

Problems of Labour Administration in Latin America

by

John S. Fox

International Labour Office

Through the different means of action at its disposal—e.g. international and regional conferences, published studies and reports and technical assistance—the International Labour Organisation has in recent years emphasised the importance of efficient national labour administration services. The following article, drawn from the experience of a regional seminar on labour administration for the countries of Latin America, presents the author's observations concerning some of the main problems of labour administration that confront the countries of that region. The author acted as Secretary-General of the seminar.

ON 24 October 1955 a group of 33 officials of the labour ministries and national labour departments of 17 Latin American countries met in Lima, Peru, to discuss the organisation and working of labour administration services. The occasion of these discussions, which lasted nearly five weeks, was a Latin American regional seminar on labour administration. Organised under the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, the seminar represented one of the methods undertaken by the I.L.O. to give effect to the conclusion of the International Labour Conference in 1953 that it is desirable to develop and intensify relations between national labour departments and facilitate exchanges of information and experience for the mutual benefit of all.

The participants in the seminar came from the following countries: one each from Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Panama and El Salvador; two each from Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay; three from Nicaragua; and six from Peru. They included chief administrative officers of ministries of labour and heads of

major branches of labour administration, such as labour inspection and labour relations, and of specialised services, such as those for the protection of women and young workers.

The object of the seminar was to discuss the general problems relating to the organisation of labour departments, together with the main branches of labour administration in which governments carry executive responsibilities for direct action. The seminar was accordingly organised around the following subjects, to each of which an expert was assigned as principal lecturer :

- (a) general responsibilities, structure and working of ministries or national departments of labour ¹ ;
- (b) labour relations services ;
- (c) labour inspection ;
- (d) manpower services.

On each of these subjects a series of lectures was given as a basis for the discussion of the questions involved. These were followed by discussion, in which all the participants and lecturers took part.

Although this article refers in broad terms to the seminar lectures and discussions, the main purpose is not to recapitulate them. The intention is rather to outline briefly the major problems of labour administration in Latin America as revealed by the information brought forward in the discussions.

Not all the problems mentioned here are necessarily encountered in the same form or degree of seriousness in all Latin American countries, nor would it be valid to conclude that they are common to the countries of the region as a whole. They appear, however, to be worth mentioning either because they occur so often that they may be considered characteristic or because of the grave difficulties they involve. In calling attention to these problems, it is not intended to criticise any government or the many hard-working officials in the Latin American countries who carry out their duties with devotion and a high sense of social responsibility. If emphasis is placed here on the difficulties and shortcomings of labour administration, this has not been done in ignorance of the many positive elements in the situation or of the degree of success achieved in the all-important task of giving real meaning to national labour and social policy, which is the basic reason for creating labour administrative services in the first place. A full picture of the situation would contain many highlights as well as the shadows to which this article calls attention. But a frank recognition and discussion of the problems that remain to be

¹ As there is no single term appropriate to all cases, the terms " ministry " and " department " of labour are used interchangeably in this article to refer to the central national labour authority.

solved will, it is hoped, help in the search for solutions and thereby make it possible to add to the positive accomplishments that have already been recorded.

At the outset it should be recognised that there are no ideal solutions for the many difficult problems involved in organising labour administration services. Methods and practices that may prove fully effective in one country are not automatically transferable to another, since every national system of public administration is rooted in the country's traditions, customs and practices. And in most cases, in Latin America as in other regions, these are far from being homogeneous.

Nevertheless the weight of changing circumstances—and, in the present case, of dynamic economic development accompanied by increased industrialisation—makes it necessary to adapt traditional institutions and practices to the new objective needs created by new social and economic conditions. The effects make themselves felt not only in the field of labour administration but throughout the whole of public administration. As a result solutions to some difficulties of labour administration may have to be worked out in the wider context of public administration as a whole.

