

Labour Legislation and Regulations in the Italian Rice Fields

Rice cultivation is in Italy an important industry which provides employment for large numbers of workers. The work is arduous and difficult and much of it is performed by seasonal migrant workers, most of them women. The special need to protect the health of these workers and to promote their general welfare has long been recognised, and a considerable body of measures have been adopted in Italy to meet this need, including legislation for the protection of women and children, the establishment of conciliation and arbitration committees, employment offices and joint committees responsible for recruitment, placement and welfare and the introduction of national and regional collective agreements for the establishment of standard conditions of work. The following report describes the development of these protective measures and the situation today.

BACKGROUND

The Italian rice-growing areas are concentrated largely in the irrigated Po plain and particularly the Lombard and Piedmontese provinces of Novara, Vercelli, Milan and Pavia, which have an extremely well-organised drainage and irrigation system, particularly in the areas served by the Cavour canal. They consist chiefly of temporary rice fields which are cultivated by undertakings with a technical organisation aiming at large-scale production and high profits. Rice fields also exist, although to a lesser extent, in the other provinces of northern Italy: Verona, Mantua, Modena, Bologna, Rovigo, Ferrara, and Ravenna. In the provinces of Lower Venezia and Lower Emilia-Romagna in the Po delta there are still permanent rice fields (*risaie di colmata*) dependent on the regular overflowing of the rivers, as well as temporary rice fields. In other areas of Italy the rice fields have lost their importance; rice is cultivated at one stage in land improvement and reclamation work, particularly for the purpose of eliminating salt from the soil. There are in all about 26,000 agricultural undertakings engaged in rice growing in Italy.

The surface area devoted to rice cultivation, according to approximate data furnished by the National Institute of Statistics, was 174,300 hectares¹ in 1952²—26,065 hectares more than in 1950 and 77,297 hectares more than in 1945, when the area under rice cultivation had fallen to 97,003 hectares, the lowest figure registered since 1931, when

¹ One hectare = approximately 2.5 acres.

² ISTITUTO CENTRALE DI STATISTICA: *Notiziario Istat*, 10 February 1953. The area under cultivation was 11.5 per cent. greater in 1952 than in 1951; the total production was 15.6 per cent. greater, and the average yield per hectare 3.6 per cent. greater.

the National Rice Office was set up. The increase between 1945 and 1952 was thus about 78 per cent.

An agricultural undertaking in the rice areas is commonly called a *cascina* when it covers between 50 and 200 hectares and has a typically capitalist economy employing regular wage labour, and a *cascinotta* when it covers a smaller area and is cultivated by a peasant farmer (either proprietor or tenant) employing wage labour only for seasonal work.

The chief crop in these undertakings is rice. If allowance is made for the fact that transplanting¹ permits the land to be used for two different crops during the year, the proportion of the total surface area devoted to rice is four-fifths in a large number of undertakings; this proportion gradually decreases from the Piedmontese to the Lombard provinces, where, in the irrigated belts, fodder growing, stockraising and dairy farming take the place of rice growing.

THE LABOUR FORCE

Large numbers of skilled workers are employed during the seasonal peak periods on weeding, transplanting, reaping, transport, drying and threshing.

The employees of the *cascina*, apart from the technical and administrative managerial personnel, are wage earners employed in a certain number of specific operations, which constitute the basis of the undertaking's technical and economic organisation.

This labour force includes—

- (1) Permanently employed wage earners² with very varied duties, including workers responsible for the upkeep and supervision of irrigation channels to ensure a regular flow of water, workers in charge of the stables and cattle, milkers, workers in charge of young stock on the pastures, and drovers and carters engaged in work in the fields, ploughing and transport. In the larger undertakings there are foremen in charge of each category, all of whom come under the owner's agent for purposes of supervision and discipline.
- (2) Non-permanent labour (*braccianti agricoli avventizi*)—local day-labourers who generally work for a varying number of days during the year in the same undertaking. These are usually members of the families of permanent wage earners or workers living in the neighbouring villages.

