

## The Asian Regional Conference

*The International Labour Organisation has constantly emphasised the universal nature of its activities. Its aim is to improve conditions of labour everywhere and to establish common minimum standards for all countries. However, certain groups of countries are faced with particular problems that require study at the regional level. It was to meet these requirements that a series of conferences of American States Members of the I.L.O. was inaugurated at Santiago de Chile in 1936. The idea of holding regional conferences for the discussion of the problems of Asian countries was also considered before the war, but the First Asian Regional Conference was not called until 1947, at New Delhi.<sup>1</sup>*

*The following article gives an account of the Third Asian Regional Conference of the I.L.O., where the subjects discussed were wages, housing and the protection of young workers.<sup>2</sup>*

AT the preceding session of the Asian Regional Conference, held in Ceylon in 1950, Japan had been represented by observers only: three years later, once more a member of the International Labour Organisation, she welcomed to Tokyo the delegates of the 18 countries who were meeting to study the special problems of the Asian region.

The presence at the opening sitting of Mr. Ogata, Deputy Prime Minister of Japan (who read a message from the Prime Minister, Mr. Yoshida) as well as of Mr. Okazaki, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Kosaka, Minister of Labour, bore witness to the interest taken by the Japanese Government in the work of the Conference, and it was soon apparent that the Conference could hardly have chosen a more appropriate place for its proceedings; the Japanese authorities had spared no pains to ensure that the material conditions should be as satisfactory as possible,

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<sup>1</sup> See "Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. LVII, No. 5, May 1948, p. 425. For an account of the Second Asian Regional Conference (Ceylon, 1950), see *ibid.*, Vol. LXI, No. 3, Mar. 1950, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed note on the Conference, containing the text of the resolutions adopted, appeared in I.L.O.: *Industry and Labour*, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1 Jan. 1954, p. 20.

and the Japanese press, radio and television had conducted a remarkable publicity campaign.

Perhaps still more than the excellent material arrangements, however, Japan's own situation made Tokyo a particularly appropriate scene for this Asian Regional Conference, as Mr. Malik, Chairman of the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation, pointed out in his opening speech :

" This is the third time that a regional conference has been held in Asia, and it seems to me to be in the fitness of things that the venue should be Japan. Not only is Japan the most industrially advanced country of Asia ; it has also had to face many difficult problems in its efforts to reconstruct its national economy in the post-war period, and the solutions it has found to some of them can be of great interest to the other countries of the region which are faced with more or less similar problems. Further, the industrial capacity of Japan can be utilised to supply a proportion of the essential requirements of the other countries of the region in respect of several categories of capital equipment and materials, thus enabling these countries to diversify their economies. Japan can therefore make a very valuable contribution to the work of this Conference."

All the delegates and advisers who spoke in the plenary discussions also welcomed the opportunity thus offered to them of profiting by the experience of Japan, a country close indeed both to the West, from which it has drawn so many techniques, and to Asia, of which it forms a part. All brought out the importance of the role that Japan has to play in present-day Asia, where developments have been so rapid since the Second Session of the Regional Conference was held in 1950. At that time many Asian countries were still immersed in difficulties of political organisation ; three years later, with their political structure consolidated and their administrative framework more soundly established, they were better able to face the great social and economic problems common to the Asian region and to seek a solution of these problems in an international collaboration involving no infringement of their newly-won independence.

" It is a short-sighted policy ", Mr. Malik continued, " to try to restrain any people from seeking their destiny in a democratic way, and the myth of superiority in race, colour and creed must be totally exploded. The advanced countries have learnt their way of life through hard experience, by trial and error, and there is no better school in which the underdeveloped countries of today can learn their lessons in democracy. The efforts can at times assume enormous proportions, but no good government, as has been rightly said, can be a substitute for self-government. I might

be given instances of some countries as not having done well after their political liberation, but it is undeniable that they were held in dependence too long for them quickly to recover. There is danger in such delays, and, if the aim of human welfare is real and genuine, selfish authority must be substituted by sincere advice. Technical assistance to underdeveloped countries is a lodestar in that way."

The Conference unanimously elected Mr. Maeda, President of the I.L.O. Association of Japan, as its president, and Mr. Kosaka, Minister of Labour of Japan, as honorary president. On taking the chair Mr. Maeda welcomed all the delegates, reviewed the various items on the agenda, and said that the Director-General of the I.L.O. had in his Report to the Conference clearly stated the problems that Asia has to solve. "Overpopulation, poverty, unemployment, underemployment", he continued, "appear to be features common to almost every country in Asia, while in the developed countries in other parts of the world technology is making rapid progress, and consequently living conditions are remarkably improved. The realisation of this sharp contrast in economic conditions has spread widely through the influence of the press, of the radio and of speedier means of travel. This realisation may arouse envy and despair but it may also serve to stimulate an earnest desire to share in human material progress. However, the most encouraging factor in the situation is that the growing desire on the part of the underdeveloped countries for more rapid industrial and agricultural progress has been matched by increased recognition of its necessity among the leaders in the more advanced nations."

