

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

Havana, 3 to 14 September 1956

Twenty years have elapsed since the first Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organisation—the first regional conference of the I.L.O.—was held in Santiago de Chile. The Sixth Conference thus provided an opportunity for reviewing the social progress made in the countries of the Americas since that time and also for discussing the regional aspects of certain general questions which are in the forefront of the present programme of the I.L.O. The following article gives a brief outline of the proceedings of the Conference; a fuller account of the discussions at the plenary sittings will be found in Industry and Labour¹, also published by the I.L.O.

THE tradition of regular conferences of the American States Members of the International Labour Organisation is firmly established, despite an interruption during the Second World War. The Sixth Conference of the series was held in Havana, on the invitation of the Government of Cuba, from 3 to 14 September 1956. The generous welcome and hospitality which it extended to all the participants were highly appreciated and were frequently referred to by speakers in the course of the debates.

The Conference was attended by 113 delegates and advisers from 19 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, United States and Uruguay), including 31 Government delegates, 13 Employers' delegates and 14 Workers' delegates. On the second day of the Conference, the Minister of Justice and Labour of Paraguay announced that his country had decided to become a member of the Organisation. This accession, which brings

¹ Vol. XVI, No. 12, 15 Dec. 1956.

the membership to a total of 77 States, was warmly welcomed by all those present as a further step towards the universality of the Organisation.

Four Ministers of Labour (from Costa Rica, Cuba, Paraguay and Peru) were present, either as members of delegations or in addition to the official delegations. Observers from three member States—France, Spain and the United Kingdom—and from Nicaragua also attended. In addition, five international organisations accepted the invitation to attend the Conference: the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the World Health Organisation (Pan American Sanitary Bureau), the Organisation of American States, and the Organisation of Central American States. Invitations were also accepted by the following non-governmental organisations: International Co-operative Alliance, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, International Federation of Women Lawyers, and World Federation of Trade Unions.

The Governing Body of the I.L.O. was represented by its Chairman, Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, and by Mr. N. Azak and Mr. J. E. Camejo Argudín for the Government group, Mr. J. O'Brien and Mr. F. Yllanes Ramos for the Employers' group, and Mr. G. P. Delaney and Mr. J. Möri for the Workers' group.

Mr. Luis Alvarado, Assistant Director-General of the International Labour Office, was appointed Secretary-General, and Mr. José Enrique de Sandoval Assistant Secretary-General, of the Conference, which was also attended by the Director-General of the I.L.O., Mr. David A. Morse.

In addition to the Report of the Director-General, the Governing Body of the I.L.O. had placed the following items on the agenda of the Conference: the role of employers and workers in programmes to raise productivity; labour-management relations; and co-operatives.

OPENING SPEECHES AND ELECTION OF THE OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

The Conference was opened by the Chairman of the Governing Body, who thanked the Government of Cuba for its invitation and the President of the Republic, General Fulgencio Batista, for honouring the opening session by his presence; he stressed the value of the regional approach to many of the complex problems with which the I.L.O. was called upon to deal. Experience had proved the value of the Regional Conferences; different

regions had their own special problems and their own aspects of general problems, and these conferences helped to focus attention on the regional aspects. Moreover, they contributed to the full accomplishment of the general aims of the Organisation, ensuring that parallel advances were made all along the front towards the ultimate goal of the I.L.O. In the field of technical assistance, also, a regional approach was necessary, since assistance had to be adapted to regional and even local needs.

The Director-General of the I.L.O. then addressed the Conference. Dealing also with the value of Regional Conferences, he emphasised that they fulfilled an equally or even more important function in enabling each region to make a contribution to the general work of the Organisation from its own experience. "In this region" he said "there is a wealth of new experience which can be of the greatest value to other parts of the world. In some sense I think it would be true to describe the Americas as a laboratory in which the most interesting social experiments are being and will be carried out." The Director-General also referred to the staunch support which the governments, employers and workers of the countries of America had long given to the I.L.O. Reviewing the social advances that had been made in the region since the first Conference of American States in 1936, he pointed to the great progress in the ratification of international labour Conventions and congratulated Cuba on its proud record of 59 ratifications—the highest figure for any of the American member States.

