

EXTRACTS FROM  
"THE WORLD  
OF INDUSTRY  
AND LABOUR  
1939"

BY  
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LABOUR OFFICE  
GENEVA

THE  
TWENTIETH YEAR  
OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
LABOUR  
ORGANISATION  
1919-1939  
PROSPECT • RETROSPECT

PRESENTED  
TO THE  
TWENTY-FIFTH  
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OF THE  
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## NOTE

*On the occasion of each annual session of the International Labour Conference, the Director of the International Labour Office submits a Report on world developments in labour and social problems during the preceding year. The Conference usually reserves the greater part of a week for the discussion of this Report.*

*The reader will find in these pages two chapters from the Report, The World of Industry and Labour, 1939, presented by Mr. John G. WINANT, Director of the International Labour Office, to the Twenty-fifth Session of the International Labour Conference, held at Geneva in June 1939.*

*The passages extracted are: the Foreword to the Report, and the chapter entitled "Twenty Years", which deal especially with the future objectives and past activities of the International Labour Organisation.*

*After these passages an extract is also given from the speech made by the Director on 28 June 1939 at the closing sitting of the Conference, which was attended by 353 delegates and technical advisers from 46 countries.*

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## FOREWORD

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At this time in presenting to you the Director's Report the opportunity of pointing to clear skies ahead is not given to me—and the enumeration of the accomplishments of the Organisation during the closing year seems by itself inadequate.

The International Labour Organisation has been so fashioned as to promote in a practical way the ideals which it embodies. Its constitution proclaims as its guiding idea that social justice and world peace are inseparable. Its general principles state the important industrial and social policies by which this union of peace and justice may be achieved. Its method of framing international conventions and recommendations is intended to enable the different countries of the world to act in agreement for the purpose of improving working and living conditions so as to assure greater social stability within each nation and an increasing friendliness among the nations. No nation is too small to be outside its field of interest, nor so great and powerful that the people can ignore the problems with which the International Labour Organisation is concerned.

The history of the I.L.O. indicates the progress it has made in carrying out the ends for which it was created. The record shows that the I.L.O. has been aware of the dynamic character of economic and social life and has tried to adjust its activities to change and new demands. Its full contribution to effective international collaboration is not, however, to be measured only by these activities.

The meetings of the Conference have provided an international forum of a uniquely representative character. The delegates represent not only the social functions of government but the great organisations of employers and workers who are directly concerned with the solutions sought. Representatives so chosen could not think of social regulations apart from the real world in which they must be applied. On more than one occasion their awareness of the ultimate framework in which social problems must be solved has led the Conference to give expression to ideas or

which have influenced the development of world  
coll. in the widest sense.

Meeting in Washington in 1919 in the midst of the bitterness of war disillusionment, the first International Labour Conference invited Germany and Austria to immediate membership. The rightness of that decision has never been questioned. When the problem of reparations was under taboo, it was the initiative of the Labour Conference that brought it into the open for examination and discussion. And again, it was an Italian labour delegate at the Washington Conference who first proposed that there be created some system of distribution under international control for the fair allotment of the raw materials of the world.

Long before the World Economic Conference of 1927 was called, a workers' delegate proposed the convocation of an international Conference, which should comprise qualified representatives of all the important organised economic factors: commerce, industry, agriculture, labour and consumption. When the history of the efforts towards international understanding during the last twenty years is written, I am confident that these initiatives taken at the Conference will be given a high place in the record.

On the present occasion it is inevitable that delegates will be more preoccupied than ever before with a general situation which gives rise to universal and profound anxiety.

In an earlier Director's Report appears the following: "And yet, there is such a state of general panic that a policy of economic armaments is being adopted on all sides, on top of the policy of military armaments." That was written in 1932. To-day we know the extent to which it is true and how far this policy has drawn the world toward economic and political strife and the increasing dread of world war.

It is not an easy matter to face the realities of the present situation and to continue to function within the limits of a non-political organisation, because the tasks we must set ourselves to do are necessarily influenced by the disturbances and confusions in the world in which we live. But I am certain that neither Member Governments nor non-Member Governments would wish to see the International Labour Organisation used as an agency of foreign policy in the field of politics. On the other hand, in approaching labour and social problems we are forced to face the economic consequence of war and peace. This holds whether it be in relation to trade conflict or war economy.

The degree to which opposing policies have compelled universal

military preparedness, and the influence that such action has had on the everyday life of people, is very much the business of the International Labour Organisation. We know that the diversion of a substantial part of the total income of any nation from useful production and services to armaments reduces standards of living. We know these costs are added to each loaf of bread we buy, to every acre of land we cultivate, and to the length of day we labour to earn a living.

These costs are the realities under the intangible shadow of war. "What", asked Carlyle a hundred years ago, speaking in quite unofficial language, "is the net purport and upshot of war? To my own knowledge, for example, there dwell and toil, in the British village of Dumdrudge, usually some five hundred souls. From these, by certain 'Natural Enemies' of the French, there are successively selected, during the French war, say, thirty able-bodied men: Dumdrudge, at her own expense, has suckled and nursed them; she has, not without difficulty and sorrow, fed them up to manhood, and even trained them to crafts, so that one can weave, another build, another hammer, and the weakest can stand under thirty stone avoirdupois. Nevertheless, amid much weeping and swearing, they are selected; all dressed in red, and shipped away at the public charges, some two thousand miles . . . and fed there till wanted. And now, to that same spot . . . are thirty similar French artisans, from a French Dumdrudge, in like manner wending; till, at length, after infinite effort, the two parties come into actual juxtaposition, and thirty stand fronting thirty, each with a gun in his hand. Straightaway the word 'Fire' is given; and they blow the souls out of one another; and in place of sixty brisk useful craftsmen, the world has sixty dead carcasses, which it must bury and anew shed tears for. . . . Alas, so is it . . . in all other lands. . . ."

