

The Fifth Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organisation

Following an invitation from the Brazilian Government, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office decided to hold the Fifth Conference of American States Members of the I.L.O. in Brazil, and the session took place at Petropolis, near Rio de Janeiro, from 17 to 29 April 1952. The material assistance and technical facilities provided by the Brazilian Government contributed greatly to the success of the Conference. The following article gives a summary of the most important discussions and recommendations.¹

BY its structure and functions the International Labour Organisation is essentially a world assembly, but this does not mean that the special social and economic problems of particular regions of the world should not be discussed and studied separately. The regional conferences held periodically by the I.L.O. are the practical application of this principle. They give the participating countries an opportunity of examining their common problems and of co-ordinating their efforts to improve social conditions, guided by the basic principles laid down by the Organisation as a whole.

The series of American conferences was the initial result of this policy, the first regional conference of the I.L.O. being that held in Santiago (Chile) in January 1936. The usefulness of this conference, which was mainly devoted to questions of social insurance and female and child labour, was so evident that three years later, when the war had already broken out, a second conference of American States was convened at Havana (Cuba) in November 1939 to continue the discussion of these matters and to examine the important problem of migrant labour. The third conference

¹ A full account of the proceedings of the Conference will be found in the fortnightly periodical of the I.L.O., *Industry and Labour* (Vol. VII, No. 12, 15 June 1952).

at Mexico City in April 1946 was devoted to questions of vocational training, labour inspection and labour-management relations. At Montevideo (Uruguay) in April 1949, the fourth conference discussed the problems of industrialisation in Latin America and of the indigenous populations, the employment conditions of agricultural workers, and the adjustment of labour disputes.

The Fifth Conference of American States Members of the I.L.O. was attended by delegates from the following 14 countries : Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela. Three other American States sent observers : Guatemala, Nicaragua and Paraguay (the last two countries are not at present members of the Organisation). France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, as nations with territorial interests in the American continent, also appointed observers, the group from the former country being tripartite in character.

In addition, the Organisation of American States, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation and World Health Organisation (Pan-American Sanitary Bureau) were represented at the Conference ; and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions sent observers.

The special delegation of the Governing Body was composed as follows : Government group—Mr. Paul Ramadier (France) (Chairman of the Governing Body), Mr. Fernando Cisternas (Chile) and Mr. Jorge Pereira Jardim (Portugal) ; Employers' group—Mr. Julio Pons (Uruguay) and Mr. Narval Tata (India) ; Workers' group—Mr. Alfred Roberts (United Kingdom) and Mr. G. P. Delaney (United States).

The Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Office, Mr. Jef Rens, was appointed as Secretary-General of the Conference.

Excluding the Governing Body delegation, the Conference was attended by 26 Government delegates, 10 Employers' delegates and 11 Workers' delegates. These were accompanied by 58 Government advisers, 36 Employers' advisers and 49 Workers' advisers ; there were also 24 observers.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT AND ORGANISATION OF CONFERENCE

The Brazilian Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, Dr. José de Segadas Vianna, who led his country's delegation to the Conference, was unanimously elected President. The following

were elected as vice-presidents: Mr. Eduardo Rebagliati, Peruvian Minister of Health and Social Welfare (Government group); Mr. José Manuel Sánchez, delegate of Venezuela (Employers' group); Mr. Angel Cofiño García, delegate of Cuba (Workers' group).

The agenda of the Conference consisted of the following items: (1) the application and supervision of labour legislation in agriculture, (2) achievements and future policy in social security, (3) methods of remuneration of salaried employees. The Conference had also to consider the report of the Director-General of the Office.

In addition to committees for the three items on the agenda, the Conference appointed a selection committee, a credentials committee and a resolutions committee.

