapter V

Albert Thomas en Voyage

The essential difference between Albert Thomas' vision of the International Labour Organisation and that of others was that whereas their attention was concentrated on the Office, the Governing Body and the Conference, his view embraced the periphery as well as the centre. Only in the Member States could concrete results be achieved. The organs at Geneva might plan for those results, supply information which would facilitate them, might desire and stimulate them, but no more. It lay with other institutions, scattered throughout fifty odd countries, to follow or to ignore the lead that Geneva might give.

The Organisation in its full and 'living' sense (to use his favourite expression), embraced those distant institutions just as much as its central machinery. He therefore regarded them as coming within the ambit of his essential preoccupations, and from the very first days of his Directorship he set out to establish effective relations between them and the Office.

It will be remembered that in the first six months, when he was not yet freed from his commitments in Paris, and when the preparations for the third and fourth meetings of the Governing Body and his first Conference might have been expected to absorb all his time, he visited Brussels, Berlin and Rome. Once the Office was established at Geneva his journeys were multi-

plied in the dual endeavour to keep in constant personal touch with the great political centres and to establish direct and periodical relations with every Member of the Organisation.

It was an ambitious programme but he pursued it with his usual relentless energy. On an average he spent nearly twenty weeks a year travelling, and during one specially busy year he took his nightly rest during a period equivalent to five months in a 'moving bed,' *i.e.* either on a boat or on a train. Non-Member States were not excluded from his itineraries though visits to them presented problems of peculiar delicacy, and colonies were included whenever possible; the possibility of useful contacts or of the accumulation of first-hand knowledge of social problems could not be restricted by the accidents of political differences or of formal status. When death intervened he was on the point of starting for Turkey, Iraq and Persia, and after that only India, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Central America remained to complete a programme such as perhaps no other statesman ever deliberately set out to achieve. Walt Whitman made a prophetic picture, both of the extent of Albert Thomas' journeys and the spirit in which they were undertaken, when he wrote:

'I see the cities of the earth and make myself part of them,

'I am a real Parisian,

'I am a habitant of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,

'I am of Madrid, Cadiz, Barcelona, Oporto, Lyons, Brussels, Berne, Frankfort, Stuttgart, Turin, Florence,

'I belong in Moscow, Cracow, Warsaw, or northward in Christiania or Stockholm, or in Siberia, Irkutsk, or in some street in Iceland.

'I descend upon all those cities and rise from them again.'

As might have been expected, Albert Thomas was sometimes criticised for the length and frequency of his absences from Ge-

neva. The criticism never went very far because it was never possible to show that his work in Geneva was in any way adversely affected. A certain vague prejudice nevertheless continued to exist against his journeys among those who did not perceive their value to the Organisation, and there may even have been some idea that though he was not indulging in joy rides yet he had succumbed to the temptation of travelling for travelling's sake. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Albert Thomas did not enjoy travelling. He was, as has been recounted, a bad sailor and for sea journeys he had a positive distaste. On land he travelled by night wherever possible in order to save time and, never a good sleeper, he slept badly (often not at all) in trains. Moreover, he worked, if anything, more intensively when on a journey. Most people who have any experience of travelling know that deliberate and lengthy concentration in a train or a boat requires an additional effort—there are a thousand excuses for being distracted, an irresistible temptation to be as lazy as the other travellers by whom one is surrounded. But when Albert Thomas travelled he remained, in a sense, in Geneva. In his absence the Deputy Director or one of the Chiefs of Division (if the Deputy Director were also absent) became Acting Director in his place. 'Absence', however, did not begin when he crossed the frontiers of Geneva. His instructions were that he was not to be considered as officially absent so long as he was anywhere within the area roughly contained within the triangle Rome-London-Berlin. Unless he were further afield papers and files followed him precisely as if he were in his office and came back signed or minuted by return of post. Some time was lost in transit, but by this device he was able to keep his personal control of all Office affairs and to maintain his detailed knowledge of all its activities.

Thus many of his absences from Geneva brought no lighten-

ing of his administrative burden and not even the relaxation of a change of work. They involved in all cases additional work in the form of an intensive study of the points on which he thought he could achieve some positive results. If Albert Thomas secured remarkable personal successes in his different missions they were due in the main to his careful preparation. He might have counted on securing an attentive hearing because of his eminence and have relied for the rest on the charm and strength of his personality. These were cards which he was always prepared to play, but he took infinite pains to provide himself with many others. If for instance he hoped to advance the prospects of the ratification of the Hours Convention in a particular country he would set to work to master in all its technical detail the legislation of the country in question; and not only the legislation, but the parliamentary discussions and any other material which might throw any light on opinion or practice. He was thus able to enter into a discussion fully equipped to understand in their national setting the points which might be made.

He went further. When he was visiting for the first time a country with which he was little acquainted his preparation included a study of all its aspects—its constitution, its economic and demographic features, its recent political history, its political parties, its press, and even the background of its art and culture. He gave the impression therefore of always having taken a special interest in its development and welfare and that impression made him immediately *persona grata*. It was not a false impression. He was visiting a unit of his Organisation, and in the development and welfare of every part of that Organisation he was interested with equal sincerity.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to accompany him on many of his missions and I had therefore ample opportunity for observing his technique, and, during the longer journeys, the

occasion to get to know him more intimately than was possible in his crowded life at Geneva.

It was a fascinating though often a fatiguing experience. He always travelled with one and sometimes with two secretaries. No sooner was the train in movement than his capacious serviette would be opened and he would dictate. When the dictation was finished his secretary would proceed to type on a portable machine while Albert Thomas turned to his *lecture*. It was the secretary's business to know when and where the train stopped. Albert Thomas' reading would be interrupted for the signature of urgent letters and as soon as the station was reached the secretary would alight to post them, and would return with all the available newspapers. These were immediately read and cast aside, and the reading of documents and dictation then alternated till some inevitable interruption such as the necessity for a meal or the end of the journey intervened. On arrival we would be met—in London or Paris by the head of our Branch Office who would immediately produce the programme of visits and interviews which he had been responsible for organising—in less frequently visited capitals in addition to the Correspondent there would be Ministers and officials, Trade Union leaders and employers' representatives.

From the moment of our arrival at our hotel, apart from the hours devoted to sleep, our whole time was completely mortgaged. The number of people whom Albert Thomas contrived to see was astonishing. I remember one occasion on which he had twenty-two important interviews in one day, nearly half of which involved lengthy journeys to different districts of a great city. Mere numbers, however, give only a false impression of feverish activity. They are to be explained by Albert Thomas' ability to get more into the day than other people and to the fact that most of the meetings had been arranged in advance. Of course it may be asked: was it necessary for him to see so many

people? Would it not have been enough for him to have seen the Ministry or Department of Labour and the employers and workers? But what is covered by the single word 'labour' at Geneva becomes administratively very diversified when it is followed up in a national centre. If we take Great Britain as an example many questions of course can be dealt with at the Ministry of Labour, but questions relating to seamen are dealt with by the Board of Trade, questions relating to safety by the Home Office, to insurance by the Ministry of Health, to mines by the Mines Department, and to Colonies by the Colonial Office; and visits to the Ministers and officials responsible for these Departments will by no means cover all the points on which the International Labour Office and the British Government may have matters to discuss.

Albert Thomas did not confine his effort, however, to contacts with the official departments immediately concerned. The ultimate decision as to the ratification of a Labour Convention might often be a question of general policy in which the Prime Minister and other Ministers would have either a word to say or perhaps a decisive influence. They therefore must be seen as well. And since their attitude would in the final analysis be dependent on parliamentary and public opinion, leaders in those spheres must also be reached if possible. This sounds as though he endeavoured to see everybody. He did—everybody that mattered—but in the time at his disposal a selection had to be made. In making it Albert Thomas displayed an uncanny skill. One of the secrets of his success was that so many of the Ministers in power in any country at any time were his personal acquaintances. But that was no accident. The Ministers of to-day were his acquaintances of yesterday, and the members of the rank and file whom he went out of his way to meet to-day proved to be the Ministers of to-morrow.

Thus when he came on one of his missions he came in many

cases as an old friend. Doors opened before him and engagements already made would be altered to meet his convenience. And, as has been said in connection with Genoa, the general information he collected from these intimate political contacts in one capital made him an even more valuable visitor in the next.

His missions, however, often demanded more than careful planning, laborious preparation, and an exhausting physical effort. They also involved on occasion a good deal of moral courage, both as regards the decision to undertake them, or in the course of their accomplishment. I remember his first mission to Spain. The dictatorship of Primo di Rivera had not long been established. It was highly unpopular with the Spanish workers, who complained that a deliberate effort was being made to destroy their organisations, and perhaps for this very reason it was anxious to propitiate the International Labour Office. The representative of the Spanish Government arrived at the meeting of the Governing Body with an invitation to the Governing Body to hold a meeting in Madrid. There was the usual informal discussion before the matter was given formal consideration and it was discovered that if the invitation was proffered the workers' group would oppose its acceptance, and would even go to the length of refusing to attend a meeting in the Spanish capital, if such a meeting were convened. The Spanish representative was therefore persuaded to keep his invitation in his pocket. The situation was an awkward one, and was made more awkward by the fact that invitations from other Governments had been accepted on previous occasions: and that the Spanish Government, anticipating no difficulty, had provided in its budget a sum of 200,000 pesetas in order to meet any additional expenses that the Office might incur, and in order to give the Governing Body a royal reception. The representatives of the other Governments on the Governing Body were extremely embarrassed. It seemed, however, that

there was nothing to be done. Albert Thomas as usual took the problem on to his own shoulders. If the Governing Body could not go, and it clearly could not do so in a truncated form, then he, who as Director represented in his indivisible person its three constituent elements, would go officially in place of it.

When his intention was known, the greatest possible pressure was brought to bear on him to abandon the idea. The workers argued that the Director of the I.L.O. could not, and should not, accept an invitation from a Government which was out to destroy trade unionism, and, they added, that if he did he would forfeit their confidence. Albert Thomas replied that Spain was a member of the Organisation: that it was his duty in the circumstances to do anything which would prevent any weakening in her collaboration: that whatever might be the internal situation the position of the Spanish Trade Unions could not be made more difficult by his visit: and that to maintain, and if possible to strengthen, the contacts between Spain and the I.L.O. must help the unions in their struggle. The workers were not convinced, and maintained their attitude. Albert Thomas remained of the opinion that his solution was the only possible one. He was, however, in a cruel dilemma since, as we have seen, he regarded the confidence of the workers as fundamental to the effective working of the Office. But he did not flinch from his decision. So great, however, did he feel were the risks involved that he explained the whole situation to me before asking me to accompany him, and added that he would quite understand if, in the circumstances, I felt that I should refuse the proposal which he was about to make. He evidently feared that his defiance of what was practically an ultimatum from the workers' group might perhaps make it impossible for him to continue as Director and that, as I had sometimes to act as Director when he and Butler were away, I might feel that my position would also be compromised.

The incident is worth recording as showing Albert Thomas' unhesitating subordination of his closest political affiliations to what he deemed to be his international duty and his almost exaggerated loyalty to his staff.

The Spanish Government appreciated his gesture. We were met at the frontier and escorted to Madrid: the Comte d'Altea and other representatives of the Government met us as we alighted from the train: luxurious suites were provided for us at the Ritz: one of Primo's own cars with a chauffeur and a footman was placed at our disposal and whenever we employed it, a squad of four motor cycles made our progress something like a procession. These external manifestations of the Government's satisfaction were not, however, calculated to make Albert Thomas' next move easier.

We drove to see Primo. He was a big, heavy and (for what my brief impression is worth) an unassuming and very pleasant man who in appearance and manner seemed as unlike a brutal dictator as one could possibly imagine. As a matter of fact, he was not personally unpopular even among his most determined opponents. Albert Thomas' contacts included as usual representatives of every shade of opinion, including those most opposed to the Primo régime, and I was as surprised by the latter's tolerance towards Primo as I was startled by the bitterness and intensity of their hostility to the King.

Primo received us with extreme cordiality. He had all the qualities of a 'good mixer', and the conversation was pleasant and even witty. One had to be aware of the delicacy of the whole situation to catch its serious undertones. We had passed the closed Chamber of Deputies on our way through the town and Albert Thomas had drawn our attention to the flower sellers with their great circular-patterned black and white umbrellas who now occupied its steps. Primo, of course, had been responsible for closing it. In the opening phrases of the conversation

Albert Thomas chatted casually about our arrival and his general impression of the streets of Madrid. He concluded with a description of the flower sellers, adding with a laugh: 'I could not help thinking that their umbrellas looked exactly like wreaths on a tomb.'

Primo joined in the laugh and interjected: 'For the dead in that tomb there will be no resurrection.'

'Don't be too sure' was Albert Thomas' half-jesting reply. 'Remember the slaughter of the Innocents.'

'But these were the guilty' was Primo's retort and proceeded to describe the way in which the late Chamber had made government impossible. He asserted that he had only assumed power in order to prevent the progressive disintegration of the State and explained his plans for instituting a new and different democratic system. Albert Thomas asked whether he hoped to get any representatives of labour to sit in his new-style Chamber. Primo thought he would—not members of the Socialist Party, but, after an interval, representatives of the Trade Unions. This, from all we had heard, seemed an exceedingly optimistic view but it gave Albert Thomas the opening for which he had been playing. He reminded Primo of the tripartite character of the International Labour Office and explained that as its Director he could not visit a Member State without visiting the employers and workers as well as the Government. Albert Thomas did not put it as a suggestion but as a decision. It could not have been palatable to Primo as the workers' organisations were in violent and almost revolutionary opposition to him and his régime. He accepted, however, without demur and added that his car was at Albert Thomas' disposal to take him to the headquarters of the Confederation of Labour whenever he desired.

We had hardly arrived back at the hotel when an intimation was received that our official programme would include an audience with the King. Was this Primo's riposte? The workers

were already embarrassed by Albert Thomas' situation as Primo's guest and they had been conspicuous by their absence at the station when we arrived. Their attitude to the King was, as we had discovered, infinitely more hostile than it was to the Government. Did Primo hope to put Albert Thomas in the dilemma of the statesmen who, before the Lateran Treaty, wished to include the Quirinal and the Vatican in the same round of calls? The workers' leaders would no doubt understand that Albert Thomas had no choice, and that the audience was equivalent to a command. But they might feel, like the workers' group in the Governing Body, that if he was in a difficult situation he had only himself to blame. And would they, or could they, explain and justify his action to the rank and file?

These doubts and difficulties were not allowed to interrupt the rest of the programme, but time had to be found for the purchase of a silk hat, indispensable for the visit to the Palace. Between two visits we stopped at the principal hat shop in the centre of the city. After Albert Thomas had been fitted, his secretary paid. (Albert Thomas hardly ever carried any money himself.) The secretary, a thrifty French soul, found the price rather high and, privileged and careful guardian of Albert Thomas' private purse, did not hesitate to express his abhorrence at so extravagant an expenditure. To reinforce his criticism he reminded Albert Thomas that he had no less than five silk hats at home bought in similar circumstances.

'That's true,' said Albert Thomas, admitting with his usual fairness the justice of the argument. 'I really ought to buy a hat case and take a silk hat with me on journeys like this as a matter of precaution.' A hat case was chosen and the secretary was again called on to pay. He was still more appalled.

'Why, it costs more than the hat,' he protested, and then, as a brilliant idea struck him, he made a suggestion that would have startled the Spanish Protocol: 'Why don't you buy one of those

silk hats that fold up?' he asked, 'and then you won't need a case.'

The interview with the King was by no means as formal as the traditions of the Spanish Court would have led one to expect. Albert Thomas was already known to him—his acquaintance with reigning monarchs was in fact wide, and he used sometimes to say in jest that he would organise a Kings' Trade Union. The conversation was concerned almost entirely with the general state of European politics. But it left an impression of remoteness from reality, and when he spoke of Spain the King seemed to have no idea at all of the deep and bitter flood of hostility which was mounting against him personally.

That evening we learnt that the visit to the headquarters of the Federation of Labour had been satisfactorily arranged for the morrow. We had to take Primo's car though the driver looked somewhat staggered when he was told his destination. With the motor cycle police escort we were however determined to dispense and orders had been given to that effect. When we came down to the entrance of the hotel three of the motor cyclists had disappeared, but the fourth, evidently their leader, was there in plain clothes. Albert Thomas explained that he would not be required but the man was courteously obdurate. He had been made responsible for Albert Thomas' safety and he could not allow him to go into what was regarded as a dangerous quarter of the town unaccompanied. As it would not do for us to be late there was no time to argue. The man was assured that Albert Thomas ran no risk and was ordered to keep as far away and to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Then accompanied by our Madrid correspondent, Mr. Fabra Ribas, to whose skill and tact the successful arrangements for the meeting were largely due, we set off.

When we arrived at the Federation Albert Thomas must have known immediately that his major problem was solved. A huge

and obviously friendly crowd filled the street and Largo Caballero and the members of the Executive Committee were waiting bareheaded on the steps of the Federation building. With some difficulty we entered and began to make a slow and difficult progress up the stairs which were packed with members who had been unable to get into the big meeting room upstairs. We had barely advanced more than a few steps when there was a violent scuffle behind us and the shouts of welcome were mingled with shouts of a more menacing kind. We turned and Albert Thomas realised what had happened with amazing quickness. He dashed back followed by Caballero and was just in time to prevent our too-faithful policeman, who had been recognised, from being severely handled. He explained the situation to Caballero and steps were taken to get the man safely out of the crowd.

We arrived upstairs and were slowly manoeuvred to a small platform, every inch of which was already occupied. Somehow room was found on it. Caballero, a man of strong character and great courage himself, as subsequent events were to prove, appreciated to the full the gesture of Albert Thomas' visit. One of Spain's greatest orators, he gave expression to his welcome in an eloquent and forceful speech. If there had been any difference of opinion as to the propriety of receiving someone who had been accused of hobnobbing with the Federation's greatest enemies, or as to the sincerity of Albert Thomas' sympathies, that speech removed them. At its close the enthusiasm was indescribable. Albert Thomas must have been moved. He had won perhaps the riskiest throw of his career as Director. If the Spanish workers approved his coming to Spain his policy was justified, and his quarrel with the workers' group in the Governing Body was at an end. I have only a vague recollection of what followed. Albert Thomas replied amid further scenes of enthusiasm. We drank sweet wine and ate small cakes, and

shook hands with hundreds of trade union leaders. Then we fought our way back through the crowds again and Primo's car was breaking all speed records to get us to the University—Albert Thomas' inexorable programme had allowed nothing for an interval of relief and self-congratulation.

There a very different audience awaited to hear Albert Thomas deliver a lecture—a Cardinal Archbishop, Ministers and ex-Ministers, Grandees and Nobles, headed all the aristocratic intelligentsia of Spain in 1923. Albert Thomas' subject was of course the International Labour Office, but he led up to it through a survey of the cultural and historical background of Spain that amazed and charmed his audience, and he concluded with a peroration of great beauty. I had thought that the meeting could not be other than an anti-climax after the events earlier in the afternoon, but it was not. Both intellectually and artistically he captured his audience completely and the warmth and duration of the applause which followed his address was almost dramatic in its unexpected spontaneity.

Albert Thomas himself, curiously enough, was not wholly satisfied with his speech. He was a severe self-critic, and perhaps he felt that for so distinguished a university audience he should have provided more of scholarship and less of eloquence. He was by training a historian, but history had become of necessity no more than a hobby which he could only pursue in fragmentary fashion. On this occasion he had taken history in his stride, so to speak, without that careful preparation which he held to be her exalted due. It was a scruple which revealed the essential honesty of his mind, and I noted it at the time because it was rare to get any real insight into his personal reactions to his own achievements. On this occasion, whatever excuses he owed to history, he certainly owed none to his audience.

His historical training and knowledge added greatly to his pleasure in the visits to the Escorial and to Toledo which the

Spanish Government arranged for him. The latter visit provided incidentally an occasion for the display of another quality which I did not know he possessed. On our return from what is perhaps the most beautiful Gothic city in Europe he was met by a group of journalists who asked for his impressions. Then followed the question 'What struck you most in Toledo?'

'El Greco's picture of the Burial of the Duke of Orgaz' was the reply, and then followed a description of the impressions which that masterpiece had made on him. The journalists listened and then began to scribble at top speed. I cannot attempt to reproduce Albert Thomas' critical appreciation. I will only note that it was reproduced practically in full in the next day's papers and given a position of great prominence—a tribute to its interest and value and to the high intelligence of Spanish journalists.

One other incident of Albert Thomas' visit to Madrid deserves record. One day an hour was somehow squeezed out of our congested programme and Primo's luxurious car made another incongruous excursion deep into one of the poorer working-class districts of the city. In a poorly furnished flat in a mean street, Albert Thomas came to pay his respects to Pedro Iglesias, the Grand Old Man of the Spanish Socialist movement, for long an invalid remote from its immediate struggles and problems. The frail old man's delight and gratitude at the visit were touching to see. It was another example of that loyalty in Albert Thomas' character which did so much to gain for him devoted friends.

It should be mentioned that Albert Thomas' visit to Spain did much more than get the Governing Body and the Spanish Government out of an embarrassing situation. It bore in the long run much more important fruit. Relations between the Spanish Government and the workers improved and Spanish collaboration with the I.L.O. became more active. In 1929 Mr. Aunos Perez, Primo's Minister of Labour, was elected as President of

the Maritime Session of the International Labour Conference. Like its predecessor at Genoa, its proceedings were stormy; the shipowners at one stage withdrew in a body and it looked as though there was little prospect of securing their return. In this unprecedented situation the President displayed admirable tact and firmness and most ably assisted the Director in the negotiations which finally led to the Conference being able to continue in a normal manner.