War not only affords no solution to the human wants with which peoples are confronted but is the very negation of everything they seek. The existing condition of "near war", though not so terrible in immediate destruction, produces results which are not wholly dissimilar in a slower though no less certain way.

The present state of armed peace means the speeding up of production, a concentration of productive energies on non-productive activities, the diversion of groups of the population to military service, the decrease of the supply of labour relative to the demand, the rapid increase in public budgets and the necessity of having recourse to loans to meet military expenditures, the

inflationary effects of such fiscal policies, an inevitable tendency towards a rise in the cost of living and the hardship which that necessarily entails on the masses of the population. As these manifestations are prolonged, they become steadily aggravated and the wastage they involve is not very different from that which would be produced by war itself. Their social consequences do not need to be underlined to a body such as the International Labour Conference. The desire to speed up production leads to a prolongation of hours of work, with resulting danger to the health and safety of the workers. The standards set by protective legislation and by collective agreements with regard not only to adult workers but also to young persons are endangered. These developments, combined with the tendency for wages and earnings to fall behind prices as a result of inflationary conditions, lead to friction between employers and workers over the whole area of industrial life unless foresight and constructive action prevent. An attempt should be made to anticipate the needs arising from these situations and to outline a basis for international action.

Rearmament cannot continue at the present rate of acceleration without eventually absorbing so much of the national income of many countries as will prove intolerable. A point may come when defence expenditure will cause actual starvation in the lower income groups. Before this happens, it may be hoped that some general international settlement will intervene. But it must be realised that even in this case most countries in the world would have to face the tremendous problems of readjustment to a peace-time economy. Serious economic re-employment problems will arise demanding urgent solution. Some means of absorbing the workers thrown out of employment by the slowing down of armament production—or, in other words, of facilitating the change-over of industry from armaments to normal peace-time production—will have to be devised. In facing these difficulties, the machinery of the International Labour Organisation with its possibilities of analysing experience and information drawn from many countries and the contacts which it can provide between Government officials and workers' and employers' leaders, who will be engaged in this task, can be of immense value.

But to be of the greatest possible service when the time of readjustment arrives, it is essential that we direct our energies now to the problems that lie ahead. Our research staff must begin in this period of tension and uncertainty to study the practices already applied in earlier periods and in different regions. It may

be that by full use of the world's experience some of the trials and errors of the past need not be repeated. Indeed, whatever the world situation, the work of the International Labour Organisation retains its importance. And if new and different tasks are thrown upon it, it is comforting and encouraging to realise that the Organisation is no longer a novel and untried instrument. During the last twenty years the very stresses and strains to which it has been subjected have strengthened its fibre and perfected its technique. In the recent difficult budgetary crisis which it has had to meet proof has been given that the collaboration between Governments, workers and employers within its framework has led to a deep and sincere appreciation in all three groups of their community of interest in its maintenance and success. It is that fact which, more than any other of the multiple achievements which it can claim, leads me to affirm my confidence in its future and in its ability to make contributions of the first value in any circumstances we may have to meet.

In order that it should be able to function effectively, it must however have at its command the necessary resources.

One of the first acts that was required of me on taking office as Director in January was to bring about a balance between income and spending, which required a reduction of the Office staff. This was necessitated by the withdrawal of certain Governments from the Organisation and the non-payment of others through forced liquidation. Other economies have been written into the 1940 budget. We cannot spend what we have not got, but eliminating useful people and curtailing services at this time in my judgment is not wise policy.

Those of us who work here have come because we believe in peace and social justice. In a world in which we are annually spending something like sixteen billion dollars on armaments, and in which over eight million men are under arms, the handful of us who are here are all too few.

It might be well to remind the peoples of the world that the total capital investment in the Peace Palace of the League, the Agricultural Institute in Rome, the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague, and the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, is less than the cost of a modern battleship and those who work in the Institutions named number less than a single regiment. It has been said that "where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also". There is much that is precious to man in the pursuit of peace and in the realisation of social justice, but

if we are to pursue them in the international world we must give the necessary material support to measure our caring. The total budget of the International Labour Office for 1940 is 9,090,000 Swiss francs—or just over two million dollars. I have no hesitation in saying that it is inadequate to enable the Organisation to meet the calls which are made upon it.

Since we are essentially a service organisation dependent for membership on a use basis, I am deeply disturbed lest a policy of continuing economies should seriously affect the growth and the enlarging field of influence of this Organisation, which has continued now these twenty years. I therefore earnestly ask that you, who direct our activities and have knowledge of the situation in which we find ourselves, will petition your Governments, on returning home, to maintain contributions on a level that will permit us more adequately and completely to serve them and the people whom they represent. I make this plea confidently, because the Member States, acting individually and through the unanimous vote of the Governing Body, have pledged themselves to maintain the activities of the Organisation even in the event of war.