At its opening meeting the Conference was honoured by a visit from the President of Brazil, Dr. Getulio Vargas, who stressed the importance of social legislation for agriculture—a question to which the Brazilian Government was at present giving much attention. He pointed out that, as regards social welfare, the labour legislation of Brazil was among the most advanced systems in the world, and that this had been achieved without class conflict or violence through the spontaneous emergence of genuine understanding of the needs of the workers. He cited the following achievements in particular: stability of employment, weekly rest days with pay, annual vacations, maternity and child welfare, limitation of hours of work, compulsory social insurance, and special tribunals for labour cases. It was his intention to extend these advantages to the workers in the countryside: “the inequality of treatment as between rural workers and urban workers has many grave consequences”. He realised the difficulty of giving practical effect to social welfare measures for workers in agriculture and the need to avoid over-rigid legislation, and hoped that the Conference would make suggestions “for effectively extending to rural labour the tangible benefits of the social legislation that already protects the urban proletariat, for attaching the country-dweller firmly to the soil by ties of legitimate and intelligent self-interest, for modifying working methods and economic relations in the countryside, and for creating decent standards of living”.

There is a need for a new revolutionary phase—a peaceable revolution but one of vital importance—in the form of an agrarian reform that will finally liberate the rural worker from his age-long servitude, and make him into a farm owner by distributing public lands and gradually eliminating a retrograde and harmful latifundian feudalism which keeps vast areas of rich virgin soil empty and untilled.

Dr. Vargas then stated that he hoped to be able to announce shortly the completion of the preliminary work on a new agrarian law, and that a Bill was now before the Brazilian Congress providing

for a rural social service "to assist in creating conditions of well-being and educational facilities among the rural population".

The President also reminded the Conference that Brazil was one of the first nations to apply the principles recommended by the International Labour Organisation and said that it was always ready to learn from the experience of other countries in labour matters. "Our flag", he concluded, "gives equal protection to Brazilian nationals and to foreigners who come to contribute their brain or muscle to build up a country that tomorrow will be the common motherland of our children."

The speech of the President of Brazil made a strong impression on the Conference and there is little doubt that some of the resolutions subsequently adopted were inspired by his words. It was also valuable in arousing public interest in the Conference by drawing attention to the importance of its work and to the possible repercussions of its discussions.

THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

In accordance with the custom at all I.L.O. conferences the Director-General presented a report on major economic trends, relations with the I.L.O. and specific social and economic problems. On the first point, the Director-General discussed the incidence of inflation on the economies of the Latin-American countries; and on the latter point, examined the position as regards trade-unionism and freedom of association.

General Discussion

The report gave rise to a lengthy debate occupying six plenary sittings, in which 33 speakers took part.

Most of the delegates expressed agreement with the Director-General's remarks on various economic and social aspects and congratulated him on the accuracy of the information given in the report. However, not all the speeches were laudatory; there was some very lively criticism, which was accepted without rancour, since the whole object of these conferences is to permit frank discussion and to clear up misunderstandings based on incomplete knowledge.

Almost all the speeches dealt with some aspect of the work of the I.L.O. in Latin America, with the social progress made in the different countries, or with specific economic problems of the American continent. Criticism was constructive and many of the suggestions put forward by delegates are likely to be of great value to the Office as a guide in its future work.

One of the subjects discussed was the economic development of Latin America and the related social problems, with particular reference to the progress made in recent years in the industrial sector, the difficulties still to be overcome, and the prospects for social and economic development. Inflation also received much attention. One speaker disagreed with the policy of "moderate inflation" referred to in the report, and others regretted the absence of fuller statistics.

Another subject of discussion was social security. The general picture given by the speeches was favourable and made it possible to assess the advances made and the process of expansion of social security in many Latin-American countries.

The central topic of discussion, however, was the extension of social legislation to cover rural workers. The tone of the debate had been set by President Vargas in his inaugural address announcing important measures of land reform in Brazil and formulating principles that corresponded to the general feeling of the Conference.

No less important were the views expressed with regard to the role of the I.L.O. in maintaining world peace; this aspect had been referred to in the Director-General's report and he had expressed his belief that in present circumstances this was the noblest and most urgent task of all.