It is not possible, therefore, to put forward ideal solutions to the problems discussed here, or to suggest models to be rigidly applied. On several occasions the International Labour Conference has dealt with special aspects of the national machinery necessary for the effective administration of labour questions, and has adopted international standards on them in the form of Conventions and Recommendations. In some cases such instruments deal with the administration of a particular branch of labour questions, as in the Labour Inspection Convention and Recommendation, 1947, and the Employment Service Convention and Recommendation, 1948. In many others provisions relating to administration are contained in instruments whose main purpose is to set minimum standards of labour and social policy; among these may be cited the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948, the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949, the Fee-Charging Employment Agencies Convention, 1933, and its revision in 1949 and the numerous Conventions and Recommendations dealing with general conditions of employment (e.g. hours of work, rest, holidays), the employment of women and young workers, industrial safety, health and welfare, and social security. In 1953 the Conference had on its agenda the broad question of the organisation and working of national labour departments and endorsed a series of observations and conclusions on the question as a guide or source of information for national action by the member States of the I.L.O.

It would not be possible within the scope of this article to summarise these decisions of the International Labour Conference relating to labour administration or even to mention the many other forms of international consultation, guidance and direct action in the matter that the Organisation has carried out through its various channels of activity. It may be noted, however, that the observations put forward in this article are linked, wherever possible, with the international guides furnished by these I.L.O. activities and conclusions.

The problems under discussion may be divided into two groups : those that have an effect generally on the whole of the labour department's effective working, such as staffing difficulties and the adequacy of labour research and statistics activities ; and those that are particularly related to specific branches of labour administration—that is, labour-management relations services, labour inspection and manpower services.

GENERAL PROBLEMS

The seminar discussions started with an examination of questions related to the general responsibilities, structure and functioning of national ministries or departments of labour. Special attention was also given under this heading to labour research and statistics services.

In these discussions the participants brought forward information concerning the status of labour administration in the governmental structure of their countries. In a number of cases the labour services have the full status of a ministry or form a major branch of a ministry. In others, however, they constitute no more than a subordinate branch of a ministry responsible for other more or less related subjects as well, such as the national economy or public health. It was clear that in both cases there are problems of organisation and co-ordination of policies and practices so as to ensure efficiency of operations. But it was equally apparent that these problems are more difficult of solution when the labour services do not constitute a full-fledged specialised department or ministry, in large part because in these circumstances they often lack the authority and resources necessary to carry out their functions efficiently and impartially and to participate adequately in the elaboration of national social and economic policy.

There is no Latin American country that has not assigned a high priority in its national policies to the improvement of the working and living conditions of its people. All have adopted far-reaching labour legislation, in most cases in the form of a comprehensive labour code. All, therefore, are faced with similar

problems of properly organising an adequate system of labour administration to ensure that the standards embodied in the legislation are applied in practice and do not remain merely theoretical, that industrial harmony is achieved, and that full employment is established and maintained. The administrative services set up to carry out these responsibilities need to enjoy a status in the governmental structure in keeping with their importance, with corresponding authority and resources. This is difficult to achieve in any administration ; but where labour services are organised as a subordinate branch of the public administration there is no doubt that the difficulties are enhanced. It was for this reason that the International Labour Conference unanimously observed in 1953 that " within the framework of a government administration it is therefore appropriate to provide a labour department—or, failing that, to set up within an existing department an administrative unit capable of ultimate emergence as a separate labour department—enjoying within the over-all structure a status corresponding to its important responsibilities ". That status has not yet been fully reached in all the Latin American countries.

Considerable importance was also attached at the seminar to the need for a good general organisation as a basis for the creation of specialised labour services for matters involving highly refined or advanced techniques. In other words, as the discussions brought out, the experience gained on the general plane in dealing in the first instance with the more easily manageable problems is frequently an indispensable prerequisite for successfully tackling highly specialised technical problems. Attempts have been made, for example, to set up vocational guidance services in the absence of adequate employment market information and an effective system of employment services, both of which are essential prerequisites. Another example may be found in efforts to organise the inspection and control of young workers without having as a foundation an adequate general system of labour inspection.