Nor are the obligations of peace for us less real than those of war. Harold Butler, my predecessor, suggested a short time ago that "the chance of remaking peace may come like a thief in the night", and then added, "But unless the implications of a real peace, and particularly its economic implications, have been thought out in advance, unless statesmen and peoples can see the issues with clear eyes when the critical moment comes, the chance may again be lost as it was lost in 1919".

It was the first Director, Albert Thomas, who asked: "What is needed for carrying out the work of peace and justice of which glimpses were seen at the end of the war?", and who replied, "The answer is the same as it always was—simply faith and determination".

I think we should keep these two thoughts in our minds. It is natural and indeed inevitable that in present circumstances the minds of statesmen should be concentrated on the problem of the security of their countries. I would not say one word which would weaken the determination of the Member countries to protect themselves against aggression and to preserve those democratic institutions which are the hope of mankind. More quickly than we have dared to believe, that very determination may give us a new chance for security and peace without war. At the present time, the invitation of President Roosevelt to a general economic

## FOREWORD

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conference still stands. I hope and believe that an exchange of views by the nations may pave the way toward that enduring peace that was hoped for so fervently in 1919 by a weary soldiery and a war-torn world. For this too we should be prepared. It may mean for us the opportunity to clarify the social objectives of a lasting peace. The workers will measure the value of any settlement by the improvement that it brings to the conditions under which they live and work. It should be our part to have ready a practical social programme that would assure to the common people recognition of their ultimate needs. If the opportunity is given, we should accept it with the faith and determination of which Albert Thomas spoke, and use to the full all the great resources and potentialities of the International Labour Organisation.

Just as the world economic crisis caused the International Labour Organisation to expand its activities to meet the demands made upon it, and thereby enlarged its influence and membership, so the present international political crisis calls not for a contraction of activities but for an increasing effort and greater energy.

In commending this Report to you, may I leave you with a single thought. Across from the International Labour Office is a statue symbolising the workers of the world. It was erected in grateful memory to Albert Thomas. Cut in the stone is this sentence: "They did not take my life. I gave it." Let us see to it that we do no less.

JOHN G. WINANT.

*10 May 1939.*

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## TWENTY YEARS

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Twenty years have now passed since the International Labour Organisation was founded. This opportunity may therefore be taken to look back over its past history and to review briefly how the Organisation has developed and what it has achieved in these two eventful decades. In the following pages, however, only the barest outline of such a review can be attempted. A fuller record of the twenty years of the Organisation must await some other occasion.

In 1919 all that yet existed of the International Labour Organisation was the fundamental Charter on which it was to be based. This document contained two things—the formulation of certain general principles, and an outline of the machinery by which they were to be put into operation. How well the machinery might work in practice, and how far the principles of the Charter were to be translated into effective international standards, was not yet known. To-day it is possible to see that a living organisation has grown up with roots which reach far into the different continents and the different strata of society.

Immediately after the World War people looked forward to a period of reconstruction and social justice freed from the danger and hindrance of international conflict. It was in this spirit that the International Labour Conference held its First Session at Washington. The Conference dealt with a wide range of questions of first-rate importance; for it was thought essential to secure immediate results on the most urgent labour problems of the day.

Yet the Washington Conference was using a new and untried instrument. The method of concluding international Conventions, not by the traditional diplomatic procedure, but by means of tripartite discussions between representatives of Governments, employers and workers, was something entirely new. It was realised that this innovation gave the Organisation its special

character and unique value; but the full possibilities which it offered needed the experience of years for their development.

#### THE NEW INTERNATIONALISM

If the Conventions which the Conference has adopted in the last few years are compared with those of its early sessions, it will be seen how much more closely the recent ones correspond to the practical exigencies of national legislation and application. This is because the Conference has developed its technique; and that result is the fruit of continuous constructive effort. The unexpected difficulties which were sometimes found by experience to stand in the way of the ratification and application of Conventions showed that more thorough preparation was needed before they were adopted. Various procedures have been worked out to meet this need: the two-reading and subsequently the double-discussion procedure; a procedure for the revision of Conventions, and the system of preparatory Conferences. This new procedure of preparatory Conferences, which has been applied for maritime questions, questions relating to coal mines, textiles, rail transport, labour inspection and so on, has proved so useful in facilitating the subsequent work of the Conference that not long ago it was given a definite place in the machinery of the Organisation. The methods of the Conference have thus been made much more elastic, and more adaptable to the different nature of the questions to be discussed. Finality has of course not been reached; as long as the Organisation is a living institution, it will have to change its methods with changing needs; but it has already done much to ensure that Conventions have a better prospect of being translated into national law and practice than in the past.

The machinery which the Conference has evolved in order to follow the progress of the effective application of Conventions in the countries which have ratified them has been invaluable in ensuring that the Conventions do not become mere statements of principle which have no practical effect. The painstaking and unobtrusive work done by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions constitutes a sure guarantee for the work of the Conference in this respect.