The difficulties of a mission such as the Spanish mission were great, but Albert Thomas had, at all events, solid ground beneath his feet. Spain was a member of his Organisation and he was there officially as her invited guest. His journey to the United States which took place at an earlier date was from that point of view a much more delicate undertaking. He might be regarded as an intruder and both he himself and the Organisation might easily be put in a false, if not indeed a dangerous, position. Moreover, those political gifts which were his protection in Europe were likely to be of no avail to him in the United States. He had little knowledge of the language and of the mentality of its people and his acquaintances among them were very few. Nevertheless, he decided to go. The United States, because of its enormous industrial importance, presented a problem to which the International Labour Organisation could not be indifferent. How could relations between the I.L.O. and the United States best be developed, even though full official collaboration must be regarded as impossible? He felt that he was handicapped in his discussions with Americans in Geneva by lack of first-hand knowledge of their country, and he accordingly determined on a personal visit. The organisation of the Office had been carried through and he felt he could safely leave it for a long period under the direction of Butler, who was now his fast friend and enjoyed his complete confidence.

He did me the honour of asking me to accompany him and

we sailed from Southampton in the S.S. 'Majestic' on 6 December, 1922. As the mission was intended to be exploratory of almost all forms of American economic activity he also brought with him a small group of collaborators, Mr. J. E. Herbert, the head of the London Branch Office, and Mr. Paul Devinat and Mr. E. Beddington Behrens from the Geneva staff, in addition to his private secretary.

I must confess that I began the journey with certain apprehensions. As I had been to the United States before, the journey made no appeal to my curiosity, and such little knowledge as I had seemed to make it certain that our difficulties would be many. Albert Thomas was a Socialist and he made it a point of honour not to hide that, on this occasion, embarrassing fact. In the United States a Socialist was a 'Red' and the war hysteria against the 'Reds' was still far from spent. It seemed to me that no amount of explanation as to the respectability of Socialists in France would be wholly convincing, and that to justify a bearded Socialist would be beyond my powers. I saw the burden falling on me personally as Albert Thomas had only a fragmentary knowledge of English and therefore his remarkable gifts of eloquence and persuasion could not be counted on.

Albert Thomas began to work before the 'Majestic' had left the dock at Southampton. He had brought with him a small library of books of American history, political speeches, statistical reports, etc., and these he settled down to absorb. I tried hard to get him to dictate half a dozen speeches in French which I could translate into English for him to read or memorise, or, alternatively, to dictate notes of his speeches (he had a lengthy speaking programme to fulfil) so that I might be prepared to undertake reasonably adequately the unaccustomed job of interpreter. He evaded these requests for a few days. He said he was learning English and he wanted to see how far he could get. He knew of course enough English to read, though slowly and

painfully, English official documents. But it seemed to me to be the wildest folly to imagine that he could ever reach anything approaching a speaking knowledge before we reached Sandy Hook.

When we were three days out he handed me a manuscript which he had prepared and asked me to put it into English. It was the French text of the speech which he intended to deliver at the New York Bankers Club the day after our arrival. I prepared an English version (rather than a translation) in which I tried to render, no doubt very inadequately, something of the distinctive flavour of his eloquence. He proceeded to read it aloud. I was appalled. His accent rendered the words unintelligible—although I had worked over it sentence by sentence I had to send for a second copy in order to be able to follow his reading.

I was afraid to express my opinion with complete frankness; I thought it might destroy his confidence. I knew that that would not be easy, but as a speaker he was an artist and for an artist to know that he was making a mess of his art seemed to me something against which no confidence could prevail. I therefore suggested that as the process of learning his speeches in English was going to take too much time, he should adopt the plan of beginning each speech with a few stock sentences in English and then continue in French, leaving me to translate afterwards. I think he guessed the reason for my suggestion, for with a twinkle in his eye he said that in his wife's opinion his English accent was hopeless. It seemed to me that Madame Thomas had chosen exactly the right word, but I insisted stoutly that with more practice he could improve his pronunciation sufficiently to make himself understood.

'All right,' he said. 'I'll practise.' And he did most earnestly. Painfully every day for an hour or more he read through the same speech, going over each sentence time after time and making an effort to apply my corrections. He improved, of course, but the improvement was uncertain in its results. He would re-

member to avoid some original and totally unintelligible pronunciation of his own, but he could not remember what was the pronunciation which should take its place, and would produce some novel substitute which might or might not convey a clue as to what the word really was. He seemed quite incapable of ever pronouncing any word in anything approaching the normal English way. The rest of the time he spent with his histories and reports. No second speech was forthcoming, and I was left in a state of distressed uncertainty as to how his speaking engagements were to be managed.

We landed in the evening and were met by Mr. Ernest Greenwood, the Office's Washington Correspondent, who produced innumerable additions to an already heavy programme. The next day came the lunch at the Bankers Club. Albert Thomas was introduced and was greeted with polite applause. He rose to his feet slowly and somehow by that mere movement he seemed to rivet attention. The art of a great speaker is something subtler than felicity of language and ease of delivery and it begins to be exercised before he opens his mouth. In some uncanny way the audience seemed to sense that Albert Thomas was a speaker as well as a distinguished guest. Perhaps it was the mere effect of his personality: perhaps it was some unconscious and unperceived setting of his shoulders or poising of his head like the preparatory flexing of a golfer or a gymnast. Anyway I felt that the audience recognised him as a speaker and I felt increasingly nervous as to what was to follow.

He began in English with a simple sentence composed of the simplest words. His voice was pitched exactly to fill the long narrow room: the words were carefully enunciated and in spite of his original accent easy to understand. After expressing in successive sentences his pleasure at being in the United States and his appreciation of his hosts' invitation he proceeded to apologise for his inability to speak their language. I drew a

breath of relief. Evidently he would now deliver his speech in French, and, as I was fully word perfect in the English version, I felt satisfied that I could provide a really brilliant interpretation. But what happened was something quite different. Albert Thomas, feeling that he was being understood, continued to improvise, and sensing that he held his audience's attention, began steadily to give his personality more play. The sentences became more ragged while the speaker became more animated. There were words that occasionally puzzled his audience, sentences that were unintelligible, but his listeners were fascinated by his voice and his gestures, and he held their concentrated attention by the force of his sincerity and conviction. When he felt that they were losing the thread he would, as it were, double back and attack his idea with simpler words and in simpler sentences. He made his limited vocabulary perform prodigies of combination for some fifty-five minutes and by some miracle he succeeded in conveying what he wanted to say. It was an amazing performance, an incredible conquest of the art of the orator, and of will power and intelligence, over a linguistic disability.

During the six weeks we remained in North America he made an average of two public speeches a day, and with practice he steadily improved. He never mastered the language, his accent remained incurable and his grammar and his vocabulary left almost everything to be desired, but he was never defeated by them even when he had to speak on the most treacherous of political subjects. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that he was defeated once, and on that occasion (I can imagine that it may have been the only one in his whole career) completely routed.

He had a deep and in fact a reverential admiration for Abraham Lincoln, whom he regarded as one of the greatest figures in the social and political history of the world. A visit to

Springfield was therefore included so that he might lay a wreath on Lincoln's tomb and the programme included the inevitable luncheon and speech. Albert Thomas was anxious to give of his best and to make a speech worthy in every respect of its subject. He devoted infinite pains to its preparation and produced an oration of real beauty, in which eloquence came as near to poetry as was possible without losing its own essential character. Impressed by its value I spent equal pains on producing the best translation of which I was capable. He liked my translation and since he had no time to memorise it he decided to read it to his audience.

The result was a calamity. He could wrestle physically with this refractory language when he extemporised in a kind of catch-as-catch-can in which he could dodge its difficulties or rely on gesture to create a diversion. He was defenceless in the Ju-Jitsu hold of the written word. He told me afterwards that as his eye fell on words a line or two ahead which he knew he could not pronounce he was seized with utter panic and an uncontrollable desire to escape the disaster which he knew they must bring. But no escape was possible. He read faster and faster till his utterance became no more than a meaningless and graceless noise. It was evident from the faces of his audience that they understood nothing whatever and when he sat down there was a minimum of polite and perfunctory applause.

He had only one other failure in North America and for this the English language had no responsibility. He was anxious to meet Henry Ford. He had read Ford's books and he was anxious to interest him if possible in the I.L.O. We were in Chicago and the news from Europe which told of Poincaré's intention to occupy the Ruhr was disquieting and having an unfortunate effect on American opinion. I pressed Albert Thomas to abandon the projected journey to Detroit and to go at once to Washington where I was sure his presence would be useful.

He admitted the force of my arguments but as usual was disinclined to abandon his programme. I think he would have abandoned it had he not been led to believe that Ford might be interested in a scheme to create a Labour University and might be persuaded to give such a scheme financial aid. Of this (since it had nothing to do with the I.L.O.) I was ignorant at the time; otherwise I might have questioned the value of the opinions on which he decided to act.

It was in fact remarkable that on the advice which he was able to obtain about a country of which he knew so little, and which is so difficult to know, he made so few mistakes. This however was one, and fortunately it cost him no more than a little time and patience. His 'introducer' to Ford had gone ahead to Detroit and the interview was duly arranged. We arrived at the tiny one-storey building in which Ford worked with a couple of secretaries and a dozen draughtsmen. It was a modest bungalow structure, utterly plain, situated in an absolutely flat and featureless area of treeless country, remote from any other building save a second smaller bungalow across the road which served as a lunch room for Ford and his staff. Ford received us in his private office. He was very like his portraits, a tall, gaunt, loose-limbed man whose head and features reminded me of the bust of Julius Caesar in the British Museum. He seemed to have unlimited time for us and rocked back in his swivel chair with lazy ease. The conversation however was far from satisfactory. Ford seemed to be courteously interested in his foreign visitors but no more. His replies were therefore casual in the extreme.

Albert Thomas struggled with his incorrigible English in an attempt, first of all, to find some ground of agreement on the great political issue of Peace, and was more than a little non-plussed by Ford's reply that the great difficulty was the Jews. Our 'introducer', seeing that Albert Thomas was getting irri-

tated, tried to improve matters, or perhaps to re-establish his own position, by a little flattery.

'I was telling Mr. Thomas, Mr. Ford, what a busy man you were, and that the first time I saw you your Secretary told me that the only time when I could have an interview was at 7.30 a.m.'

This only made matters worse. 'I make it a rule', said Ford, 'never to get up till I'm sure that I can't sleep any more and that's usually about ten or half-past ten. So it can't have been me that you saw.'

The ground was now cut from under Albert Thomas' feet. It was clear that no real contact had been established with Ford at all; that he had only the remotest idea of who Albert Thomas was, still less of the institution he represented, and no idea whatever that the interview had any particular purpose.

Professor Manley Hudson, who had accompanied us from Chicago, then intervened and gave Ford a brief sketch of Albert Thomas' career and present functions, to which Ford listened with attention. Albert Thomas did his best to start the discussion again on the basis of this welcome introduction but Ford was not to be drawn into a serious conversation and continued to dodge Albert Thomas' questions by irrelevant and, as it seemed to me, only semi-serious remarks about the Jewish race. These drew at length a violent protest from Albert Thomas, who had become increasingly irritated.

'No doubt', he said, 'there are bad Jews just as there are bad Frenchmen or bad Americans; I am willing to make allowance for your own experience, which seems to have been unfortunate. But I cannot agree with your generalisation. Some form of world co-operation is necessary and it cannot be built on the basis that one section of the human race is the enemy of all the others. Let me tell you frankly that arguments of that kind would be regarded as absurd in France. There the Jew is a

respected member of the community and we regard him as being as French as any other Frenchman. Some of our greatest surgeons, scientists and artists are Jews, and I number among them many close personal friends. We cannot forget their contribution to our civilisation, and still less do we forget that they died in their thousands in the defence of France.'

Ford seemed a trifle disconcerted at the energy of this sudden attack and drew back a little on to vaguer ground. His poise became somewhat more alert as though he feared that his adversary might suddenly burst free from the toils of his difficulties with the English language and get to dangerously close quarters. Baffled once more Albert Thomas sought another opening.

'You object to all my ideas,' he said. 'Well, what is your own solution? You won't deny that there is a problem of world peace and you must have had some ideas about the possibilities of its solution when you financed the expedition of the Peace Ship.'

'That', interjected Ford, 'was a fool idea that was sold to me by a bunch of cranks.'

'Well,' persisted Albert Thomas, 'if you think there's nothing to be done along those lines what is your solution? You must have given some thought to the question.'

'Cheap transit,' replied Ford.

'Well, but transit implies some form of international organisation,' argued Albert Thomas. 'You are a practical man and you can't advocate your remedy and just do nothing about it.'

'I'm doing what's required,' was Ford's answer. 'You don't require any international organisation. Produce cheap automobiles. When you get people across frontiers in their automobiles and getting to know the people and the country on the other side it'll be much more difficult to start a war.'

'What do you think of the Russian problem?' asked Albert Thomas at a later stage.

'There isn't any,' was the reply. 'In the last six months I delivered 275,000 dollars' worth of tractors to Russia and I got paid every cent.'

It was all very interesting and amusing but quite inconclusive. At half-past twelve Ford invited us to lunch with him and afterwards drove us at terrifying speed down a private road to the distant works over which he conducted us personally. Here he was a different man. His physical agility was that of a boy; his knowledge of detail in so vast an establishment incredibly minute—he greeted the foremen and lift attendants by their names, and rolled off dates and figures concerning individual pieces of work without effort.

Albert Thomas' and my impressions differed considerably at the end of the day. 'He's mad,' was his summary. I ventured to suggest that Ford had simply been putting up a smoke screen in order to avoid committing himself on political issues with people whom he didn't know. I also added that his ancestors came from Cork.

'I don't know Cork,' said Albert Thomas, 'but you're paying it no compliment. He's mad. Didn't you hear him tell me that Millerand's mother-in-law was a Jewess! When I tell Millerand that!' and he burst into laughter.

It was not difficult to understand Albert Thomas' irritation. It was based, not so much on the interview itself, as on the waste of nearly four precious days, and on the fact that the news from Europe made him regret bitterly that he had not gone direct to Washington, where from the different Embassies and Legations he might have learnt the full story of disquieting developments which we found it hard to understand, and without which information he felt himself ill-equipped to reply to requests from the pressmen and others for his opinion.

If Albert Thomas met with difficulties in the United States because he was not always known, some of the difficulties he encountered in Canada arose from the opposite cause. The Prime Minister, Mr. Mackenzie King, he had already met in Europe, and other distinguished Canadians had appeared as delegates at the International Labour Conference or at meetings of the Governing Body. To Ottawa therefore he could pay an ordinary official visit and pursue his normal task of promoting the ratification of our Labour Conventions. The Canadian Government gave Albert Thomas the warmest welcome and every opportunity for his work. The Prime Minister even paid us the signal, and I imagine rare, honour of bringing us in to a meeting of the Cabinet where after having introduced us to all the Ministers he asked Albert Thomas to explain to them jointly his hopes and desires as regards Canadian collaboration in the I.L.O.

On our return to our hotel we found an invitation to dine with the Governor-General the same evening. This was totally unforeseen and raised an awkward question. As we were remaining in Ottawa only two nights and then proceeding to Montreal, Quebec, and Toronto, on a rapid visit, we had left the bulk of our luggage in New York and had with us nothing more formal than dinner jackets. I consulted our Canadian friends. They also were more than a little nonplussed as the etiquette at Government House was strict. They telephoned to the Governor-General's principal aide-de-camp but he too was in a difficulty and asked for time to consult higher authority. Finally a dispensation was notified.

The incident would have been of small importance had it not been for the sequel. To Albert Thomas time was a precious commodity which he could never bear to waste. He was not unpunctual and I never knew him lose a train, though it often seemed that he was going to. He hated waiting and therefore he

always arrived at the last minute; and he allowed himself a carefully calculated latitude in this respect as regards social engagements. I warned him that on this occasion we ought to be punctual. The invitation was for 8 p.m. At 8.5 p.m. he appeared and we entered a taxi. It seemed to me we were cutting it rather fine but I consoled myself with the thought that as the Governor-General's guests were likely to be numerous some little time would be occupied by their arrival and their proper marshalling before His Excellency appeared.

The taxi drove on through unfamiliar streets and the minutes began to slip away. The houses began to thin and we seemed to be heading for the open country. Albert Thomas himself began to be a little concerned as to whether the driver was not making some mistake. We enquired if this was so and learnt with some consternation that we were on the right road but that Rideau Hall was several miles outside the city. Two agitated aides were waiting for us in still greater consternation when we finally arrived some twenty-five minutes late, and our appearance in our unceremonious dinner jackets seemed to enhance the impropriety of our behaviour. Albert Thomas was entirely unperturbed though he could not have been unconscious of the astonished and reproving glances of the forty odd other guests resplendent in uniform or evening dress and decorations. The peculiarities of royal etiquette have, however, their justification. There were no apologies to be made to an impatient host and hostess. What happened was amusing, though no doubt a little cruel to our unfortunate fellow-guests. The Governor-General had been kept waiting. It was now our turn, and a full quarter of an hour elapsed before their Excellencies appeared.

When, with all the formalities of a court, the procession filed in to the dining-room, Lord Byng had a stern, and I feared, an angry look. I wondered whether this unfortunate incident might not destroy the excellent impression which Albert

Thomas' visit had so far created. I need have had no such apprehensions. Albert Thomas among his innumerable other qualities was the perfect diner-out. Lady Byng evidently found him a delightful neighbour, and at the end of the meal when the ladies had curtsied backwards out of the room he and Lord Byng renewed an acquaintance made on the battlefields in France. They were soon on terms of such intimate cordiality that the unfortunate aides had to undergo another painful ordeal in the endeavour to convey silently to His Excellency that Her Excellency and the ladies were being abandoned overlong.

The variety of the situations with which Albert Thomas had to cope in the space of one short stay may be illustrated by another incident in a very different setting. He was addressing a meeting of some hundreds of workers convened by the Canadian Federation of Labour in Montreal, when he was interrupted from the body of the hall. Immediately the Chairman was on his feet, and there were shouts and counter-shouts. A heated argument took place not only on the floor but on the platform. Albert Thomas wanted to deal with the interruptions himself: the Chairman was equally determined to have no interruptions and to have the interrupters removed by force if necessary. We were unaware of the tradition in labour meetings in Canada and the United States that does not allow of interruptions and which goes back to the days when men came in from mining camps and pioneer areas carrying arms. In such conditions open discussion as understood in Europe was too dangerous a thing to be permitted. Members of the audience who did not agree with the speaker were expected to go away and hold a meeting for the expression of counter-opinions elsewhere if they so desired. This conception was, of course, utterly strange to Albert Thomas. A popular meeting was something he loved, and if there was opposition so much the better. Here in Montreal he could speak in

his own language. After weeks of painful struggling in English the chance of making a fighting speech in French was something not to be lost. He was not prepared to let the Chairman cheat him out of it whatever might be the protocol of Canadian labour meetings. As usual he got his way. The Chairman's French (he was an English, or rather a Scotch, Canadian) which was no better than Albert Thomas' English, was unequal to the struggle. It ended by Albert Thomas pressing him back into his chair and taking charge of the meeting. His voice and his personality easily quelled the disorder, and abandoning his original speech he offered to deal with objections from the audience.

They came thick and fast. He was a 'social traitor'; had he not manufactured millions of shells in order that the enslaved workers might be blown to pieces in a capitalistic war? how could he, a socialist, accept his huge salary when masses of the workers were living in poverty? These and other points, often brutally personal, were put with vigour and sometimes with passion. The Chairman, who felt it was also his duty to protect his distinguished guest, tried to intervene again. But Albert Thomas was in his element. These were the attacks that he had had to meet in France, both in the Chamber of Deputies and in scores of stormy popular meetings. His opponents all unwittingly had aroused the most formidable debater in the socialist world with every fact, figure and argument at his fingers' ends. They were like a man who beats viciously at a pebble and starts an avalanche. They fought hard—they were evidently tough customers—but they had no chance. The hall rocked with delighted cheers. The majority had come out of a sense of loyalty to their organisation to hear a speech on a dull but important subject. They were treated to a debating performance of the most exciting character. Albert Thomas' antagonists were also on their own ground: their points had been shaped by experience so as to make them difficult to meet, at all events, by any

brief reply: they knew, or thought they knew, the answers their questions would provoke and they were ready with retorts and accusations of evasion. But this time they had met their master. Albert Thomas evaded nothing. When they shifted their ground he followed them on to whatever issue they chose to raise—Peace, Russia, or the doctrines of Marx, and then he counter-attacked and had them fumbling for replies to his deadly thrusts. He did not pursue his advantage unduly. His attack was merely dialectical, and, after having thoroughly enjoyed himself, he ended with a reasoned plea, which was listened to without interruption, for support for the Labour Organisation from all sections of labour opinion whatever their other differences might be.

He was a little apologetic to his hosts afterwards. He felt that he had succumbed perhaps too fully to the temptation to take an evening off. But the result from the point of view of getting publicity for the I.L.O. was far greater than would have been secured if he had stuck to the programme of his usual expository speech. Next morning the whole press of Canada appeared with its largest and widest headlines—'Reds turn up in force at Labour meeting', 'Reds attack the Director of the I.L.O.', 'Reds create disturbance' and so on, and there followed long and detailed descriptions of the meeting.