A lack of co-ordination among the activities of the various branches of the labour department was also mentioned prominently as a problem in a number of cases. Among the ways in which this problem makes itself felt is the absence of means for informing officials of the activities carried out by other services than their own and the results obtained, or for keeping them supplied with up-to-date information on the findings of inquiries and investigations into labour problems. Another aspect of this problem is that of keeping officials regularly informed of studies, technical documentation and publications received in the ministry from a variety of sources ; these, according to information brought forward by several participants, do not always reach the officials who could

make effective use of them in their daily work. In this connection attention was called to the arrangements made in some countries for the preparation of a periodical bulletin for internal circulation, giving information concerning the activities of the labour department as a whole and of its various branches, as well as bibliographical information on relevant national and international publications.

Besides the problem of co-ordination within the labour ministry there is also the problem of co-ordination between it and other branches of the government concerned with related matters. Mention was made in the seminar discussions of shortcomings in the inter-ministerial collaboration that should exist between the labour, education, health and social welfare authorities in efforts to control child labour and ensure the effective protection of young workers ; or between the labour, health and social security authorities in respect of the protection of workers against occupational risks to their safety and health. The creation of inter-ministerial commissions to co-ordinate the carrying out of related activities and to direct the work of the respective officials effectively and appropriately was suggested as an approach to solving this problem.

No problem appeared to be more widespread and to give greater concern to the seminar participants than that of providing the various services of the labour department with staff adequate as regards both number and competence. It was evident from the discussions that the problem either originates in, or is exacerbated by, the prevalence of low salary scales and, frequently, the intervention of political considerations or the intrusion of personal influences in staff appointments and promotions. Often present together, these factors make it extremely difficult to attract the right type of candidate to the service and also to retain in service the kind of official who, by his educational qualifications, intelligence, integrity and balanced judgment, and his understanding of the social and human problems that are the principal object of his work, is the key to the success of a national labour department and the determining factor in the prestige it enjoys with workers, employers and the public in general. There can be little doubt that these problems will continue to bedevil labour departments as long as these factors persist, that is as long as labour officials do not enjoy conditions of service comparable to those prevailing in private employment for persons with similar qualifications, together with reasonable assurance of both stability in employment and possibilities of promotion on the basis of merit. There is good reason to regard this as one of the most serious general problems of labour administration in Latin America.

With regard to questions of staff, the participants from several

countries referred to the practice in their labour departments of employing university students as part-time officials. It is readily apparent that such arrangements may have an important contribution to make towards filling posts that would otherwise remain vacant, and towards building up a body of university graduates with practical and technical experience. It may nevertheless be observed that such measures, advisable or unavoidable as a temporary expedient, can serve only limited and short-range objectives for the labour department itself; and that, as economic and social conditions develop, the point will of necessity be reached when the department must have a permanent full-time staff, adequately qualified to carry out their functions and employed under conditions that ensure stability of employment and sufficiently attractive prospects of advancement.

For a labour department to carry out its responsibilities effectively it needs to have adequate, reliable and up-to-date information of the problems with which it has to deal. This can only be achieved through properly organised research and statistics activities, which enable the department to plan its own programmes of action, to supervise the application of the legal provisions in force, to assist employers and workers in the solution of their problems, to collaborate with other public authorities in the elaboration of national economic and social plans and to keep the public informed of current labour problems and developments—in short, all the functions that a labour ministry is called upon to carry out. Labour research and statistics activities cover a wide range of questions, including wages, hours of work and other working conditions, occupational organisations, industrial disputes, industrial hazards and injuries, employment and unemployment, and retail and consumer prices. These are questions of immediate and practical concern, not theoretical or abstract matters to be dealt with in an undefined future. Although in the development of these activities the technical collaboration of other governmental agencies—such as a national statistics authority—may be called for in accordance with the general structure of the public administration, it is nevertheless essential that they should as far as possible be concentrated in the labour authority, and that authority needs to be properly equipped for the purpose. From the information brought forward by a number of participants at the seminar, it would scarcely be accurate to conclude that the problems involved in properly organising the research and statistics activities of labour departments have been satisfactorily solved. Frequently, in the absence of adequate labour information, the activities of the labour authorities tend to be haphazardly organised and to be directed towards dealing with specific cases more or less on an *ad hoc* basis

rather than in a consistent manner based on full information of all the factors involved and their inter-relationships.