While the Organisation has constantly endeavoured to deepen the foundations of its work by more thorough methods, it has also done much to widen its basis. This is a matter which cannot be measured solely by the number of Member States. In this respect there have been both gains and losses. From the very outset,

in 1919, the Organisation invited Germany and Austria to become Members. At times it has come near to assembling representatives of the whole world under one roof; but in the early years the U.S.S.R. and the United States of America were not among its Members, and of recent years, when these countries had assumed membership, first Germany, then Italy, and recently Japan ceased to take part in the work. But, although complete universality has never quite been achieved, year by year the delegates of some 50 States have met in what is sometimes called a world parliament of labour; have engaged in the give-and-take of committee work and debate; have pooled their knowledge, increased their own understanding, and learned to get on with one another and to see one another's problems.

Another very important matter is the increase in the number of States which send complete delegations to the Conference, including employers' and workers' as well as Government delegates. This enables the Conference to present a more complete picture of all the elements of production in the various countries.

The closer contact which the Organisation has now established with extra-European countries represents further progress towards real universality. At one time the Organisation was frequently criticised, and not without justice, for being too exclusively European in outlook. By way of remedying this position efforts were made to direct the work of the Conference towards subjects which were of concern to extra-European as well as to European countries, to ensure that the Office itself, in its research work, dealt more fully with their special conditions and problems, to increase the number of visits paid by the Director and other officials of the Office to America and Asia, and to extend the network of branch offices and correspondents of the Office in different countries.

In this connection the Santiago Conference of 1936 marked an epoch, and the success achieved by it has met with such universal acknowledgment that a second Labour Conference of American States is to take place in Havana this year on the invitation of the Cuban Government. That Conference will afford a further opportunity for the Governments, employers and workers of the countries of America to consider together how to maximise the services which the Organisation can render to their social development. Regional gatherings of this kind are of inestimable value, both as a means of keeping the work of the Organisation in the closest contact with the changing problems of its Members and as a means of making it a living reality instead of a mere

abstraction in the minds of those whose problems it was created to solve.

A different but equally important aspect of the universality of the Organisation is its tripartite character. The representation of Governments, employers and workers in an international body has given internationalism a new meaning. The fact that meetings held under the auspices of the Organisation include non-Government representatives has always been one of its great sources of strength. In certain of its aspects the Organisation reaches across frontiers instead of emphasising them. Perhaps more than any other body it speaks for the peoples of the world. The fact that many hundreds of thousands of men and women in all the continents of the world regard it as "their" Organisation is the most precious asset that any international institution can possess.

In the Governing Body of the International Labour Office—the body which is primarily responsible for the continuity of the policy of the Organisation and for its regular working—there have also been developments towards a broadening of the basis. The membership of the Governing Body has been enlarged so as to give more countries, and particularly more extra-European countries, a greater share in its functions and responsibilities, and the system of deputy members has been instituted. The Governing Body, too, has improved its methods of work and acquired a tradition which maintains the continuity of its work from year to year.

Another means of strengthening the contacts between individual States Members and the Organisation is the practice which has grown up of holding sessions of the Governing Body from time to time in the capitals of different countries at the instance of the Government. These meetings have done a great deal to spread a wider knowledge of and support for the work of the Organisation among the peoples of the countries concerned. The session held in London last autumn was a notable example; it is to be followed this year by a session in Oslo in October.

A further innovation in connection with the work of the Governing Body was the recent visit paid by a delegation of its members (one Government, one employers' and one workers' representative) to the Union of South Africa, on the invitation of the Government, to gain some first-hand knowledge of the conditions of recruitment and employment of indigenous labour. The delegation spent a month in the Union as the guests of the Government, making a tour in which the authorities "were anxious to show not only their successes but also their problems and even their temporary failures"

and which was of " the nature of a friendly and loyal exposition of situations as they are ". Its report will be of the greatest help for the future work of the Office in regard to indigenous labour and constitutes an admirable precedent in the investigation of these special problems.

Another part of the machine which has developed to an extent which was hardly foreseen twenty years ago is the series of Committees which have been created to deal with the widest range of specialised subjects. Some of them consist of experts, others of representatives of interests which may not find a place in the delegations to the Conference. They advise the Governing Body on technical questions, submit suggestions which may be of assistance to Governments, and pave the way for the discussions of the Conference. But this is not their only value. They provide an opportunity, such as perhaps is given in no other way, for the persons who are concerned in each country with some such question as labour statistics, industrial hygiene, the prevention of accidents, social insurance and so on, to benefit by one another's experience, to exchange ideas and to learn from one another. These meetings help to spread a spirit of international co-operation through the wide circles in every country from which their members are drawn.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CODE