The President of the Republic of Cuba warmly welcomed all those who were attending the Conference; he was glad that Cuba had for the second time the honour of being host to a Conference of American States. Cuba had always striven to maintain good relations between capital and labour and had constantly co-operated enthusiastically with the I.L.O. to this end. "The high duties performed by the I.L.O." he said "may be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of this century." The Organisation worked in pursuit of objectives common to all. It was no super-State, striving by absolute power to impose decisions on its Members but had regard to the fundamental interests, resources and needs of each member country. That was why any positive achievement within the I.L.O. must inevitably redound to the advantage of the workers in every country that was a member of the Organisation.

After referring to the considerable improvement in conditions of life and work that had been made throughout the world in recent years, General Batista spoke of the great hopes of the peoples of the world. They wanted deeds, not words; they were neither

sceptical nor trustful, but watchful. They realised their strength and believed that the State must work for the individuals who made up the great family of each nation. He trusted that the work of the Conference would be successful and would lead to wide and fruitful results.

The Conference unanimously elected as its President Mr. José Suárez Rivas, Minister of Labour of Cuba, and as its Vice-Presidents Mr. Fallas Monje, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Costa Rica for the Government group, the Mexican Employers' delegate (Mr. Campuzano Oñate) for the Employers' group, and the Brazilian Workers' delegate (Mr. Campista) for the Workers' group. The President described the Conference as one more step in the movement for social betterment. The agenda and the reports on the various subjects to be discussed were a further proof that America was a laboratory for ideas and practical achievement designed to raise the moral, material and spiritual level of the workers.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

In his Report to the Conference the Director-General stressed the diversity of economic and social conditions in the American region. Nevertheless, the 20 years since the first Regional Conference had been marked by rapid economic growth in practically all the countries of the region, and at the same time considerable attention had been paid to the social implications of industrial development. The current social climate in the Americas seemed particularly favourable to a positive approach to the labour and social problems necessarily bound up in the transition towards a higher degree of industrialisation. The Report reviewed briefly the progress of economic and social growth in the region over the past few years and then dealt with certain problems that are of great importance for the American countries and are at the same time current preoccupations of the I.L.O. in its general programme of activities, viz. workers' education and housing. The Report concluded with a review of the activities of the I.L.O. since the last Conference of American States, with special reference to activities in the American region or likely to be of particular interest to countries in the area. Linking up his Report with the other items on the agenda, the Director-General said: "I would emphasise that the whole focus of this Conference is on understanding and taking account of the social problems arising with the transition towards industrial society". He referred in particular to the manpower problems connected with large-scale movements from rural to urban areas, the growth of factory employment, and changing skill requirements in developing industries. He pointed

out that adaptation to industrial work and the raising of levels of productivity as a means of improving living standards were problems that called for fruitful co-operation between management and labour.

In the debate on the Report many speakers provided valuable factual information concerning the social progress in their countries and the steps taken to meet the various problems that had been encountered. Several of them emphasised the help they had received from the I.L.O.'s technical assistance activities in dealing with these problems. Other speakers made valuable suggestions, based on the experience of their respective countries, for the future activities of the I.L.O., both generally and in the region.

The broad themes which ran through the debate and may be said to have dominated the discussion were summed up by the Secretary-General of the Conference in his reply as follows :

(1) There was a growing feeling that legislation, while necessary, was not enough, and that what was now needed was a greater emphasis on the machinery for securing its full application.

(2) The central importance of the individual, and hence of the human approach to the social problems of a society in process of industrialisation, was more fully recognised.

(3) There was a clearer realisation than at previous Conferences that, while material well-being was a laudable goal, it was not the whole objective but must be linked with a search for moral and spiritual well-being.

