

REPORTS AND ENQUIRIES

Labour Conditions in China

The British Foreign Office has recently published a volume of reports on labour conditions in China¹ drawn up by the British consular officers in the great majority of the consular districts of that country. The position of China with regard to the Draft Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organisation and the extent of the responsibility of foreign employers and investors for labour conditions there had been the subject of some questions in Parliament; and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who was then Foreign Secretary, wrote on 8 April 1924 to Sir Ronald Macleay, the British Minister in Peking, requesting him to have reports drawn up by the British consular authorities on labour legislation and labour conditions in China. The field to be covered was indicated in a letter of 28 March 1924 from the Ministry of Labour to the Foreign Office which contained the original suggestion that this enquiry should be made. The reports were to deal with existing labour legislation and conditions in China with special regard to the Draft Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Conference and to the organisation and development of trade unions in China. Information was also to be given with regard to the extent and nationality of foreign capital invested in industrial enterprises in the districts dealt with in each report.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Most of the reports lay emphasis on the lack of industrial development in China. The general summary of the reports prepared at Peking states :

The only ports where modern industrial undertakings, as understood in Europe, on any extensive scale are carried on are Shanghai and district (which may be held to cover the whole province of Kiangsu, and to include the factories at Wusih, Chinkiang and Nanking), Tientsin, Harbin, Hankow, Mukden, and Tsing-tao, and to a more limited extent at Canton, Newchwang and Chefoo, where modern factories are developing in the middle of local industries conducted on primitive lines.

Such a statement as the following contained in the report of the Acting Consul-General at Nanking is typical of many others :

I might preface my remarks by saying that the Nanking consular district, apart from several village or peasant industries, is not a great

¹ GREAT BRITAIN. FOREIGN OFFICE : *Papers respecting Labour Conditions in China*. China No. 1 (1925). Cmd. 2442. London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1925. 130 pp. 2s.6d.

manufacturing district. There are very few large employers of labour ; and, although the number of factories in which foreign machinery has been installed may show a steady increase, the condition of the workers remains generally unchanged, and most industrial undertakings are still run on the lines of peasant industries.

HOOURS OF LABOUR

All the reports agree that hours of labour in China are long. Some of the figures given with regard to length of working hours in various industries and areas are as follows.

The Consul-General at Shanghai states in his report :

The normal hours of labour in local British-owned cotton mills are 23½, worked in two shifts of 12 hours, allowing only two spells of 15 minutes each ; in the Japanese-owned mills 22½ hours are worked in two shifts of 12 hours, allowing two spells of 30 minutes and 15 minutes ; in the Chinese mills shifts are generally worked for 14 hours, with no spells.

The Consul at Changsha gives the following examples of hours in various occupations¹:

Occupation	Hours
Copper workers	14-15 hours a day
Engravers	11-14 hours a day
Iron workers	11 hours a day and 3 hours a night
Printers	8 hours a day
Rice hullers	10 hours a day
Shoemakers	10 hours a day
Stone seal cutters	Day shift, 8-10 hours ; night shift (not in summer), 3-6 hours
Tin workers	Winter, 16-18 hours a day ; summer, 12-13 hours a day
Hairdressers	6 a.m. to 9 p.m., though not necessarily working all the time
Hunan cotton mill	Two shifts of 12 hours each with 45 minutes rest in each shift

It is added that in almost every trade the working week consists of seven days.

The Consul-General for Canton states that in a typical match factory, the Wen Ming Match Factory, hours of work amount to 12 a day. In the Star Leather Company's tannery, which may also be taken as typical, working hours are from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Half-an-hour is allowed at midday for meals.

As an example of shorter working hours, however, it may be mentioned that it is stated that in the Electric Light Works and the alcohol and leather goods factory conducted by the Department of Industry at Foochow the employees work from 9 to 9½ hours a day.

¹ These figures do not relate to work in modern factories.