From Montreal we went on to Quebec, where all the members of the Provincial Government were by a curious coincidence suddenly and simultaneously called out of town. Albert Thomas' reputation had preceded him and they were by no means anxious to discuss with his persuasive personality their attitude to the I.L.O. or to social legislation in general. This left him with a blank day which he promptly devoted, in spite of the bitter cold of midwinter, to seeing something of the life of the French-Canadian farmer. His long excursion into the country was solely dictated by his keen personal interest in agricul-

ture,¹ but it had the unexpected effect of modifying the Provincial Government's attitude. They had thought of the I.L.O. as a machine under socialist leadership designed to improve the conditions of workers in industry with a complete disregard of the possible repercussions on agriculture. The news of Albert Thomas' agricultural interests led them to think that they had perhaps been too precipitate and that he might be more sympathetic to their views than they had supposed possible. One or two unofficial meetings were hurriedly arranged before his departure the next morning and subsequent relations by correspondence became cordial.

From Toronto we crossed back into the United States and a tiny incident of the journey is worth recording as evidence of Albert Thomas' possession of that indefinable thing called personality. We reached the frontier in darkness and shortly afterwards Albert Thomas and I were walking through the train in order to regain our car after leaving the diner. Suddenly a U.S. immigration official barred our way. I have always found the U.S. immigration officials particularly courteous but this was an exception. Perhaps the proximity of Canadian territory, or the efficiency of the frontier liquor patrol (it was in the days of Prohibition) may have been responsible. He was a huge man and he seemed to fill the passage between the two cars.

'Where the hell do you think you're going?' demanded he in a hectoring tone. 'Where's your passport?'

It was but too evident that he was in an ugly humour. I felt distinctly uncomfortable since I considered that I had a special responsibility for protecting Albert Thomas from any incident in an English-speaking country and also because we could lay claim to no official status in the United States. But no incident occurred. I am unable to recount exactly what happened and

¹This interest was not theoretical. Albert Thomas owned a farm and had a practical knowledge of agricultural problems.

the immigration official seemed to suffer from the same disability. Albert Thomas certainly did not speak. All I can remember is seeing his back as he proceeded tranquilly down the corridor, having in some mysterious way walked straight through the obstacle in his path, while the official gazed after him with a look of stupid bewilderment and made no attempt to follow in pursuit. After what seemed a perceptible interval the official scratched his head and turned to me.

'Who's that fellow anyway?' he asked.

'That', said I, 'is Albert Thomas, the Director of the International Labour Office.'

'Huh!' he said disgustedly, and with an attempt to domineer again, 'Well, he can't get away with that here.' Albert Thomas, however, did get away with it and no attempt was made to disturb him in his compartment.

I can vouch for another incident on one of his journeys which illustrates the same point. He was returning from Prague and as usual arrived at the station with barely a minute to spare. His secretary, who was in another taxi, was held up in a traffic block and lost the train. Albert Thomas had neither tickets nor money nor passport—these as usual were in his secretary's keeping. But a detail like that was not allowed to throw out his programme. He not only boarded the train, but he secured his meals and a sleeper, got past the passport officials at the different frontiers and arrived in Geneva without having been delayed. It was a proof of his supreme self-confidence and of his ability to depend on himself and his personality without any extraneous aid.

In Washington Albert Thomas had set himself what seemed to be an impossible task. He did not think that his journey to the United States could be justified by no more than a series of speeches and expository interviews. He realised that there could be no question of the United States joining the International

Labour Organisation, but he was not satisfied that some other positive solution could not be found. His scheme was to obtain the regular attendance of the American workers and employers at the International Labour Conference. This did not seem likely to be easy to secure as, in spite of Samuel Gompers' part in the original drafting of the scheme for the Organisation, there were important elements in the American Federation of Labour who regarded it with suspicion. The attitude of the employers might be expected to be even more reserved. And since, even if these two difficulties could be overcome, the blessing of the United States Government would have to be obtained, the general attitude of the Harding administration towards international questions seemed to make the whole scheme a diplomatic and political impossibility. Nevertheless, Albert Thomas succeeded. I cannot recount his negotiations in detail nor throw any light on the critical phases through which they must have passed. All I know is that at the beginning the difficulties seemed insuperable. Albert Thomas however must have seen some glimmerings of light, for he took the unusual course of modifying his programme which provided for a visit to Cuba and despatched myself and Mr. Paul Devinat to pay the visit in his place. The full mission only came together again on the eve of our sailing from New York and there I learnt a little of what had happened.

Albert Thomas had of course paid the usual round of visits, beginning with the White House, but one of them was a little out of the ordinary. There had been trouble in the coalfields in the United States and a Senate Committee was enquiring into the coal industry. Albert Thomas saw a chance of calling on the Senate in its collective capacity. Somehow or other he succeeded in appearing before the Committee to give evidence. He had no special claims to be considered an expert on coal but with inexplicable foresight he had come provided with a

brief prepared by the Office on the situation in the different coalfields in Europe. No man could present the driest of facts and figures in so interesting a way nor so effectively convince his audience of their importance and relevance. He was listened to with attention and warmly thanked for his testimony. It was a personal success, no doubt the more gratifying because of his difficulties with the language, but his objective was less to make a favourable impression than to prove by actual demonstration that the I.L.O., far from being an instrument for the dissemination of vague and theoretical idealism, was the repository of a mass of carefully analysed highly technical information which it could place at the disposal of those called upon to deal with a specific industrial problem.

This success with the Senate was only the prelude to his more serious effort. It culminated in a dinner at which Mr. Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labour, on the one side, and Mr. Julius Barnes, the President of the United States Chamber of Commerce, publicly accepted the arrangement for representation at Geneva which was then approved by Mr. Herbert Hoover, at that time Secretary of Commerce, in the name of the Administration, who was in the chair.

This achievement may perhaps be regarded as Albert Thomas' greatest diplomatic triumph, secured as it was under every possible handicap. It was his first visit to the country, in which he had spent only a few weeks: he had none of those political relations which were so powerful an aid in his negotiations elsewhere: his ignorance of the language hampered him as a negotiator and made it more difficult for him to understand the American mentality: the general outlook of the Administration on international questions was unsympathetic: and recent developments in Europe had been such as to produce a very unfavourable reaction on American opinion. But he had a way of commanding success, and, on this occasion, though he asked for a great deal,

success once more answered his imperious call. If its full measure was snatched from him by circumstances which intervened after his departure his work was far from being thrown away. It sowed the seeds from which his successor, Harold Butler, was to reap so brilliant a harvest some ten years later when, under the Presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, the United States made its entry into the International Labour Organisation.

Chapter VI

Albert Thomas and the Far East

The full story of Albert Thomas' missions would make a book in itself. Each presented its own problem and few were without some incident worth recording. His mission to the Far East, however, stands in a category apart and illustrates how wide was his vision and how completely he took the world for his province.

Of Europe he had an intimate knowledge. Its history and institutions were familiar to him. His missions to European capitals were in one sense little more than the renewal of earlier contacts and the continuation of his negotiations at Geneva. South America was more remote but its Latin tradition made it intellectually easily accessible. Though North America was a stranger continent it had definite ties with Europe both historical and industrial, and it figured inevitably in the very centre of Geneva's immediate preoccupations. The Far East, however, lay outside of the full current of the International Labour Office's activity.

Albert Thomas felt that this was wrong. He felt that if the Office was to be really international, or as he would have said 'universal,' it must react to Eastern problems with the same sensitiveness as to the problems of Western civilisation. In order to make such reaction possible the first step was evidently to secure some personal experience of Eastern conditions. Without

such experience, without knowing how far Eastern industry could be described or understood in Western terms, he felt it impossible to see the problems of the Organisation as a whole. A mission to the East was a mission to the unknown. It might produce little or nothing in the way of immediate results. But it would provide knowledge without which he felt himself handicapped for what he conceived to be his essential function.

It was for these reasons that after his visit to North America Albert Thomas' thoughts turned to the Far East. Circumstances for long were unfavourable in one way or another, and he had to wait for nearly six years before he could make his arrangements.

They were not easy and he could have found innumerable excuses for shirking a long, and possibly, in the eyes of his critics, wholly unprofitable journey. A mission to China and Japan meant a prolonged absence from Europe, in conditions in which letters could rarely if ever reach him, and cables would be his only means of contact with his base. Moreover, it meant an absence of somewhat uncertain duration. Communications in China were completely disorganised as a result of the Civil War and it was a matter of conjecture as to how far they might have been re-established before his arrival. There was a lull in the actual fighting, but no guarantee that it might not break out again with increased violence. His absence also could not be unduly prolonged and therefore it was necessary to make the outward journey by the Trans-Siberian Railway; but here again there was more than a little uncertainty, not so much as to the regularity of the service, but as to whether he would be allowed to travel through Russia.

Personal friends, who perhaps magnified the physical risks that were involved, tried to dissuade him from his enterprise; and to their counsels of prudence, which influenced him not at all, was added a pressure which he found infinitely difficult to

withstand. His mother was ailing. The stories of war and disorder in China preyed on her mind and she became convinced that this was an ill-fated voyage from which he was destined never to return. But his duty was plain and there might be no other opportunity for its fulfilment. The struggle with his filial devotion was hard. Beneath all his exterior of self-mastery, his magnificent and unassailable poise, Albert Thomas was deeply emotional. His capacity for emotion was only surpassed by his power to keep it in control. On this occasion the conflict almost broke him physically. For days he was not himself. He sat in his compartment in the train unable either to eat or work, and I began to have serious fears for his health. Then Moscow came like a challenge to which he was bound to respond, and better news of his mother's condition restored his spirits.

The journey began with a series of minor misadventures. There had been an accident on the line from Italy and the sleeping car which we were to have joined at Bale was blocked somewhere in the mountains. Another car was substituted but it contained a smaller number of berths and there was a confused fight for places. Confusion was rendered more confused by the substitute conductor whose evening off had been abruptly interrupted in the middle of what must have been some excessively convivial entertainment. He was physically in the state described as 'blind,' which consists in seeing some things double and other things not at all. The car he apparently saw double and he was convinced there was ample room for everybody; the passengers to whom he had already allotted compartments he saw not at all. With his magic key he opened their doors and ushered in other passengers who for one glad second believed their troubles were over till they found themselves angrily challenged by someone already in possession. It was a ludicrous and at the same time an intensely irritating performance. Albert Thomas, though he was tired and worried, saw only the comic

side of it and was neither dismayed nor angry. In that sense he was a good traveller.

We had a similar and more serious mishap in Berlin—more serious because there was to be no break in the journey till we reached Moscow. Our few hours in Berlin were busy ones. Albert Thomas had two or three calls to make and a host of questions to discuss with our Berlin Correspondent. To allow more time for conversation we joined the train at the second station where it stopped for only three minutes. We were told that the sleeping-car was at the head of the train, and followed by two trucks of luggage we strolled to the end of the platform. The train drew in. The sleeping-car attendant after examining our tickets told us they referred to another sleeper at the tail of the train. We made our way down the long platform only to be told that it was a mistake and that that car was full up. We hurried back. As we were halfway along the platform the whistle blew and the train began to move. Albert Thomas did not hesitate a second. He ran for the nearest door of the moving train, shouting over his shoulder to our Berlin Correspondent "Throw the luggage in through the windows". I jumped for the next door and the other members of the mission scrambled in as best they could. The energetic shouts of our Berlin Correspondent had mobilised every porter on the platform and as the train gathered way (fortunately it moved out rather slowly) all the porters in Berlin seemed to be pursuing it with our luggage. Curious passengers opened windows only to be driven back by one or other of our twenty odd suitcases hurriedly thrust at them in the most dangerous fashion. One heavy leather bag which contained stationery and a whole office equipment for Albert Thomas' private secretary had been known to astonish the most athletic porters at every great station in Europe and it was a miracle that it arrived on board without serious accident. The whole train had to be searched before our various possessions

could be collected, and then the question of accommodation had to be solved. A compartment was found for Albert Thomas in the forward sleeping-car, but there was nothing for the rest of us but to sit up till we reached Warsaw, a prospect which I viewed with more than a little distaste. But Albert Thomas' resources (or luck) were inexhaustible. He discovered (or was discovered by) a friend on the train, who had a whole compartment at his disposal and who at Albert Thomas' request offered me the hospitality of an unoccupied upper berth. This practical concern for the welfare of one of his staff was typical, and the more noteworthy since he was out of sorts and depressed.

At Warsaw Mr. François Sokal and members of the Polish Cabinet awaited us. Albert Thomas became for half an hour his usual buoyant self while we were treated to champagne in the Presidential waiting-room, and while, between enquiries about his journey, he turned to one or other Minister or official and seized the opportunity to deal with some question pending between Poland and Geneva; but once we regained the train his energy seemed to desert him, and he retired to the solitude of his compartment.

He roused himself again at the Russian frontier, which we reached late at night. The military guards with their long-skirted coats almost touching the ground looked strange and, in their silence and immobility, almost menacing. We anticipated tiresome formalities with passports and customs. Albert Thomas had been asked in Berlin if he had no fears for his personal safety. He had been told that in the Soviet press he had been long held up to execration as the example *par excellence* of the 'social traitor', whose guilt was deeper than that of any bourgeois because his was the sin against the Holy Ghost.

'Aren't you afraid that they might play you a dirty trick?' he was asked.

He laughed his confident infectious laugh as he answered: 'Me? Oh no! If I may employ a rather coarse and popular expression, which the dictionary would note as vulgar, I'm not small enough fry.' ('Moi, non! Je suis de la trop grosse viande'). It was meant as a joke and not as a boast. But at the frontier we found that it contained an unexpected and pleasant element of truth. Soviet officials appeared to welcome him and we were conducted straight to the waiting Trans-Siberian train in which compartments had been reserved for us without having to undergo the usual formalities.

We stayed for nearly a week in Moscow. It was something of an adventure like our American visit in so far as we had of course no official status of any kind. But Albert Thomas having received permission to travel through Siberia was not prepared to lose the chance of seeing something more of Soviet Russia than could be glimpsed from the window of a moving train, and his proposal to spend some days in Moscow had given rise to no objection.

Russia had always exercised on him a powerful fascination. As a young student he had won a prize for geography which took the appropriate form of a small sum to be expended on foreign travel. He promptly spent it on travelling third class as far as the money would take him into Siberia—I believe he got as far as Tomsk. During the war he paid two visits to Russia, once with Viviani in the days of the Czar, and later as Ambassador when the revolution was in full swing and Kerensky was tottering to his fall. That fall he did his best to prevent and he believed that if the Powers had shown more understanding and sympathy Kerensky might have been saved. But his personal friendship with Kerensky, maintained when Kerensky a fugitive from Russia had no longer any political importance, by no means blinded him to the importance of the great Soviet experiment. It will be remembered that in his first days at the

International Labour Office he had attempted to organise a Mission of Enquiry into conditions in Russia, and though the Mission was never allowed to start documentary studies on Russian conditions had been actively pursued ever since. To the fairness of these studies the Soviet press had more than once borne reluctant witness. On the other hand, Lenin had been credited with the dictum that the workers must choose between Moscow and Geneva, and the struggles within the Trade Union movements in many countries corresponded closely enough to the conflicting attraction of these two poles. It was unlikely, therefore, that anything in the nature of official collaboration between the I.L.O. and the Soviet State could be achieved, and indeed Albert Thomas had no illusions as to its possibility. What he did hope to secure was a regular exchange of information and a series of technical contacts on questions such as industrial hygiene into which no questions of doctrine could possibly enter.

The Soviet authorities were courteous but non-committal. Litvinoff received us at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and gave us a State dinner in the small palace which is reserved for diplomatic entertainment. Albert Thomas met most of the Commissars and talked with them freely. We were shown the Technical Departments of the Administration and allowed to discuss detail with the competent officials. We examined in all its aspects the great co-operative organisation (Albert Thomas was an enthusiastic advocate of co-operation) and attended a meeting of the co-operative executive council at which policy was discussed with surprising absence of restraint. We were specially conducted over the Kremlin and allowed to gaze on Lenin's mummy without having to wait in the endless queue which stretched down the hill almost to the river. In the intervals we made excursions of our own through the streets and visited churches and museums. Albert Thomas' interest in Moscow

was intense. He enjoyed mingling with the crowds and he seemed to sense some new quality in them. He was full of reminiscences of his previous visit. "There is the window", he said, pointing to the Town Hall, "from which I addressed the biggest open-air meeting of my life. What a tragedy it was that the Allies could not be got to understand how great and how profound a thing was the awakening of the Russian people! And to-day they are as far from understanding it as they were then."

Perhaps we were followed on our wanderings but, if so, the surveillance was so discreet as to be invisible and no attempt was made to restrict our movements in any way. In fact Albert Thomas was allowed to see and do everything he wished with one exception. He made no direct request but he made it plain that he would like to meet Stalin. For some reason this desire was not granted.

On the 7th November we were given places in the stand reserved for the Diplomatic Corps to witness the celebrations of the anniversary of the beginning of the Bolshevik régime. Only a short distance away the members of the Government took their places on the roof of Lenin's tomb to watch the great military and civilian procession file through the Kremlin Square. Albert Thomas and Stalin stared at one another with frank and undisguised curiosity across the twenty or thirty yards that intervened. No closer contact was established.

As we stood with our backs to the Kremlin we could see the enormous crowd that filled every inch of the Square to its furthest boundary save the wide lane that was immediately in front of us and which soon became a ribbon of marching troops. Aeroplanes droned overhead as cavalry, artillery and tanks followed the infantry battalions. It was an impressive display both from the point of view of equipment and of discipline. But what raised Albert Thomas' enthusiasm was the procession of

workers which followed. They marched in somewhat ragged fashion, sixteen abreast, carrying banners of every shape, size and colour, some of them inscribed with the name of a Trade Union, others with some proletarian slogan, others with crude caricatures representing capitalism or statesmen regarded as the tools or instruments of capitalistic oppression in various humiliating or embarrassing positions. The persons included in the latter category could easily be recognised despite the caricaturists' distortion of their features, and the Diplomatic Corps were careful to leave when the military procession, regarded by them as the official part of the ceremony, was over. Albert Thomas had been warned that he himself might well figure in this gallery of horrors and so indeed he did. But what led him to wait was not any curiosity in this respect but his interest in the demonstration as such. For over two hours we stood in the now deserted diplomatic stand while the procession went steadily by. Albert Thomas was enthusiastic. He was always moved by any mass demonstration and the dimensions of this were gigantic. But he sensed something more than mere size and organisation. He felt in it a spontaneous and spiritual quality and it provided him with the answer to the question with which he had come into Russia. He was satisfied that the revolution had definitely achieved something which was real even though it might yet be imponderable, and that the common people of Moscow had secured a subjective enfranchisement whatever might be the conflicting evidence as to the progress of its material fulfilment.

We had looked forward with some apprehension to the Trans-Siberian journey. We had been warned by solicitous friends that we might anticipate all sorts of discomforts. The restaurant service, we were told, was no more than a name and we would be well advised to bring supplies of food; the cold would be intense and the cars would be inadequately heated;

the line was in a state of disrepair and arrival at the other end must be regarded as conjectural. It may be said at once that none of these doleful prophecies were fulfilled. The journey proved both an interesting and a comfortable experience, save as regards two of our number whose mishap will be recounted in a moment. The wide gauge made the compartments unusually roomy. The attendants, though their own appearance was unkempt, maintained an admirable standard of cleanliness in the cars under their charge. The train ran slowly and there was little vibration. The restaurant service, if not excellent, was more than tolerable though there were signs of defective organisation when for two whole days we ran out of vodka. Each car had its own heating system and we had no occasion to complain of cold.

The monotony of the scenery was compensated for by the variety of the passengers. To that variety our own party made its contribution. Viple, Albert Thomas' *Chef de Cabinet*, and Dubourg, his private secretary, were French: I was Irish: and the remaining two members of our group were Mr. Ayusawa, a Japanese, and Mr. Chan, a Chinese, both of them members of the International Labour Office staff at Geneva. Our fellow passengers were not numerous as the accommodation on the train was limited. They included four or five French or Belgians, a couple of Japanese, a couple of Russian civilians, and a Russian army officer, a woman with two young children who looked thoroughly capable of taking care both of herself and of them, and two other women, one poorly and cheaply dressed, the other attired like a Hollywood star.

Life was not unlike what it would have been on a small boat, with the difference that the dining car replaced the ship's dining saloon and that the deck on which we took our collective exercise was only available at irregular intervals, and for a short period, in the form of the platform beside which the train stopped

—never for more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. In the course of these gatherings our fellow-passengers became more definitely recognisable figures and some knowledge of their identities emerged with greater or smaller rapidity.

Albert Thomas already knew one of our fellow passengers—we began to take it for granted that he had friends and acquaintances everywhere. On this occasion it was no casual acquaintance but an old school friend of boyhood days. He was Monsieur de Martel, the French Minister at Peking, who was returning to his post from leave. Another of the Frenchmen proved to be the representative of a big insurance company, bound for Shanghai. The third was a retired manufacturer of ladies' underwear who we learnt was setting out to fulfil a long cherished ambition of seeing the world. He ate heartily and slept solidly between one meal and the next. The fourth was a Belgian priest returning to a mission in China, a shy, rather fearful little man, who apologised for his lay attire on the grounds that as priests were not very popular in Russia he thought it safer to travel in ordinary clothes. As soon as we crossed the Chinese frontier he appeared in his Roman collar. The dangers that he knew seemed to be of less consequence to him than the vague uncertainties of the unknown. The woman with the children was English and was returning to Shanghai.

The two other women presented, however, something of a puzzle. The one was dressed with indubitable taste in expensive and fashionable clothes totally unsuited for a journey across Siberia in mid-winter. When the train stopped at an unsheltered snow-covered platform it was an incongruous sight to see her, as she alighted, hesitate on the last step before placing her foot, protected only by the thinnest of black silk shoes, on the frozen ground. She had neither snow boots, nor even leather footwear of any kind. And as she stood there, clad in a beautiful but inadequate mink coat and clutching in her thinly gloved

hand a gold mesh bag she looked like a bird of paradise which had strayed into arctic wastes. Her companion had leather shoes but there were holes in them, and all her wardrobe could obviously have been bought many times over for the price of one single feather from the other's gorgeous plumage. The pair were a mystery which excited the train's curiosity. They were travelling together but their attitude to one another indicated that they were not in the position of mistress and servant. Why had the wealthy woman neglected to provide herself with the most obvious necessities for the journey? And how came it that the poorer had paid the exorbitant price demanded for a first-class ticket when she clearly required money for elementary needs? In these questions and in the attempts that were made to answer them Albert Thomas displayed as much interest as anybody on the train.

