



REPORTS AND ENQUIRIES

Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation in Ireland¹

The forms in which vocational associations participate in the organisation of the social and economic life of a country have been in the forefront of discussion for many years, and a variety of systems have been adopted or tried in different countries of the world. It was in recognition of the importance of the problem of the relations between the State and the organised forces of labour and production that the question of "Methods of Collaboration between the Public Authorities, Workers' Organisations and Employers' Organisations" was placed on the agenda of the International Labour Conference—originally for the session that was to have been held in June 1940 but did not take place, and subsequently for the special session held in New York in October-November 1941. On that occasion, the Conference adopted a resolution which, among other things, recognised that methods of collaboration must vary according to circumstances, and that "positive results can best be assured by development along the lines of national experience", always provided that collaboration is based on the principles of freedom of association enunciated in the resolution.²

The recently published report of the Irish Commission on Vocational Organisation, which is briefly summarised in the following pages, affords an interesting illustration of such development along the lines of national experience. After an examination of the different types of vocational organisation displayed by chosen groups of countries, and a very full description of the present situation in Ireland, the Report makes detailed recommendations for the building up of a comprehensive system of organisation, adjusted to the requirements of each main department of social and economic life, and culminating in a National Vocational Assembly, the plan for which presents certain resemblances to the structure of the International Labour Organisation.

The Commission on Vocational Organisation was appointed by the Irish Government on 10 January 1939 to examine and report on:

¹ COMMISSION ON VOCATIONAL ORGANISATION: *Report, 1943* (Dublin, Stationery Office, 1944). li+539 pp. 7s. 6d.

² Conference of the International Labour Organisation, 1941, New York and Washington, D.C.: *Record of Proceedings* (Montreal, 1941), p. 166.

- (a) The practicability of developing functional or vocational organisation in the circumstances of this country;
- (b) The means best calculated to promote such development;
- (c) The rights and powers which should be conferred and the duties which should be imposed on functional or vocational bodies and, generally, the relations of such bodies to the Oireachtas [Parliament] and to the Government; and
- (d) The legislative and administrative measures that would be required.

The Most Reverend Michael Browne, Bishop of Galway, was appointed Chairman of the Commission and the members were chosen for their special knowledge in the field of vocational organisation; they included dignitaries of the Protestant Church, Members of Parliament, representatives of employers' and workers' organisations, co-operative societies, and women's institutes, and other experts in social and economic matters.

The Report of the Commission, completed in 1943 and recently released for publication, is the outcome of four years of investigation and discussion. Some evidence of the scope, variety, and complexity of the Commission's task is furnished by the fact that preceding the 539-page Report are no less than 40 pages devoted to an analytical table of contents. The Report itself is divided into four main parts:

- (1) Theory and history of vocational organisation;
- (2) Vocational organisation in foreign countries in recent years;
- (3) Vocational organisation in Ireland today;
- (4) Recommendations made by the Commission to the Government.

In Part I, the Report defines the meanings of the term "vocational organisation", examines the theory of vocational organisation and traces its history from the guilds of the ninth century to the trade unions and other vocational bodies of the twentieth century.

In Part II, the Report describes the various developments and forms of vocational organisation which have been actually realised in different States of the present day. The object of the Commission was to discover kinds or varieties of vocational organisation and their relation to different political and social environments. In regard to this relation the Commission "found it convenient to classify modern States" into five groups, as follows:

First, there were those States such as Italy and Portugal, which of set purpose developed vocational organisation and integrated it to some extent in their political structure. Secondly, there were democratic States which had no sympathy with corporative or fascist ideals and in which a Labour Party formed the Government, *e.g.*, New Zealand and Sweden. In the third class, we put States, *e.g.*, Denmark and Finland, with a mainly agricultural economy as we wished to pay special attention to the part played by vocational organisation in such countries. Fourthly, we took the large group of States, *e.g.*, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, which had a parliamentary democratic constitution, with little State regulation or planning. In a fifth and separate class

we placed those States, such as Germany and Russia, which had a totalitarian single-party dictatorship with full powers of State regulation, but were hostile or indifferent to vocational organisation.

In dealing with these various countries, the Commission used among other sources of information the report on *Methods of Collaboration between the Public Authorities, Workers' Organisations and Employers' Organisations* prepared by the International Labour Office with a view to discussion by the International Labour Conference in 1940.¹ The Report states that the Commission found the Office report full of valuable information and often had occasion to refer to it.