Finally, with regard to the general problems it is necessary to mention the relations between the national labour department and the organisations of employers and workers and the general public. There can be little doubt that at all levels of executive action, and at every stage of its activities, the labour department's work is facilitated by an understanding on the part of workers and employers of labour and social legislation and by the support of an informed public opinion, based on reliable and accurate information, for all programmes related to the elaboration and execution of labour policy. In all countries there are opportunities to use customary channels of public information and education, such as the press, radio and films, as well as possibilities for organising special exhibits, lectures and conferences, and of disseminating information in many different forms of wide appeal. That these opportunities are not fully and regularly exploited, and in a manner designed to gain wide public confidence in the trustworthiness of the information made public, would seem to be one of the shortcomings still to be overcome by labour departments in some countries of Latin America.

PROBLEMS OF PARTICULAR SERVICES

Considerable attention was devoted by the seminar to three major fields in which labour departments exercise executive responsibilities: labour-management relations, labour inspection and manpower questions. With regard to these areas of responsibility discussion was directed in large part towards clarifying and defining the functions involved; this discussion threw considerable light on the difficulties that may arise in the absence of such clarification.

Labour-Management Relations and Labour Inspection

In the field of labour-management relations the functions of the labour authority were considered under four headings: those relating to occupational organisations; collective negotiations and agreements; the settlement of disputes through conciliation and arbitration; and labour-management collaboration at the workplace and at the industry and national levels. It was noted, as a point of departure, that the principal responsibilities of the State in these matters are to define the bases on which the parties concerned may constitute their occupational organisations, to maintain up-to-date information on developments in labour-management relations, to encourage collective negotiation and the conclusion of collective agreements and, in general, to promote

co-operation and constructive relations between workers and employers. These functions emphasise assistance and advice by the competent administrative services to workers and employers in the harmonious development of their relations and not direct intervention in their relations.

This concept of the responsibilities of the labour department in the field of labour-management relations—a concept that derives directly from freedom of association and the right to organise and bargain collectively—makes it essential to organise and carry out research and statistical activities, so as to be able to furnish to the parties concerned the objective and trustworthy data indispensable for carrying forward their negotiations in a responsible and reasoned manner. In the absence of reliable data relating to such matters as consumer prices and cost of living, hours of work, wages and other conditions of work, negotiations and the conclusion of agreements are more difficult. In connection with this point mention was also made of the need for staffing labour relations services with persons trained not only in law but also in economics, sociology and accounting.

In a detailed examination of the main divisions of administrative responsibility in the field of labour-management relations, related groups of functions were considered. With regard to occupational organisations it was seen that an appropriate and consistent grouping of functions would include the following among others : to encourage the formation of organisations and, through assistance and advice to the parties, as requested, to aid them in their efforts to this end ; to see that occupational organisations are constituted and run in accordance with the relevant legal prescriptions ; to maintain current information and statistical data concerning the organisations in being ; and to determine which are the most representative organisations for purposes of negotiation or of membership in joint labour-management or tripartite bodies, or to provide the information necessary for such determination to be made.

Another group of functions relates to collective negotiations and the conclusion of agreements, which it should be a prime responsibility of the labour department to encourage and assist. Under this heading would fall such functions as maintaining and providing employers and workers with relevant information ; assisting them in drawing up collective agreements, including encouragement to include in them provisions for the establishment of joint machinery to resolve differences in interpretation, to provide for collaboration in implementation, and to pursue related purposes of labour-management collaboration ; and maintaining adequate records of collective agreements.

With regard to labour disputes the main responsibilities are concerned with the promotion of voluntary conciliation and arbitration, and co-operation with employers and workers to this end; the carrying out of administrative arrangements for the constitution and functioning of conciliation and arbitration bodies; membership of such bodies as may be provided for by the relevant legal provisions; and supervision of the legally established procedures for recording and otherwise dealing with conciliation and arbitration awards.

