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Second Series

Reports and Documents

No. 1-2

**THE PROTECTION
OF YOUNG WORKERS**

1930

**PUBLISHED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS
31 TESSELSCHADESTRAAT, AMSTERDAM**

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Contents

	Page
Preface	5
Introduction	7
I. <i>Compulsory School Attendance</i>	10
II. <i>Young Workers in Industry</i>	
(a) Minimum Age of Admission to Industrial Under- takings	15
(b) Regulations of Working Hours	17
(c) Nightwork and Underground Work	21
(d) Industrial Inspection	24
III. <i>Apprenticeship</i>	26
IV. <i>Continuation School Education (vocational)</i>	43
V. <i>The Trade Unions and Young Workers</i>	
(a) Legislation Hampering Trade Union Organisa- tion of Young Workers or Limiting it?	58
(b) Minimum Age Limit for Trade Union Member- ship?	59
(c) Rights of Young Members	59
(d) Organisational Arrangements for Apprentices and Young Workers	60
(e) Journals for Young Workers	64
VI. <i>Trade Union Demands</i>	65
	3

	Page	
VII. Miscellaneous		
(a) Paid Holidays for Young Workers	72	
(b) Young Workers and Collective Agreements .	73	
(c) Vocational Guidance and Vocational Selection	76	
 <i>Appendices :</i>		
I. The I. F. T. U. and the Youth Problem		
(a) Youth Programme	81	
(b) Workers' Education	85	
II. Extracts from the decisions of the International Labour Conferences of Washington 1919, Genoa 1920, and Geneva 1921		88
III. Ratification of Conventions relating to Young Workers		96
IV. <i>Germany :</i>		
Most Important Provisions of the Vocational Train- ing Bill	98	
V. <i>United States :</i>		
(1) The Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution	109	
(2) Extract from <i>William Green's</i> Pamphlet on Child Labor. Published in 1926 by the Workers' Education Bureau of America	110	
Literature Consulted for this Publication	115	

Preface

In 1922 the International Federation of Trade Unions issued a booklet, entitled "The Protection of Young Workers throughout the World", which gave a survey of the then state of the protection of young workers in a large number of countries. Most of the information contained in the book referred, of course, to pre-war times: it was only possible to make occasional mention here and there of legislation which had in a few countries been passed after the War.

Great changes have since been made in the protection of young workers. In almost all countries new legislation has been passed or bills introduced which have had or, when passed, will have far-reaching effects on the life and well-being of the young worker.

As much of the information contained in the 1922 booklet is now out of date, the International Committee for Youth and Educational Questions of the International Federation of Trade Unions expressed the hope that it might be possible to issue a new edition. The Executive of the International Federation of Trade Unions approved the suggestion, whence the publication of the present pamphlet.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to give as clear a survey as possible of the present state of the legislation protecting young workers in the individual countries, together with the position of *international* legislation for the protection of young workers.

In view of the enormous number of regulations existing in every country for the statutory protection of young workers, it is neither possible nor desirable for this booklet to go into too much detail. It is not intended to be a manual giving information of the legal regulations for young workers of every trade and the exemptions thereto, but merely as a publication which

seeks to give the reader an idea of the *general state* of the protection of young workers, in the hope of awakening as much interest as possible in this question in those quarters where at present there is apathy.

The present publication deals with one side only of the youth problem — the protection of young persons as *workers*. It does not touch therefore upon the general educational problem, the sports movement, the migration movement etc., for these are all questions which need separate treatment. And for the first time it deals with the question of the way in which the *trade union movement* itself works to promote the interests of the young worker.

Needless to say, the book makes abundant use of the excellent information provided by the International Labour Office: its "Legislative Series", its "Industrial and Labour Information" and its articles in the "International Labour Review" are all largely drawn upon. Valuable information has also been received from the affiliated national centres. A concise list of literature bearing on the subject, some of which has been used in compiling the present pamphlet, will be found at the end of the book.

Comrade *Andreas Sternheim* has been responsible for the compilation of the book.

Amsterdam, July, 1930.

Introduction

"The future is for the young!" A very fine utterance, but the future can only be fine or desirable when a healthy generation has been reared which is physically and mentally able to cooperate in the establishment of conditions worthy of a civilised human being.