From the examination of the position of vocational organisation in these twelve different States, the Commission drew the following broad conclusions:

(1) In every type of political and social constitution vocational organisation exists in some form and degree.

(2) In totalitarian States its autonomy and freedom are minimised and it is made to serve the political objectives of the party in power.

(3) In free countries its freedom and autonomy are preserved and it performs the function of defending vocational interests, of regulating wages and conditions, of co-ordinating production, and of advising Governments on the technical problems of economic and social life. In these countries there has been in the last century a remarkable growth of vocational organisation in the professions, among employers, and among workers. This growth has been in numbers, in functions and in structure. Organisation has tended to become more closely knit and more active.

(4) The extent to which Governments and Legislatures have encouraged and utilised vocational organisation has varied according to national circumstances, but in all free countries we find a constant and common demand of organised professions, industry, agriculture, and business to have some share in economic government and to be at least consulted in regard to the laws and decrees which vitally affect their livelihood and status.

Part III of the Report studies in detail the existing situation of vocational organisation in Ireland, the problems that have to be solved by it, and the types of solution that have been tried and that failed or succeeded.

The survey follows the division of functional life "which has been more or less recognised internationally for statistical purposes", and treats in separate chapters the vocational organisation in: (a) the professions; (b) agriculture; (c) industry; (d) commerce; (e) transport; (f) finance; (g) personal services; (h) public administration and social services.

A study of this kind had never been attempted before in Ireland and may be considered as the most valuable source of information on vocational organisation in that country.

The Commission noted many defects and much incompleteness,

¹ See above, p. 49. The Commission also made use of the supplementary report prepared by the Office for the New York Conference, entitled *Wartime Developments in Government-Employer-Worker Collaboration* (Montreal, 1941).

and stressed the necessity to foster and encourage the development of voluntary organisation of an organic kind in the field of economic and social activity. It also examined the legal status of various bodies, their rights, duties, privileges, and functions. "We have noticed", adds the Report, "that these are designed to promote not only industrial peace and order as between the conflicting classes of employers and wage earners, but also greater wealth production, better distribution, and more efficient service in the interests of the people as a whole." Arising out of this, the Commission traced the development of efforts to plan, regulate, and direct industrial life. Its judgment was that such planning as appeared was sectional, local, piecemeal, and unbalanced, and that it neglected one overriding factor—the necessary unity of the economic structure.

Part IV, the most important of the Report, contains detailed recommendations under the same eight headings as are used in Part III: the professions, agriculture, industry, transport, finance, personal services, and public administrative and social services. The Report does not suggest one uniform system for all these branches of social and economic life, since they differ so much in functions, needs, and outlook as to require each its own method or organisation.

However, in its recommendations, the Commission aimed at providing, so far as possible on the basis of existing employers' and workers' organisations, for each distinct craft or trade a vocational board, consisting of both employers and workers, which would represent the views and needs of that vocation. The Report suggests that these boards should in certain cases unite to form multi-vocational or functional bodies to deal with matters in which several vocations are engaged and have a common interest, *e.g.*, education, law, and public health in the case of professions; cereals, textiles and clothing, footwear and leather, pig products, and building, in the case of industry. But the Commission also saw the need of a higher form of unity and co-ordination. The professional group, agriculture, industry, commerce, transport, and finance form each a distinct and unified whole, whose constituent members have common interests, and consequently the Commission endeavoured to provide for each a representative body, as follows:

- (1) A Professional Commission;
- (2) A National Agricultural Conference;
- (3) A National Industrial Conference;
- (4) A National Commercial Conference;
- (5) A National Transport Council;
- (6) A National Finance Council.

These bodies, it is specified, would all be national in extent and democratic in form, and each would be constituted from all the elements vocationally engaged in the category in question. It was the object of the Commission to enable the members of each vocation to co-operate for the good not merely of each vocation, but also of the great economic branches to which each belongs, and to formulate

with complete liberty and responsibility their own views of what each branch requires. Hence, the National Industrial Conference, for instance, would include not only owners or employers, but also workers, "who are their collaborators in the production of wealth as well as their competitors in sharing the rewards. In contrast to the present situation in which plans for the promotion of a particular industry can be adopted without due advertence to the harm or loss likely to be inflicted thereby on other industries", in the proposed National Conference, all industries would be represented, and opposing interests would have an opportunity of explaining their case before a decision is taken.