The President then referred to the "cardinal principles" of the I.L.O. and its desire to co-operate in the advancement of the underdeveloped countries by the establishment throughout the world of fair social standards. "The spirit in which we approach the tasks before us", he said in conclusion, "will surely determine the measure of its success."

The agenda included three items: problems of wage policy in Asian countries, workers' housing problems and the protection of young workers. Members of the Conference also discussed a Report submitted by Mr. David A. Morse, Director-General of the International Labour Office.<sup>1</sup>

#### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

The discussion of this Report in plenary sitting gave delegates an opportunity to consider as a whole the social problems of the Asian region. The Director-General had outlined the economic

<sup>1</sup> I.L.O.: *Report of the Director-General, Asian Regional Conference*, Tokyo, Sep. 1953 (Geneva, 1953).

and social background against which a solution to the problems included in the agenda should be sought. However, he had pointed out in the introduction to his Report—

Economic development . . . is but the raw material of social progress. The benefits it brings to Asian workers depend on the social policies developed by these countries, on the improvements that are achieved in wage policies, in housing, in the training and placement of the labour force, in labour laws and industrial relations, in social security, in conditions of work, in agricultural reform, in the development of co-operation and the handicraft industries and in the protection of especially vulnerable workers. These things make up the fabric of modern industrial society. Their framing and their administration must keep ahead of economic development if the social abuses that have so often accompanied that development elsewhere are to be avoided in Asia.

Accordingly, after discussing the economic factors that affect living standards and analysing the plans for economic development being applied in Asia, the Report dealt with trends in social policy and finally with "The I.L.O. and Asia". Here Mr. Morse wrote—

I hope that the discussions at this Conference will contribute to the locally informed criticism and constructive suggestions which are vital to the continuing reality and usefulness of I.L.O. activities both in Asia and elsewhere. For the I.L.O. is a universal organisation. Its regional activities should at once contribute to the formulation of universal standards and provide the opportunity for their practical application.

There was no lack of constructive suggestions in the speeches of the 32 delegates and advisers from the three groups who took part in the discussion of the Report. While recognising the accuracy of the review which it contained, they supplemented and enriched this with apposite examples—not in order merely to round off a description, but to complete the understanding which would provide a solid basis for appropriate action. No doubt the picture of Asia which gradually emerged as one speech followed another was a dark one; but the speakers were striving, not so much to depict a regrettable situation as to outline a plan for dealing with an enormous task: by analysing the existing situation, they sought to reveal what should be done.

The Director-General had written in his Report—

The gap between current standards in Asia and in more developed countries is enormous, progress in Asia is slow and the gap may even be widening; future progress towards narrowing the gap requires a great intensification both of local and international effort.

The speakers devoted their attention to defining what this effort should be. In a debate which reached a high level they were able to bring out the double aspect—economic and human—of the general problem of development in Asia.

Various delegates described the plans for economic development now being carried out in the countries of the region. Much of value had been achieved, but they did not hide their feeling that existing programmes were insufficient. Many stressed the primary importance of agriculture in the Asian region. Mr. Desai, Indian Workers' delegate, said: "It must be realised . . . that the pivot on which our future economy depends is land and agriculture, the main basis of our wealth. I am firmly convinced that unless agricultural production, of both food and industrial raw materials, is stepped up immediately there is no hope for economic prosperity in this region. Our region is, as I have already stated, essentially agricultural, and the prosperity of the large masses, comprising no less than 75-80 per cent. of the whole population, depends upon production on the land. Our rural population are also bulk consumers of manufactured and other goods, and I am therefore of opinion that unless very close attention is paid to the welfare and needs of our village communities during the next few years and considerable purchasing power created among them, thereby giving them incentives to raise their standard of living, any steps in the direction of concentrating large-scale industries are bound to prove suicidal. I also believe that economic and industrial activities to be undertaken in most of the countries in the Asian region should all be such as would contribute to the welfare of our rural population."

Many speakers stressed the importance of expanding trade and above all of a stabilisation of the prices of raw materials for economic development in the Asian countries and for a higher rate of agricultural production. Mr. Davis, Government delegate of Singapore, said in this connection: "It is scarcely possible even to plan improvements in working and social conditions unless there is a prospect of economic stability, and for many countries of this region that depends on stability in world prices and trading conditions." Mr. Mendis, Government delegate of Ceylon, said that a solution of this problem "seems available in an international price stabilisation agreement . . . . Commodity agreements are nothing new to the world and we have already had the experience of the International Wheat Agreement. It only requires the impetus of an international body and recognition of the mutual economic interdependence which exists between all nations . . . to ensure for us and other partners to such an agreement the freedom and protection from external circumstances that are necessary if we are to achieve those objectives to which we are dedicated." Several other speakers also called for an international agreement on the prices of raw materials.

