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I.L.O. Notes

FOREWORD

These notes mark the introduction of a new feature in the *International Labour Review*. It has often been pointed out that readers of the *Review* are not kept sufficiently well informed about the general activities of the Organisation. No doubt the articles and other material published in the *Review* provide a good deal of information as to the current research work carried on by the various departments of the Office on the important economic and social problems of international interest which are engaging its attention, and they often offer the occasion of recording how the Organisation came to take up the study of any particular question, and what conclusions or decisions relating to it have already been taken or seem to be possible. But with the exception of the annual article on the proceedings of the International Labour Conference, the information thus placed at the reader's disposal has had neither continuity nor method.

It is true that in the general programme of the publications of the Office the task of providing current information on the everyday life of the Organisation has been more particularly reserved for *Industrial and Labour Information*. But as readers of the *Review* have often neither the time nor the opportunity to read the weekly publication as well, it seemed that it might be useful to give at the beginning of the *Review* some brief notes on the general activities of the Organisation, without otherwise changing the contents and repeating to any serious extent what is published elsewhere. These notes will not take the form of a continuous record, but rather of occasional references to recent events of importance in the life of the Organisation.

On this first occasion, the opportunity is taken to give a general survey of the work of the International Labour Organisation during 1934.

THE WORK OF THE ORGANISATION DURING 1934

The year 1934 was an important one in the history of the International Labour Organisation.

On 20 August of that year, the United States officially accepted Membership of the Organisation, and a month later the U.S.S.R. acquired Membership by virtue of its entry into the League of Nations. Afghanistan and Ecuador also became Members in September. Thus sixty-two nations now belong to the International Labour Organisation, which has therefore reached a decisive stage on its way to becoming definitely a universal institution.

Its universal character has moreover been emphasised within the structure of the Organisation itself, as a result of the coming into force of the amendment of the Treaty of Peace—the application of which had remained in suspense for twelve years—allowing the election, for the first time, of an enlarged Governing Body. The amendment assures a closer collaboration of the Governments, employers, and workers of extra-European countries.¹

These developments will afford the Organisation greater possibilities of success in connection with the problems raised by the depression throughout the world, which, owing to their great and varying scope, can only be dealt with properly by an institution of world-wide extent.

It is evident that the effective participation of the United States will, on the one hand, provide the Organisation with very valuable information on the great effort of economic reconstruction which is being carried on by President Roosevelt's Administration, and which interests all other countries, and, on the other hand, will bring new life and new points of view into the international discussion of the steps to be taken to combat the stagnation of economic life, as well as unemployment.

This will be particularly noticeable in dealing with the problem of hours of work, one of the chief tasks of the Organisation, and one in connection with which the United States has acquired most valuable first-hand experience. At its 1934 Session, the International Labour Conference took no definite decision on the question, but it was placed on the agenda of the 1935 Session in a form which is somewhat analogous to the American system of codes, since it aims at the adoption of a Convention providing for the reduction of hours of work throughout the sphere of economic activity, but allowing the applica-

¹ Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, Sept. 1934, pp. 284-286.

tion of the reform industry by industry, with the adaptations appropriate to each case.

At its 1934 Session, moreover, the International Labour Conference achieved definite progress in this field by adopting a Convention on the reduction of hours of work in automatic sheet glass works—to the same effect as that adopted in 1931 for the limitation of hours of work in coal mines. It is hoped to secure the partial revision of this latter Convention in order to facilitate its ratification.

In another field, directly allied to the social consequences of the depression, the Conference last year obtained an important success by adopting an International Convention on unemployment insurance and assistance for the unemployed. All the States which ratify it are bound to set up a system which will ensure that persons involuntarily unemployed shall receive a benefit (compulsory or voluntary insurance), or an allowance (assistance), or a combination of the two.

At the same Session, the Conference extended the scope of the 1925 Convention on compensation for occupational diseases by including additional processes and diseases, one of the diseases so added being silicosis. It also adopted a partial revision of the 1919 Convention prohibiting the night work of women; the general lines of the Convention were left untouched, but certain minor changes were made with a view to facilitating ratification by a larger number of countries.