At the apex of the vocational pyramid, the Report recommends that the six vocational representative bodies mentioned above should join in the formation of a supreme national organ, the *National Vocational Assembly*.

It is obvious, states the Report, that vocational organisation is incomplete if it stops at the occupational level. Each of the six principal occupational groups cannot act in complete isolation; no one of them can secure either industrial peace or more efficient production independently of the others. Wage rates and price levels in one may affect the others, production and prosperity in one may be seriously hampered by weakness or failure in others. The welfare of each vocation depends on the efficiency of other vocations in their allotted function and on the security and prosperity of the nation as a whole. Thus the progress of agriculture depends on the service given by finance and transport, on the prices charged by industry, commerce, and the professions, and on the general level of prosperity of the community. Hence, it is clear that these main groups should come together to consider all the matters which are of common interest, to discuss divergent claims or views on these matters, and to reach the maximum degree of co-operation in the national interest. There is need of a central body in which the views and claims of each vocation will be tested and judged by the criterion of the common national interest.

However, the Commission rejected the suggestion that functional or vocational bodies should be employed as agencies for the recruitment of a Legislative Chamber. The functions of vocational bodies in regard to legislation should be confined strictly to the tendering of independent advice on technical aspects of "social and economic questions". "Any mixture or confusion of the political and vocational", says the Report, "would be fatal, as the political element would soon dominate and at once would discredit and nullify the vocational character of the body."

The National Vocational Assembly should be composed of 120 members to be elected in the following proportions: National Agricultural Conference, 40; National Industrial Conference, 20; National Commercial Conference, 10; National Transport Council, 10; National Finance Council, 10; Professional Commission, 10; co-opted by the elected members, 20.

The Commission did not endeavour to allocate seats to the different vocations in strict proportion to numerical and economic importance, but tried to devise a workable scheme which would conform in a general way with the economic configuration of the country.

The Report notes that it is the essence of the Commission's recommendation that both employers and workers will be fairly represented. Members of the Assembly should not be eligible for membership of the Parliament, but should have the title of National Councillor.

The functions of the Assembly would fall into three main divisions: co-ordination, planning, and consultation.

In regard to co-ordination, the Assembly should act as the supreme vocational authority. It should be the final Court of Appeal in the case of disputes concerning vocational matters; it should endeavour to secure harmony and co-operation between vocational bodies; and where vocational organisation is defective or lacking, it should take appropriate measures to promote it.

Moreover, the Assembly should be the supreme centre of vocational effort for the two main functions of vocational organisation, namely, industrial peace and the regulation of production.

It should harmonise and develop the various joint endeavours of each vocation to provide fair wages and conditions. If any particular vocation were to plead that it could not afford a proper standard because of unfair competition or of handicaps in connection with finance, transport, raw materials or equipment, the Assembly should examine into the case and advise on the proper measures for remedying it. Similarly, the Assembly should have the function of promoting and supervising the measures which each vocation may adopt for the regulation of competition, production or marketing. While each vocation should be urged to set its own house in order, it should be the duty of the Assembly to see that the general interest is safeguarded and that the policy and progress of regulation are co-ordinated.

In regard to industrial peace, social security, and economic regulation, in which new problems are constantly arising and new methods being discovered, the Report sees an immense field of work for the deliberations of a National Vocational Assembly.

The second main function of the Assembly should be to plan. The existence of unemployment and emigration is a constant reminder of defects that call for attention. It should be the duty of a National Vocational Assembly to consider such problems, to examine remedies, to calculate their cost, and to propose for adoption the policy or procedure that is possible with given resources in a given time, as well as to indicate how this could be geared up to secure the maximum effort in case of emergency.

All would agree, stresses the Report, that democracies are bound to make the maximum use of their resources and to plan economic life in accordance with the dictates of social justice. The whole organised economy of the country should devote itself to the task so as to secure that planning will not be external, imposed, unwisely contrived and regardless of cost, but will be the deliberate achievement of a free people.

We do not see any way in which a democratic people can organise itself for planning the maximum development of its resources in a wise and just scheme of national scope other than by means of a National Vocational Assembly such as we recommend, wherein shall be gathered the representatives of every sphere of its economic life.