Though recognising that agriculture holds a dominating place in Asian countries, speakers by no means neglected the problem

of industrialisation. The Director-General had said in this regard in his Report—

Whatever progress is achieved with capital formation, either from domestic sources or from foreign borrowing, it is certain that capital is going to remain scarce for many decades. The methods of production based on high capital investment per unit of labour which prevail in the advanced countries would surely be uneconomic for countries of Asia today. These methods of production have been developed for countries where labour is scarce and dear, where savings are high and where effective demand has kept ahead of what can be produced with existing techniques and labour forces. It is labour which has had to be economised. In Asia labour is plentiful and cheap, and it is capital which has to be economised. This is a new economic problem and demands new technical methods for its solution. The search for these methods, and their application, will not be easy. It calls for a sustained effort of imagination and ingenuity, using the creative energies of the whole community, to produce new technologies which will be genuine innovations.

Mr. Maulik (Employers' delegate, India) said how interesting he found the idea of developing a new type of industry, different both from the present cottage industries and from the present large-scale factory industry, which for the same amount of capital investment could produce more than the former and provide more employment than the latter. He therefore asked that the I.L.O. should undertake research to define this new type of industry. However, he went on, it was possible to overstate the difficulty that populous countries, encountered in adopting modern methods of production. "The number of persons directly engaged in manufacturing industry does not by itself give a complete picture of the employment potential, because for every one person so engaged there are several persons who come to be employed in the various stages of the manufacturing and distribution processes. An initial increase in manufacturing activity is the most important way of assisting employment and the most effective way of increasing the total national output at a more rapid rate than population increase. Living standards are determined basically by the availability of goods and services, and it is large-scale industrialisation which makes possible adequate and cheap supplies of the desired goods . . . . The matter of capital formation out of the savings of the community and the paucity of capital can also be overstated. During the war years no country seemed to have been preoccupied with the problem of capital formation, yet there was greater economic activity. It would be a sad commentary on the values of our times if wars could somehow be financed, but not economic development during peacetime." Mr. Maulik therefore proposed that the I.L.O., in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, should study the possibility of financing economic development through methods other than taxation.

The problem of financing economic development was one of those that attracted most attention during the debate. The majority of the speakers admitted that the shortage of capital was a major obstacle to this development, and they proposed various solutions. In the view of Mr. Ahmad (Workers' delegate, Pakistan), although financial assistance from foreign countries is necessary, the Asian countries should at the same time try to achieve capital formation at home by curtailing defence expenditure in the national budgets. "We find", he went on, "that many Asian countries allot in the national budget as much as half of their resources to defence, and as a result they have to cut down on their nation-building projects. This diversion of national resources to defence expenditure at the expense of the development projects works against the very principle of I.L.O. ideals, which say that maintenance of world peace depends more on meeting the basic needs of the hungry people. I would therefore humbly suggest to the Asian governments that they should curtail their defence expenditure in favour of capital formation, without which the plans for the development projects cannot be executed. After all, the intention of all governments in Asia is to defend their people, and not the territory alone. If the people die, will it be worth while simply to defend the land?"

Mr. Allana (representing the Governing Body) defined the problem in the following terms: "It must be admitted that financing of industries and of agricultural development—because there is a colossal lack of irrigation projects, of hydro-electrical schemes, of power-generating schemes—can only be done through domestic savings being canalised into private industry or agriculture, or through foreign private capital or international financing. It is admitted on all hands that the volume of domestic savings in each of the countries of Asia has not been tapped or canalised into productive industrial channels. That, certainly, is the primary responsibility of every country. However, if this study is carried a step further the conclusion becomes irresistible that in spite of these domestic savings there will not be adequate finance to cater for the growing needs of industrial and agricultural development. At that stage arises the question of devising means to attract international capital, through international sources, and foreign private capital." With a view to solving this problem Mr. Allana submitted a resolution concerning the international flow of capital for economic development, which was unanimously adopted by the Conference. The Conference declared in the resolution that a speedy and substantial increase in the international flow of capital is essential if there is to be the desired improvement in living standards in Asian countries, noted with interest that the problem of financing economic development had for some time been under

active consideration by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and expressed the hope that "effective arrangements can be devised to increase the flow of capital to the underdeveloped countries, and in particular that in the near future intergovernmental lending and grants may be progressively supplemented by substantial movements of foreign capital". This, the resolution continues, should be encouraged to participate in the development of less advanced areas by the easing of restrictions on the export of capital and the creation of conditions which would make investment attractive to the private investor, assist governments in promoting measures of social and economic development, open up fresh avenues of employment, and ensure to the workers fair wages and a progressively improving standard of living.