The following particulars are given with regard to hours of work in Chefoo :

Occupation	Hours a day	Average 8 ½ hours' average on whole year
Hair net examination rooms in factories		
Silk filatures	11-15	13
Straw braid	10-12	11
Peanut factories	10	
Fish industry	10-14	12

The Nanking report states that in the Tatung flour mill work goes on day and night for 7 days in a week, the factory hands working in 6-hour shifts, 12 hours on and 12 off.

The Consul for Newchwang gives the following figures. For labour in purely Chinese employ, working hours are 12 a day, ordinarily only daylight work. If night work is resorted to in emergencies, wages are doubled. For labour in foreign employ, working hours are 8 a day.

The Acting Consul at Ningpo reports :

The hours of labour are uncertain ; if there be a good demand for the articles which are being produced, the hours of labour are very long, whilst when the demand is poor, the hours of labour are shorter. In the first instance, the hours are 13 or 14 a day with a break of two days at the beginning and in the middle of the month.

At Tien-tsin the hours in engineering works are 10 to 14 a day, and "in some of the match factories the employees, including young children, are said to work from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. " In the larger factories, however, hours of work are generally in shifts of 12 hours each.

At Yunnan-fu 8 hours is said to be the average working day.

The reports as a whole would thus seem to indicate that there is a very great divergence in working hours in China. They vary from 8 hours per day to 14 or 15 hours, not only from locality to locality, but even in the same locality. Some of the reports suggest that long hours of work, in certain areas at least, are not felt to be a hardship. The Consul at Foochow, for example, in stating that hours of labour are long, adds :

I doubt whether this is generally felt to be a grievance. . . . The standard of industrial efficiency is materially lower than in Western countries. Although there is no regular weekly day of rest, the number of public or semi-public holidays is large, and the cessation of work on such holidays is very general.

WEEKLY REST AND HOLIDAYS

Closely connected with hours of labour is the question of weekly rest and holidays. In this regard also there is great divergence in practice. A report for Chefoo, for example, mentions that in the silk filatures only four holidays are given to the workers throughout the year, these being national occasions. In the hair net trade, on the other hand, Sunday is generally free, except when filling rush orders. It is also

stated that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce at Chefoo adopted a resolution for one day's rest in seven. At Kiukiang it is stated that there is no such thing as Sunday or a day of rest. The report for Foochow states that there is no regular weekly day of rest, but that the number of public or semi-public holidays is large, and the cessation of work on such holidays is very general. In other areas two days' rest per month is granted and most of the reports point out that at the Chinese New Year holidays varying from a day or two to two or three weeks are taken by the workers. In this respect also there appears to be little uniformity in practice.

WAGES

Most of the reports give particulars with regard to wage rates in certain industries within their area. The Consul-General for Canton quotes as follows from a report with regard to a typical match factory, the Wen Ming Match Factory :

The output averages 18,000 packets per day, valued at 900 Mexican dollars, and the wages bill is said to amount to approximately 700 dollars. Only the men are regular employees, paid by the month (averaging 15 dollars a month), the children and women engaged in packing, labelling, box-making, drying, and employed on the various pieces of machinery, etc., are all paid daily by piece work. The children, whose task consists in stripping the match frames and packing the boxes, earn two coppers¹ per tray of 120 boxes, and a fast worker can make as much as 30 cents a day. Women work faster, and can pack an average of 30 trays daily, but owing to being frequently unable to work from illness, they are not so much to be depended on as the child workers.

In the Star Leather Company's tannery boys receive up to 6 dollars a month according to length of service ; unskilled labourers, 8 dollars ; skilled machine workers, 12 dollars ; highly skilled splitters (by hand), 20 dollars ; and women and unskilled casual labour, 12 dollars.