(4) Emphasis continued to be laid on the need for freedom in all its forms, and particularly (in so far as the I.L.O. is concerned) for complete and genuine freedom of association.

Commenting on the first of these themes, the Secretary-General pointed out that, while most of the countries represented at the Conference had a very large body of labour legislation, much of which was advanced and in harmony with international standards, the debate had shown that it was not always effectively applied. This was due in some cases to lack of adequate machinery and in others to a shortage of qualified staff to ensure its implementation. In both these respects the I.L.O. was in a position to assist any countries that might wish for guidance in building up administrative machinery or in training personnel. The second theme was linked with the first. It implied that social legislation, to be effective, must improve the lot of each individual worker. The speakers who had referred to productivity, workers' education or better housing had made it clear that they were not thinking in terms of masses, but of the lot of individual men and women. From this followed the third theme—a growing concern with non-material

things. So long as one considered men in the mass, one might be tempted to think that a bare sufficiency of material things (although even that had not been achieved for millions in the region) should satisfy them. But when one placed the accent on the individual and on human personality, one was brought up sharply by the recognition that man did not live by bread alone.

Finally, referring to freedom, the Secretary-General recalled that one speaker had pertinently remarked that freedom was something which could not be taken for granted but must always be actively cherished. Several speakers had suggested that, despite favourable legislation, true freedom of association was not enjoyed by the workers of some countries in the region. Hence the repeated appeals to all countries not only to ratify but to apply the principles laid down in the relevant international labour Conventions. The Secretary-General pointed out that methods of ensuring freedom of association might well differ from country to country and that one should not be too hasty in condemning systems different from one's own. He emphasised that a trade union could usually develop most strongly when it restricted itself to defending the economic and social interests of those it represented and did not allow its efforts to be dissipated or distracted by political action. He also stressed the need for a high sense of responsibility on the part of trade union leaders and a fuller recognition by all concerned that there could be no rights without corresponding duties and obligations. Only thus was it possible to create a favourable climate of labour-management relations that would promote further social progress.

ROLE OF EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS IN PROGRAMMES TO RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

The Committee on Productivity set up to consider the first item on the agenda put forward its conclusions in two resolutions, which were unanimously approved by the Conference. The first deals with the role of employers and workers in programmes to raise productivity and begins by outlining the potential economic and social benefits of higher productivity and the requirements to be fulfilled if they are to be secured. These requirements include measures to prevent unemployment as a result of increased productivity, and to promote the closest co-operation and understanding between governments, employers, workers and, in general, all social groups. Means for achieving these aims are recommended in considerable detail. The resolution then discusses the role of employers and their organisations and outlines the problems of organisation, of human relations and of personnel policy and

the technical problems to be solved. The next section deals with the role of trade unions and workers and the way in which they can co-operate in raising productivity. The resolution also stresses the importance of sharing the results of increased productivity equitably.

The second resolution contains a number of proposals for international action in the field of productivity. It invites the Governing Body to give consideration to the possibility that the I.L.O. should stimulate interest in efforts to raise productivity and give wider technical assistance to this end. It also suggests that the Office should continue and expand its programmes of study and research into the problems involved in increasing productivity in the American region. Finally, it proposes that meetings be convened under the auspices of the I.L.O. to consider the problems involved in adapting modern techniques of industrial organisation and management to the conditions prevailing in the less developed countries.

LABOUR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

The Committee set up by the Conference to consider labour-management relations produced three resolutions, which were unanimously adopted by the Conference. The first of these lists a number of points which the Governing Body might take into consideration when preparing a programme of action on the subject of labour-management relations. It suggests study of the practical means of creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and confidence within each undertaking, including the establishment of systems of information and consultation and the association of representatives of the staff in the preparation and application of works rules. The resolution also calls for a study of practical means of encouraging and developing collective bargaining and makes certain suggestions concerning the settlement of labour disputes by mediation, conciliation or arbitration. Another suggested subject for study is the contents and application of collective agreements, including measures for the speedy settlement of disputes arising out of the negotiation, application and interpretation of such agreements without prejudicing the continuity of relations between the parties. Finally, it is proposed that there should be a systematic exchange of views between the I.L.O. and the various public and private institutions in many American States engaged in the study of different aspects of labour-management relations.