The permanent wage earners and day-labourers are as a rule employed on the ordinary tasks of cultivation, of which the most important occur in April and consist of the preparation of the fields, ploughing, harrowing, manuring and fertilising, and sowing. They cannot, however, perform the extra work required by weeding³ and transplanting operations⁴ (a

¹ Among the sowing methods in use, the method of sowing in seed beds and subsequently transplanting is becoming more and more general. When the young shoots are from 15 to 20 cm. high they are carefully lifted and transplanted at once.

² The individual employment contracts of agricultural wage earners, whatever their category, may not be for less than two agricultural years.

³ The marsh plants which encroach on the rice fields have to be pulled up as soon as they have reached a certain size. This work is called *monda*, from which are derived *mondina* or *mondariso*, the terms used to designate the women workers who perform this difficult task.

⁴ This operation makes the work of the *mondine* all the more arduous by reason of the cuts caused on the hands by the flinty limestone soil.

30-day to 40-day season from about 20 May to 10 July), reaping, transport, drying and threshing (in September).¹

- (3) Seasonal labour, mainly women and girls, is recruited for these operations either in the district or the surrounding districts (in which case they do not sleep on the *cascina*) or in other provinces and regions; this migrant labour is provided mostly by contingents from the provinces of Emilia and Venezia.

Thus considerable numbers of seasonal labourers gather in the rice-growing belt during the peak periods. The average numbers are 180,000-200,000 workers for weeding and transplanting, and 100,000-120,000 for reaping, transport, drying and threshing, which represents a total movement of about 300,000 workers each year, the great majority of whom come from distant provinces.

Out of the 200,000 women workers, about 150,000 are agricultural *braccianti* regularly entered on the manpower lists and thus enjoying all the rights and privileges of this category of worker; the others have no special agricultural activity or qualifications, and are entered on the employment office lists only for the rice season.

The workers engaged for reaping, transport, drying and threshing are usually recruited in the region; large numbers of men take part in these operations and are as a rule in charge of the machines.

Trade-Union Activities

This large body of workers has exerted considerable pressure on both employers and the public authorities.

The first trade-union organisations, called "improvement leagues" (*leghe di miglioramento*) or "resistance leagues" (*leghe di resistenza*), were formed in 1884, and about 1900 the first agricultural collective agreements were signed, usually covering entire provinces, but sometimes single districts. The trade-union organisations succeeded after a few years in establishing a sort of monopoly of the labour market in the provinces of the Po Plain. Their goal was to become compulsory intermediaries between labour and the head of the undertaking, so doing away with the free selection of labour (by creating "class" employment offices), substituting collective agreements for individual contracts and organising work by teams of unionised workers.

Collective agreements represented a victory for the agricultural workers won by pressing their demands for the solution of their most urgent problems through trade-union action: Government action mostly followed after and simply set the seal on established facts.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

The first legislative provisions concerning the rice fields date from 1866. Act No. 2697 of 12 June 1866 issued regulations for rice growing in the provinces of the Po Plain, such cultivation being permitted only at certain distances from the villages and under special conditions and regulations for each region. After the unification of Italy, Act No. 2697 of 1866 was extended to cover the whole Kingdom by section 69 of the Public Health Act of 22 December 1888.

¹ Reaping is done with a sickle; the sheaves are carried to the farm and then spread out on a flat space in the sun to dry. When they are completely dry threshing is carried out by machines.

After serious agitation by organised agricultural workers—the first real resistance movement being the dispute in the Molinella rice fields in Bologna in 1893—and especially the political and economic strikes of 1901 and 1907, which paralysed huge farming areas in the Lombard and Emilian plains, the Giolitti left liberal Government began the enactment of a series of legislative measures which put Italy in the front rank of countries as regards the legal protection of workers.

The first legislative measure for the protection of labour in the rice fields was Act No. 337 of 16 June 1907 concerning work in the rice fields, which tackled the problem of the protection of women and children for the first time in Italy; for other agricultural workers the problem remained unsolved until rules were introduced through collective agreements.

Section 11 of the 1907 Act, which became section 82 of the consolidated text of the Public Health Acts of the same year, ran as follows :

Children under 14 years of age and women in their last month of pregnancy and during the first month after confinement shall not be employed in weeding rice fields. Children under 16 years of age and women under 21 years of age shall not be employed on such work except on production of a birth certificate. Migrant workers engaged in weeding must produce a medical certificate from their home commune showing that they are free from any contagious disease. Pregnant women must possess a medical certificate showing their date of pregnancy.