Reply of the Secretary-General

In his reply to the delegates' comments on the Director-General's report, the Secretary-General of the Conference said that during the speeches he had noted the outstanding importance attributed to the economic problems of the American continent, and stated that these problems were also the subject of constant investigation and study by the I.L.O.

He then explained, in reply to a comment by the Employers' delegate of the United States, that the I.L.O. had at no time maintained that a policy of inflation at any price could be economically justified. The I.L.O. had merely said that a certain degree of inflation which inevitably accompanies any economic development does not necessarily constitute a danger to the national economies, if it is kept strictly within the limits of a healthy economic and financial situation.

Mr. Rens then referred to the land reforms announced by the President of Brazil which, he said, were not only a vital element in the progress of that country but would find echoes in many nations of Latin America, Asia and the Near and Middle East. Economic progress unaccompanied by social progress was a delu-

sion; the I.L.O. had always tried to associate one with the other.

Such progress, in present circumstances, could be achieved only by international co-operation. He cited in this connection, as a striking example of the new political concept, the technical assistance programme undertaken by the United Nations, and outlined the part to be played by the International Labour Office, which had added these new activities to its traditional legislative functions. He recalled that the Office had allocated \$2,000,000 for technical assistance this year and asked the Governments to make requests for technical services which could help in their economic development.

An important passage in the Secretary-General's reply related to the trade union movement in Latin America. In regard to the present situation, he thought that there had too often been a tendency in the Latin-American countries to link the trade union movement with purely political groups and that the confusion which too frequently existed between trade union and political action in the long run weakened and divided the labour movement. He suggested that trade union leaders in Latin America should not tie themselves to political groups and should limit their personal activities so far as possible to the social and occupational fields, in order to make trade unionism the real power for stability and progress that it should be in the Americas.

He said that the criticisms made by some delegates with regard to certain aspects of the work of the I.L.O. would be carefully examined. He produced statistics to show that the view expressed by the Government delegate of the Dominican Republic that the International Labour Organisation was too "European" was unfounded. Out of a total of 324 international officials in the professional category, 102 were Americans—53 from Latin America, 29 from the United States and 20 from Canada. In the Governing Body, six members of the Government group, two of the Employers' group and two of the Workers' group were Americans.

In conclusion, Mr. Rens summarised the work of the Conference, which he believed faithfully reflected the collective efforts of the American continent to improve the conditions of the workers. He stressed the aim of the I.L.O. to promote social progress by collaboration between public authorities and employers' and workers' organisations in an atmosphere of free discussion, negotiation and, where necessary, compromise. He ended with these words: "Let us not forget that the real purpose of every organisation, whether it is an undertaking, a trade union or the State itself, is to contribute to the full development of all the faculties of man".

APPLICATION AND SUPERVISION OF LABOUR LEGISLATION IN AGRICULTURE

The committee appointed by the Conference to discuss the application and supervision of labour legislation in agriculture consisted of 12 Government members, 6 Employers' members and 6 Workers' members. The report prepared by the Office on this subject was taken as the basis for discussion. It was agreed that there is an urgent need for a policy to ensure effective application of social legislation in agriculture and to extend the legislation progressively and as rapidly as possible. The Conference subsequently adopted three resolutions on this subject.

Application and Supervision of Labour Legislation in Agriculture

The Conference laid down the principle that in the interests of the whole community there should be a rapid and progressive extension of social legislation to agriculture so that agricultural workers can enjoy the benefits already provided by law for urban workers. As means to this end, it attached particular importance to the development of social security, the enforcement of contracts of employment, the organisation of employment services and vocational training, the protection of the right of association of agricultural workers, and the provision of machinery for settling labour disputes.

The Conference recommended that Governments should take all appropriate steps to keep employers and workers fully informed of the laws which affect them, employing modern methods of publicity and education. It recommended the creation of regional or local joint committees, and employer and worker representation on the committees responsible for wage regulation, for managing social security funds, etc.