The consular report for Chefoo encloses a statement from Mr. J. W. Nipps, an American Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association at Chefoo, which states that in the silk filatures the workers are paid not by the hour but by piece (or rather task) work. Each worker must handle 960 cocoons per day and must produce 8 skeins of silk, for which he receives 5 coppers per skein, or 40 coppers per day. In addition he receives his food, which costs approximately 10 coppers per day. At the end of the month those workers who have not missed a day and whose workmanship has been of a high grade receive a bonus of 100 coppers. Those who have been absent for more than two days, or whose quality of work has been poor, are fined a similar amount. Thus an average worker, not counting bonuses or fines, working every day in the month, would earn 1,200 coppers (approximately 3.40 gold dollars). In the hair net, lace, and embroidery industry ordinary workers receive from 25 to 35 coppers a day. Inspectors are paid from 40 to 50 coppers.

¹ 185 coppers = 1 Mexican dollar = 0.53 gold dollar, or 3.5 coppers = 1 gold (U. S.) cent.

The Consul at Nanking reports that in the only factories in his consular districts worthy of special mention, the one a British and the other a Chinese concern, the scale of wages does not vary appreciably from the current local rates, a coolie's pay being approximately 13,000 cash per month (equivalent to from 6.50 to 8 dollars).

The report for Newchwang gives certain information with regard to wages. For labour in purely Chinese employ it states that in the older trades, such as bean-oil manufacture, skilled workmen earn from 300 dollars to 360 dollars a year, local paper currency, or 30 dollars a month. Unskilled or second-grade workmen are paid at the rate of from 12 dollars a month upwards. In the iron trades, forges and machine shops the rate of pay works up to 30 or 40 dollars a month, with two or three meals a day. In the cloth-making industry wages ranging from 12 dollars to 20 dollars a month are earned. In the case of labour in foreign employ, the wages paid are in Mexican dollars or gold yen : 40 to 50 a month for skilled labour and about 20 dollars a month for unskilled labour. Food is not supplied. In the bristles and hair cleaning trades, as well as in the raw silk spinning trade, wages amount to 30 or 40 dollars a month, without food.

According to the report for Ningpo wages in that district are roughly as follows :

Men : skilled from 60 cents to 1 dollar a day, unskilled from 25 to 50 cents a day.

Women : skilled from 30 to 50 cents a day, unskilled from 15 to 25 cents a day.

Children : about 10 cents a day.

The general summary states that "there has been a general rise of wages during the past few years, but it is improbable that they have kept pace with the rise in the cost of living".

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

With regard to the employment of children, these reports do not add anything of much importance to the evidence contained in the report of the Shanghai Child Labour Commission¹. A communication of the Consul-General at Shanghai states :

It is the regrettable fact that there is no restriction in force governing child labour and that children in local British, foreign-owned and Chinese factories do work excessively long hours, both on day and night shifts, and that many very young children who do not work themselves accompany their parents in the factories.

The communication points out that normal hours of labour vary from shifts of 12 hours to shifts of 14 hours and that the hours worked by children and young persons are the same as those worked by adults.

The following table, which is an analysis of Appendix No. 1 of the

¹ Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. X, No. 6, Dec. 1924 : "Labour Conditions and Labour Regulation in China", especially pp. 1011-1022.

Shanghai Child Labour Commission Report, shows the nationality of factories in the district of Shanghai and the type of labour employed in them.

FACTORIES IN SHANGHAI DISTRICT, BY NATIONALITY, AND
WORKERS EMPLOYED, BY AGE AND SEX

Factories		Workers over 12		Workers under 12	
Nationality	Number	Male	Female	Male	Female
Chinese	186	19,690 (37%)	26,292 (50 %)	1,184 (2 %)	5,948 (11 %)
American	13	2,080	3,720	—	1,100
Belgian	1	20	30	—	—
Portuguese	2	75	80	—	—
French	5	219	2,660	372	2,227
Japanese	30	13,801	30,420	655	1,992
Swedish	1	50	—	—	—
Italian	7	223	3,460	440	2,770
British	26	7,614	15,918	1,612	3,209
British-American	2	1,665	3,827	247	318
Total Foreign	87	25,747 (26 %)	60,115 (59.5%)	3,326 (3 %)	11,616 (11.5%)
Total Foreign and Chinese	273	45,437 (29.6%)	86,407 (56.9%)	4,510 (14.5%)	17,564

The Consul at Amoy reports that in the country districts there are many abuses arising from the family system which require legislation. In hammering pewter, for example, the work continues from 6 a.m. to midnight, children also being compelled to work. The employment of children to carry loads greatly in excess of a normal weight is stated to be quite an ordinary occurrence.