Finally, with regard to joint collaboration machinery, whether at the level of the workplace or industry or at the national level, the labour department's functions are mainly concerned with encouraging the establishment of such bodies and assisting the parties concerned through information and advice as to how to set up and run joint bodies.

Three sections or services, which together form the labour-relations branch of a labour ministry, are needed to carry out effectively the functions outlined above. These would be responsible respectively for occupational organisations, collective negotiations and agreements and labour disputes. The functions relating to joint machinery for labour-management co-operation could be assigned to the section responsible for occupational organisations or to that concerned with negotiations and agreements.

Some space has been devoted here to outlining the main functions of a labour department in the field of labour-management relations because the absence of such definition in a number of Latin American countries has given rise to serious practical difficulties of labour administration. In particular, these difficulties are most prominent in the sometimes confused situation as regards labour relations on the one hand and labour inspection on the other.

As a number of speakers at the seminar indicated, an unduly large proportion of the activities of the labour inspectorate is often devoted to the investigation of complaints and disputes rather than to the regular inspection of workplaces. In more than one case no regular inspection is carried out at all, and visits are made only after a complaint has been made or at the request of trade unions or when a dispute is known to exist or to be developing. In one country regular inspection is carried out with respect to occupational safety and health, but inspections of workplaces with regard to other questions (hours, wages, young workers, etc.) are carried out only after a complaint has been received. This approach has obvious disadvantages, the most important of which is that it subordinates, if not eliminates entirely, the main functions of the labour inspectorate, which are to supervise the application of protective labour legislation, to assist employers and workers to

understand the legal requirements and how to comply with them, and to keep the authorities advised of defects or abuses not covered by existing legal provisions. When these are properly carried out their effect is not only to enforce compliance with the labour legislation but also, and at least equally important, to prevent misunderstandings, conflicts and disputes. If labour inspection is limited to cases where disputes have already broken out, it is clear that these preventive influences cannot make themselves felt.

There is no doubt that, by reason of their close and direct contacts with employers and workers in the workplaces visited, labour inspectors are often in a position to become aware of disputes in their initial stages. In such circumstances their activities should be limited to informing the services responsible for dealing with labour-management relations so that they can intervene with a view to preventing conflicts or restricting their effects. In so doing, labour inspectors act as perceptive agents for the information of the competent branches of the labour department, leaving to the latter the responsibility for taking appropriate action.

Related problems of incompatibility of functions arise when, as is sometimes the case in Latin American countries, labour inspectors are assigned formal conciliation or arbitration duties. Practical experience in many regions and countries—including Latin America—has conclusively shown that when a labour inspector acts also as an industrial conciliator or arbitrator one or the other of the parties to the dispute will tend to regard him with suspicion and to withhold its confidence and collaboration from him in his capacity as inspector. Or there is a real risk that he may be tempted to carry out his enforcement duties with some laxity in order to win the employers' good will and thus facilitate the settlement of disputes.

The normal executive functions assigned to labour inspection and labour relations services need to be clearly distinguished because in certain important respects they are incompatible when carried out by the same official. It should be recognised that these are separate areas of responsibility for which a labour department should have separate services, appropriately staffed, and carrying out equally important responsibilities of the State in the field of labour administration.

With regard to the organisation of labour inspection, three problems evoked considerable interest in the seminar discussions. One of these referred to the administrative structure of inspection, that is, whether it is preferable to organise inspection in a single unified service or to have multiple services each specialising in a specific major branch of inspection, for example one in safety and health, another in the protection of women and young workers

and a third in general labour law inspection (hours, wages, etc.). Both structural forms are found in the Latin American countries, and both offer certain advantages and disadvantages. Where the multiple structure exists, however, the difficulties of organising the activities of the separate services, so as to achieve a maximum of co-ordination and interchange of information and a minimum of duplication of visits, appear to loom very large. These questions are all the more difficult to resolve where, as is sometimes the case, inspection is not concentrated in the labour department as the authority with primary responsibility for supervising the protection of workers at their work but is assigned in part to other government departments. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this is the division of responsibilities for protecting workers against occupational risks to their safety and health, whereby occupational safety responsibilities are allocated to the labour authority and occupational health to the public health authority, although in practice these are two aspects of workers' protection that cannot be separated. The actual effect of such separation appears to be that in some cases the desired protection falls between two stools, and little is done in respect either of safety or of health protection for workers in certain areas of employment.