As regards supervision, the Conference attached particular importance to systems of labour inspection and recommended the gradual creation of bodies of specialised inspectors for agriculture, the establishment of service centres located in convenient places, and co-operation between the labour inspection services and the education authorities, social welfare officers, health inspectors and judicial authorities.

The resolution lays down rules for the selection of labour inspectors and recommends that the inspection services should be placed under the supervision and control of a central authority. It indicates that the essential functions of labour inspectors should be to supervise the enforcement of the legal provisions relating to

conditions of work and the protection of workers while engaged in their work, to supply advice concerning the best means of complying with the law, and to report defects or abuses not specifically covered by existing legal provisions.

The resolution also contains separate sections regarding special inspection services for the protection of children and young workers, co-operation between Governments to exchange experience in the organisation and operation of inspection services in agriculture, and use of the technical assistance which the International Labour Organisation is able to supply in connection with the establishment of inspection services and the training of inspectors.

Land Reform

The Conference recognised that agriculture is the most important branch of activity throughout the Americas, especially in the Latin-American countries, both because of the number of persons engaged in it and of the part it plays in the national economy. In view of this fact and of the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations on land reform, the Conference adopted a resolution recommending Governments to "focus special attention on . . . land reform as a positive means of providing security of employment, of checking rural exodus, of increasing productivity and real incomes and of raising standards of living in the countryside".

The Conference also urged the extension to agricultural workers of the "social benefits and living conditions enjoyed by industrial workers and urban populations". It recommended that "Governments should consider without delay appropriate action suited to the particular national circumstances, with a view to promoting accession to ownership of the land for the cultivator, bringing about security of land tenure, and expanding and developing programmes for the economic, cultural and social welfare of the agricultural working populations as a prerequisite for an expanding economy in conditions of social justice and in the interests of the whole community".

Minimum Prices and Voluntary Insurance

A third resolution adopted by the Conference recommends the adoption of a policy providing financial guarantees or fixing minimum nation-wide prices for agricultural produce, and the establishment of voluntary insurance against the hazards inherent in agricultural production. The resolution suggests that the Governing Body of the International Labour Office should request the

Food and Agriculture Organisation to undertake a detailed study of this problem, and that the Office should co-operate in this study, submitting the parts for which the I.L.O. is responsible to a forthcoming conference of American States Members.

SOCIAL SECURITY : ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE POLICY

The Conference entrusted this item of the agenda to a committee of 12 Government members, 6 Employers' members and 6 Workers' members. The first two meetings of the committee were devoted to a discussion of the report prepared by the Office, which related the progress made in social security during the last fifteen years and indicated some of the problems which remain to be solved in the American continent.

The committee discussed a number of proposed resolutions and incorporated some of the suggestions in a resolution on medical care. A draft resolution on the housing problem was referred to the Resolutions Committee because there was not sufficient information available on all aspects of the problem to enable the resolution to be adopted.

Protection of Social Security Rights of Migrant Workers

As regards migrant workers, the Conference recommended that the countries should conclude a special agreement, taking account of the diversity of laws and methods, and providing for equal treatment in social security matters as between nationals and citizens of the other American States, for the maintenance of benefit rights where a beneficiary takes up residence in the territory of another American country.

An appendix to the resolution contains proposed technical clauses for the international agreement; and it is suggested that these should be taken as a tentative basis for further examination, and that the Governments should transmit to the Director-General their views on these technical clauses.

The resolution requests the Governing Body to consider the most appropriate procedure for giving effect to the proposals, and to authorise the Director-General to take all necessary action.

