

commonly mentioned, e.g. six days in the bulb district, three in Loosduinen, five in Koedijk, etc. In the dairy industry the number of days' holiday with pay varies from three to eight.

## The Housing of Agricultural Workers in France

The National Council of Labour Supply (*Conseil national de la main-d'œuvre*) in France, which is an official body attached to the President of the Council and representative of the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, employers, workers, and the Ministries of Labour, Agriculture, the Interior, Foreign Affairs, the Colonies, Public Works, and Transport, has published a report of its proceedings in 1926-1927 referring to the supply of agricultural labour.<sup>1</sup> The report falls into two parts. The first part on "Causes of the instability of alien labour in agriculture" naturally leads on to the second part on "Rural housing", inasmuch as defective rural housing is considered one of the main reasons for dissatisfaction among the large number of alien agricultural workers whose engagement in French agriculture is a necessity in view of the difficulty of obtaining French workers for this industry.

In the case of alien agricultural workers there are certain differences in national customs which cause difficulty. Workers coming from cold climates are accustomed to double doors and windows and to much more powerful heating than is customarily provided in French farm workers' lodgings. Workers from some other countries are not used to cooking their meals over an open hearth; they expect to have their dwelling-places whitewashed inside and out. Workers from the North, from the Netherlands, Sweden, etc., are "accustomed to a real standard of comfort" and are not satisfied with what is accepted as good lodging on French farms.

Apart from these admitted differences of national standard or only of national custom, it has long been the opinion of more progressive French agriculturists that French farm-house lodging requires to be brought up to the mark on behalf of all workers in French agriculture. A fairly decided tone has recently been adopted in the resolutions passed at various French agricultural congresses. The Ninth General Congress of French Agriculture at Strassburg in 1927 resolved "emphatically to bring to the notice of Parliament the need for passing an Act to suppress certain existing abuses as to rural accommodation and rural sleeping quarters".

As a matter of fact, a private member's Bill (the "proposition Chaussy") was sent up by the Chamber of Deputies to the Senate as long ago as 22 December 1924, but has never proceeded further, great

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<sup>1</sup> MINISTÈRE DE L'AGRICULTURE, SERVICE DE LA MAIN-D'ŒUVRE ET DE L'IMMIGRATION AGRICOLES: *Les questions agricoles au Conseil national de la main-d'œuvre (session de 1926-1927)*. Paris, 1928. 35 pp.

opposition being felt to its terms. This Bill included a categorical prohibition of the custom, still prevailing in some districts, of housing staff in charge of stock in the actual building occupied by the animals without a sufficient intervening partition (commonly known as "cou-chage à la paille"), and provided that, at latest within the six months following the promulgation of the Act, public Administrative regulations should fix the general conditions for the lodging of wage earners on agricultural undertakings. The Bill was considered too onerous and may now for practical purposes be reckoned to have been replaced by the Bill presented at length, after a delay of four years, by the Senate reporter himself, Mr. Courtier, on 17 January 1928, acting in the name of the various Senate Commissions to which the 1924 Bill had been referred. This new Bill, while including the suppression of human sleeping accommodation in direct contact with the animals, leaves the details of the necessary measures to be settled by public administrative regulations, and fixes the period within which constructional changes must be carried out at from one to three years according to the size of the farm. Moreover, it permits the farmer to appeal to the Minister of Agriculture from the order made against him, allows him to recover for wilful damage done to his new buildings by workers occupying them, and makes arrangements for low-interest-bearing long-term building loans, not exceeding 100,000 francs per enterprise, and repayable in twenty-five years, from the Rural Credit Funds.

A resolution having been submitted containing *inter alia* a request that the discussion of this Bill by the Senate should be expedited, the Permanent Committee of the National Council of Labour Supply instructed a subcommittee to examine the question. From the brief summing up of the existing situation which was laid before the Council of Labour Supply the following descriptive paragraphs may be quoted.

Workers' housing conditions, either definitely below standard or merely too primitive, are beyond question among the most potent causes of the rural exodus.

It is true that remarkable improvements have been brought about on a great many large farms during the last few years. But a great deal remains to be done, and many farms offer their workers accommodation only in cowsheds or stables, in bunks nailed to the wall, furnished with mattress and coverlets but without sheets. Even if sheets were provided, it would be impossible to keep them clean or to insist on their being kept clean, as it is often difficult for the occupant to undress.

Lighting is often reduced to the storm lantern, used for working in the shed or stable. Washing accommodation is mostly non-existent and has to be sought at the pump or from the stable pails. Drying clothes in bad weather is impossible.

In fact, conditions are approximately those met by soldiers in time of war. They are not so bad as to interfere with life, but they fail to correspond with modern standards of comfort or health and drive the worker to the public house. Because of them farm workers are more and more difficult to get. The superior elements in the agricultural population will no longer consent to such conditions; it may be noted that experience of urban or even of barrack life, where conditions are, after all,

only of very moderate comfort, frequently leads to a refusal on the part of young countrymen to return to the land.