Slowly, much too slowly, there is progress in the domain of the welfare of the young worker. If the history of the working class as a whole is one of great deprivations and defective protection, this is assuredly true of the young worker, who is more liable to exploitation than the adult, because he cannot, like him, change conditions by means of his own strength. The lawgiver, spurred on from time to time by the organised working class, must come to his assistance.

It cannot be denied that since the War there has been much progress in the protection of the young worker, democratic governments, in the few countries in which they have been established, showing special zeal for this cause. Even in colonial and semi-colonial countries there is a beginning, although there is no doubt that in such countries legislation is far behind what is necessary and desirable.

Various reasons may be adduced for the increasing interest in the subject. Firstly, even in the most reactionary countries the idea has slowly made way since the War that the worker has a right to statutory protection whenever he needs it for his physical and mental welfare. The recognition of this right must in itself lead to greater attention being devoted to the young in general. It would almost seem as if it needed a World War to point the attention of the authorities to the enormous importance to the social scheme of things of the great group of young workers. The German census of 1925 showed that there were 5.24 million young workers between 14 and 18 and

3.86 million between 18 and 21. In Great Britain there are about 2.2 million workers between 14 and 17. These figures are sufficient to show the importance of the young worker's section of the working class. Another reason for the growing interest in wage-earning youth is the fear that there may be a grave shortage of labour in coming years, on account of the low birth rates during the War. The Institute for Research into Trade Fluctuations in Germany has published some interesting statistics concerning the expected shortage of young workers owing to this cause. Taking 100 as the standard for the number of young workers between 15 and 20 in 1928, the range during the next years is computed as follows : 1929, 99 : 1930, 97 : 1931, 91 : 1932, 83 : 1933, 73 : 1934, 63 : 1935, 60 : 1936, 65 : 1937, 73 ; 1938, 81.

Last year a commission appointed by the British Ministry of Labour issued a "Memorandum on the Shortage, Surplus and Redistribution of Juvenile Labour during the years 1928 to 1933", in which it is prophesied that, taking the country as a whole, the decline in the supply of juvenile labour between 1927 and 1933 would be such that the figure for the latter year would be 20 per cent below that for the former year. After a sharp rise in 1934 and the three successive years there would be a further gradual decline till 1940 at least.

But although the number of young workers swelling the ranks of labour may be expected to be smaller during the coming years, yet we cannot venture to say with certainty that there will be a shortage of young labour on the labour market. There are other factors to be taken into consideration. We are living in a period of rapid technical transformation ; human labour is being constantly replaced by machinery. It is impossible, therefore, to forecast whether the same amount of young labour will be *required* in the next few years : besides which, there is the state of trade to be considered. But what is of great importance in this period is the vocational training of the young worker. Only a very hasty and superficial observer would venture to make the assertion that rationalisation will make skilled labour superfluous. Several enquiries have shown that rationalisation tends to make unskilled workers and

assistant labour superfluous — a phenomenon which is especially noteworthy in the metal and building industries. Nor must it be forgotten that the technical rationalisation of factories which leads to the substitution of machinery for human labour also causes the employment of fresh labour in manufacturing the new machinery, appliances etc. Thus, unless the present signs are misleading, there will always be a large demand for skilled workers. There is every reason, therefore, for trade unions everywhere to promote energetically measures for the thorough training of wage-earning youth, the chief of such measures being the raising of the school age, the statutory regulation of apprenticeship, compulsory continuation schools — in short, all the demands contained in the International Federation of Trade Unions' programme⁽¹⁾ for the protection of youth. Moreover, despite the growing interest in the young, there are still many injustices to which the young worker falls a victim, especially in countries where there is little statutory protective legislation, and where the trade union movement is of little importance: also in the colonial and semi-colonial countries where there are not only no trade unions, but where legislative measures are taken to prevent their creation. Thanks to the inadequate protection afforded to them, young human lives are daily sacrificed in many such countries, or their growth and general progress restricted by neglect.

Is there anything more deserving of our attention than the interests of the child or young person who will soon be absorbed into the industrial process, and who seeks, demands and is entitled to help and assistance ?

(1) For this programme see Appendix I.