Future Policy in the Field of Social Security

In a resolution on future policy in the field of social security, an important statement of principle was laid down as follows :

Social security, like any other policy promoting the welfare of the community, depends on an increase in production and in national income which

equitably distributed, will make it possible to improve general living conditions, increase opportunities for employment and guarantee the attainment of higher income, goods and services. Social security should be conceived and applied in such a way that it will contribute to the attainment of these goals and will be fully successful only when such policy coincides with parallel programmes of economic development, of the protection of health, of the promotion of education, of sufficient production of goods and services and of proper equilibrium in the relationship between capital and labour.

This aspect was emphasised by the Secretary-General when, summing up the work of the Conference, he said :

In the field of social security the Conference has concentrated on consolidating the results already achieved, before aiming at further advances which the economy of the American continent in its present state could hardly support. By consolidating what had been achieved, the economy will be enabled to absorb the cost of social progress, and the administration will be able to perfect its methods and thus improve the social services themselves.

The resolution adopted by the Conference on this point refers to one aspect of social security that is of vital importance : the extension of benefits to the rural and indigenous populations. The complexity of this problem was realised, and the delegates had pointed out the necessity for co-ordinating social security measures with other action to improve the living and working conditions of the rural population. Certain current defects in the social security systems are mentioned in the resolution, such as the lack of doctors and hospital facilities, and emphasis is laid on the need to provide these services with the additional resources required.

The resolution also considers that administrative expenses should be reduced by simplifying and rationalising the organisation and procedures, and recommends specialised training courses for social security staffs. It proposes that the national authorities should revise benefit rates from time to time to take account of changes in wages and prices, set up employment services, and attempt to unify social security systems or at least to bring about close co-ordination in aims and types of activity (naturally, without detriment to benefits or rights already acquired by individuals).

The Conference recommended the early establishment of a technical assistance centre to promote the progress of social security. It proposed that the I.L.O. should organise training courses for officials of social security institutions under the expanded technical assistance programme, organise exchanges of officials between the American countries (so as to enable them to study organisation and methods in relation to benefits, the collection of contributions, the keeping of records, the identification of insured persons, etc.) and assist social security institutions in drawing up and carrying out training programmes.

Investment of Funds of Social Security Institutions

The Conference approved a resolution submitted by the Employers' delegate of the United States recommending that, subject to the basic principles which must govern every investment of social security funds, reserves should be invested in such a way as to be of social and economic utility (in the financing of workers' housing, for example). The resolution thus attempts to give social security funds a productive function, not merely for social security purposes but also for the whole economy of each country.

Medical Care

The fourth and last resolution approved by the Conference in relation to social security is based on proposals submitted by the Brazilian delegation, and refers to the extension of medical services and to the prevention and cure of certain diseases, such as tuberculosis, which are dangerous to the community.

The measures suggested include specialised medical treatment, increased hospital capacity, and compensation in case of enforced idleness which is as nearly equal as possible to the earnings when at work. The I.L.O. is asked to approach the World Health Organization so that the activities in this field may be co-ordinated.

METHODS OF REMUNERATION OF SALARIED EMPLOYEES

The committee on remuneration of salaried employees consisted of 12 Government members, 6 Employers' members and 6 Workers' members. It embodied in a single text three draft resolutions submitted by the Government member for Brazil, by the Government member for Cuba, and by the Employers' members of the committee.

The resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Conference, reaffirms the belief expressed in the I.L.O. Declaration of Philadelphia that "labour is not a commodity and that all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity", and lays down certain fundamental principles in relation to the problems of remuneration of salaried employees. It states that the general policy regarding salaries should be to adjust remuneration to economic conditions in the country, and that salaries should be fixed according to the cost of living and general economic situation. It therefore considers that salaried employees should be free to engage in collective bargaining, that conciliation machinery should be established, and

that employers and workers should be encouraged to use voluntary arbitration or appeal to the competent courts where the procedures of a country provided for such appeal.

In regard to methods of wage fixing, the resolution recommends the adoption of the principle of a minimum wage equally applicable to wage and salary earners, who should be consulted—together with the employers—when statutory minimum wages are fixed. It reaffirms the principle that legally prescribed advantages for the worker (in this case, minimum rates of remuneration) cannot be waived by agreement.