While accommodation in stables is below standard, accommodation of single workers or of families of workers in such other quarters as the farm can offer is often most primitive on the scores of cleanliness (owing to bad surface of floors or walls), lighting (owing to insufficient window space), heating, bedding, and washing accommodation. . . . Finally, as well as bad housing there is the question of lack of housing.

The causes of this state of affairs, in the opinion of the writers of the report, are economic. French agriculture has for a long time past been running on too narrow a margin of profits. A very considerable difficulty arises out of the lack of arrangements for compensating the tenant for improvements at the end of his lease.

On 28 March 1927 the National Council of Labour Supply adopted an important resolution, which, together with the text of the Senate Bill subsequently drafted, may be considered to have brought the whole subject once again into the range of practical politics. The resolution requests the Government to take all useful measures to give legislative force :

A. To the following proposals, which are inspired by the Recommendation of the International Labour Conference of Geneva, 1921, concerning the living-in conditions of agricultural workers ;

(a) to take statutory or other measures to regulate the living-in conditions of agricultural workers with due regard to the special national climatic or other conditions affecting agricultural work, after consultation with the employers' and workers' organisations concerned, if such organisations exist.

(b) Such measures shall apply to all accommodation provided by employers for housing their workers either individually, or in groups, or with their families, whether the accommodation is provided in the houses of such employers or in buildings placed by them at the workers' disposal.

(c) Such measures shall contain the following provisions :

(i) Unless climatic conditions render heating superfluous, the accommodation intended for workers' families, groups of workers, or individual workers should contain rooms which can be heated.

(ii) Accommodation intended for groups of workers shall provide a separate bed for each worker, shall afford facilities for ensuring personal cleanliness, and shall provide for the separation of the sexes. In the case of families, adequate provision shall be made for the children.

(iii) Stables, cowhouses, and open sheds shall not be used for sleeping quarters, unless such sleeping quarters in stables, cowhouses, and open sheds fulfil the conditions laid down in paragraphs (i) and (ii) and are provided with means of outside ventilation and natural lighting.

B. To practical means designed to give actuality to the above proposals, such practical means to be sought in the sphere of moral and pecuniary stimulus, in taxation relief, and in credit facilities ;

C. To instructions authorising the Agricultural Credit Funds to issue to rural proprietors long-term individual loans for the purpose of

aiding in the construction, alteration, improvement, or transformation of buildings destined for the accommodation of agricultural workers.

D. The Council recommends agricultural societies to undertake, in consultation with the administrative authorities concerned with agriculture, a propaganda campaign among farmers to encourage them to make such improvements to their buildings as are immediately practicable.

The wording of paragraph A (c) in this resolution, on the vital point of the suppression of accommodation in stables, cowhouses, and open sheds, departs from the text of the International Labour Conference Recommendation by adding the permissive words "unless such sleeping quarters etc.". The rest of paragraph A, descriptive of standards to be followed in providing agricultural workers' accommodation, follows the Recommendation textually. The Senate Bill, as already stated, provides that the details of the measures to be taken to suppress the assigning to staff in charge of stock of sleeping quarters in direct contact with the animals in a cowhouse or stable shall be fixed by public administrative regulations.

It may be noted that two Acts, the Act of 5 August 1920 on Agricultural Credit and Co-operation and that of 5 December 1922 on Cheap Housing and Small-holding to some extent encourage the construction or reconstruction of rural housing in general. But their application is insufficient. However, under the new Act of 13 July 1928 on housing introduced by Mr. Loucheur, considerable encouragement is to be given to rural housing.

This Act makes provision for the construction or the transformation of 260,000 dwellings (of which number 200,000 are to be cheap and 60,000 medium-rent dwellings) over a period of five years. The Act particularly stipulates that a third of the credits voted for the execution of this programme is to be reserved to rural districts.

Financial assistance is to take the form of loans at low interest up to 40 or 50 per cent. of the value of buildings in the case of new buildings, and up to a maximum of 25,000 francs in the case of restoration, sanitary improvements, or transformation, of buildings already existing. Non-recoverable grants, ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 francs per dwelling, may be made to large families, disabled soldiers, war widows, and workers incapacitated as a result of their occupation.

In addition, as this financial assistance should, according to the Act, be carried out through the agency of recognised public utility institutions, it is stipulated that if the necessary institutions to meet the needs of all the communes are not voluntarily created during the six months following the promulgation of the law, the Departmental authorities shall set them up on their own authority.

This assistance will benefit "agricultural workers, small proprietors or cultivators without large resources"; it is not designed to meet the case of the large farmer who has to construct accommodation for a number of workers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SOCIÉTÉ ET UNION CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DES AGRICULTEURS DE FRANCE: *Le problème du logement*. (Typescript.) 31 pp.