The explanation proved to be as simple as it was curious. The one was a Bond Street mannequin going out to Japan at the invitation of a wealthy Japanese who had sent her unlimited funds for the journey. She had never been out of England before and had presumably no idea of the nature of the journey which she was to undertake. The other was a cabaret dancer who, having fallen on hard times in Berlin, had been compelled to accept an engagement in Harbin. The mannequin had discovered that the dancer could speak English and, anxious for her companionship and the assistance of her knowledge of other languages, had paid the difference in the price of her ticket.

It was in this queer environment that Albert Thomas, now completely his old buoyant self, turned to his usual work of preparation for an important mission. Three great cases were unlocked and a selection from a regular library of works on China was extracted. Incidentally, the cases were locked again, a fact which was to cause unexpected trouble later on. He settled down to the study of the works of Confucius and of Sun Yat

Sen; to the discussion with Mr. Chan, his Chinese collaborator, of the history of the Chinese revolution, and of the conflicting views of various authors on this or that aspect of Chinese life. As an instance of his thoroughness he asked Chan for his expert opinion of five different estimates of the population of China which he had dug out of five different authorities. The rest of us read, though more superficially, books on China, played bridge in the restaurant car, and otherwise began to adapt ourselves, on the whole very successfully, to the monotony of the journey.

It was broken disconcertingly at Sverdlovsk, the town close to the frontier between Russia and Siberia where the Czar and his family were murdered. When the train stopped we alighted with more than usual curiosity. There was little to see as of course we could not leave the small station. But there were curious little wooden boxes, made by the peasants to be bought as souvenirs and, rare sign of civilisation on the Trans-Siberian stations, there were postcards on sale. These proved the undoing of two of our number. Albert Thomas' secretary, Dubourg, had of course Albert Thomas' letters to post. Ayusawa, our Japanese collaborator, accompanied him, and they added to the despatch of Albert Thomas' mail their own contribution of a number of postcards. The Trans-Siberian is a treacherous train. It starts gently without any fuss or warning. A bell, it is true, is rung, but it has no insistent note. I confess that I never heard it, until, warned by what now befell, I kept a careful ear open for it at subsequent stops.

As the train moved off we stood in the corridor to see if anything more could be seen of the town than had been visible from the station. It was some minutes before we realised that Dubourg and Ayusawa were missing. A hasty search confirmed the fact that they had not scrambled on board one of the other cars. Their predicament was evidently serious. They had no

baggage, no passports, and, for all we knew, no money. Moreover, the next Trans-Siberian train would only pass four days later, and even then if our programme were maintained it looked as though they could never catch us up, or at all events not till we had almost completed the journey in China. We tried to get the train to put back or to wait at the next station, two hours ahead. The train officials were polite but the suggestion that the Trans-Siberian might alter its schedule was evidently not acceptable. At the next stop a telephoned message was awaiting us asking us to leave money, luggage and passports, with the stationmaster. There was nothing else to be done. And it was more than a fortnight later before our companions, due to the accident of our own delayed departure from that town, were able to catch us up at Mukden.

The absence of Dubourg greatly hampered Albert Thomas in his work as he had now no one to dictate to. He was compelled therefore to make his own notes as best he could. He made no complaint as he struggled on with a note book and a pencil, but the process was irritating in a train and undoubtedly reduced the amount of reading that he was able to accomplish. He had laid down for himself a programme of study for the period spent in the train, and in consequence he entered on his mission to China less completely equipped than he had considered necessary. Not only had he no one to dictate to but, since space in his compartment was limited, only a first instalment of the books which he meant to digest had been removed from their cases. When he required others it was found that the cases had been locked and that the absent secretary had the key. This had a less important though in its way an equally irritating result when we came to change trains. The extracted books and papers could not be replaced. They were numerous and bulky, and neither string nor paper nor any means of making them into parcels were to be found on the train. Finally they were

heaped into the rugs, which were collected from one or other of the party, and in this insecure and untidy fashion an awkward problem was solved, though the dignity of our luggage suffered more than a little thereby.

At Manchouli, the Chinese frontier station, we were met by the Chinese General commanding the district. He travelled with us as far as Tsitsihar and expressed with considerable force and conviction his belief (it was in 1928) that the Japanese were planning a military coup in Manchuria. He told us that he had information that the Japanese had introduced great numbers of troops recently and that he estimated that their total forces in China could not be far short of half a million. His attitude appeared to us alarmist and his figures it seemed must certainly be exaggerated. On the other hand, he looked a quiet, sensible little man as he sat in Albert Thomas' compartment with something curiously unwarlike about his slippared feet.

At Harbin we were greeted by two Chinese officials who had travelled all the way from Nanking to meet us. They were two charming young men named Mr. Su and Mr. Fu. Mr. Su spoke perfect French and Mr. Fu good forcible American. They brought with them the first of our diplomatic problems. Before we left Europe Albert Thomas had received a letter from the South Manchurian Railway saying they had learnt with interest and pleasure of his intention to visit China and Japan. They added that, as the railway between Mukden and Peking had been damaged in the Civil War, the only available route was to travel from Mukden to Dairen on the South Manchurian Railway and thence to proceed by boat to Tientsin, and they asked Albert Thomas and his party to be their guests for this part of the journey. Albert Thomas had replied accepting their kind offer, but with characteristic caution he had made his acceptance conditional on the line from Mukden to Peking not being open. In some way the Chinese Government appeared to

have got wind of this correspondence and Mr. Su and Mr. Fu had been instructed to tell Albert Thomas that the Chinese Government would very much dislike his travelling on the Japanese line in Chinese territory. Albert Thomas replied that he was not committed to the South Manchurian route and that while travelling in China he would be glad to follow any route that the Chinese Government might indicate. Could he travel direct from Mukden to Peking? The delegates replied that he could. 'All right' said Albert Thomas, 'then that's understood. I'll telegraph to the South Manchurian Railway and tell them that as the service to Peking is open I shall be unable to take advantage of their offer.' It seemed to me that this was taking a lot for granted, and I ventured to enquire how the delegates themselves had travelled. They answered with some embarrassment that they had travelled by sea to Dairen and thence on the South Manchurian. But they insisted that although the line was not open there would be no difficulty and that a special train would be provided for us from Mukden. Albert Thomas reiterated his decision: if they could convey him to Peking on the Chinese line, he would go.

At the frontier a letter of welcome expressed in the warmest possible terms had been received from the South Manchurian Railway saying they were making all arrangements, and adding a further and very pressing invitation to visit the great coal mine at Fushun and to spend at least a day in Dairen as their guests. A reply was now sent recalling the reservation made in the original correspondence and regretting that, since Albert Thomas was in China at the Chinese Government's invitation and was therefore obliged to fall in with whatever arrangements they might make, it would be impossible for him to take advantage of the Company's offer. In order, however, to show his appreciation of the Company's kindness he would extend his stay in Mukden by a day in order to visit the coal mine. This was an

example of Albert Thomas' habit of compromise and of his dislike of turning anyone down completely. The sacrifice of a day from his programme which allowed him all too short a time in China was a heavy one. That it was not, as the sequel will show, appreciated as it deserved, was significant of the tenseness of feeling in Manchuria, rather than an example of the remarkable courtesy of the Japanese which we were later to appreciate in Japan itself.

When we came to take the South Manchurian Railway at Changchun (we had in any case to travel over the section Changchun-Mukden) we were, it is true, entertained to breakfast at the Yamoto Hotel, but no special arrangements were made for our railway journey and we had considerable difficulty in finding places in a crowded train. The visit to the coal mine at Fushun was conducted with an equal lack of ceremony. We were accompanied from Mukden by an American Publicity Agent of the Railway who was personally most courteous, but no one in authority received us at the mine itself. It was a bitterly cold day and after gazing down into the huge excavation—Fushun is the largest open mine in the world—we were shown the palatial block of modern office buildings. It was pleasant to find shelter from the cutting wind and I had a hope that we would be offered some refreshment and perhaps a hot drink. Neither host nor refreshment, however, appeared. Albert Thomas must have been rather annoyed though he made no sign. He asked to be shown the workers' living quarters. This request was evidently unexpected but it was complied with and we were conducted to a kind of compound in which were a number of long, low, solidly-built huts. Albert Thomas asked if he could see the interior of one of them. This again was unexpected, and in the absence of instructions our guide seemed to hesitate. The workers, it was explained, had come off their shift and would probably be asleep. Moreover, they were rather

a rough lot (they were contract labourers under a contract for, I think, three years) and would resent being disturbed. And further, their foreman, or boss, would not be there. Albert Thomas ignored the implied refusal and proceeded, to the guide's evident dismay, to enter.

I was glad of his decision because the interior proved to be warm, though unpleasantly fuggy. A row of bunks occupied the whole of the wall space and a stove was burning in the middle of the narrow space between. It was very like a compound in one of the gold mines at Johannesburg. The room was ill-lit and there appeared to be little ventilation. Two men were cooking something at the stove, and as our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, curious Oriental faces could be dimly seen watching us from the shadows of the bunks. Albert Thomas seemed perfectly at home and with the aid of our Chinese collaborator as interpreter proceeded to question the men at the stove. Somehow his personality seemed to thaw their apathy or suspicion and he was soon on the best of terms with them. He enquired about their wives, their children, how long it was since they had heard from them, what they proposed to do when they left the mine and so on. In some way he made his sympathy and interest understood. Others climbed out of their bunks and came nearer. One man unpacked his tiny personal kit and produced one or two pathetic souvenirs of his home in some distant province. Altogether we spent a very friendly forty minutes in the hut. When we left, our guide drew an obvious sigh of relief, though whether it was that he had really feared an incident, or because Albert Thomas' questions about wages and conditions appeared to him indiscreet, we could not tell.

This was Albert Thomas' first contact with the common folk of the East and it had shown that, in spite of the difficulty of language, it was not impossible that East and West might meet,

at all events when the West was represented by someone with Albert Thomas' peculiar power of transmitting his sentiments of sympathy and understanding.

That sympathy and understanding had been greeted the evening before in another and very different environment at Harbin. There the organisations of Russian refugees who looked on Albert Thomas as their great protector¹ turned out in force to welcome him, and when he alighted from the train and had been greeted by the Chinese authorities he was received by their representatives with all the ceremony of a sovereign. Ex-Dukes, Generals and Admirals came forward to welcome him according to a strict and pathetic protocol while a band of brass instruments, drawn up with military precision, filled the station with the ever-stirring music of the Marseillaise, and a vast crowd of Russians burst into frantic cheers. We were conducted then to a great hall. Champagne of a dubious kind flowed freely. Laughter, animation and gaiety dominated the crowd, to be replaced by vociferous enthusiasm as the speakers proposed the toast of Albert Thomas and the International Labour Office. But somehow it all had a feverish and unreal note, a note of 'let us drink and be merry for yesterday we died'. And this impression was intensified when we were able to escape and see something of the city and of the conditions in which these unfortunate refugees were still clinging to their hopes and traditions. It would need a great artist to paint a picture of Harbin as it was in 1928. It had always been picturesque as the meeting place of Russia and China, a cosmopolitan city in which Czechs and Poles and Germans and Japanese and Americans mixed with the Russians and Chinese and rubbed shoulders with queer adventurers of nationalities less defined. But

¹The Refugees Service of the League of Nations had been transferred to the International Labour Office after the death of Nansen, and Albert Thomas was, therefore, responsible for its administration.

now there was added a refugee population driven to every possible resource in order to secure the most precarious of existences, a population capable of the highest degrees of heroism and equally of the lowest depths of despair and degradation.

In an atmosphere of perpetual insecurity, of civil wars and bandit raids, of threatened foreign invasion, of spying and intrigue, of private guards and armed civilians, of kidnapping and robbery with violence, of conflict between honour and necessity, of prostitution and drug trafficking, of economic desperation, and of a shrill and hysterical gaiety, the life of the town flamed and hissed like an *auto da fé*. There can never have been, and it may be hoped there never will be again, any community quite like it. It was a fearful reminder of the realities which lay behind one of the problems with which the International Labour Office was struggling in Geneva.

After our return from the coal mine we drove into the Walled City to dine with Marshal Chang Tso Liang, the 'Young Marshal' who, on the death of his father, killed by a bomb when his train was passing under a bridge, had become the War Lord of Manchuria. We left behind us the wide avenues of the modern railway town, in which illuminated trams and cars were celebrating the Emperor of Japan's coronation, and plunged into dark and narrow streets. We entered a gate guarded by sentries and after passing through a series of courtyards in which the inevitable Chinese band was struggling with some French music, we were greeted by the Marshal and his principal advisers.

We looked at the Marshal with interest. He had been represented in certain sections of the European press as a degenerate and a cocaine maniac, ruined by his excesses, both in body and mind. We found a young man in a dinner jacket who proved capable of intelligent conversation without the aid of an interpreter, and whose principal hobbies were tennis and golf. The

most striking figure was, however, that of his chief of staff, General Pai, who immediately attracted Albert Thomas' attention. He was a man of obviously strong personality and keen political intelligence. The Marshal displayed a certain youthful ardour; he seemed eager to pursue a progressive policy but to have a very open mind as to how to set about it: the General was apparently more the man of action; he had already instituted both social and industrial policies in the great arsenal of Mukden, which was under his control, and which employed no less than 18,000 hands. Albert Thomas seemed to sense a latent difference of policy between them. 'I wonder which is the real leader?' was his comment afterwards. 'The Marshal, he talks easily. He sees clearly that he is caught between the force of Japan on the one side and the movement of Chinese revolutionary opinion on the other. But his ideas are too general and superficial. I rather suspect there is an undercurrent of conflict between him and the General. The General strikes me as the kind of man with long political views and a policy of his own. He has a head, that fellow. He has a head.'

A few weeks later we learned with something of horror that the head which Albert Thomas admired had fallen. The Marshal had arrested its owner one morning on a charge of treachery and had had him shot within the hour.

From the Marshal's house we drove to the Chinese station where the Marshal had placed a special train at our disposal for the journey to Peking. It was a generous gesture, as there was no rolling stock in Peking and it was more than possible that his train might not be returned. The station, a tiny affair with a single platform, was in darkness. So was the train save for a few guttering candles stuck in bottles attached to the walls of the corridor. We climbed in only to find that the train was unheated, that some of the windows were broken, and that there was no bedding of any sort. The temperature was 18° below

zero. Our Chinese friends apologised profusely, and explained that as a result of civil war everything was disorganised. They assured us, however, that everything would be put right, that bedding would be provided and that the heating would work as soon as we started. We had serious doubts, and I for one regretted the scruples which had led us to abandon the luxury of the South Manchurian Railway. Those doubts were intensified by an inexplicable delay. We shivered on the dark platform exchanging repetitions of polite farewells with the Marshal's representatives and sympathising with the unfortunate military band which stood to rigid attention waiting to play us triumphantly off. When it became clear that the delay was to be prolonged Albert Thomas pleaded that they might be dismissed. But apparently it could not be done. If we must go without bedding and without light we must at least have musical honours!

The source of the delay had at last to be admitted. The train had to proceed through the main station in the modern town and the signals remained persistently against it. Telephone messages proved of no avail, the station master replying that he had no instructions. This was of course possible as no train had been run over the line we were to take for several months. The Chinese, however, were convinced that it was a deliberate retaliation for Albert Thomas' refusal to travel on the South Manchurian Railway. The deadlock seemed to be complete, but fortunately we had with us Monsieur de Martel, the French Minister in Peking, who had preferred to take his chance of the overland journey with us rather than follow the longer route via Dairen. He managed to get a telephone call through to the company's headquarters and to secure the favourable intervention of some high railway authority. And after more than an hour's delay the engine finally gave a triumphant whistle, the band raised their brass instruments to their frozen lips and to a burst of martial music we moved off on our uncertain journey.

The conditions were far from enviable. We were frozen with the cold, and the draughts from the broken or ill-fitting windows seemed to reduce the temperature by another ten degrees. We stopped at the main station to take on board our luggage. In the middle of this operation the whole station was plunged into darkness. Was it an accident? The Chinese had their own opinion. We got under weigh again, colder than ever. But the Chinese were as good as their word. About an hour later the train stopped once more. Abundant piles of clean, warm bedding were carried on board: boys appeared from nowhere to make up our beds: hot drinks were distributed: and we felt we could face whatever might befall with renewed optimism. Nevertheless, we passed a cold and uncomfortable night, and as we tried vainly to sleep other anxieties assumed exaggerated proportions. The line had been neither inspected nor repaired for a considerable time and there was some uncertainty as to the state of the permanent way and of the bridges. No mishap befell us, however, and some thirty hours later we arrived safely in Peking.

Peking may be regarded as the real starting point of Albert Thomas' mission. As he made his first contacts the difficulty and complexity of his task became apparent. With what elements in China was he to deal? There was of course a Government at Nanking built around a series of Yuans or Councils, and the main figures in that central organisation he could of course see and talk to when he arrived in the new Chinese capital. Behind the Government lay the Kuomintang, the party of which the Government was the instrument. But the Kuomintang had its branches in each province and its provincial councils, how subordinate or independent remained to be seen. Existing side by side with them in the great centres were the municipal administrations, linked in some vague way with the central administration and obviously capable of exercising considerable political

influence. Within the Kuomintang party there were acute differences of opinion, and in particular an opposition between the North and the South. And lastly there were the Tuchuns, the War Lords, watching each other in a precarious truce, which might at any moment be broken in order to support the policy of one or other section of the party or to pursue a private interest. It was by no means easy to discover how the Government of China was supposed to work on paper. It was clearly going to be infinitely more difficult to discover how it worked in practice and what was likely to be its future development.

Below all this diversity were to be found three elements of unity. First, an intense hostility to Communism and an almost panic fear of it which led to cruel repression. There were no less than forty executions of communists or suspected communists at Hankow in the three weeks immediately preceding Albert Thomas' visit, and I myself witnessed three such executions on the occasion of my visit to Wuseh. This opposition to Communism was confusing because it did not seem necessarily to entail an opposition to certain communist doctrines. The opposition to Communism was no more deep nor widespread than the opposition to Imperialism, the second point on which Chinese opinion was unanimous. The third and probably the most important element of unity was the devotion to Sun Yat Sen. His picture was to be found everywhere, in all official buildings, in the Marshals' headquarters and in outlying barracks, in Trade Union offices, in the houses of rich and poor, in the big towns and in remote villages. Sun Yat Sen had in fact a position similar to that of Lenin in Russia. His writings and above all his will and the famous Four Principles which he bequeathed therein to the people of China were the Law and the Prophets. At every public meeting his portrait was hung in the place of honour. Every meeting opened with a brief impressive ceremony in which the audience rose to its feet and stood re-

verently while the chairman faced the portrait and read aloud the Four Principles.

Albert Thomas' position in the face of this strangely organised China was complicated by the view which it took of him. He found that they were not primarily interested in him as the Director of the International Labour Office, and that the immediate problems of the International Labour Office could only be approached through the general question of the relation of China to the European Powers. He was regarded as a European statesman with great influence and with a reputation for courage and fairness. He must be brought to see that no understanding between China and Europe was possible till the unequal treaties, which imperialistic exploitation had imposed on China by force, and which were universally obnoxious to her nationalistic sentiment, were abrogated. Albert Thomas was always glad to be led to discuss the central problems of a country's policy. The idea that the International Labour Office dealt with technical and subsidiary questions which were remote from the great political currents was an idea that he could never accept. The Chinese attitude was therefore by no means unwelcome but it was obvious that it must lead him on to delicate and even dangerous ground.

Some day perhaps a detailed account of Albert Thomas' mission in China may be published. The notes of his innumerable interviews and the comments which he was in the habit of dictating should provide the material for a vivid picture of a specially interesting moment in Chinese history. It is no part of the purpose of the present chapter to cover so wide a ground but merely to recount one or two incidents which illustrate how fully Albert Thomas' reasons for undertaking the journey were justified, and others which throw into unexpected relief some of his qualities against this strange background.

Certainly for those who accompanied him the journey

served to enlarge their vision and to secure that realisation of the diversity of industrial and human conditions which he was for ever insisting must be always present behind the paper work in Geneva. His own experience was enriched in infinitely greater measure. First because of his greater foundation of knowledge, and secondly because he saw China in the perspective of a historian who had specialised in the study of revolutionary periods. In this latter respect he was admirably equipped to seize on the real issues that underlay a situation so confused as to be unintelligible to the ordinary observer. He was able to find and to follow threads which escaped others, or which, if found, would have broken under clumsier handling. They led him of course on to the field of purely political issues but to this he was by no means averse. Political issues, in his view, could not or should not be settled without regard for social considerations. The solution of social problems could not be pursued successfully in a vacuum from which their political environment had been abstracted. Social policy could not be divorced from political factors and Geneva's influence could only be effective if it was based on a knowledge of those factors. It was his special gift that he was able in each country he visited to present the efforts of the International Labour Office to secure this or that reform not as something which was being pressed from some distant international centre for some remote international reason, but as a contribution to the solution of a vital national pre-occupation in the country which he visited. That was perhaps the real secret of the success of his missions. But it involved political study and above all political understanding. In China he could do little more than lay the foundations for future action, to be undertaken or secured by other officials who followed him and who will, it may be hoped, follow him periodically in the years to come. His achievement therefore can be no more than indicated in these general terms. But in the course of it

there were small happenings that may be recorded here because they illustrate some of his unusual qualities.

