MEMORANDUM ON THE EDUCATION BILL, 1917.

I DESIRE to support the suggestion which has been made by Mr. Barnes to the War Cabinet that the Prime Minister should take an opportunity of making a declaration to the effect that the Government propose to pass the Bill early next session. My reasons for taking this ground are as follows:

1st. A very considerable amount of disappointment has been felt and has been expressed throughout the country at the postponement of the Bill, and I fear that, unless some earnest of the Government's intentions be forthcoming, a suspicion will arise that the Government is not seriously desirous of attacking the fundamental problems of reconstruction.

2nd. The Bill has secured an amount of agreement unparalleled in the history of our educational legislation. Twenty-nine bishops of the Established Church have declared in its favour, and are reinforced by the Free Church Council and the Congregational Union. It is true that the Roman Catholics have manifested apprehensions lest some parts of the Bill may be injurious to their schools and may conflict with the principles upon which Catholic education proceeds. I believe, however, that the apprehensions entertained in this quarter are devoid of foundation, and rest upon a misconception of the purpose and probable working of the clauses objected to. In any case, the opposition of the Roman Catholics, should it prove to be serious, could be almost certainly overcome by a modification in the Board's regulations for secondary schools. I should add that, so far as I have an opportunity of judging, the whole body of organised labour is behind the Bill. It has the support of the Labour party in the House of Commons and of the trade unions, though in certain regions, such as Preston, there may be, and probably will be, some local labour opposition to the abolition of half-time. I venture to think that no measure of far-reaching social importance has ever obtained so large a promise of support in the whole history of this country since the abolition of slavery.

3rd. It is true that some apprehensions have been expressed by the Local Education Authorities with respect to the administrative clauses of the Bill, but in the letter which I have addressed to the Chairman of the Education Committee of the London County Council I have gone a long way to meet the objections which have been raised from this quarter, and I do not apprehend that any serious difficulty will remain if the Local Education Authorities can receive an assurance from the Government that at least 50 per cent. of their approved educational expenditure will be borne by the Treasury. On this point I am corresponding with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

4th. The opportunity is unique and will not recur. There can be no extension of popular education in this country which does
not entail some abridgment of juvenile labour in the field of industry. Indeed, we should, I take it, all desire to see a greater and more economical use of machinery, an increased number of brain workers, and a reduction in the volume of juvenile labour employed on mechanical tasks. It is the object of the Education Bill to strengthen these three interconnected tendencies, but it is clear that the purpose of the Bill cannot be effected without some dislocation of labour. There must be less industrial employment of young children, a larger employment of adults, and an extended use of machinery. The inconvenience necessarily dependent upon these changes will be very greatly lightened by demobilisation. They will therefore be much more readily accepted now than they would be at any time subsequent to the war. Bradford and Preston will grumble over the abolition of half-time in any case, but all our industries have experienced so many shocks during the war that changes which at other times would have seemed formidable, now appear to be comparatively insignificant, and there is always the hope that demobilisation will provide a new source of labour which may take the place, to some extent if not entirely, of the labour displaced by the extension of the school age. I repeat, then, that so favourable an opportunity for educational reform will not recur.

5th. Apart from the merits of the specific proposals in the Bill, the country would greatly benefit by the passage of a measure of education which commanded the general agreement of the various religious denominations, and was framed with the sole purpose of promoting educational efficiency. Nothing would be more likely to get us out of the rut of sectarian controversy than the passage of an agreed Bill to promote popular education. Such an agreement exists at the present moment. If we wait too long and allow the generous atmosphere created by the common sufferings of the war to be dispersed, I can see very little chance of substantial progress upon rational lines.

H. A. L. F.

October 31, 1917.