Another section, which became section 84 of the consolidated text, made the following provision :

Every nursing mother shall be granted time off to feed her child ; such time shall not be deducted in the computation of her hours of work.

These provisions were included in the consolidated text of the Public Health Acts approved by Royal Decree No. 636 of 1 August 1907 (Title IV : Rice Growing) and the general regulations thereunder were approved by Decree No. 157 of 29 March 1908. Some of the sections of the consolidated text of 1907, particularly sections 99 and 108, were amended by Act No. 487 of 17 July 1910.

Numerous decrees were issued in 1910, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1929 and 1930 to approve the regulations for rice growing in various provinces.¹

The consolidated text of the Public Health Acts of 1907 set up conciliation committees to settle disputes concerning employment contracts in the rice fields. Royal Decrees No. 158 of 29 March 1908 and No. 41 of 5 January 1911 dealt in detail with the application of this Act. The jurisdiction of the committees was limited to cases of a juridical nature ; it did not cover industrial disputes about the alteration of agreements in force.² It still remained to extend conciliation to industrial disputes. (Arbitration was introduced in agriculture throughout Italy in 1916 by Decree No. 649 of 30 May 1916.) This was achieved by the Ministerial Decree of 26 March 1918, setting up the arbitration committees provided for by the Lieutenant-General's Decree No. 350 of 14 March 1918 concerning the recruitment and placement of labour for work in the rice fields in the provinces of Novara and Pavia.

¹ See, for example, Decree No. 312 of 18 February 1930, a translation of which appeared in *INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE : Legislative Series*, 1930 (It. 3).

² See " Industrial Arbitration and Conciliation in Italy ", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, April 1921, pp. 56-66 ; and " Conciliation in Agriculture ", *idem*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, July 1923, pp. 144-147.

General provisions governing the placement of agricultural labour were made in Decree No. 1911 of 17 November 1918, which was supplemented by Decree No. 641 of 13 April 1919. These measures were subsequently revoked, and placement became the responsibility of offices coming under the National Assistance Institution (*Patronato nazionale*), which was given official recognition by the Ministerial Decree of 26 June 1925 and which grouped together all bodies concerned with workers' welfare, including the migration secretariats, employment offices, people's secretariats and poor-relief societies. The Institution operated in liaison with the Fascist corporations.

In 1932, in order to put a stop to confusion in the engagement of workers and to resulting abuses in the organisation of the seasonal migratory movements, a "single national employment exchange, operating free of charge, for persons engaged in weeding rice fields, gathering olives, and harvesting corn"¹, was set up by the Ministerial Decree of 26 March 1932. Since then the rice grower has applied to employment offices in order to engage the labour he requires. These offices communicate manpower requirements to the provinces of origin of migratory labour, through the national employment office, and in this way migratory labour is properly shared out as requests are received.

The reorganisation of the rice-growing sector has continued without interruption since the war. The recruiting and placement of workers engaged in weeding, transplanting, reaping, and rice-harvesting operations is organised on a provincial and inter-provincial basis.

An Inter-Regional Migration Committee has been set up within the Lombardy Regional Labour Office, with its headquarters in Milan, to deal with the four rice-growing provinces of Piedmont and Lombardy (Novara, Vercelli, Pavia and Milan). Its composition is fixed by the Ministerial Decree of 6 April 1949 on a joint basis; it includes six members and six substitute members appointed by the employers' and workers' organisations. An official of the Regional Labour Office acts as secretary.

The organisation of the placement of seasonal workers in the rice season is regulated by the provisions of the Presidential Decree of 29 April 1950. Under this Decree employment is made subject to the conditions laid down in sections 7 to 29 of Title II of Act No. 264 of 29 April 1949 respecting the placement of, and assistance to, involuntarily unemployed workers. The main points applying to the operations of the rice season are (a) that workers must be enrolled on the employment lists of the local branch of the provincial labour office in their home district, after producing and depositing their workbooks certifying their age and qualifications; (b) that the employer is required to make application to the appropriate office, specifying only the number, category, and qualifications of the workers required, and to take on the workers registered on its lists; (c) that preference is to be given to workers whose homes are in the district or neighbouring districts.