After four busy days in Peking we were again given a special train to take us to Hankow. The conditions were not unlike those on the journey from Mukden, though the train itself was better equipped. Ours was the first train to run over the whole of the line for some considerable time and as it was to pass through several disturbed areas it was armoured and heavily guarded. We stopped frequently to enable the locomotive to take in fuel and water—there was no chance of changing locomotives, and uncertainties as to the condition of the machine were added to those concerning the state of the permanent way—in particular of the great bridge over the Yellow River, which, however, seemed to have survived with undiminished solidity. These stops were extraordinarily interesting. The single platform at each station was crowded with a dense mob of people who seemed to be waiting for a train—if so, with the incredible patience of the Chinese, they had been waiting for months. And not only the living were waiting. At almost every station were to be seen two or three of the enormous decorated wooden caskets in which the Chinese place their dead, waiting there more patiently still, till a restored service could carry them to some ancestral burying ground.

It was at one of these halts that the one exciting incident of the journey occurred. The train drew in to the platform while we were at lunch in the dining car. There was the usual crowd at which we gazed with idle curiosity. Suddenly Albert Thomas who was sitting opposite to me said: 'There's something the matter. Yes, something serious. Look at the crowd. I'm going to get out and see.' He rose and went out. I looked at the crowd with close attention. I could see nothing special about it and I felt disinclined to interrupt an excellent lunch. Marshal Pei Tsong Chi had given us not only guards but his own private dining car

fully equipped with three of his best cooks. No sooner had I turned my eyes to my plate than with a deafening roar and clatter a string of heavily loaded waggons, rocking dangerously and obviously out of control, crashed past on the far side: We rushed to the windows and watched them disappear in the distance with a swarm of Chinese soldiers clinging for very life face downwards on top of the sacks with which they were loaded. A coupling on a military supply train some miles up a long incline beginning at the station had snapped and these were the runaway waggons. We all, I think, drew a sort of retrospective breath of relief as we realised that we were on a single line and that but for the accident of a switch having been over that was the end of our journey in China.

Why did Albert Thomas insist on getting out! Was it instinct or some queer kind of telepathy? None of the rest of us had seen anything peculiar in the crowd's attitude. Perhaps they shrank away as the swaying waggons, threatening to overturn at every moment, approached, or before the runaway took the points. But if so it was after Albert Thomas had left the train and when our attention was attracted by the noise to the other side. I could only conclude that, like all great speakers, he had an uncanny sense of the feelings of a crowd and that some tiny preliminary stirring in it, or even its collective emotional reaction before it could be translated into any movement, had carried a message only capable of being recorded by someone with his abnormal sensibility.

That curious sensibility enabled him on occasion to check the accuracy of our faithful interpreter Chan. At one Trade Union meeting in Canton after Albert Thomas had spoken and had offered as usual to answer questions, a young Chinese rose in the body of the hall and made a short speech in Chinese. In the case of a European speaker, even without knowing the language, it is usually possible to gather, either from the face or

tone of the speaker, or from the reaction of the audience, some idea of his general drift. No such clues are available in the East where tones and expressions, if expressions there be, follow an unfamiliar scale.

'He wants to know. . . .' said Chan.

'No! No!' interrupted Albert Thomas. 'He has attacked me.' Chan looked appealingly at the Chairman, Neither of them wished to lose face by admitting that China's distinguished guest had been met with opposition.

'He's only a young man of no importance' said Chan. 'He doesn't understand. . . .'

'No! No!' said Albert Thomas. 'He understands quite well and he doesn't agree. And it's no use telling me he isn't important. The others listened to him carefully. He said. . . .' and here he set out what he imagined the other's argument to be. Chan reluctantly consented, still insisting faintly that 'he was young and ignorant.'

'Now I'm going to reply' said Albert Thomas. 'Listen carefully and translate me exactly.' Albert Thomas then set out his guess at the other's arguments (we learnt afterwards that it was surprisingly accurate) and proceeded to demolish them by appealing, with chapter and verse, to the writings of Sun Yat Sen, pointing dramatically to the portrait behind the Chairman's head as he did so. No impassivity could hide the attention of the audience. Chan and the Chairman recovered their poise—they were not to lose face after all. I have already recounted how Albert Thomas faced a hostile audience in Toronto. This was a similar but a more remarkable achievement. He had to fight on the less familiar ground of Chinese revolutionary ideas, with the curtain of an interpretation between him and his adversary. A real discussion was instituted and at the end among those who remained to make his closer acquaintance and to ask for advice on Trade Union policy was his young opponent.

Albert Thomas' studies of Chinese revolutionary literature served him well on many other occasions and not only in Trade Union circles. Marshal Li-Tsung Yen, the War Lord of Hankow, and the real ruler of a vast territory, for instance, put forward the theory that the obstacle to any understanding between China and the Western Powers was the Second International—a theory which was the more unexpected in that he was actively engaged in summarily executing anyone suspected of sympathy with the Third. We were invited to lunch with him at his headquarters and we sought to identify him among the small crowd of generals and colonels who received us. It took us a second or two to adjust our ideas when we were introduced to a small man with a close-cropped head who wore the uniform of a common soldier—or in fact something even plainer since he had neither belt nor accoutrements. He had the appearance and allure of a 'boy', and it seemed astonishing that he should be the undisputed ruler of the much more military and commanding figures among which he suddenly appeared without any ceremony. In fact, I think we still had some doubts as to his identity until he took his place at the head of the table with Albert Thomas in the place of honour on his left hand. He sustained his argument however with a good deal of skill and logic. Modern China was anti-capitalist: the capitalist system in Europe had led to imperialism and imperialism to the concessions. China would never agree to the maintenance of the concessions. The Second International in Europe by compromising with capitalism had given it a longer lease of life. Neither social progress nor international amity could be achieved till the capitalist system was swept away. Albert Thomas replied on each point basing his case on the writings of Sun Yat Sen—That the capitalist system existed in Europe could not be disputed. But it was being progressively brought under control by a democratic movement which was steadily fulfilling the programme of Sun

Yat Sen in a series of positive achievements. The Marshal seemed impressed and the argument was continued at the banquet which he gave Albert Thomas in the evening and to which he invited all the authorities of the province.

These lunches and dinners, at which formal speeches were made, were a constant feature of the journey in China. With the exception of the days spent in trains or boats it was rare for a day to pass without at least two such functions. Here again Albert Thomas' studies in the Trans-Siberian came to his aid. Chinese orators, like British parliamentarians in the days of Pitt and Fox, had a taste for classical quotations, and on these formal occasions they would point their arguments or rhetoric with quotations from Confucius. Albert Thomas, with his amazing memory, could always cap the quotation or develop it in its context, to their amazement and delight. Nothing perhaps did more to impress his hosts, and his detailed knowledge of the works of Sun Yat Sen on the one hand and of Confucius on the other undoubtedly contributed enormously to the opinion which was expressed to me by the Chinese on several occasions—'He is the first European statesman who has understood China.'

Of course there was more to it than just a facility for happy quotation. Without the background of his preliminary studies what he observed and assimilated in China itself could have fallen into no clear picture. His discussions with the Chinese must have remained on a basis of no more than courteous enquiry and he could have attempted to exercise no moderating influence on a situation which at that time seemed to be developing in the most dangerous fashion. With his historian's knowledge of the course of the French Revolution, and his personal experience of the development of the revolution in Russia, he saw the disasters to which revolutionary nationalism might lead, not only for China herself, but for the rest of the world unless an attempt were made to inform and guide it by realistic

considerations. He felt it to be his duty as an international official to do what in him lay to influence Chinese opinion towards more moderate but more practical ambitions. It never occurred to him that this was a responsibility that he might evade. As usual he assumed it unhesitatingly and without any fear of the consequences which it might involve.

Those consequences began to be apparent at Hankow. He was violently attacked by one speaker at the French Club after a speech in which he had reminded his hearers that in the difficult days which might arrive it was for the French, who had been the first people to proclaim the Rights of Man, to give an example of sympathy and of comprehension. He was told that his policy was a betrayal of all that France had done to build up the prosperity of China and that it would be fought both in China and in France. Albert Thomas replied vigorously and the majority of his audience was convinced. But the spark of controversy was alight. It flashed ahead of him to the press in Shanghai. From Shanghai tendentious articles and reports reached the press in Java in the endeavour to prejudice his reputation before he reached the Dutch East Indies. And from the East they travelled to Paris and London. From unimportant papers they penetrated into the great dailies and eventually found their way even into the columns of *The Times*. For weeks after his return to Europe he was kept busy meeting a series of absurd but dangerous charges, as for example that he had stated that the unequal Treaties were the cause of the appalling conditions of labour in China, that he was opposed to the introduction of foreign capital into China, and that he had deliberately abstained from visiting factories under European control in which the conditions were good.

At Hankow we boarded the 'Luen-Ho', a British steamer, which was to convey us down the Yangtse to Nanking. Our journey was more uneventful than the notice prominently dis-

played for the information of passengers might have led us to expect. It ran as follows:

'Passengers travelling between ports on the Yangtse river are hereby warned that indiscriminate firing on ships by native troops occurs at various points along the river, and in travelling by our vessels under these conditions they do so entirely at their own risk. Certain parts of the vessel are protected as far as possible against rifle fire and passengers are strongly advised to ascertain the position of same as soon as they embark.'

But though no occasion arose to take shelter behind the steel plates with which part of the deck was protected, our river trip was not devoid of incident. Within a few hours of leaving Hankow two of our party, on wishing to retire to bed, found it impossible to open their cabin door. When an entry was finally made the cabin was empty. Every scrap of their luggage, amounting in all to nine suit cases of varying sizes, had completely disappeared. It seemed an audacious and foolish theft since, as the boat was well out in the river, there did not seem to be any means by which the thief could evade capture or dispose of his booty.

We found that this was an entirely erroneous conclusion and that the Yangtse steamers, for all their spick-and-span white paint and air of discipline and order, contained as it were a ship within a ship wherein the Captain's authority did not run. The lowest deck was crammed with Chinese passengers each carrying on his private traffic of 'pidgin cargo' or opium smuggling or pursuing the profession of pure piracy. Into this part of the ship none of the ship's officers dared to venture, Not only was it as much as their lives were worth to do so, but immunity for this floating Alsatia was a condition of being able to run the boat at all. It seemed a poor look out for our companions' luggage, but our luck held good. One of the 'boys' who had been instructed to make a search suddenly appeared crying in tones of triumph:

'Topside! Topside!' and on the upper deck behind the lifeboats we found the missing luggage. The cases had been cut open and their contents scattered in disorder, apparently in a search for money or jewellery. The only jewellery as a matter of fact consisted of a set of rather modest pearl studs to which the owner attached a sentimental value. An untidy person, he had long ago lost their case and had packed them rolled up in a twist of old newspaper which escaped the thieves' attention. As for the rest, fortunately it was a calm night and not a sock or shirt had been blown overboard. This incident was the origin of a story, widely reported at the time, to the effect that the ship had been attacked and all Albert Thomas' luggage, including important political papers, stolen. The reference to important political papers was probably due to an unfriendly inspiration (or perhaps even to disappointment, if it be assumed, as it was in some quarters, that the thieves had really been after Albert Thomas' luggage and had made a mistake), and it gave rise to some uneasiness in Europe as to the nature of Albert Thomas' activities in China.

Nanking represented Albert Thomas' main objective in China, and we looked forward to our arrival there with interest and curiosity.

We disembarked from the 'Luen-Ho' in midstream and landed in the little town that lies on the river bank which we first mistook for Nanking itself. We drove through crowded narrow streets and arrived at a huge gate in a great battlemented wall of immense thickness. 'The gate of Nanking' said our Chinese guide.

Our car passed through and we found ourselves in open country. We drove on past small farms and cultivated fields for mile after mile. Here and there was a villa or a small village. The villas we were told were the Ministries—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and so on.

It was strange to look at these modest villas and to think of Whitehall and the Wilhelmstrasse or the Ministries in any other great capital. It was stranger still to have come from the teeming life of Mukden, Peking, Hankow, Kiu-Kiang and of all the smaller towns that we had passed on our way, in search of the centre of all the swirling currents of their tumultuous revolutionary existence, and to find a few gentle villas scattered over a pastoral scene. As we went, in the days that followed, from villa to villa, engaged in our round of visits to the Headquarters of the Kuomintang, to the Presidents of the Yuans or Councils, to the Ministers and to the heads of the Government Departments, we found that in the aggregate they and their staffs amounted to a considerable population. We found a young and energetic Mayor, in temporary one-storied offices, surrounded by maps of foreign cities and foreign reports on town planning, while outside, a great avenue, over fifty yards wide, was being driven through farms and fields towards the great tomb on the mountain side destined to receive the body of Sun Yat Sen. We found other energetic and fervent officials in no wise blind to the immensity of the task confronting them and none the less full of enthusiasm and determination. They worked under all sorts of handicaps—for instance all the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were still at Peking; but in spite of obvious insufficiencies, in spite of the interplay of forces beyond their control, and in spite of a proportion of unpractical visionaries and of too practical self-seekers, it was difficult not to feel the presence of a deep faith and a great dedication.

The immense emptiness of Nanking, for our first impression subsisted, then appeared as something appropriate and symbolic; a habitation for the spirit of the New China in which it might expand, freed from the paralysing traditions of the past.

From Nanking Albert Thomas proceeded to Shanghai and thence we took ship to Kobe for the visit to Japan.

In China Albert Thomas' mission had been a matter of keen interest to the political and army leaders. To the mass of the Chinese people he was naturally unknown. In Japan the Government of course treated him as an honoured guest. Every hospitality and honour was extended to him, including a private audience with the Emperor. But what was striking and unexpected, even by the Japanese themselves, was the popular welcome which he received.

His coming had been heralded by numerous notices in the Japanese press, some of them not without a certain quaint humour for the Western mind. I remember one series of headlines displayed above Albert Thomas' portrait which read 'Visit of Distinguished French Statesman with Abundant Whiskers'. Whether for some reason or other his whiskers made a special appeal, there was no doubt that his personality and appearance were widely known and that his coming was awaited with the keenest interest by the Japanese Trade Unions.

We were given the observation car in the train from Kobe to Tokio. At every station at which the train stopped the local Trade Unions were massed with their banners, and prolonged cheering greeted Albert Thomas' appearance on the platform at the back of the car flanked by Bunji Suzuki, the Japanese workers' delegate at the International Labour Conference, and Mr. Mayeda, who had for some time been the Japanese Government representative on the Governing Body. Albert Thomas would be called on for a short speech and then there would be more cheering as the train moved off.

At Tokio the crowd was so great that all the police arrangements proved wholly inadequate. As the train drew up and Albert Thomas appeared the crowd surged towards him. By the time he had alighted and shaken hands with Mr. Yoshisaka who had come to welcome him on behalf of the Japanese Government any possibility of restraining the crowd was gone.

The French Ambassador was swept helplessly away as were other distinguished people. Our own party tried to stick closely to Albert Thomas as there had been rumours of communist aggression, but our effort was hopeless. The flashes and smoke of magnesium flares (the Japanese journalists take at least five times as many pictures as their American confrères) added to the confusion. We were separated from one another in the excited crowd and had eventually to make our ways individually to the Imperial Hotel to which Mr. Yoshisaka somehow or other managed to convey Albert Thomas.

There were stories in the press next day of a hostile communist demonstration at the station. There may have been communists in the crowd, but if so their numbers must have been insignificant. The police perhaps under-estimated the number of Trade Unionists that would turn out to welcome Albert Thomas. That was something of which they could not judge by experience. But the Tokio police was certainly far too efficient and well organised to have made any mistake about a demonstration of the Tokio communists whose activities they were constantly watching, and the press stories were perhaps a friendly exaggeration designed to save the face of the police, whose precautions had proved insufficient in the face of a crowd of unexpected dimensions.

Rumours of communist hostility to Albert Thomas were in fact constant. Either they had no foundation or the police were efficient enough to prevent their ever coming to anything. There was, however, a general nervousness about communism among the public in general, due no doubt to the extent of the success of the communistic movement in China, and this nervousness was reflected in the press, and in official circles. On the boat from Shanghai to Kobe we were confidentially told by the Captain that he had received a wireless to warn us that the communists would attempt to prevent Albert Thomas from

landing in Japan. All that happened was that we were met by Bunji Suzuki and the Kobe Trade Unionists with their banners. When it was arranged for Albert Thomas to address a public meeting in the great hall of the Asahi newspaper the same rumours of communist disorder were rife. They proved to have as much, or as little foundation, and Albert Thomas spoke for an hour to an audience of three thousand people without interruption of any kind. Of the degree of seriousness of a communist menace in Japan we could form no idea. But that there was widespread anxiety was evident. What is curious is that at the present time that anxiety seems to have been exaggerated in retrospect. A friend of mine who recently returned from Japan informed me that he had been told that the communists had prevented Albert Thomas from speaking in the Asahi Hall in 1928. The reality of the menace seems therefore to have sunk deeply into the consciousness of the Japanese people, but in recalling their past dangers they seem to do less than justice to the efficiency of their police service.

Albert Thomas, it has been recorded, liked a full day. The Japanese took him at his word. They were anxious that he should be given the opportunity to see everything and they produced programmes of activity that sufficed even for his capacious appetite. I remember one day which began with a visit to an employment exchange at 4 a.m. He visited iron and steel works, textile factories, and glass works; he inspected small establishments and big in these and other industries; works with modern equipment and traditional handicrafts; small shops and great commercial establishments; farms and village co-operatives. He met all the principal trade unions and the great employers' federations or associations in all the principal industrial centres. And he discussed with the Ministers and the principal officials in the Department of Social Affairs his comments and suggestions and the possibility of the ratification of labour conventions.

He found much to admire in the Japanese people and in particular, to use his own words, 'its intense devotion to moral culture, its respect for human personality, and its determination to practise the most modern technical methods.' He found, too, a full realisation of the many problems which the rapid growth of Japanese industry had brought in its train and a determination to solve them in a spirit of social justice. These problems he discussed, as was his wont, with complete and sometimes disconcerting frankness, the problem of the relations between the workers and the employers, the relation of the family system to the conditions of modern industry, the necessity for more unity in the Trade Union movement. Here in Japan the problems were as diverse and industrial as in China they had been essentially single and political.

It is therefore difficult to give in this sketch any impression of them. All that can be said is that his personal success, in spite of his occasional scepticism, for instance, as regards the efficacy of the family system in modern industrial conditions, was as great in one country as the other. He had no such simple key to the popularity of his hosts as his knowledge of Confucius had provided in China. But he won the heart of Prince Tokugawa by his genuine interest in the No plays—it will be remembered that he had a special love and knowledge of the theatre. He delighted the shipowners and seamen, who gave him a joint banquet, by donning for the occasion a complete Japanese costume with which he had been presented. It was in fact a graceful compliment which was highly appreciated all over Japan. His feeling for the artistic beauties of Japan and the obvious keenness of his appreciation of Nara and Kyoto evoked an instant response from a people in whom love of beauty is a predominant characteristic. And somehow he appealed to the common people. Perhaps the incident that gave him the greatest pleasure occurred one evening when we went for a stroll through the working-

class quarters. The main streets were lit with innumerable lamps and electric signs and packed with people. The whole scene had the aspect of an exhibition thronged with sightseers and for Western eyes provided a spectacle of never-ending interest. Albert Thomas as often found means to kill two birds with one stone. This was an excellent opportunity to buy some toys for his youngest daughter. So we combined our observation of street life with the search for a toy shop. Finally we found one and Albert Thomas proceeded to make his choice. At the end, as he handed over the parcels, the shopkeeper made a solemn reverence and pronounced, solemnly and with great care, the two carefully separated syllables 'Tow-Mah'. Then, as if afraid of not having been understood, he produced a newspaper and pointed first to Albert Thomas' portrait and then to Albert Thomas as he repeated with the same careful effort 'Tow-Mah'. Albert Thomas was delighted at this proof that the reports of his speeches in the press were receiving attention from some of Japan's humbler citizens.

The hospitality extended to Albert Thomas in Japan cannot be described in all its picturesque detail. It had that special quality of concern for the guest's comfort which is characteristic of the keenness of Japanese perceptions and it can perhaps be best illustrated by a personal experience. At Albert Thomas' request I went off to inspect the older forms of silk manufacture in the small town of Okaya. In the evening I dined as the guest of the local employers' association and discussed with them the general organisation of their industry. The meal was less satisfactory than the discussion—it was no doubt excellent, but Japanese cooking was strange to my palate—and when I was awakened next morning to commence my inspection of the factories at 6 a.m. I was anxious for some solid and appetising food before starting out in the cold—it was December and there was snow on the ground. I was brought a cup of weak tea. I

ventured to ask if I could have some biscuits, as I anticipated that my lunch would be a repetition of the dinner of the evening before. I was told that breakfast would be served as soon as the Chief of Police, who was to accompany me on my inspection, arrived. A few minutes later he was introduced and we moved into a dining room furnished in European fashion. We took our seats at the table. Before us were glasses and in the middle of the table a bottle of Henessey's Thin Red Stripe Whiskey, a bottle of white French wine and a bottle of Wincarnis. I was unutterably dismayed and wished I had insisted on my biscuits. My host seemed to take it for granted that I would breakfast on whiskey. I refused firmly and opted for Wincarnis which I vaguely recollected was advertised as containing some elements of nourishment. My host and the Chief of Police, no doubt out of compliment to me, were served with whiskey—a wine-glassful each, with no water. Then we solemnly drank, the Chief of Police rather copiously. He evidently got the surprise of his life. He maintained an admirable self-control over everything save the colour of his countenance which slowly turned from red to a bright purple. I dared not laugh and I took with fortitude a second glass of Wincarnis in the belief that I should be dependent on its nourishing qualities for the next twenty-four hours. After an interval during which the Chief of Police and my host seemed to make little further progress with their whiskey, hot toast and butter were brought in and these I attacked with vigour. The remains of the toast were removed and replaced by some fried fish and 'chip potatoes. The ungrateful thought crossed my mind that all that was needed to complete an excellent meal was a cup of coffee. No coffee appeared but the fish was followed by cold ham and salad. I was now feeling replete and ready to face the day's work but the meal was not over. The ham was succeeded by plates of Quaker Oats and as my host obviously took great pride in this exotic

dish I did my best to do justice to it. Feeling that I had completed a really good though somewhat unusual meal I lit a cigarette with great contentment and lay back only to find that I was now faced with a slice of melon. I extinguished my cigarette. After the melon had been cleared away I found myself presented with some really excellent *café au lait*. This I decided must be the end and I lit up again. The coffee was removed and I found I was expected to tackle two boiled eggs!