Certain rules for the protection of wages are laid down : (a) the maximum interval between payments of salary should not exceed one month ; (b) upon termination of a contract of employment, final settlement of all salary due should be made within a reasonable period of time ; (c) salaries should be paid directly to the employees, subject only to any deductions prescribed by law or collective agreement ; (d) employers should be prohibited from limiting in any manner the freedom of the employee to dispose of his salary.

Contracts with public authorities should provide for payment of salaries not less favourable than those paid in similar activities in the districts where the work is carried on or in the nearest appropriate district.

The principle of equal remuneration for equal work should be respected, without discrimination because of race, creed, sex or national origin. (An exception is made in the case of experts and technicians from foreign countries, who may be compensated for the inconvenience and extra cost of living outside their own country.)

In its concluding parts the resolution suggests certain action by Governments and by the International Labour Organisation. First, countries that have ratified the Protection of Wages Convention, 1949, should not make use of the clause in the Convention permitting them to exclude salaried employees as a group from its application ; and all countries should regularly publish statistics of remuneration and cost of living, and pamphlets explaining the law on salaries.

Second, the I.L.O. should be prepared to supply technical assistance to Governments on problems of remuneration of salaried employees. The I.L.O. is specially requested to publish a detailed study of salary and wage regulation in the Latin-American countries.

The Conference considered that, in view of the widely different practices in the Latin-American countries, it would be premature to make detailed recommendations regarding profit sharing, dismissal compensation, bonuses, gratuities, family allowances, etc.

It therefore decided to ask the Governing Body to authorise the Office to make further investigations into these matters and to place them on the agenda of the next American regional conference.

OTHER RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED

Three resolutions were adopted by the Conference on matters not included in the agenda.

Freedom of Association

A resolution on freedom of association, submitted by the Workers' group, was adopted by 30 votes to 3. The Conference urges Governments to give prompt consideration to the possibility of early ratification of the Freedom of Association Convention, 1948, and the Protection of the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949. It emphasises that the development of a stable and durable trade union movement can only be achieved if trade unions are constituted without regard to the race, national origin or political affiliation of their members, and "pursue their trade union objectives on the basis of the solidarity and the economic and social interests of all workers".

The resolution urges Governments to supply the fullest possible factual information when any allegations are made against them in regard to trade union rights, and to consider in such cases the advantage of impartial examination by I.L.O. machinery in alleviating tensions.

Manpower

In a resolution on manpower, the Conference recommends that the Governments should examine the possibility of ratifying the Employment Service Convention, 1948, and the Migration for Employment Convention, 1949, as well as the corresponding Recommendations; and that the International Labour Office should render any technical assistance that may be required in connection with manpower problems, the organisation of employment services, migration, and vocational training and guidance. It requests the Governing Body to authorise the Director-General of the I.L.O. to convene a technical conference on manpower in Latin America in the course of 1952.

Co-operation and Handicrafts

In a resolution on co-operation and handicrafts, the Conference recommends that the I.L.O. should develop its practical work in the fields of co-operative organisation and handicrafts by facili-

tating regional and international exchanges of experience regarding co-operative institutions, by helping to establish pilot projects and in the training of officials, by giving expert assistance on technical problems, by studying methods of developing handicrafts among the indigenous populations, and by helping to set up national co-operative councils. It also considers that the I.L.O. should examine the possibility of joint action with other international organisations, such as the F.A.O., U.N.E.S.C.O. and the Organisation of American States.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

At a plenary meeting of the Conference, the Secretary-General announced the creation of a joint technical assistance mission for Latin-American indigenous populations under the auspices of the United Nations, the International Labour Office, F.A.O., U.N.E.S.C.O., W.H.O. and the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau. Mr. Rens informed the delegates that, following requests for technical assistance from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, it had been decided to send a preliminary mission to these countries, headed by Professor Ernest Beaglehole (New Zealand) and composed mostly of Latin-American experts. The first mission would remain only for a short time and its purpose would be to make an estimate of the problems and of the resources so far provided for the benefit of these populations. It would be followed by another mission (which would probably remain for several years) whose object would be to find the most effective way of assimilating these populations, which hitherto have remained outside the economic and social life of the countries. The United Nations and the International Labour Office would share responsibility for the administrative and practical direction of the mission, while other specialised agencies, such as F.A.O., U.N.E.S.C.O. and W.H.O., would undertake tasks within their particular spheres.