The total number of Conventions adopted by last year's Conference was therefore four.¹ The Conference also accomplished the first stage in the preparation of two Draft Conventions to be submitted to the 1935 Session for adoption. One of these concerns the conservation of pension rights of migrant workers, a question of particular interest for countries having a very complete system of social legislation. The other, aiming at the prohibition of the employment of women in underground work in mines, is, on the other hand, mainly important for countries which are yet only in the first stages of industrial development. The contrast presented by these two problems is characteristic of the wide field of action of the Organisation.

No less significant is the choice of the questions which the Governing Body of the International Labour Office has decided to bring to the attention of the International Labour Conference for the first time in 1935; the agenda of that Session comprises, besides

¹ For a detailed account of the proceedings of the Eighteenth Session of the Conference, cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, Sept. 1934, pp. 277-320.

the problems of the unemployment of young persons and holidays with pay, the recruiting of Native labour in colonies and in other territories where labour conditions are similar.

The International Labour Office has drawn up carefully documented reports on these various problems to serve as a basis of discussion by the Conference.¹ It has also made preliminary studies of general questions suitable to be brought before the Conference at a later date, such as safety of workers in the building industry, the employment of children in the cinematograph industry, the recruiting and placing of migrant workers, collective agreements, etc.

Further, entirely apart from any proposal for international regulations, the Office has investigated, in the light of the experience already gained in many countries, the possible lines of a rational public works policy, aimed at ameliorating unemployment and creating new economic activity.² It may be recalled that last year's Session of the Conference adopted a resolution in favour of more co-operation between States in this matter.

The principal studies published by the Office during the year dealt with the organisation of "Social Services" in 24 countries³, "Industrial Hygiene" (an account of the basic principles of general regulations for industrial health)⁴, "International Standardisation of Labour Statistics"⁵, "International Comparisons of Cost of Living"⁶, "Hours of Work in Postal Services"⁷, "Safety in Spray Painting"⁸, etc. The Office also continued to follow the progress of "Social and Economic Reconstruction in the United States" with the greatest attention, and published a new and particularly important study on this subject.⁹

The report of one of the Assistant Directors of the Office, Mr. Fernand Maurette, on "Social Aspects of Industrial Development

¹ International Labour Conference, Nineteenth Session, Geneva, 1935. The following reports have been published up to the present: *Unemployment among Young Persons*, Report III (Grey-Blue), 189 pp.; *The Recruiting of Labour in Colonies and in Other Territories with Analogous Labour Conditions*, Report IV (Grey), 282 pp.; *Holidays with Pay*, Report V (Grey), 117 pp.

² Cf. the study just published: *Public Works Policy*. Studies and Reports, Series C (Unemployment), No. 19. Geneva, 1935. iv + 166 pp.

³ Studies and Reports, Series M (Social Insurance), No. 11. Geneva, 1933. xxiii + 688 pp.

⁴ Idem, Series F (Industrial Hygiene), No. 14. Geneva, 1934. 48 pp.

⁵ Idem, Series N (Statistics), No. 19. Geneva, 1934. 64 pp.

⁶ Ibid., No. 20. Geneva, 1934. viii + 146 pp.

⁷ Idem, Series D (Wages and Hours of Work), No. 21. Geneva, 1935. iv + 95 pp.

⁸ Idem, Series F, Second Section (Safety), No. 7. Geneva, 1935. 105 pp.

⁹ Idem, Series B (Economic Conditions), No. 20. Geneva, 1934. viii + 401 pp.

in Japan ”¹, aroused the greatest interest in industrial, commercial, and labour circles everywhere ; the more so as it was a first contribution towards the solution of the questions of competition and standards of living which have arisen almost universally owing to the rapid industrial development of certain countries that, until recently, had remained outside the main currents of international competition.

This question was frequently raised at last year's Session of the International Labour Conference, or at meetings of the Governing Body, by delegates of all Groups and from all parts of the world.

Finally, the great progress achieved in 1934 by international social legislation in extra-European countries cannot be too greatly emphasised. Of 57 ratifications of Conventions which were registered during the year, 44 were by countries of Latin America and 3 by China.

If to these developments are added the visits of the Director of the International Labour Office, Mr. Harold Butler—in the spring to Rumania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, in the autumn to the United States and Mexico—the mission of Mr. Maurette to Japan, and those made by various officials of the Office to South America, it will be found that a steady tendency towards universality stands out definitely as the leading feature of the activity of the International Labour Organisation in 1934.

¹ Studies and Reports, Series B (Economic Conditions), No. 21. Geneva, 1934. 69 pp.