Of the other resolutions, one calls for a study of systems of profit-sharing and their effects on labour-management relations,

and invites the Governing Body, in the light of that study, to consider placing the subject of systems of profit-sharing on the agenda of the next Conference of American States. The other suggests that consideration be given to organising in the American region a seminar at which employers and workers could exchange views on labour-management relations. In this connection the Government delegate of Argentina (who submitted the resolution) expressed the hope that, if such a seminar were to be organised under the auspices of the I.L.O., it might be held in Buenos Aires.

CO-OPERATIVES

Before reaching its conclusions, embodied in two resolutions, the Committee on Co-operatives set up to study the third item on the agenda had a discussion during which certain points of interest were made. It was suggested, for example, that, while public authorities can render useful continuing service to co-operatives, the latter should assume responsibility for their own operations as soon as possible and that governmental assistance should be withdrawn as soon as they were able to stand on their own feet. One member expressed the view that, in the Americas, first priority should be given to the development of housing co-operatives. There were differences of opinion as to the desirability of requiring the mandatory auditing of the accounts of co-operatives or general supervision of their working. Several Workers' members were opposed to these ideas, but some Government members pointed out that such measures were necessary to prevent the formation of bogus co-operatives. The representative of the Organisation of American States, who attended the Committee meetings as an observer, spoke of the desire of his organisation to continue to collaborate closely with the I.L.O. in assisting in the spread of the co-operative movement throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The first resolution, adopted by the Conference by 33 votes to 4, with 2 abstentions, deals with the following aspects of co-operatives : general aspects of development policy ; organisation, administration and finance ; co-operative legislation ; co-operative education and training ; agricultural co-operatives ; housing co-operatives. On each of these points the resolution enunciates certain principles which were believed to provide a suitable basis for the promotion of co-operatives in American countries. These principles follow closely the conclusions of the American Regional Technical Meeting on Co-operatives, held in Mexico City in 1955.¹

¹ See *Industry and Labour* (Geneva, I.L.O.), Vol. XV, No. 7, 1 Apr. 1956, pp. 278-280.

The United States Employers' member reserved his position on this resolution in general and in particular as regards (a) the reference to promoting the accumulation by co-operatives of adequate financial resources, and (b) the absence of a reference to the desirability of placing co-operatives and other enterprises on a basis of fiscal equality.

The second resolution, adopted by the Conference by 36 votes to 0, with 1 abstention, suggests that the I.L.O., in collaboration with the Organisation of American States, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and other international organisations, could contribute greatly to the promotion of co-operative organisation in American countries by providing technical assistance in the form of information, advice and studies, the organisation of seminars and courses, the granting of fellowships and the establishment of pilot projects adapted to the needs and conditions of the receiving countries.

RESOLUTIONS

In addition to the resolutions embodying the conclusions of the committees dealing with the technical items on the agenda, the Conference had before it five resolutions on more general matters. These were referred to a Resolutions Committee, which made some changes in wording and then recommended them to the Conference for approval, subject to reservations on certain points by individual members or by groups.

A resolution on workers' education welcomes the development of the I.L.O. programme in this field and invites the Governing Body to facilitate the further expansion of I.L.O. activities, taking due account of the special needs of workers' education in various regions of the world. In a second resolution the Conference welcomed Paraguay as a Member of the Organisation and expressed the hope that all the States of the American Continent without exception would be represented as Members, by tripartite delegations, at the next session of the International Labour Conference. The Conference also adopted a resolution expressing the firm hope that the International Labour Conference, at its 40th Session, would successfully continue the preparation of international instruments concerning the protection and integration of indigenous populations and of other tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries. The fourth resolution called for a strengthening of relations between the I.L.O. and the Organisation of American States through co-operation with the special delegates of the Presidents of the American Republics.