The third function of the National Vocational Assembly should be to advise. The Report notes in this respect that the consultation of organised vocational bodies is generally recognised as a safeguard against bureaucracy, and therefore the Commission recommended, in the case of each vocation or group, councils or boards for the discharge of this function. But "where a matter concerns two or more vocations, it is not the best or most constructive policy to submit it to each separately and to set conflicting views in opposition so as to play off one vocation against another. . . The better policy is to submit such common questions to the National Vocational Assembly and allow it to find the best measure of agreement." The Report recommends, therefore, that the Assembly should be the recognised consultative body on general vocational or economic questions. It should be the body to which Government should apply for information, suggestions or advice on the best means of attaining national policy:

In the body politic, the electors, Oireachtas and Government share the supreme responsibility for determining the main principles of policy. The Vocational Assembly should advise on the best means of implementing it and so provide most valuable and powerful collaboration.

The reports of the Assembly should be published in the Official Gazette, and within three months an official statement should be issued indicating whether they have been accepted, and, if not, the reasons for rejection.

In order that the Assembly may fulfil its consultative functions, the Report recommends finally that among the powers given to it by law should be included the right to obtain information and statistics from Government departments and to inspect and report on all statutory orders and regulations, quotas, licences, tariffs and exemptions.

The Report suggests that the Assembly should choose triennially from among its members a *Governing Body* of not more than 24 persons selected from the different vocations in the following proportions: agriculture, 8; industry, 4; commerce, 2; transport, 2; finance, 2; the professions, 2; co-opted members, 4.

The Governing Body should be entrusted with specific tasks delegated to it by the Assembly, conduct investigations, and deal with the routine administrative duties of the *National Vocational Office*, the establishment of which is also recommended. This Office should consist of a full-time Director and staff, and the Director should be entrusted with the general administration of the Office, the appointment of the staff, and the preparation for meetings of the Assembly and Governing Body. He should be responsible for the execution of the decisions of these bodies and draw up an annual report for their consideration.

An important part of the work of the Office should be to take the initiative in developing, improving, and co-ordinating vocational organisation throughout the country. The Office should have power to obtain up-to-date information and expert advice from organisations represented in the Assembly. The State should also supply such documentary and statistical material as may be

required. In order to preserve the freedom of action of the Governing Body, the personnel of the National Vocational Office should not be civil servants nor have their privileges.

The Report finally recommends that a *Provisional Vocational Assembly* be established and entrusted with the task of preparing the legislative and administrative measures that would be required to set up the National Councils, Conferences, Commissions, and Assembly referred to in the Report.

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As the Chairman of the Commission points out in a foreword, the Report, while explicitly recognising that several forms of organisation are possible, "endeavours to outline a scheme that will be just, efficient, and adapted to the conditions of the country". He also emphasises that not all its recommendations are capable of being carried into effect at once.

The Report, he says, is a serious effort to show how abstract principles can be applied to the concrete realities of our complex social and economic life. But it does not pretend to provide detailed drawings or blueprints for the erection and interior decoration of an elaborate structure conceived after the manner of a material building which is to be occupied at once. It has in more than one place made it clear that vocational organisations should develop from existing institutions and follow the laws of organic, vital growth, without violent breach of continuity. Not all the plans and suggestions in the Report are put forward as immediately operable: some must await the development of others as their firm foundation. Many details and proposals have been left to the discretion of some administrative or vocational body in order to secure that growth be guided by increasing experience.

Conditions of African Employment on the Rand Gold Mines

As previously recorded in these pages, increases in the wages of South African Natives employed by the Witwatersrand gold mining industry came into effect on 1 April 1944.¹ These increases were decided by the Government of the Union of South Africa after consideration of the report of a committee which was appointed in February and concluded its work in December 1943.² Since the report, now published, in addition to examining questions of Rand wages, submitted considerations on the general structure of employment that may be of

¹ *International Labour Review*, Vol. L, No. 4, Oct. 1944, p. 522.

² Union of South Africa: *Report of the Witwatersrand Mine Natives' Wages Commission on the Remuneration and Conditions of Employment of Natives on Witwatersrand Gold Mines*, 1943. U.G. No. 21—1944 (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1944). iii+62 pp.