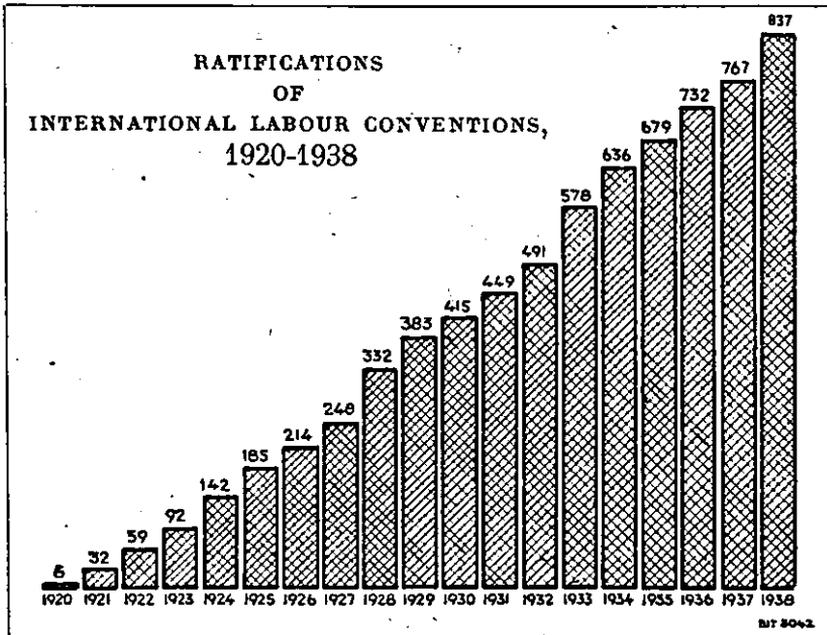
The above pages describe the instrument which the Organisation has become; it is now time to review briefly what it has achieved in the last twenty years.

The principal function of the Organisation, as laid down in its Constitution, is the building up of what may be called the International Labour Code. The accompanying diagram shows the ratifications of the various Conventions received from the Member States. Year by year the International Labour Conference has set up standards of working conditions to which it invites the nations of the world to conform. Sixty-three Conventions have been adopted, and 839 ratifications received (15 March 1939); and these Conventions are not the arbitrary result of theory, but the product of laborious research, comparison and discussion.

In spite of the disturbed circumstances in many countries, the upward movement of ratification has not faltered. During the twelve months ending 15 March 1939, 57 new ratifications were recorded, the largest number since 1935-1936. Over two-thirds of these ratifications came from non-European countries, including 22 from New Zealand, 5 from the United States, and 4 from Brazil.

In the case of Iraq and Turkey, moreover, as well as New Zealand and the United States already mentioned, the ratifications were the first to be registered by these countries.

In addition to the direct influence which Conventions exercise when they are ratified and embodied in national legislation, there can be little doubt that they exercise an indirect influence. Their existence sets up a standard which public opinion gradually tends to accept as normal; and one result of this is that they act as a



check on any tendency to allow conditions of work to be depressed below that level in times of difficulty. This indirect influence is very hard to measure; but if the differences which exist in labour legislation now and twenty years ago are studied in relation to the Conventions, there is little doubt that it is considerable.

A few examples of the direct and indirect influence of the Conventions may be given.

The well known Washington Convention of 1919 concerning the 8-hour day and 48-hour week in industry, which gave effect to one of the principles proclaimed by the Constitution of the Organisation to be of special and urgent importance for the improvement of the worker's lot, has been of outstanding importance in the life of the Organisation. It has obtained some 23 ratifications, which is by no means a negligible figure; but its actual influence has been much greater than that figure would seem to indicate. In every part of the world the Convention has been the

fundamental basis for efforts to generalise the 48-hour week and it has inspired many laws and regulations even in countries which have not ratified it.

The Convention concerning the employment of women before and after childbirth set up standards considerably in advance of current legislation at the time when it was adopted. It has been ratified by 16 countries. When it was adopted in 1919 not a single State was in a position to ratify at once. Only one State at that time provided for the total of 12 weeks' leave laid down in the Convention; in 1939, 25 States made provision for the 6 weeks' leave before childbirth, and 31 States for the 6 weeks' leave following childbirth. In 1919, the guarantee of re-employment stipulated in the Convention was enforced in 6 countries only; in 1939, this guarantee is given in 39 sovereign States and a number of dependencies. Maternity benefit, provided for by compulsory social insurance schemes, was given by 8 States in 1919; in 1939 in 27 States. Finally, the provision made in the Convention for nursing the child was then to be found in 6 or 8 countries at most; now, it is in operation in 36.

The series of Conventions fixing the minimum age for admission to employment in industry, on board ship, in agriculture and in non-industrial occupations at 14 have been widely ratified; and the parliamentary discussions which preceded these ratifications in many countries prove that the Conventions were instrumental in crystallising public opinion on this point. The three revised Conventions raising the minimum age to 15 are in advance of legislation in a large majority of countries; but they have already induced several countries to adopt or consider the adoption of the higher minimum age.

The 15 Conventions on various aspects of social insurance have received 136 ratifications, and the definite undertakings thus given by States checked any tendency to lower the standard of protection afforded by social insurance during the recent depression; for none of these ratifications has been denounced. In addition, the resolution of the Santiago Conference endorsing the principles of the social insurance Conventions is evidence of the desire of the countries of America to carry out a wide social insurance programme; and measures to implement this have already been taken or are under consideration, more particularly in the Latin-American countries.

The 13 Conventions dealing with maritime questions constitute a very creditable part of an international seamen's code. Some

of the older Conventions have practically reached saturation point as regards ratification. Since the 1936 Maritime Session of the Conference, moreover, there has been a considerable revival of interest in seamen's labour questions in many maritime countries: no less than 27 new ratifications were registered during the last 18 months. The practical effect of these Conventions may be illustrated by two examples. First, when the Convention providing for special unemployment indemnity to seamen in case of shipwreck was adopted in 1920 there was probably no country in the world which made similar legal provision for its seamen. The benefits of the Convention are now enshrined in the national laws of almost all maritime countries of any importance. Secondly, the Hours and Manning Convention adopted in 1936 is already producing notable results; certain countries have made or are making substantial reductions in working hours for their seamen, particularly deck personnel.