The placement service may take on an inter-provincial or national character in order to meet special requirements (section 23). The functions of these offices are fixed by the Presidential Decree of 29 April 1950. The provisions of this Decree reiterate the general rules for placement laid down in Act No. 264 of 1949. The following, for example, are the functions of the Lombardy Regional Labour Office, which is responsible

¹ See INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE: *Legislative Series*, 1932 (It. 2).

for centralising placement services in the provinces of Novara, Vercelli, Pavia and Milan :

- (a) to draw up general rules for the employment of labour in weeding, transplanting, reaping, transport, drying and threshing ;
- (b) to fix the conditions and time limits for the registration of workers on the special lists for this kind of operation ;
- (c) to work out the provincial labour contingents required for the above operations ;
- (d) to accept engagement contracts for labour within the limits previously set for each contingent, authorising the transfer of the workers engaged from one province to another ;
- (e) to issue instructions to provincial labour offices concerning the drawing up of special lists for the formation of communal contingents and to direct labour to rice fields in other provinces.

The Regional Labour Office must collaborate with the Inter-Regional Migration Committee, on which employers' and workers' organisations are represented. The members of the Committee are appointed by Ministerial Decree for a term of two years. The Committee's role is advisory, and its functions consist chiefly in giving advice and making technical and organisational proposals for regulating the placement of workers during the operations of the rice campaign.

The Decree also specifies that unauthorised transfers of labour may result in the workers being sent home and fined under the penal provisions of section 27 of Act No. 264 of 1949.

The Ministerial Decree of 15 May 1950 set up an inter-regional welfare committee for women workers engaged in the weeding, transplanting, reaping and harvesting of rice. The committee operates in Milan in the headquarters of the Regional Labour Office.¹ Its main tasks are to make proposals for the use of funds put at its disposal for the relief of women workers and to co-ordinate welfare work among migrant women workers engaged in the operations of the rice campaign and their children.

The Decree also specified that a special welfare committee may be set up by the prefect in each province of origin or destination of migrant workers, under the chairmanship of the director of the labour office and composed of one official from the prefecture, one official from the Medical Labour Inspectorate and one representative of each of the occupational associations of large agricultural employers, peasant farmers and workers represented on the provincial employment committees (section 25 of Act No. 264 of 1949). The aims of this committee are to encourage and co-ordinate welfare work in the province among seasonal workers employed in the rice fields.

¹ The Committee is composed of one official from the High Commission for Hygiene and Public Health, one official from the Medical Labour Inspectorate, the members of the Inter-Regional Migration Committee and one representative of the following institutions : the Rice Office, the Society for the Protection of Mothers and Children, the National State Insurance Institute, the National Sickness Assistance Institute, the National Employment Injury Insurance Institute, the Italian Red Cross, the institutions authorised to engage in welfare work and institutions and agencies pledged to provide substantial financial and material contributions towards such welfare work.

REGULATION BY COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

The regulation of conditions of work by collective agreements remains the usual way of determining relations between employers and workers in Italy.

All workers in the rice fields, including day-labourers and seasonal workers as well as permanent wage earners, are covered by contractual clauses drawn up for their respective categories.

The national agreement (*patto collettivo nazionale di lavoro*) lays down basic general rules regulating industrial relations; these rules become enforceable after their inclusion in provincial and regional agreements.

The section of these agreements which enunciates the general principles regulating conditions of work reproduces at the regional or provincial level, except in a few cases, the clauses of the national agreement, suitably adapted to meet local requirements, political or otherwise, and without prejudice to previously existing conditions more favourable to the workers.

Permanent Wage Earners

The current national collective agreement respecting permanent wage earners was concluded on 31 July 1951 for a duration of two years. It is automatically renewed from year to year but may be terminated by either of the parties at six months' notice from the date of expiry.