The need to ensure that foreign capital is rationally used to increase employment openings was frequently stressed. "Unemployment and underemployment", one of the speakers said, "are the two great obstacles to the economic development of Asia." This determination to spare no effort in the struggle for full employment was also revealed in the number of references made by the speakers to productivity. All recognised the urgency of increasing productivity in all branches of the economy, but they stressed an idea which the Director-General had urged in his Report as follows :

Since capital is the most scarce of all the resources available in these countries, it may be stated as a general principle that efforts towards raising productivity should entail as little increase in capital investment as possible. In applying this principle two aspects of the problem may be usefully distinguished. One aspect relates to the determination of the optimum ratios of capital to labour in connection with planning for creation of new employment opportunities for existing surplus labour. Obviously, the larger the amount of capital used to equip one additional worker, the higher will be the productivity of that worker. But since total capital resources are limited, less capital will be available for equipping other unemployed and underemployed workers. Therefore the important thing is to decide the most desirable way in which the capital resources are to be apportioned among the surplus labour both from the point of view of production and of employment.

When considering means of bringing about economic development and higher productivity, speakers did not lose sight of the essential object of this process, namely, to raise the standard of living. They pointed out that economic progress should not be obtained at the price of unjustified sacrifice on the workers' part. In another passage of his Report the Director-General had said—

The speed with which productivity can be raised will depend largely on the initiative of the workers and management of the existing producing units. Considering especially the fact that for most of the existing producing



units the capital-saving methods best suited for wide application, at the present stage, are simple but effective improvements on the methods currently in use, the workers themselves, who actually run the existing production processes, should be able to contribute greatly towards the development of such capital-saving methods provided they have the necessary incentive. The same is true of management. The process of spreading new technical knowledge can also be accelerated immeasurably by existing small producers learning from one another and promoting efficient organisations . . . both for developing and for spreading this knowledge. Thus, the basic requirement for a rapid increase in productivity would seem once again to be the full participation of the whole people.

These views met with general agreement. Various speakers stated that arrangements should be made for the equitable distribution of the profits of increased productivity; that plans to increase productivity should be so conceived as not to cause unemployment but on the contrary to open up new employment possibilities; that the parties concerned must make a joint effort, and that if this were to be possible the workers must be able to participate fully in the preparation of such plans.

The part that powerful, independent occupational organisations can play in this regard was brought out by many speakers. All the representatives of the workers described the efforts made by their associations to improve the conditions of the working class. They protested against any policy of restricting trade union freedoms and urged that collective bargaining, the importance of which is unanimously recognised, can only live up to its name if it is conducted on a footing of real equality. Organisations should be strengthened, said Mr. Vasavada (Workers' adviser, India); that would create a consciousness of their responsibilities on the part of both workers and employers. "Collective bargaining", he went on, "should not rely on the principle that might is right, that whenever I am strong I can get what I want, and when I am weak I am deprived even of what is due to me . . . . Collective bargaining should be guided by the over-all spirit of service to society." Several speakers drew attention to the importance in this regard of the international labour Conventions concerning freedom of association and the right to organise and to bargain collectively.

To secure also dignity and freedom for the worker, both as a consequence of material progress and as an element in it, was another essential preoccupation of those who took part in the debate. It is significant that a resolution calling for freedom of workers' suffrage and eligibility for election was submitted to the Conference and unanimously adopted; this recommends, *inter alia*, that governments and employers should refrain from any interference in the free exercise of these rights.

It is clear, however, that enjoyment by the workers of a satisfactory way of life presupposes not only a respect for their liberties but also acceptable material conditions, particularly a healthy dwelling, a satisfactory level of education and a training which will give access to stable and sufficiently remunerative employment.

### THE QUESTIONS ON THE AGENDA

It was soon evident that the Governing Body and the Asian Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup> had been well advised in choosing the items on the agenda. Speakers were unanimous in stressing their very great importance. While the technical committees discussed the details of the texts to be adopted, many delegates described in the plenary sittings the situation in their country as regards these problems and submitted proposals, many of them original, for their solution. The question of housing in particular received ample attention. Undeniably the shortage of housing is a problem common to the whole of Asia : but it takes various forms in different countries. How is it possible, in Hongkong, to house a population which has almost quadrupled in a few years and indeed amounts to some 2.5 million persons ? How is it possible, in Burma, to repair the enormous destruction caused by the war ? How is it possible, in Malaya, to build villages that will both provide the inhabitants with satisfactory accommodation and protect them against the attacks of rebels ? Representatives of the governments described the action taken—the establishment of a Ministry of Housing, the foundation of separate housing offices, the construction of model villages, the encouragement of private companies and the adoption of plans to assist individual building. The workers' unions co-operate in this task, and the employers—particularly on plantations—also strive to find a satisfactory solution. Indeed, as was pointed out by Mr. Vasavada (Workers' adviser, India), the problem of housing cannot be left to one element of society alone : it should be tackled from all three sides ; nor should employers forget that to provide housing for the workers is an investment, in the same way as capital goods, machinery or building ; Mr. Vasavada therefore proposed a comprehensive co-operative building movement, supported by the government, which would legislate to enable the workers to purchase land as cheaply as possible.