The final resolution gave rise to rather more discussion and amendment. This resolution deals with the defence of trade union

rights, and in its original form it advocated certain machinery for safeguarding freedom of association. There was no disagreement as to the principle of freedom of association, but there were differences of opinion on the means by which it should be secured in different circumstances. The authors of the resolution—the Workers' members—eventually withdrew the section dealing with machinery in the hope of securing unanimity. However, the Employers' members still found it impossible to support the resolution, which contained a passage stating that concrete complaints had been made to the effect that in some countries there subsisted a policy of violation of trade union rights by the public authorities; the text went on to speak of "the imprisonment, exile and even assassination of trade union leaders". The Employers' members held that such allegations could be made only on the basis of duly verified factual information; the text as it stood implied a general charge of wrong-doing against unnamed governments, concerning which the Employers had no knowledge. They would therefore be obliged to abstain, although they were in favour of recommending the adoption of measures to safeguard trade union rights. The resolution was finally adopted by the Committee by 13 votes to 0, with 2 abstentions. The Conference subsequently also approved the resolution, again with the abstention of some of the Employers' delegates. It condemns any infringement of trade union rights anywhere, recommends the release of trade unionists imprisoned on account of legitimate trade union activities, calls on governments to ratify and apply effectively the international instruments concerning trade union rights, and asks the Governing Body to act energetically and rapidly on any well-founded complaint of violation of such rights.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Certain other points should be mentioned to complete this brief account of the proceedings of the Conference. The Government delegate of Argentina extended an invitation to hold the Seventh Conference of American States Members of the I.L.O. in Buenos Aires. The Secretary-General of the Conference expressed his appreciation of this generous invitation and gave an assurance that it would be borne in mind when in due course the Governing Body came to consider the date and place of the next conference.

At an early stage of the Conference, an address was given by the Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States. This was the first occasion on which a Secretary-General of the O.A.S. had attended an American Regional Conference, and he stated that his presence there was a token of the desire of the O.A.S. to take

part in the work of social justice as expressed by the Presidents of American States at their meeting in Panama a few weeks earlier. The O.A.S. was devoting special attention to housing problems and the development of co-operatives, and in both these fields there was room for fuller collaboration with the I.L.O., which would certainly produce results that would be fruitful for both organisations and for the countries of Latin America.

The Conference, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, set up a Credentials Committee of three members, one from each group. The only objection to credentials was against those of the Workers' delegate of the Dominican Republic. After careful examination of the evidence submitted to it the Committee unanimously decided that the objection was not well founded, but the Workers' member of the Committee added a reservation expressing doubts as to whether genuine freedom of association existed in the country in question.

FINAL SPEECHES

Before concluding its proceedings, the Conference took the occasion of the centenary of the birth of President Woodrow Wilson to pay a warm tribute to his work in the cause of peace and co-operation between nations. Closing speeches were made by representatives of the three groups of the Governing Body, the Workers' Vice-President of the Conference and the Assistant Secretary-General. All agreed that the Conference had carried out its work in a spirit of complete freedom, in which the individual members and the groups were able to put forward their points of view. Although these often conflicted, a remarkable degree of unanimity had been reached on all the resolutions embodying the recommendations of the Conference for future action either by member States or by the I.L.O. The recommendations to the Governing Body would all receive careful consideration and would, it was stated, help the Governing Body greatly in the consideration of certain difficult problems, such as freedom of association, at its forthcoming sessions. In declaring the Conference closed, the President emphasised the need for the full play of democracy, freedom of opinion and respect for the opinions of others. It was through observance of these principles that the Conference had reached results which, he was convinced, would promote the interests of the workers and lead to even closer collaboration between the American States and the I.L.O.