It was indeed a magnificent breakfast though a little unexpected in the order of its presentation. The whiskey, wine and Wincarnis, the Quaker Oats and possibly the ham, must have been specially ordered from Tokio for my entertainment, and indeed careful enquiry must have been made as to what were the appropriate beverages and dishes to lay before an international official of Irish nationality. Okaya is a remote spot where European visitors are rare if not unknown. If this was the hospitality offered to one of his lieutenants it is not difficult to imagine the degree of care and attention with which Albert Thomas was treated.

From Japan we travelled to Hong-Kong, spending a further day at Shanghai on the way. In China Albert Thomas had been told that he could not hope to understand the new China without a visit to Canton, and so to Canton he decided we must go. On the small steamer that bore us thither from Hong-Kong the passengers were shut in a sort of huge cage as a protection against pirates. The Chinese pirate in these waters has a very different technique from that which has delighted the schoolboy reader. There is no hoisting of the Jolly Roger and casting loose the long gun, no outmanœuvring the helpless prey and standing-by to board and all the rest of it. He begins by boarding—in the most peaceful manner as a coolie passenger duly provided with a ticket—and then at a convenient moment he and his fellows seize the unsuspecting ship. That was the original tech-

nique, but the ship is no longer unsuspecting and his task is made more difficult by enclosing the passengers whom he intended to rifle, and the bridge which he intended to rush, within a cage of stout steel bars, outside of which there remains little worth seizing. It gives the ship a peculiar appearance and also the passengers. I remember the picture presented by Albert Thomas as he strolled on the limited deck space with a tall, black-bearded Franciscan missionary, and the two pacing backwards and forwards against the bars looking for all the world like two criminals safely bestowed under lock and key.

After our return to Hong-Kong began our colonial journey. When Albert Thomas' intention to visit the East became known he was strongly pressed by the Dutch Government to include the Dutch East Indies in his programme. Questions relating to native labour were being actively studied by the International Labour Office and the Dutch were anxious that its Director should see for himself something of the conditions in the Dutch Colonies. There was a limit, however, to the length of the period which he could remain absent from Geneva and it was difficult to give them satisfaction. Albert Thomas accepted—or rather he placed at their disposal a certain number of days and undertook to visit Java if they could get him there and back from Singapore within those limits. This the Dutch undertook to do with the aid of the Governor-General's yacht. No sooner had the French Government learned of this decision than they in their turn came forward with a similar request. The Director of the International Labour Office must equally see conditions in Indo-China. The difficulty was the same, or rather greater, since further days had to be subtracted from the original programme. A solution was found in the offer to transport us from Hong-Kong to Haiphong in one of the ships of the French China Squadron, and then to convey us overland from Hanoi

all the way down to Saigon whence we could proceed by ship to Singapore. But what seemed a simple and admirable arrangement in Paris proved difficult of application in practice. The China seas are wide and the units of a China squadron have many activities dispersed over that vast area. Albert Thomas was warned by telegram that the only naval vessel available was too small to accommodate the whole of our party, that at this time of the year unpleasant weather conditions might be anticipated and that the voyage, if undertaken, might be expected to be uncomfortable.

As the great liner, the 'President McKinley', moved majestically up the harbour at Hong-Kong Albert Thomas scanned the lines of shipping and asked us if we could identify the 'Altair'. We could see nothing reasonably like a French naval unit, but her commander was waiting for us on the quay, and confirmed the fact that his vessel was lying in the harbour. She had been too small to attract our attention. Her commander explained that he was at Albert Thomas' disposal to make the passage if he wished, but repeated the warnings contained in the telegram. Albert Thomas however refused to consider any re-arrangement of his programme. We should have to squeeze into whatever room there was, and as for bad weather, well, the passage would only last forty-eight hours. His voice was as confident as ever. But he had been none too happy on the 'President McKinley' and he must have looked forward to the voyage on the 'Altair' with something approaching dismay. As a matter of fact, it turned out not only a pleasant but a triumphant experience. Whether it was the effect of being vaccinated against smallpox by the ship's doctor, or the excellent cooking of the Commandant's boy, none of us were sick although the weather was far from calm. We were all able to watch with interest and undistracted concern the difficulties of the navigation through the narrow straits of Hainan while the small vessel rolled and

pitched and great seas broke on the treacherous rocks on either side.

In Indo-China it might have been supposed that Albert Thomas might have found a chance to rest after his strenuous weeks in China and Japan. He was among people of his own race and he came with all the prestige of an ex-Minister. But even so he had to tread delicately. As a member of the Socialist party whose attitude had always been critical on questions of colonial expansion he was an object of suspicion to large sections of colonial opinion. There was a certain coolness in the group of leading citizens whom the Governor-General, Monsieur Pasquier, invited to meet him at the Palace of Hanoi. Albert Thomas attempted to dissipate some of this prejudice by his speech. He made as usual no secret of his political affiliations, but he concluded a vivid sketch of his first impressions with the words: 'I have come. I have seen. I wish to help.' It would be too much to say that he conquered. But some at all events of the prejudice against him was removed, and his eagerness to study and his indefatigable energy in inspecting all that could be shown to him helped to remove it still further.

Days of motoring down the Mandarin Road, fording innumerable rivers on crazy rafts—for there are many rivers and few bridges—and a final hundred kilometres or so by railway brought us to Saigon. From Saigon a small steamer, carrying in all nine passengers and 900 pigs, bore us to Singapore, or rather to the roadstead outside where we transhipped to the Dutch yacht and set out across the Equator to Java. Here another set of problems awaited. In one of his reports to the Conference, Albert Thomas had used the word 'vestige of slavery' in referring to the system of penal sanctions for contract labourers. Penal sanctions, though in process of being eliminated in the Dutch East Indies, still existed, and this description of the system had given great offence. I remembered my own fears of the risks

and dangers connected with the Director's Report to the Conference when its preparation was first mooted. It is a tribute to Albert Thomas' skill that out of a series of such reports running each to hundreds of pages and commenting freely on social problems of all kinds, this was the first phrase which had provoked an angry reaction. The situation was rendered more difficult by the publication in the Dutch East Indies press of inaccurate and tendentious accounts of Albert Thomas' attitude and speeches in China. It was not eased by one aspect of Albert Thomas' own character. He was not a man who arrived at his opinions without reflection nor who used words lightly. With all his love of compromise and his tact and diplomacy he was not prepared to make a withdrawal. The phrase had perhaps been too brutal; it would perhaps have been better if it had not been used; penal sanctions in the Dutch East Indies were no doubt not open to the abuses they might involve elsewhere—all that he was willing to admit. But that penal sanctions were a vestige of slavery he was convinced was true, and that statement he was not prepared to retract. As usual he did not attempt to avoid his opponents. On the contrary, he sought them out and himself opened the discussion. There were many meetings which had an unpleasant atmosphere of strain. But the Dutch, who are an exceptionally courageous and obstinate race, have also qualities of generosity which enable them to admire courage and obstinacy on the other side. In the end it is probable that Albert Thomas did himself and the International Labour Office more good by his attitude than he would have done by some diplomatic withdrawal whose sincerity would certainly have remained suspect.

After Veltevreden, Buitenzorg and Bandoeng the yacht bore us away north again to catch the 'Athos II' at Singapore. Then came the long sea journey towards Europe with leisure to sort out ideas and impressions and papers and notes. Colombo,

Aden and Djibouti were not interruptions so much as chances to secure more knowledge which must not be missed. For each of them Albert Thomas had his tiny programme, his list of people to see, his note of one or other problem on which to seek first-hand information. Three years previously some private individual had written to the International Labour Office to protest against the conditions of the women workers at Djibouti. Albert Thomas produced the letter from his papers and off we went to investigate its justification. Then came the Red Sea and Suez. Leaving the 'Athos II' to pursue her leisurely way through the Canal we took a car across the desert to Cairo. It broke down with increasing frequency after the first hour or so and we began to think we should have to spend the night in the desert. It was nearly 10 p.m. when we struggled into Cairo. While we secured a long overdue dinner Albert Thomas went off to see some of his omnipresent friends in order to pick up the general threads of the situation and to discover whom we should endeavour to see the following morning. His desire was to establish contact with the Egyptian Government and to interest them in the International Labour Office. He finished his preliminary enquiries at about 2 a.m. and they resulted in a full programme for the two or three working hours that would be available between breakfast and the departure of the train for Port Said.

I watched these arrangements with selfish regret. It was my first visit to Egypt, and I hated the idea of leaving Cairo without seeing the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Perhaps Albert Thomas guessed as much—perhaps he shared my unexpressed desire. But the programme had to provide first for the interests in the Office. The Pyramids, however, were not omitted. They figured in a pre-breakfast programme and in the bitter cold of dawn we mounted our camels and saw them emerge from the loneliness of the desert night.

Chapter VII

How Albert Thomas left the International Labour Office

At 3.30 a.m. on the morning of 8th May, 1932, I was awakened by the insistent ringing of my telephone. I reflected sleepily that there could be no reason for anyone ringing me up at that hour in Geneva. It must be a mistake in the number. But the ringing continued and I got up. 'Sorry to disturb you' said the voice of a friend, 'but I've bad news. Albert Thomas is dead. He died suddenly in Paris last night.'

It was shattering news. It seemed impossible that it could be true, impossible that that tremendous vitality should have ceased without warning and without struggle. And yet as my half-awakened consciousness laboured with a sense of loss and disaster, a series of small incidents of the past few months came one by one to my memory and began to take on in retrospect an ominous significance.

Albert Thomas had caught the influenza early in the year. On the doctor's advice he had gone to bed. That was unusual. As a rule he laughed at his doctors. He had spent a great part of his life in deciding what proportion (if any) of the counsels of experts should be accepted, and how their proposals should be adapted to circumstances of which they were no judge. Doctors, in his view, were not authorities whose instructions must

be blindly obeyed but experts of a rather narrow kind who must be treated as such. He had had influenza before—or as he put it ‘my doctor *says* I have influenza’—and had taken it lightly. Once when he continued to work in his office with a temperature he had gone so far as to recognise that ‘flu’ was troublesome. ‘I found it hard to finish my day’s programme’ he said. That had been his maximum concession. This time, however, he must have had a severe attack and though he had made a pretence of grumbling he was prevailed upon by his wife and his doctors to stay in bed. Unfortunately, before he had recovered, the meeting of the Governing Body came round. After a struggle he agreed to stay away from the preliminary meetings of Committees. No argument or persuasion, however, could prevail on him to stay away from the session itself. He took his usual place at the Chairman’s right hand and as question after question came up he intervened with his usual energy and mastery of the subject under discussion. He went off immediately afterwards to deliver a big speech in Lyons. He returned triumphant.

‘I have discovered the real cure for flu’, he announced, with his robust happy laugh. ‘The thing to do is to address a big meeting. I spoke for sixty minutes and perspired profusely and now I’m all right.’

It was too optimistic a view. The influenza had weakened him and he was drawing on his reserves. But his power of work was as great as ever and his buoyancy of spirit unaltered. He seemed impregnable. Perhaps he himself had come to believe that in a sense he was; that the immense strength of his indomitable will could defeat any minor ailment. Beyond the fact that he grew thinner there was no outward sign that he was under any special strain. At the Conference he was quieter. He appeared less frequently in the committees, but only those in the closest contact with him noticed any difference in his manner and they thought he was either a little tired or preoccupied—as

often happened—with some problem which he would disclose in his own time.

One incident was significant—or at all events seemed so afterwards. He had been anxious to press a certain resolution on the economic crisis through the Resolutions Committee and to obtain for it priority. Everything was arranged and he had undertaken to make the proposal himself. At the last moment he changed his mind and in the absence of any motion to the contrary the Committee proceeded to take the resolutions in the order in which they were printed in the Record. It was unusual for him thus to alter his programme, but he was such a master of Conference tactics that it was assumed that he had some tactical reason for his decision. Two days later the resolution in question was reached. The Committee, which was a small body, was meeting in a small room near the entrance of the Conference hall late in the evening. As no question of priority had been raised its business was almost formal. Suddenly, seizing on an observation from one of the delegates which was of no particular importance, Albert Thomas began to speak. The attention of the delegates was aroused by a certain tension and seriousness in his attitude. Then he went on to deal with the substance of the motion. He was, strictly speaking, out of order, but no Chairman could have stopped him. The Committee found itself listening to a review of the main features of the crisis and of its political background which was as unexpected in its content as it was startling in its emotional intensity. Albert Thomas seemed to have forgotten the Committee's mission and functions. He spoke as if he was addressing the Conference or even some wider body, and as if his arguments and gestures were addressed to some invisible opponent. His voice rose in magnificent passages of appeal and criticism till it carried through the flimsy walls and out into the hall beyond. Members of the staff going home after their day's work, chauffeurs

and taxi drivers waiting for the Committee members, cleaners and distribution clerks, crowded outside to listen. He seemed to be under an overwhelming impulse to utter with all the emphasis in his power his misgivings and his fears. His audience listened spellbound as he ended with a plea for courage and for action and with a warning that if they were not forthcoming Europe and the world would find themselves faced with darkness and disaster.

After the translation he apologised with a shrug and a laugh for having allowed himself to be carried away and his audience went home impressed but more than a little puzzled. Can it have been that his extraordinary sensibility had felt the presence of some menacing shadow and that he had suddenly determined to deliver his message before it was too late? Few who heard it will forget the passionate conviction of his warning, and in the light of the events of the last few years it has proved uncannily prophetic.

He had, however, another opportunity when some days later he made his reply to the discussion on the Director's report. It was one of his great speeches, some say his greatest. But delivered to the packed Conference hall in the presence of the journalists it was necessarily less frank in its arraignment of the failure of statesmanship to deal with the crisis than his intervention in the Committee Room. No less than sixty speakers had taken part in the debate. Albert Thomas spoke for over an hour and a half, with all his usual vigour and brilliance. With the supreme art of the orator he wove his replies to scores of diverse points into a coherent exposition of the problems facing the Organisation and of the lines along which they must be tackled.

I happened to be just outside the door beside the President's rostrum when he came out on the conclusion of his speech. He was literally drenched with perspiration. I congratulated him on his speech and he thanked me. His collar was just a wet rag,

but his head had its usual poise and his eyes their habitual serenity. It was only when I heard a note, not of panic, but of urgency in his 'quick, quick, my scarf. I must get home at once and change' and noticed that he trembled as the faithful Lombardi helped him into his overcoat, that I realised that he was completely exhausted.

I was a little uneasy but my misgivings as to his condition were not of long duration. Three-quarters of an hour later I saw him again. He was his old self welcoming Sir Henry Betterton, the British Minister for Labour, and members of the British Delegations to lunch in the Parc des Eaux-Vives. Albert Thomas was the perfect host and never did he seem in better form. Sir Henry Betterton had been one of his critics in the debate which was just over, and Albert Thomas now set himself to jest at their parliamentary duel and to eliminate any sting that it might have left. Sir Henry responded and congratulated Albert Thomas on an 'oratorical achievement unparalleled in my experience.'

'Oh!' cried Albert Thomas in high good humour. 'You and I will be friends even though we may sometimes disagree. We are both politically minded, and politically minded men can always understand one another.'

Seeing him thus full of vigour and humour in the middle of his guests, struggling gaily with his incorrigible English, drinking a health with Canada or South Africa, I forgot my sudden uneasiness of an hour before. There could be nothing physically wrong with a man with such a power of recuperation.

One other incident is tragic now in retrospect. It must be recounted to complete the series. The President of the Conference was Senator Gideon Robertson of Canada. After the Conference was over he had to authenticate with his signature copies of the texts adopted and he was invited to Albert Thomas' flat to perform this necessary formality. He was already a sick man

and when the texts were presented to him he was unable to sign his name. A few minutes later he collapsed with a stroke.

A second set of texts had then to be prepared for signature by one of the Vice-Presidents and these had first to be signed by Albert Thomas. He signed with his usual bold unhesitating pen. Gallois, his assistant *Chef de Cabinet*, who was handing him the documents remarked: 'You are in better form for signing than the unfortunate President.'

Albert Thomas looked up with his eyes twinkling behind his glasses and replied: 'Are you quite sure?'

It is difficult now to resist the conclusion that for many weeks he had been fighting a battle in which he was using up his reserves. His amazing resistance and his powers of recuperation deceived his friends, his doctors and perhaps sometimes even himself. But there must have been times when he felt himself near defeat. His answer was to attack, to make still greater calls on his diminishing stores of vitality and energy. It was the policy of a great leader, but, alas! there is one enemy against which no leadership is of any avail.

After the Conference he set out for Paris, Berlin and Warsaw. In Paris he consulted his doctor. He was told that one of his lungs was slightly congested and that he must rest. In particular he must abandon the idea of the journey to Warsaw. He gave way but as usual he compromised. He would abandon Berlin and Warsaw. He would go to Geneva and take a rest. But he would not go to-day. He would finish his Paris programme and go to-morrow. It was a fatal compromise. That night he dined alone—a rare thing for him to do, but sometimes his habit in Paris—and after his dinner he went for a stroll. He felt unwell and stopped to order some brandy at a small café. When the drink was brought he was unconscious. The congestion in the lung had suddenly become acute and death supervened before medical aid could be secured.

He was unrecognised by the proprietor and staff. When the police came the only clue to his identity was his card of membership of the Socialist Party stamped with the receipt for the current contribution. It was indeed a curious fate that he, one of the best known men in Europe, whose photograph was perpetually before the eyes of the public either in his international rôle or in one or other reminiscence of the war, and one whose untiring activity kept him almost always the centre of a group, should have died alone and unrecognised in his own city. But it was fitting that his end should come among the ordinary people to whose service he had devoted all his great gifts. He was proud of being one of them and of the philosophy which underlay his activity they were at once the inspiration and the foundation.

How well he was known and how wide were the sympathies he had created became apparent in the hundreds of telegrams which poured in to the International Labour Office from every country on the globe. They came from Monarchs and Presidents, from statesmen of all parties, from provinces and municipalities, from workers' and employers' organisations, from co-operative societies and social organisations, from movements of all kinds which at one time or another had appealed to him, and never unsuccessfully, for counsel or encouragement.

He was buried in his native town of Champigny. For hours an unending procession of mourners passed through the hall of the *Maison du Peuple* which had been transformed into a *Chapelle ardente*. There came members of the French Government, Ambassadors and Ministers of the Paris Diplomatic Corps, Members of the Council of the League, of the Governing Body and of the staff of the International Labour Office, representatives of employers and Trade Unions and numerous other organisations and the whole community of Champigny itself to pay a last farewell to its famous son. There was one

pathetic incident. A woman, poorly dressed, suddenly bent and thrust into the mountain of wreaths which towered almost to the ceiling on either side of the bier a tiny, cardboard box. One of the attendants nervously extracted and opened it. It contained two or three simple flowers, a tribute too modest to be exposed publicly among the floral splendour with which Governments and associations paid their last salute. But it symbolised the place which Albert Thomas held in the hearts of the poor and the simple, and it was, I have no doubt, the tribute which would have pleased him best. Those who understood secured for it in the final arrangement a place of honour among tributes richer but perhaps less significant.

* * * *

It was thus that Albert Thomas left the International Labour Office. As suddenly and as strangely as he had entered upon the scene he left its stage for ever. None saw his entry and none saw his exit; in Washington a paper unfolded in silence revealed a name from the other side of the world; in Geneva a telephone shrilling in the night told that he was henceforth a name and no more.

In the interval he had been its dominating figure. His personality had overshadowed all others, he had secured the unchallenged leadership of the Organisation which had been committed to his charge and he had seemed to embody in his own person the will and the energy of a world-wide movement.

It is no part of the scheme of this book to endeavour to enumerate the achievements of the Organisation for which he was responsible nor to assess their value. All that has been attempted is to recount some personal reminiscences which may help to show what manner of man he was. When, however, those reminiscences are pieced together it may be felt that they give an incomplete and perhaps an unreal picture. They are admittedly no more than fragments, but a reader who did not know

Albert Thomas may perhaps wonder whether they do not represent a conscious, or unconscious choice on the principle *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, or on the basis of mistaken loyalty to an inspiring chief. No such choice has been made and it would be a disservice to Albert Thomas' memory to attempt it. But those incidents which are most easily recalled and which lend themselves to illustrate his character are naturally those which throw into relief his qualities. His qualities were exceptional: his defects very ordinary. If it had been the other way about this book would never have been written, nor would there have been any occasion for it.

