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Constitutional Questions

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CHAPTER VII

REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

82. The I.L.O. has devoted considerable attention in recent years to the intensification of its regional activities and important developments in regard to these activities are expected to take place during the interval between the present session of the Conference Delegation on Constitutional Questions and the 29th Session of the Conference. The 3rd Labour Conference of American States has been convened to meet in Mexico City on 1 April 1946; its comprehensive agenda will give a full opportunity to the representatives of the American Members of the Organisation to consider the further development of its regional activities in the American republics. Discussions in regard to an Asiatic regional conference are in progress and the representatives of China and India on the Governing Body have indicated their hope that agreed proposals on the subject will be approved by the Governing Body in the near future. The holding of a technical regional conference for the Near and Middle Eastern countries as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made is also in contemplation.

83. The Delegation regards these developments as a vitally important contribution to strengthening the influence of the I.L.O. in areas of the world which are confronted with particularly critical problems of labour relations and social policy; it fully recognises that in order that progress towards the application of Conventions and Recommendations by the less developed countries may be made a reality, it is necessary to provide for the intensive consideration on a regional basis of the problems and difficulties arising from the nature of the economic structure of the less developed areas of the world, from demographic and social conditions there, and from inadequate communications and shortage of technical and administrative personnel. While the problems of the various undeveloped regions have much in common, those of each region have distinctive features. The experience which the I.L.O. has already acquired is eloquent of the necessity of building the arrangements contemplated for any region with the building materials which can be found there. Only by a process of growth in each region, rooted in the

needs and aspirations of the region, can enduring results be attained. It is therefore essential to leave it to the Members of the Organisation from each region to work out, within the common framework of the world-wide activities of the Organisation, the regional arrangements best adapted to their own needs and requirements. The Delegation considers that the inclusion in the Constitution of a general provision authorising the Organisation "to convene such regional conferences and establish such regional agencies as may be desirable to promote the aims and purposes of the Organisation" would give a useful stimulus to the process of healthy autonomous growth within each region. It does not consider it desirable to include in the Constitution any detailed indications of the nature and form of the regional arrangements which may progressively develop, since, for the reasons indicated, these are unlikely to be uniform in character. It is, however, desirable that there should be general rules governing the powers, functions and procedure of regional conferences, and the Delegation accordingly recommends the inclusion in the Constitution of a further provision specifying that such rules shall be drawn up by the Governing Body, and submitted to the General Conference for confirmation.

84. As regional activities develop it may be desirable that the Office should supplement its existing network of branch offices and correspondents by the establishment of regional offices on a larger scale, equipped for the collection and distribution of information and for the organisation of regional research and of technical assistance to Governments in the region. In order to secure the necessary co-ordination between the work of such offices and the general work of the Organisation it would seem essential that their staffs should be a part of, and interchangeable with, the headquarters staff of the Office and that regular transfers of staff between headquarters and regional offices should be a matter of routine. The development of effective regional offices properly integrated in the general structure of the Organisation would necessarily be a slow process. The practical problem which would arise in the event of the establishment of such offices would be that of staffing such offices with experienced personnel having an adequate general knowledge of the International Labour Office and its methods of work, without further weakening the already inadequate central staff at present available as a nucleus around which to rebuild the Office on a peacetime scale. The only solution for this problem is to begin by rebuilding the central office to a reasonable size and then to detach from it as circumstances may require staffs for such regional offices as may prove to be desirable in the light of future developments. Temporary arrangements for the organisation of work

from regional centres may be desirable in the near future in connection with some of the regional conferences which are in contemplation, but the Office is not yet in a position to staff a series of regional offices with experienced personnel without a serious impairment of the efficiency of its central services.

85. Important as the intensification of certain of the regional activities of the International Labour Organisation may be in order to establish more effective contact between the Organisation and all parts of the world, and more particularly in order to enable the economically less developed areas to secure the fullest consideration for their special problems and draw the greatest possible advantage from the services which the Organisation can be equipped to render to them, it must never be forgotten that a regional approach affords no panacea for the problems confronting the Organisation in its efforts to contribute to the attainment of social justice on the basis of an economy of abundance throughout the world. Indeed the renewed importance which the economic interdependence of the continent will have when the difficulties of the immediate post-war period are overcome, the obvious advantages of a world-wide pooling of experience relating to our ever more complex social problems, and the fact that there are no self-contained geographical regions the social and economic problems of which can be dealt with in isolation from those of the rest of the world, all point to the importance of co-ordinating on a world-wide basis regional efforts to promote social progress. When regional developments occur within the framework of the International Labour Organisation, a large measure of co-ordination can be secured by adequate liaison arrangements without any formal demarcation of authority upon which it might be difficult to secure agreement. It has been customary for the Governing Body to be represented at regional conferences by a tripartite delegation, and for the Governing Body delegation always to include members from outside the region, who act as a link with the wider interests of the Organisation. The Delegation attaches the highest importance to the maintenance of the principle that the regional activities of the I.L.O. are designed as a contribution to a larger measure of world unity and must not be allowed to become a contributory factor in the perpetuation of disparities between different regions of the world.

86. The Delegation has considered at length, in the context of these wider considerations, whether it is desirable to include in the proposed constitutional provision referring to regional arrangements a reference to the possibility of regional Conventions. Certain members considered the adoption of regional Conventions to be positively undesirable, since it is the primary object of the

I.L.O. to establish minimum international standards of world-wide application, and the adoption of regional Conventions would be calculated to prejudice rather than facilitate the attainment of this objective; other members took the view that the inclusion of a provision on the subject in the Constitution would be premature. Accordingly, the Delegation, after full examination, without desiring to prejudice further consideration of the question in the future, recommends that no further steps should be taken in the matter at present.

87. The Delegation wishes to draw special attention to the useful part which regional conferences could play in the framing of general Conventions in appropriate cases. They would be uniquely qualified to advise on the desirability of including in such Conventions modifications of their provisions designed to take account of the special circumstances of certain countries in accordance with Article 19, paragraph 3, of the Constitution of the Organisation. Special regional meetings might sometimes be held for this purpose in cases in which no general regional conference was expected to be held prior to the matter coming before the International Labour Conference for decision. At such meetings some of the prospective parties to the proposed Convention from outside the region could also be represented with a view to ensuring that any proposals adopted would be likely to be acceptable to the International Labour Conference as a whole.