Whatever may be the structural organisation of labour inspection, there are many problems of personnel that are at times very difficult to resolve. Some of these, which concern the labour department as a whole, have already been mentioned. With respect in particular to inspection, perhaps more than other branches of labour administration, it may be emphasised that effectiveness depends in large measure on the ability of the inspector to establish good relations with employers and workers and to gain their confidence in his professional ability and impartiality in supervising the enforcement of the protective labour legislation, and in helping them to understand and comply with their responsibilities. These functions require of the inspector high qualities of good judgment and tact, integrity, practical experience of industry and technical knowledge, qualities that can be assured only through a careful selection of candidates and thorough training. Closer attention to these basic needs in a number of countries of Latin America would be well rewarded by more effective inspection, the avoidance of many needless complaints and disputes, and a higher level of workers' protection.

Another question that evoked considerable interest and lively discussion related to inspection methods. Labour inspection may be repressive or persuasive in conception, or it may use a mixed system of coercion and persuasion. Where the repressive or coercive concept is the rule, emphasis is placed largely or entirely on the

automatic application of sanctions in all cases of contravention of the legal provisions. Where the underlying concept is persuasion, the inspector's chief function is to educate and advise, to induce employers to comply voluntarily with their legal obligations and assist them to find satisfactory solutions to the problems raised by the regulations protecting their workers. Between these two extremes is the mixed system, by which the inspector advises and instructs in less serious cases and has recourse to the imposition of penalties in the case of serious and repeated infractions. The latter system has in practice proved the most effective and has been incorporated in the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (Articles 3 and 17).

A number of countries in Latin America apply the mixed concept, others the exclusively repressive. It is to be noted that the systems that place so much emphasis on repression appear also to be those in which inspection visits are made not as a routine preventive activity but largely or entirely in consequence of complaints or disputes, and in which the settlement of disputes through judicial procedures dominates and overshadows all other activities of the labour department. It can validly be held that this situation results in defeating the purposes of the labour department. Laws and regulations protecting workers cannot be properly enforced without the co-operation of the employers, but drastic coercion is not conducive to an atmosphere of co-operation or harmonious industrial relations. On the contrary it promotes lack of understanding for the labour legislation and resentment towards both workers and inspectors, who are held responsible for the coercive measures applied automatically and, in many cases, unreasonably in view of the nature or gravity of the offence.

But the transformation of a system of inspection from a predominantly repressive service to one applying either coercion or persuasion according to circumstances is not easily achieved. It depends in large part on the professional abilities of the inspection staff and the degree to which both employers and workers understand the protective labour legislation and their legal rights and responsibilities. Its operation depends on the inspector's personal appreciation of the situations with which he has to deal, and for this heavy responsibility he must have the qualities and technical knowledge referred to earlier. Although, therefore, the transformation is essential and, in the long run, inevitable, it can only be successfully achieved as the result of a carefully supervised process of change and over a period long enough to permit the necessary conditions to be developed. Labour administrators in the Latin American countries that have not yet developed inspection services along these lines have a difficult problem to solve.

Manpower Services

The third area of major executive responsibility of labour departments to which the seminar gave attention is that of manpower questions. The problems of labour administration in this field are not as clearly discernible as they are with respect to labour relations and labour inspection because for the most part administrative services for manpower questions are in many of the Latin American countries either in a very early stage of development or are virtually non-existent. The discussions, therefore, turned largely on reviewing the functions and responsibilities of labour departments with regard to manpower problems.