Still it is perhaps important to insist that his great gifts and the strong discipline with which he employed them did not remove him from the category of ordinary human beings. He was not infallible and he was not always successful as the incidents at Springfield and Detroit have shown. He failed too to secure the same measure of influence and confidence in England as he did in other countries, and that failure cannot be ascribed only to his difficulties with the English language. In his endeavours to secure support for his policies in England he seemed to meet with a certain antipathy which all his charm was unable to conquer. The very eloquence, energy and impatience which evoked an immediate sympathetic response in practically all countries, including English-speaking countries such as the United States and Canada, seemed to provoke in Great Britain, even sometimes in circles which were naturally favourable to his policy, the opposite reaction. It was not that he was disliked, but the very fascination which he exercised seemed to rouse a certain distrust. His brilliance, his omniscience and perhaps still more his rapidity, gave to the British mind an impression of insecurity and perhaps of insincerity—the speed with which, when one or other of his carefully prepared plans encountered some obstacle, he could substitute another and defend it with

equal conviction and an equally formidable array of facts and arguments may have left slower minds in some doubt as to whether both plans were other than brilliant and unsound improvisations. The truth was usually that both had been foreseen, and that the second was one which had been deliberately prepared in view of the very emergency which had arisen.

There is, however, little doubt but that he would have overcome this prejudice in the long run. It was a challenge to his intelligence of which he was well aware. He needed no convincing that British support was one of the corner stones of the Organisation; he desired to secure it to the fullest extent, and he spared no effort to understand the British point of view. His difficulty was in part his honesty. He could not pretend to accept another view when he was satisfied that his own view was sounder, and he always hoped that he would succeed in showing that this was so. It was here that he failed—not in his inability to understand the nature of a British view so much as in failing to distinguish its quality on one or other occasion. For example, he would fight for a compromise when no compromise was possible, but where the British would have accepted a defeat and bowed to the view of the majority. Albert Thomas would be hurt when his dearly won concession from other elements in the Governing Body or the Conference was turned down, and the British in their turn would be irritated at the loss of time and at the fact that they had been made to appear more intransigent. An analysis of difficulties of this kind would perhaps contribute greatly to the possibilities of international understanding. And Albert Thomas in his own mind had already begun to make it and had begun to alter his methods in consequence. That he was already on the road to success may be gathered from the speech of Mr. Forbes Watson, the British employer in the Governing Body, after his death, in which, speaking with real emotion, he stated that while opposing him he

had come to know him and to conceive for him a sincere admiration and friendship.

It has been recounted earlier that his family life was happy. I have heard it asserted that important family events figured in his famous daily programme and that the time to be allowed for them was calculated as closely as if they were committee meetings or official interviews. Whether that be an exaggeration or not it would be an entirely false representation of his character to suggest that a sort of puritanical devotion to duty or an overwhelming avarice of time blighted his enjoyment of ordinary pleasures. He would indeed play with all the intense abandon of a happy child. I remember him once at the Hague in the midst of another case before the Court challenging one of his legal advisers, Mackenzie,¹ to a shooting match in a booth on the promenade at Scheveningen. For half an hour he shot at pipes and ping-pong balls, and his delight at his success and his envy of Mackenzie's superior skill were childlike and sincere.

It was not often that he could allow himself such distractions. But it was not that he was remote from them or inaccessible to the joys of sport and recreation. He made efforts to learn to ski, with what he himself described as only moderate success: he occasionally drove his own car to the alarm of his passengers; and he went for long walks with his family over high mountain paths. He loved too the life of the common people. Nothing pleased him better than to be free, not just to observe, but to mix with the life in the working-class quarters of Geneva or Paris. He was a unique success at a diplomatic dinner, but he was no less a success, and happier in being so, in a cheap restaurant surrounded by workers or standing at some zinc-covered bar. On such occasions he would 'parler ouvrier'. He was as familiar with the language of the French workers as he was with that of the French classics. For that reason he was accepted as one

¹Now Professor Norman Mackenzie of the University of Toronto.

of themselves and he could in consequence represent them with authority and interpret with certainty their feelings and desires.

These were qualities which help to explain some of his success. Let us now look deliberately for his defects. It is possible to list some of them, but they were usually controlled and corrected by his intelligence. He was impatient and his impatience sometimes led to bursts of anger. Perhaps it may be counted a defect that these bursts of anger were usually about small things: he could be patient enough when anger or impatience might have compromised a long and delicate negotiation. When his patience had been tried too long the tempest would burst round some innocent and irrelevant victim. It may be added (was it a defect or a quality?) that though he could be very angry he could never bring himself to be severe.

It might be said, too, that he was jealous, conceited and ambitious. But in so saying the words need careful definition and qualification. Jealousy, conceit and ambition may be defects or qualities according to the person to whom they relate. A man's conceit of himself is laudable or ridiculous according as it is justified or not. When it is justified it is frequently irritating to others whose own conceit lacks a similar foundation and is by them counted a fault.

Jealousy, though, Albert Thomas had and sometimes a certain petulance in its expression. When he went to the United States, Clemenceau had preceded him, and the ship's wireless news carried continual reports of the enthusiastic reception accorded to the ex-Prime Minister. Albert Thomas did not hide his irritation. I put it down first of all to political antagonism. But he was still more irritated when the news came of the crowds which thronged to hear Coué. 'A charlatan!' he exclaimed angrily. 'The Americans must be mad to attach any importance to this village fakir.' He could also be derogatory of speeches made in the Assembly even when he agreed with

the policy they expressed and when the speakers were his close political friends.

These little bursts of jealousy were disconcerting from a man so admirably poised. But they were to be explained by his artistic temperament and by his ambition. He saw a world slipping and sliding towards disaster for lack of leadership. He was convinced that he had qualities which, given their scope, might supply what was needed. It irked him to see lesser men occupying the stage from which alone that leadership might be exercised and securing facile plaudits for their superficial efforts. The great politician must be a great artist. But unlike other artists he cannot produce his work in obscurity and leave it for the judgment of posterity: he cannot leave his heritage in stone or sound, in paint or in poetry to be discovered and appreciated after he has gone. The material that is his medium cannot be shared out between him and his competitors. That material is the opinion of his own generation. If he cannot seize and mould it his gifts can never find their expression and must remain for ever sterile. Albert Thomas was given a great opportunity with the International Labour Organisation. He took it gladly and he gave it every ounce of his talent. But his mastery of it must have stimulated his ambition to tackle a still greater field and it is difficult to say that such an ambition was reprehensible or illegitimate. If it occasionally came to the surface in little gusts of jealousy or sarcasm it was only that it was in the circumstances a human ambition rippling the surface of a very human temperament.

Perhaps if he had lived that ambition might have been realised. When Sir Eric Drummond announced his intention of resigning his post as Secretary-General of the League there were many who thought that Albert Thomas would succeed him. It seemed likely that the new Secretary-General would be of French nationality and there was no Frenchman with a com-

parable record in the international field or with such obvious qualifications. He possessed an unsurpassed knowledge of the world's peoples and their problems and an intimate acquaintance with their political leaders and methods. He was liked and trusted in practically every capital—from the beginning of the work in the I.L.O. he cultivated the friendship of Germany and was *persona grata* in Berlin: he was on good terms with Mussolini and with Spain: to the peoples of the Little Entente and Poland he was an old friend of the war and of pre-war days: the Scandinavian countries knew and admired him as one of the great protagonists of the League and he had many firm friends in the capitals of North and of South America and in Asia. Though his own idea had been that sooner or later he would return to French political life it seemed that such qualifications must almost inevitably lead him to the Secretary-Generalship of the League.

It is interesting to attempt to imagine how his powers would have been exercised in that wider field. Could he have found there the same scope for his unrivalled capacity for leadership and what would have been the response to its appeal? Could he have given to the League of Nations the same cohesion and the same sense of its personality that he gave to the International Labour Organisation, and could he have secured for the Secretariat the kind of special position which he secured for the International Labour Office? It is a speculation as fascinating as, alas! it is now futile.

One may perhaps add to this list of Albert Thomas' defects that he was not legally minded and that there was one gap in his vast range of knowledge—he knew little or nothing of the physical sciences. He was impatient of legal obstacles. But if he knew little about law he knew much of it. He was quite clear that law was meant to be the servant of society and not its master, that it must serve the purposes of society and not be used to

thwart them. His quarrel with the lawyers was not with their science but with their insistence on its negative aspects. He wanted them to help him forward and not to hold him back. It was on this principle that he made his choice of legal advisers for the Office and his successes at the Hague Court are proof that the principle is not inconsistent with legal knowledge in its technical sense.

But when all has been said about his defects and his qualities, and when it has been admitted or demonstrated that the latter far outweighed the former, one question remains: Was he possessed, as some of his critics asserted, merely with a fever for activity? Did he dissipate his energy and intelligence in any and every field in which he could secure a brilliant but unsubstantial success? Or had he on the contrary some deep guiding purpose to which all his various activities were subordinated and co-ordinated? For anyone who knew him there can be no doubt as to the answer. It was one of his characteristics that he always worked to a plan and it may be taken for granted that all his minor plans were designed to contribute to some greater achievement. This is evident from any study or experience of his work in the International Labour Organisation. But there is little doubt that his plan did not stop there and that the policy along which he tried to guide the Organisation was based on ideas much more fundamental than the securing of political and administrative successes. What those fundamental ideas were it is not easy to state with precision but it is possible to make some attempt to seek for the main principles at the basis of the philosophy which he attempted to apply in his guidance of the Organisation. It can only be done tentatively, for he never laid them down himself in any coherent way and all that can be done is to try to deduce them from the experience which underlies the preceding chapters.

Somebody once said of Graham Wallas that he was more in-

terested in Town Councillors than in Town Councils. It might be said of Albert Thomas that he was more interested in men than in Man. He was interested in men as men, men in their numbers, in their diversity, in their dignity, in their ambitions, in their hopes and fears, and above all in their imprescriptible rights to spiritual and economic independence. Walt Whitman made a prophetic picture of Albert Thomas when he wrote:

*'I see ranks, colours, barbarisms, civilisations,
I go among them, I mix indiscriminately,
And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth.'*

This was his starting point. This it is which explains his conception of the Office as a 'living' instrument, his criticism of the League as 'divorced from the peoples', his belief that the only sure foundation for the Office was the support of public opinion, his rejection of the idea that the Organisation was no more than a mechanism to correct inequalities in the possibilities of commercial competition as between nation and nation. This it is which explains his conception of the Organisation as something which was more even than machinery for collaboration between nation and nation.

He saw the Organisation not as a mechanism for collaboration but as the collaboration itself in full action. He saw it not in any sense as a Super-state—such a conception would have been in contradiction with his whole outlook—but he saw it as much more than inter-State. He saw it as an organisation of the peoples of the world, an organisation in which cabinets and parliaments, national and colonial civil services, factory and medical inspectorates, associations of workers and employers, and the individuals composing them, ministers, deputies, civil servants, employers and workers, had all their appointed place and function.

It was a gigantic vision, something so overwhelming in its

complexity and detail that the brain recoils from it and finds it easier to fall back on some simple diagram on which are spaced the sixty-two States Members of the Organisation. But to Albert Thomas it was not a vision. It was a plan, and he set out to achieve it. It was this conception of the Organisation which guided him in his choice of methods for the Office; it was this desire to bring the Office into direct contact with the individuals in the different countries which led him on his tireless journeys to all the continents of the world. It is difficult to know which to admire more, the all-embracing sweep of the vision, or the audacity of mind that saw it not as a theory but as a programme to be carried out.

The magnitude of his task cannot be exaggerated. The Governments had only a vague idea of their commitments: Civil Service officials were perhaps more familiar with the texts but only in an abstract way: employers' and workers' organisations had no realisation either of their rights or of their opportunities: the masses and public opinion knew nothing whatever: and that was the position not in one country but in all. To attempt to create habits of international collaboration between these diverse elements in over fifty countries was indeed a gigantic task.

It is true that a beginning had been made before Albert Thomas came on the scene. The Washington Conference had been held and had every title to be considered a success. But it met in very special conditions, the conditions of the months immediately succeeding the war. The armies were being demobilised and Governments were nervous about the result. Promises had been made to labour and the time had come when labour expected them to be fulfilled. The general attitude of Governments was one of fear. Clemenceau, for instance, thought it necessary to draft 40,000 troops into Paris as a precaution against trouble on 1 May, 1919. The Washington Conference was held

in October of the same year while the Peace Conference was still sitting. It was in a way a continuation of the Peace Conference. Though it was a remarkably successful experiment in organisation and a proof that the machinery contained no flaws it was not a test of how that machinery would function under different conditions.

Albert Thomas saw this clearly. He realised that the International Labour Organisation must develop as it were a personality of its own. And he sought the basis for such a personality on wider and deeper lines than those which its authors had commonly advanced. He rejected the theory that it existed mainly to secure equitable conditions of commercial competition, and he laid the major emphasis on the idea of the pursuit of social justice.

Social justice is not easy to define. To Albert Thomas it meant much more than the removal of social injustice. It meant a positive policy through which the individual might attain his political, economic and moral rights. This was the doctrine which he believed could alone give the Organisation a real unity and personality, which could guide it safely where narrower doctrines would inevitably lead it to a division along lines of national interest. He expressed his idea differently at different times and to different audiences in the endeavour to make it intelligible by putting it into the language of those he wished to convince. The result is that to get at his underlying thought it is necessary to integrate these fractional expressions of it into one general principle and to ignore its particular presentation on a particular occasion.

A clue to his fundamental thought can be found in the advice which he gave to the Chinese during his visit. There he found revolutionary conditions in which all preceding systems or traditions had been thrown into the melting pot. In the resulting confusion of ideas, employers, workers and political leaders

seemed to have lost all sense of clear direction. The employers were faced with an anarchy in which the workers tended to interpret their loudly proclaimed political freedom as freedom not to work. The workers complained that they were exploited by both home and foreign capital and that the International Labour Office was no use unless it could improve their miserable conditions of existence. The politicians saw in foreign capitalism the source of imperialism and hence of the detested concessions and were anti-capitalistic in an extreme sense. On the other hand, they hated and feared communism and pursued its adherents with extreme severity. In this confusion all elements bombarded Albert Thomas with requests for help and advice.

To the employers he explained the advantage of Trade Unions, that is of organisations of workers with whom they could negotiate concerning conditions of labour. He urged on them that they should encourage such negotiations and warned them that in their own interests they must be prepared to make concessions.

When the workers said that they could do nothing because of their miserable conditions and that the International Labour Office must remove from them the oppression of the foreign and the Chinese capitalist he bluntly replied that the International Labour Office was not God. He told them that an improvement in their conditions could only be brought about by their own organised action, and that such action could only be successful if it were run on industrial and not on political lines and if it were accompanied by increased production.

To the politicians he read the lessons of all previous revolutions, and pointed them with the dicta of Sun Yat Sen. The revolution to succeed in all or any of its objects must ground its new régime firmly on the people. Of the people the workers could most easily be organised. Let the Government initiate and encourage that organisation by every means in its power. The

precise formula did not matter. If they were afraid of free organisation let them choose the corporative method of an organisation run by the Kuomintang Party and under its control. But in either case let them make use of such experienced Trade Union officials as they might be able to find. A workers' movement without the old militant spirit would get nowhere. It would either have no real existence, and therefore fail to achieve its purpose, or it would become purely political and either duplicate or obstruct existing political machinery.

It will be noted that to all these groups he emphasised the same fundamental idea, the creation or encouragement of Trade Unions, and there is no doubt that he regarded this as the fundamental step which must precede or at least accompany any programme of social reform.

In society as he saw it, and still more in society as he saw its probable development, Trade Unionism was not only a fundamental industrial element but the very foundation itself of all the industrial and political superstructure. 'Government of the People, by the People, for the People' he regarded as the ultimate wisdom upon which a stable and peaceful world might be built. But it would not suffice to proclaim it, nor could one of its elements be divorced from the others. 'Government for the People' went of itself. Albert Thomas could not conceive that government for any other purpose or in any other interest could survive so long as man was man. 'Government by the People' meant that the people must learn to govern. He had no illusions about their fitness for the task, no mystic belief that the voice of the people was the voice of God whereby what was spoken was *ipso facto* achieved. Any popular movement aroused his enthusiasm but his welcome for any awakening of the spirit never blinded him to the fact that government is a highly technical operation for which belief in one's right to govern is no substitute. 'Government of the People' implied something more

difficult still, the ability to be governed, the capacity to submit to discipline in the general interest.

The fulfilment of a programme of social justice would indeed favour the achievement of government as Lincoln defined it. Men must have opportunities for education and leisure and the performance of the duties of citizenship. But Albert Thomas would have argued that such opportunities, however plentifully given, were not enough. Government could not be learnt in schools any more than the practice of medicine can be learnt from books. The ability to govern and be governed is something which cannot be acquired without an apprenticeship. And since that apprenticeship must be open to all men, how else in modern conditions could it be secured save as men might organise themselves to understand and to negotiate concerning the conditions of their daily work? Trade Unionism was not to Albert Thomas so much an end in itself or a factor in the improvement of labour conditions as a means of securing for the masses of the people a real political apprenticeship, an experience of 'government of the People, by the People, for the People.' Through such experience they would become capable of a measure of government based on a knowledge of industrial facts fully within their competence. In the absence of such self-organisation and the knowledge which it was bound to bring they must be the prey or the victims of doctrines and doctrinaires. And without the experience of government in industry they could never hope to govern themselves efficiently in a wider sphere.

For the same reason Albert Thomas encouraged with all his power the co-operative movement and the participation of the workers in the management of social insurance schemes. But he placed his major emphasis on Trade Unionism, first because its basis was the whole of the workers' activity, and secondly because he foresaw that industry (including agriculture) must be-

come in certain of its aspects a predominating preoccupation of the modern State. Through the Trade Unions therefore the people could become a real factor in government, and could exert through their own chosen representatives an influence and an authority based on first-hand knowledge, which they could not otherwise ever acquire.

If we take this as Albert Thomas' fundamental theory we shall find an explanation of many of his methods and policies: and the fact that they fall into a logical relation when they are considered in its light would seem to be some evidence that it does not misrepresent his ideas. It explains, to begin with, the importance he attached to the workers' group in the Governing Body and the Conference. When he was challenged on the ground that he was leaning overmuch to their side, he could, of course, and often did, point to the text of the Constitution and argue that the Organisation had been created for the workers and to improve their conditions. But his real belief went, I am convinced, much deeper than that. If the Organisation failed to keep the confidence of the workers what worried him was not that it would thereby fail, or become a less efficient instrument, to secure the fulfilment of the solemn promises which the Governments had made. For the Governments and their promises and what the workers might care about their fulfilment or non-fulfilment he did not philosophically care a rap. But for the first time here was a constitutional instrument giving the Trade Unions a recognised place in the structure of society. In the development of that principle lay, he believed, the future of the peaceful ordering of the world, since thus and thus only could the peoples participate in any real control of their destiny, and he would run any risk and assume any burden rather than let that great experiment be destroyed before it had borne its fruits.

That he was guided by some such idea as that set out above

may be seen from the fact that he never made himself the mere mouthpiece of the workers' aspirations and demands. He did not recoil from quarrelling with them over his visit to Madrid: he ran counter to the wishes of a majority of them when he paid his visit to the Pope and instituted a collaboration with the Church: he had to tread delicately and incur unpopularity when he negotiated with Mussolini and kept Fascist Italy in the Organisation. On these occasions he took the risks and responsibilities of his leadership. He had to weigh his hold on the workers against the necessity for giving the Organisation its widest scope. The Organisation must become a real power. No movement or State that could add to its strength, or support the cause of social justice, must be alienated or kept at arm's length. He made his policy understood. A Catholic priest and an Italian delegate came to preside over sessions of the Conference. The Organisation was strengthened thereby, and at the same time the rôle of the Trade Unions in world organisation lifted to a still wider and more influential plane.

This same line of thought leads logically to his conception of his rôle as Director. If he had thought of the Organisation as an organisation of its Members, it would have been natural to conceive of the rôle of the Office as that of a secretariat and nothing more. It would convene the Members, provide them with the material for their discussions and leave to them the trouble, and the responsibility, of arriving at their decisions. In the other conception this clearly would not do. It is doubtful even if it would have proved workable. Contradictory proposals would have been made: the workers would have made their own proposals and taken it badly if they were beaten, as they almost certainly would be. Moreover, any proposal, however good in itself, would have started off with the handicap of a national label. It would have been regarded as designed in a purely national interest. This was the danger that Albert Thomas saw

when he denied that the Organisation had as its main function to secure fair conditions for international competition. He realised that there could no more be a permanent industrial *status quo* as between country and country than its political equivalent. The Organisation must not be allowed to divide on those dangerous lines. It could only hope to triumph if the solutions it suggested were put forward from some source that was beyond the suspicion of serving some national policy or advantage. Moreover, if the real sense and potentiality of the Organisation was a co-ordination of world interests, if its ultimate basis was social justice for the individual and not an industrial equilibrium between States it must find a leadership which drew its strength and authority and influence from no purely national source.

In the absence of any other possibility such leadership could only devolve on the Director, who constitutionally was also Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference. From him and from him only could come proposals for action untainted by any suspicion of national manoeuvring, and if they were his proposals it followed that he must be allowed to explain and to defend them in debate. The Director therefore could not consider his rôle as equivalent to that of a national Civil Servant, nor could he be subjected to the same restraints and rules of conduct. Fortunately, the texts supported this contention, but as a matter of fact so skilfully did Albert Thomas proceed to act on it that no appeal to them was necessary.