In the case of the special indigenous labour Conventions, their value—drafted as they are in accordance with the best experience and the tendencies of colonial practice—has been increasingly recognised and their influence has been extensive even in the territories of States which have not yet ratified them. Thus the Forced Labour Convention, although it has unfortunately still not been ratified by two colonial powers, may be said to have set the standard for colonial policy in regard to the use of forced or compulsory labour. In the same way, the Recruiting Convention, although not yet actually ratified by the European colonial powers, has already had considerable influence in practice. Even the proposals which, it is hoped, will lead to the adoption of Conventions on the regulation of indigenous workers' contracts of employment and on penal sanctions at the present Conference, have begun to lead to practical results.

Worthy of special mention, too, is the extent to which the general Conventions are being applied in the colonies, subject to modifications designed to adapt their provisions to local conditions. Provision for such application was made in the Constitution of the Organisation, but no one in its early days would have ventured to predict the wide influence on colonial labour legislation that these Conventions have exercised in the last few years. The Committee of Experts on the application of Conventions has described this as "one of the most interesting developments of international labour legislation with which the Committee has to deal", and has recorded that "the development of social legis-

lation in many colonial territories has been one of the urgent necessities of recent years, and, in the accelerated tempo of action to meet this necessity, international Conventions are increasingly serving as pointers ”.

Side by side with the 63 international labour Conventions are the 56 Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference over the last twenty years. As is well known, Recommendations, though made the subject of the same intensive preparation and discussion as the Conventions, do not involve a formal international obligation. They lend themselves particularly to the treatment of measures which are still in the formative stage, or to the laying down of a more detailed line of policy than would be suitable in a Convention.

One example of the influence which can be exercised by a Recommendation may be given. In 1923 the International Labour Conference adopted a “ Recommendation concerning the general principles for the organisation of systems of inspection to secure the enforcement of the laws and regulations for the protection of the workers ”. As everyone having any acquaintance with industry is well aware, it is not only the quantity of the legislation on the statute book, but also the quality of the inspection service that really determines the labour standards of a country. This Recommendation sets out something in the nature of a model code of labour inspection. A number of countries, including Belgium, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, have made partial reforms in their inspection systems so as to bring them into harmony with specific points laid down in the Recommendation, and two countries, Rumania and Estonia, have even taken the Recommendation as a basis for the organisation of their new labour inspection service. In Cuba, in Ecuador, and in Venezuela, moreover, the labour inspection services organised during recent years are modelled on this Recommendation.

At the 1940 Session of the International Labour Conference it is hoped to give the principles of factory inspection the more specific status of a Convention.

It will be seen from the list of Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the annual Conference, and from the few examples of their practical effect given above, that the Organisation in the past twenty years has travelled a long way in establishing an international labour code. Gradually, however, it has become clear that the real utility of such a code could be greatly enhanced if the Organisation did not confine itself to setting up standards, but also did something to bring about the necessary organisation

and co-ordination of social policy on which the improvement of living and working conditions depends. A shifting of emphasis in this direction has taken place, especially in the last few years.

Examples of this new outlook may be found in the two Preparatory Conferences which formed part of the Organisation's programme for the reduction of hours of work. In both the Coal Conference of May 1938, and the Conference on Rail Transport of March 1939, the discussion by Government, workers' and employers' representatives dealt not only with the immediate question at issue, but also to some extent with the whole social and economic situation of these two key branches of production. In the textile industry this process of enabling an industry to see itself as a whole has been carried a stage further. In accordance with suggestions made by the Washington Textile Conference in 1937, the Governing Body decided in principle to set up a Permanent International Tripartite Committee on the Textile Industry, which would make it possible for the first time to review continuously the world textile industry with a view to determining what can be done to improve the situation of the 14 millions of men and women engaged in it.

Another instance is to be found in the new approach which the Organisation has recently made to the important question of migration, as a result of the Conference on Migration for Settlement to which reference has been made in a previous chapter. The proposal of this Conference that a permanent International Committee on Migration for Settlement should be created has already won sufficient support to enable the necessary action to be taken. It is noteworthy that the Eighth Pan-American Conference held in Lima in December 1938 recommended that the Governments of the American countries should support the setting up of this Committee.

Perhaps the most striking example of the changed emphasis in the outlook of the Organisation is to be found in the work of the International Public Works Committee, which held its first meeting in July 1938 and was attended by representatives from 25 countries. The origin of the Committee lay in the idea that advance planning of public works programmes is an important means of diminishing economic depressions and that national action needs to be supplemented by international exchange of information, and perhaps by definite international action. The specific task of the meeting was to draw up a uniform plan on the basis of which Governments would be invited to furnish information concerning their public

works policies and programmes. The success of this action already seems assured. Eleven Governments have notified the Office that they intend to give effect to the Public Works (International Co-operation) Recommendation, while four others have advised the competent authorities in their own countries in favour of adherence. Furthermore, seven other countries are known to be taking action with a view to approval. There is thus every probability that further meetings of the Committee will soon be convened, so that the Committee should be in a position to make an important contribution to the co-ordination of the policies of the Member nations in the common struggle against the causes of unemployment.

### THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE

Side by side with these developments there has been a parallel development in the International Labour Office itself. The small but enthusiastic body of workers hastily gathered together from different countries in 1919 to create an institution for which there were no precedents has grown into an international clearing house of information on labour and social questions. Its work includes the translation of labour laws, which are made available, through the Legislative Series published by the Office, to the legislators of other countries. It includes the issue of publications which have a wide circulation among Governments, employers, workers, and students of social problems in general. As the National Industrial Conference Board of the United States has written: "The special investigations of the I.L.O. assemble information which would not otherwise be available. Prior to its organisation there was no medium through which those interested could keep in close touch with the development of labour legislation". Certain of the studies issued, moreover, have become standard works in their own fields, as, for instance, to mention only two: *The Encyclopædia — Occupation and Health*, and the *Year-Book of Labour Statistics*.

The publications of the Office cover practically every social and economic problem of the day. For example, studies published in the past year deal with such different subjects as: *Industrial Labour in India*, *The Minimum Wage*, *Economical Administration of Health Insurance Benefits*, *Social Problems in Agriculture*, *Safety in the Construction and Use of Lifts*, *The Coal Mining Industry*, *Labour Courts*, *The Law and Women's Work*, and *Conditions of Life and Work among Natives in Peru*.

Another side of the work of the Office which has developed very

considerably is the supply of information in response to external enquiries. Many of these call for detailed investigation before a reply can be furnished. One section of the Office alone—that dealing with social insurance—is called upon to handle well over 100 enquiries every year. The 111 requests for information received by this section during 1938 included 56 coming from Governments and public authorities, 10 from trade unions, 9 from other bodies, and 36 from individuals. Equally striking examples could be found in the work of other sections.

Sometimes the Office is able to give a Government more direct assistance by sending a member of the staff to take part in the work of preparing or improving social legislation. Of late, Governments have been showing an increasing tendency to avail themselves of the services of the Office in this way. Recent instances include the sending of specialists from the Office to Egypt to assist with industrial hygiene questions, to Turkey for social insurance questions, and to Venezuela for questions of colonisation and social insurance as well as to assist in the drafting of a labour code.

The entire activity of the Office, both in the building up of a labour code and in the supply of information, is based on its research work. There are two considerations which give this work a special value. First, one of the major obstacles to social advance is that in the field of the social sciences it is almost always impossible to carry out controlled experiments such as can be made in the physical realm, and therefore it is far more difficult to arrive at objective conclusions. Secondly, when conclusions have been reached, there is a deep gulf to be bridged between theory and action. The International Labour Office is favourably placed in both of these respects. Its research work has the enormous advantage that it must of necessity use the method of international comparison. The comparative method is to the social scientist what the laboratory is to the physicist. The Office cannot of course make experiments, but it can and does do the next best thing, which is to study the same phenomena in a large number of different countries. This helps to rule out what is accidental in the experience of any particular country and to bring to the fore those things which are fundamental to all. In addition, the International Labour Office is also in a good position to bring the conclusions reached directly before those capable of acting upon them. The fact that the research work of the Office goes directly before technical committees or to the Governing Body or to the Conference, gives it a great practical value.

Moreover, the constitution of the International Labour Office guarantees it a certain breadth of view, and in two dimensions. In the first place, its tripartite nature forces it, when weighing the merits of any measure, always to consider the social as well as the economic costs involved. It has learnt to realise that a course of action which may be economically effective can prove socially ruinous; while, on the other hand, things socially desirable in themselves may nevertheless be economically prohibitive. Because its results must bear the scrutiny of Governments, employers and workers, it cannot ignore either one aspect or the other. In the second place, the international nature of the Organisation induces in it a just sense of balance between national and international considerations. It is particularly sensitive to those types of action which, while nationally advantageous so long as one country is applying them, may be internationally disastrous if applied by all.

The work on economic depression and unemployment is an instance of how, through research based on wide international experience, and a broad outlook, the Organisation has helped to guide world opinion towards more effective methods. Many years before it became a generally accepted standpoint, the International Labour Office was insisting that the means of dealing with industrial depression was not to bring about general wage reductions and to multiply tariff barriers, but to reinforce purchasing power through the long-range planning of public works, backed by appropriate monetary policy and made general by international co-operation. In this, perhaps the most important of all social-economic questions, whether seen from the standpoint of the workers, or of the employers, or of the Governments, the International Labour Organisation has been a pioneer. Mr. J. M. Keynes, in his *General Theory of Employment*, speaking of schemes of public investment as a means of maintaining the optimum level of employment and of improving the international economic situation, writes: "The consistent appreciation of this truth by the International Labour Office, first under Albert Thomas and subsequently under Mr. H. B. Butler, has stood out conspicuously among the pronouncements of the numerous post-war international bodies." From the small beginning in the Recommendation concerning unemployment, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1919, urging States Members to "co-ordinate the execution of all work undertaken under public authority, with a view to reserving such work as far as possible to periods of unemployment", to the Public Works (International Co-operation) and Public Works (National Planning) Recom-

mendations of 1937, the International Labour Organisation has studied and progressively developed the technique for dealing with industrial depression some five or ten years in advance of public, or even expert, opinion. The detailed resolution submitted to the World Monetary and Economic Conference of 1933, presented jointly by the leaders of all three groups, and unanimously adopted by the International Labour Conference, set out certain of the essential means of meeting economic depression which only now are beginning to be applied.