One of the major responsibilities of a labour department is to participate in the preparation of national development plans. Of the various factors that enter into the planned development of the national economy—capital, raw materials, power, machinery and labour, among others—manpower is perhaps the most flexible. But there are definite limits to such flexibility, and economic development plans, if they are to be balanced in relation to national circumstances, need to take full account of available and prospective labour skills and resources. This requires, in the first place, close and constant study of the manpower situation, including such aspects of it as employment and unemployment, the number of skilled workers available, the skills needed for newly developing or prospective industries, and the like. In other words the importance of labour research and statistics comes again to the fore.

The responsibilities of the labour department with regard to manpower extend not only to the formulation of general policies and plans but also to two main areas of executive action: employment services and training in needed vocational skills. The function of employment services is to bring labour supply and demand into balance—to find appropriate jobs for unemployed or underemployed workers, to bring together job opportunities and the workers with the technical skills and aptitudes needed for those jobs. Continuing analysis of the employment market, together with the organisation of a system of employment services appropriate to national and local needs, is in brief the way in which labour departments discharge this responsibility. Closely related to this is the training of workers in vocational skills as indicated by both actual and prospective industrial development. It is evident that to this end there is an urgent necessity for close co-operation between the labour and education authorities with regard to the extent, nature and structure of the vocational education facilities for the young persons who will enter the employment market, and the organisation and functioning of apprenticeship

systems. It is further evident that traditional methods of training may not be adequate to the urgent need for skilled workers created by dynamic industrial development. For both economic and social reasons, therefore, it may be necessary to explore methods of training workers in a short period of time in the industrial skills needed. In this the labour department has an important executive role to play.

CONCLUSION

The value of the seminar at Lima was both actual and potential. It represented an immediate opportunity, highly appreciated by all who participated in it, for a mutually beneficial exchange of information and experience and for the development of useful relations between national labour departments of the region. Its potential value lies in its indication of the problems that remain to be solved and the action needed to deal with them.

It was not the purpose of the seminar to review national labour policies or labour standards, but the administrative machinery needed to make such policies and standards effective. Many of the problems that emerged are neither unique to Latin America nor common to all the countries of the region, each of which displays its own national traits. Because of such differences, moreover, it is not possible to draw up a list of the problems in order of importance that would be generally valid for all the countries in the region. Generalisations are either inapplicable to a particular set of national circumstances or must be shaded and adapted to them. The following concluding observations are put forward subject to this reservation.

Many of the problems that have been reviewed here are to be found in other countries and regions, both more and less developed economically. Latin American countries are not the only ones that are still working towards resolving such questions as the proper status of labour services in the governmental structure, the co-ordination of activities both internally and with related government departments, the staffing of labour administrative services, comprising the inter-related questions of selection, training, status and conditions of employment of officials, the adequacy of labour research and statistics and the promotion of an informed public opinion in support of the programmes and activities of the labour department. What is, however, more characteristic of Latin America is the absence of a clear distinction in practice between labour relations and labour inspection functions, and the consequent subordination of many essential responsibilities of a preventive nature to the operation of the machinery for settling labour disputes, whether individual or collective. Besides dealing with complaints

and settling disputes, it is at least equally important for a labour department to prevent them as far as possible and to take positive action to promote harmonious industrial relations.

This situation represents not only a difficulty for effective labour administration but at the same time an immediate opportunity. For the solution of a number of other difficulties the labour department may be dependent on decisions taken in other branches of the government, or a long and careful period of preparation may be required, but in respect of the clarification of the functions of labour relations services and labour inspection it may be possible to make appropriate internal arrangements within the labour ministry to build up the preventive side of its activities. Once this is achieved, such problems as the proper training of labour officials in carrying out their tasks will probably prove more manageable. Certainly such clarification, where it is needed, would contribute greatly towards enabling the labour department to carry out its responsibilities more effectively. The fact that the needed separation of functions is to be found in some countries of the region shows that there is nothing inherent in Latin American conditions to prevent it.