Speakers recognised the need for joint action by the three elements in society. They also pointed out the weakness of the building industry in the Asian region. It must, they said, be

<sup>1</sup> The Asian Advisory Committee, a tripartite body, was established in 1950 to advise the Governing Body of the I.L.O. on Asian problems and on the Asian aspects of general problems.

developed, raw materials must be found, new materials must be made available through rationally conducted research, and standards must be laid down corresponding to the resources and needs of each country. Finally, many referred to the close link between the housing problem and the wage problem. "Because of our low levels of productivity and income", said Mr. Huvanandana (Government delegate, Thailand), "most people in Asia must of necessity spend almost all of their income on the bare essentials of life. Thus, only the wealthier classes can afford to purchase adequate housing . . . ." The immediate need, he declared at another point in his speech, was a minimum wage structure which would secure a reasonable living standard, to be followed in due time by a proper living standard incorporating labour's fair share of the benefits that would accrue from raising productivity. On this point also there was no difference of view between members of the Conference. Government delegates mentioned important measures taken to solve the problem of low wages, but admitted that a great deal remained to be done. In particular, Mr. Abid Ali (Government delegate, India) said: "I would stress that a progressive wage policy under which the standard of living of workers could rise through the growth of healthy trade unionism and effective collective bargaining, side by side with power to fix minimum wages and in due course fair wages, is an essential need in this region."

Realising that the economic development and social progress of Asia are tasks requiring a long-term effort, speakers stressed the importance of protecting youth. Young workers must be educated and trained, in their own interests first of all but also in order to establish the manpower potential that is indispensable to the economic development of Asia. Various speakers showed that the protection of young workers is a major objective in most of the Asian countries. Some described in detail the action taken both to protect workers in employment and to provide them with education and training. Particular reference was made to the need for a coherent, continuous process ranging from general basic education to placement and including vocational training and guidance. Several speakers pointed out that such training and guidance should be conceived not in the abstract but with due regard for the manpower needs of the various countries.

### *The Resolutions Adopted*

There had thus been general agreement on principles and objectives regarding the three items on the agenda, and it was to be expected that the conclusions of the Conference's technical committees would be approved in plenary sitting without much

discussion. Their resolutions were indeed unanimously adopted. The committees had realised from the outset the importance and urgency of the problems referred to them, and each submitted a draft resolution which aimed not only at formulating principles but also at defining a programme of practical action.

The Committee on Housing analysed at some length the difficulties hampering a solution of the housing problem in Asia—shortage of materials, shortage of capital, shortage of technicians (architects, town planning experts, specialists in public health). In the resolution appended to its report the Committee sought to lay the foundations of a workers' housing policy comprising carefully arranged priorities for the use of available materials, so as to avoid competition between housing construction and work directly connected with economic development. It made a distinction between a programme of "short-life" housing and one providing for the construction of permanent dwellings, and recommended eminently practical action in both these regards.

The Committee on Wages, in its resolution, stated the principle that it should be the common objective of governments, employers and workers to establish wages at the highest level consistent with the economic condition of each country, and that in future wages should tend to provide the worker with a fair share of the increased productivity resulting from national economic development; to this end it recommended the practice of collective agreements as normally the best means for determining and adjusting wages; in the case of countries where collective bargaining is non-existent or not effective it recommended wage regulation by statute as a preliminary step towards the development of collective bargaining systems but stated that even here recourse should be had to tripartite machinery.

The Committee on the Protection of Young Workers stressed that the discussion had been directed only to the means of providing such protection, since its necessity was unanimously recognised. This Committee's resolution recommended a series of measures regarding general education and vocational training, vocational guidance and placement, and regulation of the employment of children and young persons; the resolution concluded with practical advice regarding the implementation of the programme so outlined.

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND THE ROLE OF THE I.L.O.

The resolutions on workers' housing and the protection and vocational preparation of young workers both included paragraphs on technical assistance. "One of the most practicable means of facilitating an early solution of the Asian workers' housing problem",

the former resolution states, "is through technical assistance from the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and other specialised agencies, and from other sources. It is recommended that the possibilities of utilising various types of technical assistance which are available to Asian countries in tackling the workers' housing problem be thoroughly and fully utilised." The resolution on young workers urged governments to "build up effective administrative and inspection services, making use, where consistent with their resources, needs and plans for economic and social development, of the assistance available through the International Labour Organisation and other international agencies under the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and similar schemes, to improve conditions of life and work for young persons".