The contractual clauses cover all aspects of conditions of work and employment, most of which are governed by current legislation. They include a definition of the permanent wage earners whose qualifications are to be specified in the provincial collective agreements, and deal with engagement, individual contracts, workers' duties, trade-union work-books, tools on loan to workers, probationary periods, and the engagement and protection of women and young workers. They also prescribe hours of work, which should not in principle exceed eight a day, and leave it to the provincial agreements to specify exceptions, particularly as regards extra work on public holidays, at night or during the weekly rest period. Overtime and work performed on public holidays or at night is paid at 16 per cent., 25 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively above the normal rates.

The clauses relating to remuneration (made up of the basic wage in cash, the cost-of-living adjustment and payment in kind) are also worked out in the provincial agreements, on the basis of a classification of categories by age groups and sex. The wage of male workers between 18 and 65 years of age is taken as the base. Female workers between 17 and 55 years of age receive 70 per cent. of this. Male workers below 18 years and female workers below 17 years are paid percentages of the full rate according to age. The youngest workers (14-15 years of age), male and female, receive 50 per cent. of the full rate. An end-of-year bonus is granted, equal to 16 days' total wages.

Other clauses concern employment injury insurance, travel, annual holidays with pay (eight days), State insurance, welfare, family allowances, maternity protection, military service, special leave of absence, seniority bonus, discipline and individual and collective disputes.

Day-Workers

The national collective agreement respecting day-workers, concluded on 11 May 1950 for a duration of two years, has been legally terminated

by the two signatory workers' organisations (C.G.I.L. and C.S.L.I.)¹, joined by the two trade-union federations formed after 1950, the U.I.L. and C.I.S.N.A.L.² The agreement remains in force until a new one has been concluded.

The terms of this agreement were drawn up at the same time as those of the agreement for permanent wage earners and correspond to them very closely. The main differences to be noted concern remuneration, the elements of the non-permanent workers' hourly remuneration being the basic cash wage and the cost-of-living adjustment. These workers are also granted compensation in lieu of bonuses, holidays, etc., from which the day-labourer cannot benefit. This compensation takes the form of a 6 per cent. increase on the total of the combined wages and cost-of-living adjustment.

Seasonal Labour

The national collective agreement for workers engaged in weeding and transplanting operations in the rice fields was concluded on 27 May 1948. Another collective agreement concerning reaping, transport, drying and threshing operations was concluded at Vercelli during the summer of the same year. These agreements establish the clauses covering all aspects of conditions of employment and of work, namely recruitment, travel from the provinces of origin to the rice fields, hours of work, wages, food, housing, welfare, social insurance, etc. As in the case of the national agreements concerning permanent and non-permanent wage earners, the provisions of these contracts are included in the provincial contracts with such changes as may be required by local circumstances, again without prejudice to existing conditions which are more favourable to the workers. These agreements, which are generally for one year's duration, are the subject of lengthy negotiations each spring between the employers' and agricultural workers' associations.

Changes made during subsequent years in the terms of the 1948 agreement are mostly concerned with wages, in spite of the large number of contractual clauses involved dealing with employment, hours of work, overtime, task work, food, welfare, etc.

The contractual clauses concerning protection of women and children, conciliation and arbitration committees, and recruiting and placement of workers, which especially concern seasonal women workers in the rice fields and which are covered by legislative provisions, have already been discussed above. They will be specifically dealt with here only in cases in which the collective agreement goes beyond the scope of legislative regulations.

Section 10 of the 1948 national agreement guarantees seasonal workers a minimum number of days' work during the rice season. The duration of this guaranteed employment was fixed at 30 days, or 240 hours' work, and was kept at that figure when the 1952 agreement was concluded, although the employers wished to have the clause omitted, at least as regards workers recruited on the spot or in neighbouring communes.

In order to ensure a fairer distribution of jobs during recruitment, the labour contingents are determined on a provincial basis; the selection of labour is ultimately the responsibility of the communal committees.

¹ *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro; Confederazione Sindacati Lavoratori Italiani.*

² *Unione Italiana del Lavoro; Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Nazionali Lavoratori.*

The employer may ask by name at the employment office for a particular person as agent to direct and supervise the operations, but it is clearly laid down that he may in no case choose the members of the teams, and his requests for labour at the employment office must be purely numerical and not include names.