At Chefoo, however, where from 15,000 to 20,000 girls and women are employed in the hair net, lace, and embroidery industry, it is stated that only a very few of the managers will employ girls under 12 years of age, and it is exceptional to see girls under this age at work in these factories.

In the Foochow report it is stated that in the two most important industries in that city children under 14 years of age are not employed. On the other hand, women and young persons, sometimes mere children, are employed on heavy labour, such as carrying loads of earth, bricks, timber or other building materials, night-soil buckets, scavenging, carrying bags of rice or other produce.

The Consul at Newchwang reports that female and child labour can hardly be said to exist in that part of China. Women and young girls from 10 to 16 years of age are, however, employed in the match factories for filling match-boxes. Their working hours are about 8 a day.

A darker picture is painted in the Tien-tsin report, which may be quoted here though it refers to other matters besides the employment of women and children :

The factories at Tien-tsin are for the most part overcrowded, badly ventilated, and generally insanitary. . . . Machinery is often left unfenced with the result that frequent accidents occur, especially to children. The hours of work are generally, in the larger factories, in shifts of 12 hours each. In engineering works the hours are 10 to 14 a day. In some of the match factories the employees, including young children, are said to work from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. The stoppage of work on Sundays is unusual, but some of the factories stop work twice a month for cleaning and repairing machinery. A noticeable feature in the Tien-tsin cotton mills and match factories is the "apprentice" system, under which the labour of young boys is exploited under thoroughly unsatisfactory conditions of sanitation, with no regular money wages.

Numerous rug workshops exist in Tien-tsin and Peking which may be said to be on the borderland between the old handicraft and the modern factory system. A recent writer on the rug factories in Peking, the conditions of which are generally similar to those of Tien-tsin, has described the rooms as dark, dusty and unventilated, the workrooms used as dormitories; no sanitary appliances; the hours of work 12 to 14 a day; no protective or co-operative organisation; the apprentices starting sometimes at 8 or 9 years of age, though generally at 11 or 12; no claim against employers for sickness; the only vacation ten days at China New Year, and three or four days at the spring festival, with occasionally a few days in case of a wedding or a funeral in the family; tuberculosis and trachoma both prevalent.

For Tsinan the following description is given :

Conditions in some of the factories, notably the flour mills and the hair net factories, leave very little room for improvement; and factory conditions generally are far more hygienic than the small industries, such as the manufacture of rugs or the knitting of socks, which are conducted by individual families in their homes. The dark spot in the Tsinan labour field is the child labour in the match factories and the cotton mills; but it is noteworthy that some attempt at control was made about a year ago by the publication of a police order regarding the use of phosphorus in match factories.

With regard to the maternity protection of women, little evidence is given. It is stated, however, in the report for Chefoo that in the hair net and lace trade employers voluntarily give the women four weeks' rest (i.e. two before and two after confinement) on full pay if they are regularly employed. The report for Yunnan-fu states that there are no fixed regulations in the district, but that it is customary for women to rest one month after childbirth, while persuasion is used to induce them to cease work shortly before.

GENERAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

The following paragraph is taken from Mr. Nipps report, enclosed in the consular report for Chefoo :

The sanitary conditions in silk factories are extremely bad. In order to protect the silk, the atmosphere must be kept warm and moist. Windows and doors are therefore continually closed, and the air is constantly loaded with odorous dust and germs. The workers almost uni-

versally wear no clothing above the waist. They can readily be recognised in any crowd by their sallow complexion. All workers must live in the factories. Those completing their work before night are free to go where they please, but they must return by dark. This means that only a few men get out of the factories except on special occasions. When they finish their work at night, they pull out their roll of bedding and sleep on the floors, on stray boards laid across benches, or on the ground in the courtyard. They rise at the break of day, roll up their blankets and stack them in some corner until night. Thus they work, eat and sleep in the same quarters.