During the discussion of the Director-General's Report, speakers referred again and again to the problem of technical assistance. Although such questions as the financing of economic development, for instance, were dealt with at greater length, this was no doubt because these problems required policy decisions, whereas technical assistance is already in existence and its value is not contested. This does not of course mean that no improvement is possible with regard to technical assistance, and many constructive criticisms and suggestions were made on this point as on others. Mr. Abid Ali (Government delegate, India) said: "It is essential for indenting countries to plan ahead their requirements. It is equally important that fields in which the indenting countries are in a position to commence action should be given priority. On the part of the authorities arranging for technical assistance it is essential that they should be able to operate a satisfactory recruitment programme in so far as experts are concerned so that the experts who are offered are persons of outstanding technical knowledge having sympathies with the underdeveloped countries. The I.L.O. should try to build up, as far as possible, a roster containing details of experts in different fields. The I.L.O. should also try to work out blueprints of projects which are considered likely to be of value to underdeveloped countries. It would then be easier for these countries to know what was involved and what might be expected to be achieved on the execution of a certain project, and to make up their minds quickly. . . . Follow-up in the case of fellowships is of particular significance."

Mr. Kotaki (Government delegate, Japan) stressed the part that his country can play in the field of technical assistance, and said: "In order to provide a large part of the surplus population in rural areas with as many employment opportunities as possible it seems especially necessary to take positive measures to increase

agricultural productivity through the improvement of agricultural technique, to promote processing of agricultural products and to extend technical and financial assistance to the handicraft industry and to medium and small scale enterprises parallel with the acceleration of industrialisation in specific fields. In such a sphere it seems that Japanese skills, suited to the actual conditions of Asia, are more applicable than those of Europe and America—which are highly specialised—and I believe that there are possibilities for the employment of Japan's technical co-operation, such as the sending of specialists to the Asian countries, the opening of institutions for practical training of their people, etc. The I.L.O. has already started the work of such technical assistance and it is hoped that such work will be carried out more positively and extensively in future, as the Indian delegate pointed out just now. For our part, we pledge ourselves to full co-operation in this respect."

Several speakers pointed out with satisfaction that the I.L.O. had made great efforts in Asia since the previous session of the Asian Regional Conference. "There is some misunderstanding", said Mr. Ahmad (Workers' delegate, Pakistan), "regarding the I.L.O. in Asia. A section of the people feel that the I.L.O. does not take the same interest in Asia as it does in other regions. I can say without fear of contradiction that this idea has no foundation at all . . . . The I.L.O. is fully aware of the fact that two-thirds of the world's population live in Asia . . . . The I.L.O. cannot justify its existence as a world organisation dedicated to the social and economic progress of humanity if it fails to save the Asian peoples from their present degradation."

Numerous speakers also asked the I.L.O. to carry out various kinds of research. Indeed, the resolution on workers' housing included a chapter entitled "Future Action by the International Labour Organisation". The Conference here requested that attention be given to the possibility of establishing two research centres for the arid and humid regions of Asia respectively; it recommended that the Office be instructed to continue and develop its studies on such subjects as the place of workers' housing and related facilities in national economic development programmes, the utilisation of underemployed resources in a short-life housing programme, co-operative housing, apprenticeship standards and vocational training in the building industry, the improvement of productivity in the industry, and the contribution that workers, employers and governments can make to the provision of an adequate supply of workers' housing.

The speeches showed clearly that delegates attached the greatest importance to all forms of action by the I.L.O. Although technical

assistance and research work received much attention, the legislative aspect of the I.L.O.'s activity was by no means neglected. Several speakers regretted that the number of ratifications of international labour Conventions by Asian countries was so small. They referred in particular to the Conventions concerning freedom of association and the right to organise and to bargain collectively, as well as the maritime Conventions adopted by the general Conference at its 28th Session (Seattle, 1946). Some added that the ratified Conventions have not always been satisfactorily applied and that means should be found of correcting this situation. One speaker expressed the desire that the Conventions and Recommendations should be drafted in a more flexible form, so that ratification and application in underdeveloped countries would be facilitated.

The Conference's interest in this question was reflected in its unanimous adoption of a resolution, submitted by the Japanese Workers' delegate, on prompt ratification of international labour Conventions by Asian countries. Here, the Conference pointed out that social progress in Asian countries would be materially assisted by the extensive ratification, acceptance and observance of the Conventions, Recommendations and resolutions adopted under the auspices of the International Labour Organisation. It therefore urged governments in the Asian region, in consultation with the appropriate organisations of employers and workers, to keep under constant review the progress of their law and practice in relation to the provisions of the Conventions and Recommendations, with a view to raising the conditions in their own countries to the level of the provisions and so facilitating in appropriate cases the ratification of Conventions and the acceptance of Recommendations; it also asked governments to give careful consideration to the results of the Asian Regional Conference and expressed the wish that this question be considered again at its next session.

Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans (Government delegate, United Kingdom) defined the role of the regional conferences. They are now, he said "a well-established feature of the work of the I.L.O., and it is recognised that they have their own special contribution to make towards the work of that Organisation . . . . The countries of Asia, for instance, are bound together not only by community of sentiment and tradition but also by the close similarity of many of their most fundamental social problems. The I.L.O. has always prided itself, and rightly, on its free discussions, where every opinion may be given full and unfettered expression. At the same time a sense of kinship in face of a common task is a priceless asset, which we should guard jealously and never allow to become dissipated by undue insistence upon national or sectional

differences. The problems which we discuss here are stubborn enough, but at least they can often be focused more clearly than is possible at meetings covering a wider range of countries. We thus have a unique opportunity of arriving at conclusions which, even if they provide only partial solutions, are at any rate concrete and practical conclusions. But results which are concrete and practical depend on the extent to which we can profit by the varying experiences of each other. Each conference is not an end but a beginning; it affords the opportunity of assessing, critically if need be, the policies already followed and of providing, through full and free debate, the materials for further progress . . . . I think we can claim that much useful work has been done at this Conference. Experiences have been exchanged and new friendships made. But we cannot yet assess its result. We shall only be able to do that when we see the fruits beginning to grow in the countries represented here. The cultivation of that fruit is our responsibility, and ours alone. But when that is accepted something more remains to be said. We cannot—and this is something which was said long, long ago—live unto ourselves alone. The regional approach has its place—and, as I have tried to show, a very important place—in the battle for social progress. But the I.L.O. as a whole, if it is to fulfil our hopes and the aspirations of all of us, must have a wider approach, a world-wide approach, an approach which you have frequently heard summed up in the word ‘universality’.”

#### CONCLUSION

The results obtained by the Conference and the spirit in which it worked were so aptly described by the Secretary-General, Mr. Jef Rens, in his reply to the debate on the Director-General's Report, that this review will perhaps be best concluded by a reproduction of the chief passages of Mr. Rens' speech.

After thanking the Japanese authorities for their generous hospitality, the Secretary-General referred to the peculiar difficulties raised in the present age by the concentration of millions of persons in enormous cities. “To limit the excessive development of large cities”, he said, “and to reduce the congestion in those which have already clearly passed reasonable bounds, seem to me to be essential factors of any adequate housing policy.” He then quoted a number of instances from the Scandinavian countries. “It was rightly stated and reiterated during the debate that this is one of the most important problems in the whole field of social policy. Apart from stable employment, no other factor contributes so much as decent housing, with a minimum of comfort, to imbuing the



worker with a sense of security. The profound and rapid economic changes which are taking place in the countries of Asia today tend to uproot an ever growing number of citizens. We have already experienced this phenomenon in the countries of the West. In these changed economic conditions the aim of government policy should be to ensure a new basis of stability in the life of the citizens. In seeking this new stability it is well to bear in mind that housing is one of the firmest of all stabilising social elements." But this problem was not peculiar to the Asian countries, he added ; the Director-General was considering the choice of housing as the central theme for his Report to the next session of the International Labour Conference, and the discussion that had taken place at Tokyo at the Asian level would serve as a valuable introduction to the debate at Geneva in June 1954.

As regards a second problem, the protection of young workers, there had been agreement that the objectives were non-controversial ; the real issues were the ways and means of achieving these objectives. " There is a special urgency ", continued Mr. Rens, " about the application in Asian countries of the principles concerning the protection of children and educational and vocational opportunity for youth which are embodied in the I.L.O.'s Constitution. Not only is there the general question of population increase which underlies all current problems in Asia but there is also the important consideration that the present generation of young workers has grown up during the difficult years of the war and is therefore in need of special care and attention. In order to safeguard the future of the nation—and this means its youth—particularly during the present transitional period of widespread industrial development, protection must take positive forms."

All the speeches had referred to the notorious inadequacy of incomes, and more particularly of wages, in the Asian countries ; and the Committee on Wages had sought practical means which might contribute to increasing wages in Asia. Doubtless the raising of wage levels was conditioned, as many delegates had pointed out, by the increase of production ; but wage levels were not conditioned by the level of production alone. " Exploitation, usury, inequality in the distribution of land, still constitute in different parts of Asia obstacles to the fair remuneration of workers. In certain countries there are too many large landed proprietors, and too many landless agricultural workers. There is too grim a difference between the magnificent, modern business centres and superb residential districts of your large cities and the sprawling suburbs in which masses of workpeople are crowded together in squalid slums. Any economic development policy which is not accompanied by a very generous social policy and a progressive

fiscal policy is courting failure through lack of support from the working masses. The peoples of Asia, having won their independence the hard way, should avoid in the social organisation of their national communities the crying inequalities and injustices which accompanied the first stages of industrialisation in Europe and should see to it that their rich citizens do not become too rich and that their poor ones do not become poorer. Fortunately the speeches made from this platform both by Employers' and Government delegates and by the spokesmen of the Workers reveal a social conscience which augurs well for the future. Let the governments, then, pursue their efforts in the field of agrarian reform by redistributing the land more equitably among those who till the land and extending to the countryside the amenities, including public hygiene facilities, of the towns; let them keep ceaseless watch over the distribution of national income in order to correct, by fiscal measures, all major inequalities; let private entrepreneurs make their goods available to the consumers at reduced prices, give their workers decent wages, and content themselves with what I would dare to call a reasonable scale of profit. Such a policy on the part of authorities and employers will no doubt encourage workers to intensify their own efforts and to give their full support to measures for increased productivity."