The women workers are made up into teams consisting for the most part of adult women ; the team may not include more than 10 per cent. of young workers between 14 and 15 years of age. The head of the team must be an experienced worker, democratically appointed by the members of the group ; she is responsible for dealings with the employer on all questions concerning the team, and for directing its work and ensuring the observance of discipline, according to orders received ; she also keeps the workbook up to date.

The working day in the rice fields consists of eight hours of actual work ; it is usually broken by rest periods so arranged that work is never continued for more than four hours at a stretch. The timetable most commonly applied in the Piedmontese and Lombard *cascine* begins with three-and-a-half hours' work from 5 a.m. to 8.30, followed by a half-hour break for a snack at the workplace ; work is resumed from 9 until 12, when there is one hour's break for lunch ; the working day ends with two hours' work from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The timetable, showing the times and length of breaks, is displayed near the entrance to the living quarters on the farm. Women with nursing children are granted a rest period of at least half an hour, which is not deducted in the computation of their hours of work. The weekly rest period consists of 24 hours on Sunday, according to the provisions of section 85 of the consolidated text of the Public Health Laws.

All trade-union organisations without exception demand a seven-hour day, which has in fact been applied since 1949 in the rice fields in the province of Bologna. In this case the provincial collective agreement has altered the provisions of section 11 of the national collective agreement. The Bologna agreement allows mothers a break of one hour and a half for nursing their children, which counts as working time for wage purposes. Task work is not permitted in the province of Bologna. The time required for the journey from the farm to the place of work is not counted as working time, since in the *cascine* of the Po Plain the distance involved is not great. Under the Bologna agreement, which concerns mostly local labour, any transport expenses are borne by the employer.

Wages.

Weeding and transplanting. According to the provisions of section 14 of the 1948 national collective agreement, wages for the eight-hour day are fixed at different rates for different age groups and for local and migrant labour. All workers are entitled to one kilogram of commercial polished rice for each day's work in addition to their wages. Migrant workers are housed and fed by the employer¹, whereas local workers are entitled to one meal a day only. Basic cash wages have been as shown in the table below.

The workers' organisations demand different wages for transplanting, but were not able to obtain them during the negotiations for the renewal of the national collective agreement.

¹ Formerly a sum calculated at about 10 per cent. of the wages was deducted to cover food.

BASIC WAGES FOR WEEDING AND TRANSPLANTING

| Workers | Wages in lire | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------|-------|
| | 1948-1950 | 1951 | 1952 |
| Local : | | | |
| from 15 to 65 years of age . | 1,000 | 1,050 | 1,120 |
| from 14 to 15 years of age . | 880 | 930 | 1,000 |
| Migrant : | | | |
| from 15 to 65 years of age . | 950 | 1,000 | 1,056 |
| from 14 to 15 years of age . | 836 | 846 | 916 |

Overtime, which may only be performed in case of technical necessity, is paid at 30 per cent. above the normal rates ; work on Sundays and public holidays is paid at 50 per cent. above normal rates.

The provincial agreement for Bologna for 1949 considerably improved on the conditions laid down in section 14 of the national collective agreement. In Bologna, where local labour largely suffices to meet the requirements of the rice campaign, the hourly wage is 129 lire as against the 125 lire stipulated in the national agreement ; for transplanting, the wage is raised to 142 lire. The supplementary kilogram of rice is accorded for each seven-hour working day or fraction of a day exceeding four hours ; half a kilogram is granted for work of less than four hours' duration.

Reaping, transport, drying and threshing. In the inter-regional collective agreement of 1948 covering Milan, Pavia, Vercelli, Novara and Alessandria, wages are fixed for an eight-hour working day as follows :

First Category Work (Reaping and Mixed Operations).

Men from 17 to 65 years of age : 16 kilograms of polished rice, plus 140 lire for local workers and 40 lire for migrant workers.

Women from 17 to 65 years of age : 15 kilograms of polished rice, plus 140 lire for local workers and 40 lire for migrant workers.

Young workers of both sexes from 16 to 17 years of age : 14.40 kilograms of polished rice, plus 125 lire for local workers and 36 lire for migrant workers.

Second Category Work (Transport, Drying and Threshing).