A joint communiqué signed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of the I.L.O. was published simultaneously in New York, Geneva and Petropolis, announcing the setting up of the mission and its early departure for Latin America.

This scheme originated in a resolution adopted at the first meeting of the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour at La Paz (Bolivia) in January 1951, in Resolutions 58 and 275 of the United Nations General Assembly, and in Resolution 313 of the Economic and Social Council.

At the same plenary meeting, a message from General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondón, President of the Brazilian National

Indian Protection Service, was read, in which he expressed admiration for the work undertaken by the I.L.O. Committee.

CONCLUSIONS

While each of the American regional conferences has been devoted to important issues and has contributed to their solution in the different countries of the American continent, the Fifth Conference at Petropolis this year will certainly stand out from all the others because it broached a question in the most typical and fundamental sector of the Latin-American economies—the application of labour legislation in agriculture, with the related problem of agrarian reform. As the President of Brazil pointed out in his inaugural address, the importance of this problem in all countries with an agricultural economy (as the majority of American countries are) is so great that the mere fact of examining it and preparing the way for possible solutions represents “a peaceable revolution”, but one that is all the more beneficial because it will open up great possibilities for carrying out all the programmes of economic and social development that are so much desired by the men responsible for the destiny of these countries and by those who are fighting for an era of peace, prosperity and social justice in the world.

In addition, the Conference provided an excellent opportunity of surveying the progress of social security in the American continent during recent years. In the discussion, the main emphasis was on giving practical effect to the advances already sanctioned by law, rather than on expanding the existing legislation. The Conference recognised that the rural population must be given the same benefits as town-dwellers already enjoy, though it was realised that such an extension of the social security system would present many administrative and technical difficulties as well as economic and financial problems. It was clear from the tenor of the debates and resolutions that the Conference regarded social security as a necessary part of the economy of every country and as an element in every economic system, whether public or private.

The resolution on the remuneration of salaried employees widened the original scope of the discussion by using the term “employees” covering both wage earners and salary earners. It outlined a salary policy with wide implications and stressed the importance of I.L.O. technical assistance in this field.

No summary of the results of the Conference can omit a reference to the findings with regard to the trade union movement in Latin America. The Director-General's report, the speeches of

various delegates (including the Workers' delegate for Uruguay and the observer for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), and above all the reply of the Secretary-General, stated the problem frankly and placed it in its proper context. The views expressed on trade union duties and responsibilities in the American continent deserve to be pondered, and may perhaps provide the starting point for a new approach to the problem.

The usefulness of these regional meetings of the I.L.O. cannot be judged only on the merits of the actual resolutions adopted. The record of proceedings does not give a complete history of the conferences—there are certain imponderables that must also be taken into account. Through these meetings the bond between the I.L.O. and the member countries is strengthened, new links are created between the participating countries, and new approaches to common problems are discovered. The delegates learn much from the successes and difficulties of their neighbours; and there is an opportunity for constructive comment—for criticism when a wrong road is taken, and for praise to encourage a useful initiative.

The Conference at Petropolis is a good example of what can be done in this direction. It was a halt in the long journey of social progress, to measure the distance already covered and the road which still lies ahead. For the I.L.O., it had the virtue of enabling the Organisation once more to show its constant concern with the social and economic problems of the American continent, and to obtain the comments and criticisms of the American countries as a guide for its future work.