The responsibility for taking these measures, said Mr. Rens, lay with the peoples of Asia themselves, and speeches at the Conference showed that almost everywhere a beginning had been made. It remained true, however, that more substantial technical assistance by the advanced countries could greatly speed up the process. Moreover, it seemed from several speeches that the time had perhaps come to stabilise the prices of the principal raw materials by means of broad international agreements.

In its present state the Technical Assistance Programme depended to a large extent on the quality of its experts. The I.L.O. was devoting the utmost care to their selection. It should be stressed that the provision of technical assistance, so important today, was but complementary to the traditional legislative function of the International Labour Organisation. If the technical assistance work of the I.L.O. was to bring about the expected results, it should be accompanied by progressive application by the recipient countries of the social standards set up by the International Labour Conference. It was therefore fitting for the present meeting to examine the problem of the ratification and application of Conventions. The International Labour Conference had been endeavouring to render the instruments it adopted more flexible, without sacrificing the concept of universal standards, and would no doubt continue to do so.

"I have no doubt", Mr. Rens went on, "that the notion of technical assistance is a great notion, a just notion and a timely notion. To a certain extent—but only to a certain extent—it reflects that basic idea of the Declaration of Philadelphia which so many delegates have quoted, namely that poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere. Indeed, in the long run—in the very long run—technical assistance is of course in the interests of all. There is, however, much more involved in this technical assistance programme than a mere question of interests. It would be, in my very firm conviction, a mistake to believe that men are guided by interests alone. Whatever the power of self-interest as a motive of human conduct may be, the history of mankind cannot be wholly explained by this motive alone. It is impossible to confine man's soul within such narrow bounds. Sympathy towards those who are deprived of the essentials of life animates those who themselves possess everything that they need. Men are humiliated in their own dignity because other men live in degradation. Men feel their own rights to be endangered because other men have no rights. Men suffer because others suffer. Some of the greatest spiritual adventures of mankind are based on such expressions of solidarity as these, which bind man to man."

Unfortunately, the resources placed at the disposal of the Technical Assistance Programme were not sufficient and had even recently been reduced. If the peace talks now envisaged gave positive results, the time would perhaps come when the advanced countries would be able to supplement their present technical assistance activities with assistance in the form of supplies of equipment and materials, and the way might also be opened for the investment of private capital. "Given a favourable evolution of the international situation, the efforts which the peoples of Asia have begun to deploy with such energy, the technical aid which they are already receiving—and in the near future, I trust, a more substantial material aid—all these concerted endeavours should, in the foreseeable future, change the face of this continent and bring to its inhabitants really human living conditions."

The I.L.O. was pledged to do all within its power to help the Asian countries. Good note had been taken of every comment made during the Conference, and the further studies requested would be undertaken to the fullest extent permitted by the resources of the Organisation.

"This is the second occasion," said Mr. Rens at the close of his speech, "on which it has been my privilege and my very great honour to serve as Secretary-General to an Asian Regional Conference. The first time was at New Delhi in 1947. At the risk of

appearing a little presumptuous, I should like to mention a few—a very few—of the thoughts suggested to me by a comparison of the present Conference with the corresponding assembly in New Delhi. Six years ago the debates were more impetuous, criticism was more vehement and the temper of the Conference was more clamatory. And it is easy to understand why. Several Asian countries had only just recovered their independence and many delegates of all three groups had been formed in the hard school of opposition and struggle. They lacked practical experience of power and they had not yet had time to acquire a full sense of their new responsibilities. Since then this experience and this sense of responsibility have been progressively acquired. I have found striking evidence of this throughout your very substantial general discussion, the level of which compares favourably, in my opinion, with that of the corresponding debate in the sessions of the general International Labour Conference. I have been deeply impressed both by your profound understanding of the relevant economic and social problems and by the penetrating intelligence which you have shown in seeking appropriate—and often indeed very original—solutions to your difficulties. What has struck me even more is the moderation and thoughtfulness shown in your speeches—a moderation and thoughtfulness attributable, no doubt, to the seriousness with which you have approached the heavy responsibilities that have fallen to your lot; your firm determination to overcome one by one the obstacles in your path; and your recognition that in taking up the Herculean tasks which lie ahead you must rely first and foremost on your own efforts. It is for reasons such as this that, to my mind, your debates have been more sober, more constructive, more realistic than those of the First Asian Regional Conference.”

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