Another example of the value of the research work of the Office—and only a few examples can be given—is to be found in its studies of silicosis. These studies were reinforced by the international Conferences on this subject held in Johannesburg in 1930 and in Geneva in 1938, which made experience concerning this occupational disease acquired in certain countries, especially in the Union of South Africa, available to other countries interested in the solution of the problem. With a similar object in view the Office endeavours to collect and disseminate data bearing on the subject.

The standardisation of labour statistics and improvement in their comparability brought about by the Office's research work, assisted by the Committee of Statistical Experts and the successive Conferences of Labour Statisticians, is more important than the general public may realise. The existence of adequate and internationally comparable statistics is essential for the close study of fact which should precede legislative measures, and therefore provides a firm basis on which international labour legislation can be built up.

Many other examples of the kind of work which the International Labour Office does might be given. But apart from these, there is something else which the Office represents. It is a fact of the utmost importance that, at a time when national rivalries made such an achievement more than usually difficult, it has been possible to build up the nucleus of an international civil service. Experience has proved conclusively that men and women of different nations, of widely different cultures and habits of thought, can work together in an objective spirit in the service of an ideal. Their national patriotism is not destroyed, but is enlarged into a world loyalty based on the idea of common humanity. This result has been possible only because the Organisation does serve an ideal, and because the individuals making up the Office believe in that ideal.

The value of an international civil service is manifold. The duties of the International Labour Office staff range from telephonic interpretation, making possible simultaneous rendering of speeches

in several languages, to the habit of mind which sees social and economic questions from the point of view of the world as a whole. Such special aptitudes are not rapidly or easily acquired; but if the nations of the world are to find their way to a better understanding, no instrument is more necessary than a personnel which makes this understanding practically realisable. The fact that in the course of the last two decades the authority of the International Labour Organisation has steadily developed must be attributed in no small part to the fact that the international staff brought together in Geneva have made its cause their own.

These few examples may give some idea of the direct and indirect influence which the work of the Organisation in its various forms has exercised, viewed from a general international standpoint. But that influence can perhaps be still more clearly seen in the individual countries. The delegations to the Conference, however, will be more competent to appraise the services of the Organisation from this national angle.

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The above brief review of the work which the International Labour Organisation has done in the last twenty years is concerned only with the past. The future of the Organisation—what it may become in a world so different from anything which could have been foreseen in 1919—is dealt with in the Foreword to the present Report. All that has been attempted in this Chapter is to show what kind of an instrument has been created and what results it has proved capable of achieving. It may surely be claimed that it has succeeded in furthering steady social progress through a period in which it has had to contend both with the results of economic depressions and with international difficulties. No more striking evidence of this could be given than the loyalty with which the Member States have stood by the Organisation through all the perils and uncertainties with which international life has been beset in recent years. The need for such an instrument as the International Labour Organisation is no less in 1939 than it was in 1919; in some ways it is even greater. So long as the Organisation can count on the support of the three elements—Governments, employers and workers—on which it is founded, it will be able to continue its struggle for social justice, and for the fulfilment of the promise of which Abraham Lincoln once spoke—the “promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men and that all should have an equal chance”.

*Extract from the*

DIRECTOR'S SPEECH AT THE CLOSING SITTING  
OF THE CONFERENCE

(28 June 1939)

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I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to state, as simply as I can, my belief in the future of this Organisation. . . .

We are living in troubled times, and yet the spirit of the Conference has been one of hope. You have had the courage to look forward to better days and have expressed the faith of men who dare to live boldly. The best evidence of constructive action is your presence here, and in my judgment your greatest accomplishment has been to consolidate the position of the Office and to outline the policy of the future. It calls for continuance of action whether we face peace or war. Added to that, you have adopted a series of useful Draft Conventions and Recommendations, and forwarded a Conference in the New World which will meet in Havana this fall.

The postponement of the 40-hour week might have disheartened a less tried body if it had not been for the realism and the tenacity of purpose which will continue to place this issue in the forefront of all social advance.

The workers of the world have learned to-day that with disarmament, under whatever political ideologies they find themselves, they can look forward not only to reduced hours but also to increasing surpluses of the necessaries of life, when income now devoted to national defence may be utilised for a more abundant life and thereby raise the individual and collective standard of living for all people everywhere.

The reduction of the hours that men labour will continue to be on our agenda.

When I left the United States in 1935 to come here, some of my friends suggested that I should remain at home. I told them that every man would like to do that, but reminded them that years

before in 1917 great numbers of us journeyed overseas on the only official foreign mission that was ever assigned to us, and that I would like the privilege of going back to Europe as an envoy of peace and good will. We live but once. When it is over we would all like to leave a friendlier world behind us. That I believed then. That I believe now.

The leadership in those countries that fought in the World War is largely in the hands of men who were themselves soldiers. They know from their own experience the agonies of the battlefield and the suffering of women and children in the home land. I want to believe that their understanding of the cruelties and hardship of war, and their love of their own people, will never permit them within this generation again to plunge the Western World into armed conflict—for war brings no victories, but only death and mutilation and destitution and personal sorrow.

We close this Conference of 1939 with malice toward none, with good will toward all, and we ask for peace, not bowed by fear, but with the simple courage of the soldier who stands ready to give life gladly that others may know the joy of living.

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