Moreover, he did not have to invent the system of presenting the Conference with proposals for decision rather than with material for debate. The Organising Committee had already established that useful and intelligent precedent at Washington. But Albert Thomas carried it further. The Organising Committee it is true presented proposals. But at the Conference the Committee crumbled of necessity into its national elements each

with national instructions. Albert Thomas' substitution of the Office as the author of proposals had the advantage that the Office was still there to defend or explain them when the discussion at the Conference took place. Moreover, he carried the same principle into operation as regards the matters to be discussed and decided by the Governing Body. On every such question the Office, under his directions, prepared a note, setting out first the history of the question, then the various considerations which ought to be taken into account in dealing with it and concluding with definite proposals as to the decision which the Governing Body ought to take. It was not always easy to make such proposals. Often there were two or more alternatives between which a choice was almost arbitrary and there seemed no objection to leaving the choice to be taken after the discussion. But Albert Thomas refused to follow that method. The Office must make a preliminary choice and give its reasons for it. The natural result of this method was of course that the Office (as a rule the Director in person) became involved in the discussion which followed. If his proposal was opposed it was inevitable that he should give, or be asked to give, the reasons which had led to its formulation; if a counter proposal was made it would almost always happen that its essential elements had already been discussed in the Office note and reasons given for its rejection, and here again he could intervene, or would be asked to intervene, to develop those reasons.

Thus the Director had secured a position not very different from that of a Minister making and defending his proposals before a representative body.

It was, as has been said, a system which justified itself by results in the rapidity and clarity with which business was transacted. But this was certainly not Albert Thomas' main motive in following it. In his mind it had another and much more fundamental justification. The Conference and the Governing Body

might go slower or faster, they might refuse this or that proposal, they might veer off to the right or to the left, but if they were to make progress in the long run they must keep a general direction. Such general direction would not happen of itself. It could not be left to the accident of the happy thought or the fortunate and transitory orientation of one Government or another. The wind might come from a quarter which made direct progress impossible; it might fail altogether and the vessel lie becalmed, or in some tempest she might even be driven backward. But she could not be allowed just to run before whatever wind might blow. Her objective had been laid down in her original sailing orders and these must be respected. In one word, Albert Thomas' method was navigation as opposed to drift. He made others keep a clear vision of the purpose of the voyage and he had his polar star by which the best possible course might be set according to the circumstances of the weather.

Albert Thomas was accused of dominating his Governing Body. 'The Governing Body!' said one British delegate sarcastically. 'The Governing Body is not a Body and it doesn't govern anything.' That was perhaps true in the beginning. Albert Thomas' personality, his knowledge, his clear view of what he wanted and the skill and determination with which he set out to get it, aided by his superb qualities as a parliamentary debater, made him a formidable force. It was not a force that could easily be controlled by a Governing Body whose members, with a few exceptions, had no very definite views on what ought or ought not to be done. But Albert Thomas' method changed the Governing Body itself. He never kept any cards up his sleeve. His papers and proposals were fulsomely explanatory. As time went on they began to be properly digested in the Government Departments; members began to arrive equipped with information and instructions; they began to

work together and to negotiate with their colleagues in other groups; the focusing of discussion on definite points and the fact that Albert Thomas insisted on clear decisions, all these factors combined to produce a Governing Body which, in spite of its tripartite and international character, attained a cohesion which many a purely national body might envy, and became fully capable of fulfilling the functions which its name implied. When this had occurred Albert Thomas did not secure so easily the decisions he desired and sometimes he did not secure them at all. But he had a satisfaction hidden from those who sometimes triumphantly thought that he was losing ground. He had taught the Governing Body to govern.

The same process could be marked in the Conference though the conditions were different. Its larger size, the longer interval between its meetings, the variation in the composition of its delegations, dependent on the different questions to be discussed, made it less easy to achieve anything like the same cohesion.

But for that very reason the method of placing before it definite proposals which it might accept, reject or amend, but outside of the framework of which it could not stray, was of even greater importance. In a body of its size the possibilities of a roving and inconclusive debate were infinite. The system of focusing its discussions both in committee and in full Conference has certainly been the secret of its success. That system has now for many years been incorporated in its Standing Orders and it is unlikely ever to be called into question.

In following and perfecting the system instituted at Washington, Albert Thomas made the Conference a highly efficient legislative body. By providing it with the equivalent of a series of parliamentary bills (preliminary draft conventions) and by securing for the Office the right to 'explain' them he secured that its discussions should be effectively directed towards international solutions. It was thus and thus only that what would

otherwise have been no more than what Professor O'Rahilly once called 'a multi-national meeting' could be transformed into a real international conference.

But in the case of the Conference, as in the case of the Governing Body, Albert Thomas' motive was not one of merely securing efficiency. As we have seen he did not attach to the adoption of international conventions the same importance as the authors of the Organisation, in the sense that he did not regard them as the end, but only as the means, or rather as one of the means for securing something much wider and more fundamental. To restrict the Conference to its legislative task was to leave unused, or at all events, only very partially used, the greatest instrument which the Organisation possessed for the promotion of social justice. It was for this reason that, in pursuit of his idea of the Organisation's possibilities, he struggled hard to secure the discussion of the Director's Report and made use of the opportunity thus given for a survey of social problems in general. As he had led the Governing Body to a position of authority and influence, so, too, he tried to lead the Conference to a sense of its wider responsibilities as a great international social forum. In his conception the Conference provided the great meeting place of the peoples of the world. Its discussions, it was true, must be limited to social questions. But it was through the discussion of social questions that the masses could make known their wants and desires and difficulties. And who should say where the frontier of social questions lay? It must recede as social progress advanced, or even as social consciousness became keener and social education more developed. It was in the Conference, where experiences could be exchanged, where statesmen and administrators and employers and workers from all countries might confer, that that consciousness might be sharpened and that education advanced. But once again it would not happen of itself, or only in a slow and hesita-

ting fashion. There must be an impulse and a direction. And from whence could it come but from that 'living' instrument, the Office?

This I think is what Albert Thomas meant when he wrote in Paris in 1920 that the Office could be no bureaucracy. This is what he meant when he talked about attempting to state the new social programme which 'is as yet ill-defined'. It could not be a set of specified reforms, but a response of the Office and the Organisation to the needs of a growing and changing civilisation. To appreciate those needs the Office could not remain aloof from the discussions in which they were put forward. And it was only in and through those discussions that its response could be formulated in any effective way.

If this was Albert Thomas' view of the real functions of the Office it is easy to explain his view of his rôle as Director. The Organisation was an organisation of peoples. It worked through its Conference and its Governing Body. But within the Conference or the Governing Body there was nothing corresponding to a Government. The rôle, similar in some respects to that of the Government, could only be undertaken by the Director. If it was not undertaken both Conference and Governing Body must, in default of some happy accident, be fated to talk and not to decide. On the Director therefore fell of necessity the task of leadership, the task of initiative, the task of taking all those measures which might be necessary to defend the Organisation. It is this which explains Albert Thomas' assumption of the responsibility for defending the budget of the Organisation before the Assembly of the League, and it is this which explains his decision to fight the case of the Organisation's competence before the Court of the Hague.

These decisions could of course be justified on another and a narrower ground. There can be urged in defence of them strong reasons of a practical character. It can be shown that Al-

bert Thomas could not consider himself as obliged to follow the rules of conduct proper to a Civil Servant without betraying the essential interests of the Organisation he served. The reason is simple but often forgotten. The Civil Servant might well be criticised for taking certain of the responsibilities which Albert Thomas took. And he would be justly criticised because he would be taking responsibilities which belong to his political chief, *i.e.* to his Minister. The permanent head of a national Department of State is expected to distinguish between those questions which are purely administrative and those which are political. The latter are not within his competence. He refers them to his Minister and it is the Minister who takes the responsibility for the decision on them. The Minister is always there. He can be reached at any hour of the day, and for that matter any hour of the night if the question is sufficiently urgent. But the head of an international department has no Minister to whom he can appeal in this way. In the case of the Director of the International Labour Office the nearest equivalent is the Governing Body. But the Governing Body is not there all the time. It does not exist except when it is in formal session and that is only for some six hours a day for a very limited number of days every three months or so. It is not a homogeneous body, and even if it were, thirty-two persons can clearly not take decisions with the same rapidity as one. The dilemma is unescapable. Either the Director must, in the intervals between the sessions, take a great many decisions which in a national service would be referred to the Minister, or he must remain silent and inactive in the face of whatever circumstances may arise, until the next meeting of the Governing Body comes round, or until a special meeting can be got together. The second alternative means paralysis and not progress. It is clearly an impossible method for any institution which depends for its success on its response to demands from outside.

Moreover, there are certain responsibilities which the Governing Body cannot assume even if it remained in permanent session and which are normally assumed by a Minister. A Minister in fact assumes his greatest responsibilities and assumes them continuously when a proposal of the Department which is in his charge comes before Parliament. But when a proposal of the International Labour Office comes before the Conference the Governing Body splits into its component parts. It cannot in the nature of things remain a collective unit. Its Governmental members are merged into their national delegations and the workers and employers into their respective groups. Thus at a most critical period the Governing Body can in no way fulfil the equivalent of Ministerial functions.

There is still another difficulty. A Minister can only come to one decision on a question at a time, and when he does so it is a unanimous decision. But when the Governing Body comes to a decision there may be, and there often is, a minority. Suppose the decision of the majority is attacked in a national press or a national parliament. Who is to defend it? If it is not defended, it may be made ineffective and the thesis of the minority may prevail. If this is to be allowed to happen the Governing Body might as well take no decisions at all. Suppose, to take an imaginary case, the Governing Body's decision is attacked in France by a prominent statesman. Who is to reply? It cannot be the French representative on the Governing Body, who is a French Civil Servant. It cannot be the representative of another Government on the Governing Body—it is impossible to imagine the Polish or Spanish or Canadian representatives entering into a controversy in Paris. It cannot be the workers or the employers on the Governing Body since they would have no authority to represent anything else than their respective groups. The only possible representative of the Governing Body is clearly the Director, and just as clearly it is his duty to assume

this defence of the Governing Body's decisions. It is admittedly not an easy task. It must be performed without taking sides against the minority, not only because the minority has rights as well as the majority, but because the minority opinion at one meeting may become the majority opinion at some future date.

But just as it is impossible to throw a question into the Conference or the Governing Body and leave it to the accident of this or that happy or unhappy initiative, so it is equally impossible to leave the decisions of the Conference and the Governing Body to the hazard of national opinion without defence or explanation.

Thus from purely practical considerations which arise out of the structure of the International Labour Organisation we arrive at certain conclusions which imply that the responsibilities of the Director cannot be defined and limited in the same way as those of the head of a national Department of State. Albert Thomas arrived at the same conclusions and acted on them. It may be surmised that he reached them not along these lines of practical reasoning but from much more general considerations of the nature and possibilities of the Organisation. But it is interesting to note that the conclusions *are* the same. And it was characteristic of him that his theories, based on what seemed to be remote and abstract principles, so often led to methods of action which were confirmed by purely practical considerations.

If his fundamental ideas thus led to sound administrative methods, it may, however, be asked, why some of them did not lead to difficulties in an institution with the special characteristics of the I.L.O. Since he regarded the existence of Trade Unions as the necessary basis of modern society and their development as essential to its progress how could he without insincerity make any show of impartiality between the workers and the employers? Little has been said in this book of his relations with the

workers' group, save in connection with his visits to Spain and to the Pope, occasions on which he and the group did not see eye to eye. But those were differences of opinion on questions of method and not on questions of substance. Did it not follow from his general ideas that his sympathies and influence must always be with the workers, and if so must not the employers have regarded him as prejudiced against them? Questions of this kind must inevitably have occurred to the reader during his perusal of the preceding pages, and, though no attempt can be made to discuss Albert Thomas' political relations with the employers and the workers, his general effort cannot be understood without a brief indication of the nature of his attitude to these two groups.

As regards the workers it has already been made sufficiently clear that his sympathies were wholly with them and he made no attempt to disguise that fact. Their leaders, Jouhaux, Oudegeest and Mertens, were his intimate friends and they knew that they could count on him to understand their policy and to further it by every means in his power. In fact, they regarded him as one of themselves. It was just this, however, which made it possible for him on occasion to take a strong line in opposition to their views, as for example in his relations with Fascist Italy, when he felt that the interests of the Organisation required it.

What then were his relations with the employers, and in particular how was it that this champion of the workers' views came to be placed by the votes of the employers themselves in a position in which he could exercise great influence in the workers' favour? The story of Albert Thomas' appointment as Director has been told in an earlier chapter. It is recounted there as I witnessed it and in terms of the information that was available to me at the time. But it affords no explanation of the attitude of the employers. How was it that the employers were

willing to combine with the workers in order to secure the election of a man who had been bitterly attacked in his own country for the whole of his social policy while he was Minister of Munitions, who was accused of having unduly raised wages and thus increased the cost of living, of having established works committees and put into operation many other measures which the employers disliked, and who at the same time had given proof of strong personality and devastating energy? Would it not have been natural for the employers to prefer to leave the choice of a suitable candidate to the Governments on whom they could count to find someone of sufficient technical eminence but with less dangerous personal qualities and above all with colourless political views?

The explanation of the employers' attitude at Washington shows how in international decisions logical considerations may be upset by personal and national reactions in an unexpected way. When Mr. Guérin, the French employers' delegate, was first approached in favour of Albert Thomas' candidature he was violently opposed to it. He held in an extreme form the view of French employers in general which has been indicated above, and he expressed it with characteristic frankness and vigour. When, however, the workers approached the representative of the British Government, they obtained a sympathetic hearing.

The most talked of candidate as the first meeting of the Governing Body approached was Butler, in view of his part in the work at Paris and his brilliant record as Secretary-General of the Washington Conference. But the British Government had not given him any backing for the reason that they thought it was unlikely that the United States would agree to both a British Secretary-General¹ and a British Director of the I.L.O. Since

¹Sir Eric Drummond had been named as first Secretary-General of the League in the Peace Treaties.

a British candidate was thus apparently ruled out and since there was no United States candidate in sight, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Barnes, both of whom knew and appreciated Albert Thomas, were not unfavourable to his appointment. When, however, it became clear that the United States would not participate either in the League or the Labour Organisation, the objection to two British appointments became less strong and the British Government began to reconsider the position. Though the reasons which could be invoked in favour of a British appointment had to give way before political considerations connected with the United States, they could be urged with vigour when those considerations no longer obtained. The workers, who were well informed, were quick to see the possibilities of this new situation and approached Mr. Guérin again. This time they were more successful. Mr. Guérin had his own views of Albert Thomas but he reacted now as a Frenchman rather than as an employer and he displayed all his energy and pugnacity in favour of the very candidature which he had previously so emphatically refused to consider. He succeeded in convincing the other employers, with the exception of his British colleague, that Albert Thomas was the best possible candidate and that they must avoid at all costs having a Governmental nominee imposed on them. How finally the rest of the Governing Body came to agree to the proposal which thus came to be made by the employers and workers jointly has already been recounted.

Albert Thomas' hold on the employers' group, when he took up his functions, was therefore much less strong than we had imagined. It was, however, not as weak as we should have thought had the whole story then been known to us. Mr. Guérin's original attitude no doubt represented an opinion widely held in France particularly among small employers. But the bigger men who had actually worked with Albert Thomas, when he was

Minister of Munitions, saw him somewhat differently. They had no illusions about his sympathies, but they had learned to respect his intelligence and to know that they could rely on his essential fairness. The most prominent amongst them was Robert Pinot who succeeded Mr. Guérin as a member of the Governing Body. He led many a fight against Albert Thomas' policies and he fought them with the greatest skill and tenacity. Through it all, however, he remained on good personal terms with Albert Thomas, who always respected a fighter and who regarded Pinot as socially minded in spite of his attitude of opposition.

Albert Thomas' relations with Robert Pinot may in fact be taken as typical in many respects of his attitude to the employers' group.¹ He considered that the group had a useful and indeed an essential function in the scheme of the International Labour Organisation. It was, he was fond of saying, 'His Majesty's Opposition', something as necessary to the proper working of the constitution as 'His Majesty's Government.'

In Albert Thomas' mind the claims of the workers were justified. The business of the Organisation was to find ways of meeting them. The difficulties in the way of doing so were considerable, and they could not be successfully overcome save in such a way as would cause the minimum of disturbance and as would secure the assent, if not the support of public opinion. But, first and most essential step, these difficulties must be understood, and a full understanding of them could not easily be secured without the collaboration of the employers. In Albert Thomas' view the essential function of the employers was to put forward all the obstacles both technical and economic in the way of any proposed reforms. Then there could be effec-

¹For an account of the view which Robert Pinot held of the I.L.O. and of Albert Thomas' views of Robert Pinot's contribution, see *La vie et l'œuvre de Robert Pinot*, by André François Poncet.

tive discussion as to how those obstacles could be surmounted. Albert Thomas nourished no illusions as to the easy path which the Organisation must tread and it was his honesty in this respect which won him the confidence of the employers. Their attitude to him and his relations with them are admirably described in the words which Mr. Oersted, the employers' Vice-President of the Governing Body, and the Chairman of the Employers' Group, pronounced at his funeral:

'It is true that there was at times disagreement between him and the employers' representatives; it was inevitable that our points of view should differ, but I venture to say that we always understood one another, and on both sides we were always certain that there would be full respect for convictions which we realised were deep and sincere.

'All the employers' representatives found in Albert Thomas a noble and loyal friend who worked unremittingly for his ideal, but was always ready to admit the sincerity of those whose opinions differed from his own. This lofty outlook enabled him to realise, even when the employers' group was forced to oppose him, that they were entirely devoted to the ultimate aim of the International Labour Office, which is social peace.'

Mr. Oersted, it will be remarked, spoke for 'all the employers' representatives' and there is no doubt that individually they would have re-echoed his words. Could there be a better proof of the supreme ability with which Albert Thomas was able to conciliate his declared adherence to the workers' cause and his duty as Director to deal fairly with the groups in the Governing Body?

One thinks of Albert Thomas most frequently in all his splendid energy and his unflagging activity, an energy so overwhelming and an activity so sustained that it seems they must have borne down the obstacles before them like some natural force. One forgets how easily that energy might have aroused and intensified dangerous antagonisms against which his activity, had

it not been constantly controlled and guided by an objective intelligence, might have battered in vain. Behind his activity lay a plan and behind the plan a philosophy which unfortunately he never developed in any connected form. Perhaps there were socialistic elements in that philosophy, perhaps his socialist creed had been its inspiration. All that can be said is that it led him to methods which stood every practical test, judged by the needs of the Organisation, and that he used it to no other end and to no other advantage.

It is reasonable to suppose that his philosophy must have been modified, or at all events enriched by his experience as Director, and by the innumerable contacts with problems and peoples which had previously lain outside of his sphere. It is beyond question that he underwent a certain evolution as his experience widened and deepened. With all his activities he found time for reflection. He even imposed on himself a discipline of reflection as he imposed a discipline of work. In the United States when he was struggling with the English language he refused to make the same, or even a similar speech, more than once. 'I must renew my ideas' was his phrase when he set himself to frame a new speech for a quite different audience which would have been perfectly content with the speech delivered to its predecessor. 'The time has come', he said on another occasion, 'to make a re-statement of the whole socialist creed. The old formulas are out-worn. I dream of tackling the task.' Unfortunately it remained a dream, for strong as must have been the temptation, strong because the more difficult the task the more inspiring the challenge to his combative nature, it was overridden by something stronger, his passion for concrete results.

He was, as has been said, interested in men as men. Theories and statements of theories did not really interest him in themselves. He could never have turned the great power of his intellect for instance to the study of pure mathematics. And politician though

he was, with all a politician's delight in manoeuvring a Committee or a Conference, his mind was for ever bent on the actual results which through a long chain of bodies and institutions would eventually be achieved in the life or conditions of some workman or clerk. If he could have had his way he would have put the International Labour Office in the middle of the working-class quarter in an industrial city so that the staff might never forget the real object to which their efforts were directed. It was that passionate desire for concrete results which was the main-spring of his energy and the fundamental inspiration of his life. In Nanking he was presented with the draft of a labour code. It bore all the marks of the revolutionary spirit of its authors and though admirable in many of its provisions went far beyond what had been found practically possible in many highly developed countries. Albert Thomas did not hesitate to criticise it strongly and to argue that the new Chinese administration should make a start, however modest, on limited and severely practical lines. 'You must begin', he argued (I cannot reproduce the passion and sincerity of his plea), 'by prohibiting the work of young children and the exploitation of female labour. You must build up step by step a corps of factory inspectors who will enforce these provisions. Employ all your means and energy on that first and consider the rest later'. Strange advice from the man who was accused of being a theorist and a doctrinaire!

It is by concrete results that he would wish to be judged. In what measure did he achieve them? The reader has been warned that the authoritative answer to that question must come from the historian and the biographer. But there can be little doubt that when the social legislation which he inspired or initiated is examined, when his influence on the social movement and thought of his time can be weighed and measured, it will be found that his achievement did not fall far short of his ambition.

Yet when all that has been counted to his credit, there will remain something perhaps still greater. It can perhaps best be expressed as a paradox. That while his disappearance weakened many causes, and not least the great cause of international peace, and destroyed many hopes, it weakened hardly at all the great Organisation into which he had breathed a life and a personality, and the International Labour Office which he had created, without any experience to guide him, as an international instrument to serve a great international purpose. His personality had become merged in the International Labour Office, till it seemed that the two were indistinguishable. Critics, and even friends, were inclined to believe that the International Labour Office could not recover from the shock. Albert Thomas, they thought, had carried it triumphantly to a position that was over-eminant. It must now slip back to a more modest and obscure rôle. It did not. The measure of his greatest achievement is that evident fact. The International Labour Office did not shrink in activity, in influence, in prestige or importance. It continued to expand. The seeds which Albert Thomas had sown produced their harvest and the reapers were trained and ready. There was deep sorrow at the loss of a leader as loved as he was admired. But there was no jolt and no jar: no change of method: no timid shrinking from responsibilities once thought dangerous or inappropriate. All that happened was that one international servant succeeded another and the work went on.

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