Men from 17 to 65 years of age : 15 kilograms of polished rice, plus 140 lire for local workers and 40 lire for migrant workers.

Young male workers from 16 to 17 years of age : 12 kilograms of polished rice, plus 125 lire for local workers and 36 lire for migrant workers.

Women from 16 to 65 years of age : 12 kilograms of polished rice, plus 132 lire for local workers and 38 lire for migrant workers.

Young female workers from 15 to 16 years of age : 10 kilograms of polished rice, plus 115 lire for local workers and 32 lire for migrant workers.

Workers may choose whether they take payment in cash or in kind.

The 1952 agreement granted over-all wage increases. For work of the first category, basic wages for men between 17 and 65 years of age

were increased to 1,740 lire, and for women between 17 and 65 years of age to 1,640 lire—an increase of 95 and 90 lire respectively.

The basic wage is as a rule calculated according to the value of 16 kilograms of commercial polished rice; an immediate advance of 1,600 lire is paid from these wages. This "advance" is higher than the total 1951 basic wage, which was 1,540 lire. The final rates are calculated according to the average price of commercial polished rice on the Vercelli market during September and October. If the price exceeds 100 lire per kilogram the wages are adjusted up afterwards, but if the market price falls below this figure no subsequent reduction may be made.

The 1949 collective agreement for the province of Bologna gives the workers better terms than the national agreement and preserves the principle of a cost-of-living adjustment. Remuneration must be in cash.

The wages of workers employed in reaping and threshing are generally fixed on a basis of 2 kilograms of commercial polished rice per hour with variations for workers on special jobs. The base for mechanics and machine-operators, for example, is 2.2 kilograms, to which is added the cost-of-living adjustment of 30 lire per hour. Some changes have been made in the terms of the 1948 agreement; wages are now calculated on the basis of a six-hour day for workers employed in reaping, transport and drying and a seven-hour day for threshing operations. One hour's overtime, at a rate 15 per cent. above the normal rate, is permissible in the above cases when necessary. Where overtime is required for specific technical reasons connected with production, it may be permitted for one hour a day, at a rate 30 per cent. above the normal. Work during public holidays is paid at 50 per cent. above the normal hourly rate.

The basic hourly wage is calculated on the price of a given quantity of commercial polished rice.

Food.

Migrant workers employed in weeding and transplanting are housed and fed, whereas local workers are entitled to one free meal a day only. The food provided is on the basis of daily and weekly rations. The daily rations are 50 grammes of bread, two servings of rice soup and one-quarter litre of milk. The weekly rations are 200 grammes of meat, 200 grammes of cheese, 200 grammes of dried fruits and one-half litre of wine.

The food rations are improved under the terms of the 1951 agreement: pasta must be served twice a week in place of rice, the quantity of cheese is larger and a choice is allowed between cheese and dried fruit.

The Bologna agreement provides for 250 grammes of bread and soup per day, 150 grammes of meat, 100 grammes of dried fruit and 100 grammes of cheese per week. Claims in respect of food are still outstanding.

Housing.

Living quarters and dormitories must conform to the local health regulations as regards protection against the weather and mosquitoes, the volume of air per person, ventilation, the separation of sexes, etc. Living quarters are governed by legislative provisions laying down strict health rules. Camp beds must be provided, together with mattresses stuffed with sufficient quantities of fresh dry straw.

Welfare.

Seasonal migrant women workers must undergo a medical examination, and must produce at the time of recruitment a certificate from the public health office of their home commune showing their state of health and certifying freedom from contagious diseases. Persons suffering from contagious diseases and women during their last month of pregnancy or the period following confinement are automatically eliminated. The certificate is issued free of charge under the provisions of section 11 of Act No. 337 of 16 June 1907.

The welfare of workers between the recruitment areas and the *cascina* is the responsibility of the inter-regional welfare committee for women workers (Ministerial Decree of 15 May 1950). This work is financed by the bodies concerned, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Welfare achievements include the creation of canteens and first-aid posts in transit stations and crèches for babies and children accompanying their mothers during these seasonal migratory movements. Local, provincial and regional welfare committees, in agreement with the employers, organise a medical service with doctors, nurses and inspectors.