On the other hand, other reports give evidence of factories in which sanitary conditions are excellent. The report for Nanking, for example, contains this passage :

The following notes on working conditions at the International Export Company's factory may be of interest. The buildings are fire-proof, clean, well lighted and well ventilated. Dining rooms and modern sanitary arrangements are installed ; and the personal cleanliness of employees is insisted upon. The working day is probably long, but every effort is made to allow the employees a part of Saturday and the whole of Sunday for rest and recreation. A First-Aid Department attends to accident cases ; sick men are sent, when necessary, to the port medical officer ; and regular employees off work through sickness are paid on proof being furnished. Women are employed for very light work only, and only a few boys are employed as office boys.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNIONISM

Much evidence is given with regard to the development of trade unionism and the organisation of the Chinese guilds. The volume contains a very interesting memorandum on the organisation and development of trade unionism in Shanghai, in which it is pointed out that the development of trade unionism in Shanghai dates from the war ; the labour movement started in 1916, and continued to exist in a feeble way until 1919, when a great development began to take place. The memorandum includes a translation of an Order of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce in Peking, in which rules are given with regard to the organisation of unions of employers or of workers. Summaries of the rules of some of the Chinese trade unions are also given, together with a list of 44 unions in Shanghai, with a total membership of 84,000 workers. Of these unions the largest are the Shanghai Carpenters' and Masons' Guild with 50,000 members and the Chun An Sailors' Association (American Trade) with 10,000 members. Apart from Shanghai, trade unionism in the modern sense is said to be unknown, except in the south at Canton and Swatow, and to a limited extent at Amoy and also at Harbin, which is in close contact with the Soviet régime. Throughout the whole country, however, the ancient organisation of guilds continues to exist. A long and interesting account of the guild system is given in the report for Foochow, and the Consul for Changsha gives a list of what amount to collective agreements fixed between the masters and men in the various industrial guilds.

The volume also contains information with regard to the amount of foreign capital invested in industry in China, statements as to the extent to which labour conditions would appear to conform to the Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Conference and the Chinese Provisional Factory Regulations of 29 March 1923, and a reprint of these Regulations and of the Report of the Shanghai Child Labour Commission.

Statistics of Land Reform in Esthonia

A comprehensive and detailed scheme of land tenure reform was introduced in the Esthonian Republic by the Land Act of 10 October 1919 and some earlier Acts, the purpose of which was to expropriate the whole of the former large estates and divide them up so as to make a large number of new small holdings. Successive Governments were anxious to carry out the provisions of the law and at the end of 1924 so much progress had been made in dividing up the land that the reform could be considered as complete, at least in broad outline. In 1922, the third year of the reform, the Government took a census of the results to that date; a report containing the statistics obtained has been published by the Esthonian Central Statistical Office¹. The present article, dealing with the most important of these statistics, especially those which illustrate the social effects of the reform, is based on a summary provided by the Statistical Office, and containing also figures for 1923 and 1924 so far as available.

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND BEFORE THE REFORM

Before the introduction of the reform the total area² of the large estates in Esthonia was about 2,222,500 dessiatins³, comprising 1,149 properties with an average area of 1,935 dessiatins; while the area occupied by small owners was 1,611,900 dessiatins, comprising 51,640 properties with an average area of 31.2 dessiatins. In other words, the average large estate was 62 times the size of the average small property. But on the large estates the amount of agricultural land

¹ ESTHONIA. RIIGI STATISTIKA KESKBÜROO: *Asumaa Majapi-damised Eestis 1919-1923*. (New farms created 1919-1923.) Tallinn, 1924.

² These figures do not cover the Petseri district and the districts on the far side of the river Narova.

³ 1 dessiatin = 2.70 acres = 1.0925 hectares.