Every year the national bodies carry out a welfare plan covering 18 provinces of emigration or immigration. In 1951 more than 150,000 women and 30,000 young persons were assisted and 514 crèches for babies and children were organised, of which 85 were new installations.

According to section 79 of the consolidated text of the Public Health Acts, communes in rice-growing regions must provide medical and pharmaceutical facilities in the *cascina* according to the rules governing such care in the case of communal poor relief. Most of the migrant women workers registered as *braccianti* on the labour lists are entitled to insurance benefits for sickness, invalidity, tuberculosis, employment injury, maternity and old age. In addition to this, each *cascina* possesses a first-aid chest containing products necessary for the protection of workers' health, the indispensable drugs for the prevention of endemic diseases and first-aid requirements for industrial accidents.

The conditions of work of these women, under a blazing sun and in muddy or flooded fields, are extremely arduous, and efforts are being made to render them more tolerable. Straw hats and dark glasses are supplied, but the old stockings used to protect the legs have not yet been replaced by rubber or waterproof leather boots and gloves, although the demand for the free provision of boots on loan to workers is made every year during the negotiations for the renewal of the collective agreement.

Workers in the fields must be provided with drinking water according to legal provisions and the instructions issued by the Ministry of the Interior in Circular No. 20800/2 of 6 June 1908.

An inquiry carried out in 1951 showed that the average sickness rate during that year's season was about 5 per cent. The prevailing diseases were those of the digestive tract (1.5 per cent.), rheumatism (1 per cent.), skin diseases (0.6 per cent.), and infectious diseases (0.4 per cent.).

CONCLUSION

This review of the conditions of work in the Italian rice fields provides a good example of complete regulations in this domain.

The most important aspects of employer-worker relations are covered by legislative measures, including basic regulations governing the protec-

tion of women and children, the creation of conciliation and arbitration committees, and the organisation of local and regional non-fee-charging employment offices, completed by joint committees responsible for the recruitment, placement and welfare of migrant labour. Collective agreements elaborate the legislative provisions in detail and seek not only to ensure increasingly adequate protection for seasonal workers but also to provide them with increasingly humane conditions of work. The practical working out of these regulations presents problems of a social and trade-union nature. These problems must be faced and ways found of providing a better reward for such difficult and arduous work. The parliamentary inquiry carried out in the summer of 1950 into the work and living conditions of women workers led to a similar conclusion. The main recommendations were that the hours of work should be limited and overtime permitted only in exceptional cases; that fairer remuneration should be fixed, taking into account the fact that the season is tending to cover a shorter period of time owing to the increase of transplanting and the use of hormones and chemical weed-killers; that health measures should be improved so as to meet the requirements of women workers by providing means of protection and defence against exposure to the sun and prolonged immersion, thereby reducing the big sickness rate. These recommendations are also the basis of the demands made by workers' organisations, which are strong enough to see that the contractual clauses are observed and to impose more favourable conditions. When the collective agreements come up for renewal each year, the trade unions make demands aiming not only at wage improvement, the reduction of hours of work, total conformity to the law in the matter of placement, more adequate welfare measures, etc., but also, on the non-material level, at a greater respect for the human dignity and personality of the worker. Their main demands are for the reduction of hours of work to seven per day; an increase in the basic wage for transplanting operations; contributions to the "welfare fund"; more effective protection and welfare measures, especially at the place of work; and the improvement of health conditions in the dormitories in conformity with legal provisions.

It is probable that these demands will be progressively met, the more so since the farmers' economic circumstances are appreciably improving as the result of the wider use of new methods of cultivation, which enable two main crops to be produced from the same land during the year and reduce the cost of weeding. It is to be feared, however, that these developments may bring about a decrease in the length of employment of seasonal labour, which would have serious repercussions on the economic circumstances of such workers, since the rice season provides their main source of income. This would be all the more serious in view of the economic depression and unemployment now rife in the provinces of Emilia and Venezia, from which the migrant workers come. A possible solution of these distressing problems would be to spread the cost of seasonal labour, which was about 15,000 million lire in 1952, over the teams of women workers and to arrange for them to set up workers' co-operatives and undertake the work of weeding and transplanting themselves.
