PREPARATORY ASIATIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

NEW DELHI, 1947

Report of the Director-General
THE SUCCESS which has attended the work of the International Labour Organisation has been in no small measure due to the fact that from the outset it has attempted to deal with concrete questions which have been carefully defined; this has facilitated the adoption of practical measures for the improvement of labour conditions, after a free exchange of views between representatives of Governments and organised employers and workers and by voluntary agreement between them. The questions have necessarily been of a technical character. But the approach to these technical issues has a wider social background, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated. Moreover, this background cannot be regarded as something static: it is a composite of changes wrought by the march of events, the sometimes swift and often subtle transformation in the social outlook consequent upon these changes, and the contending trends of thought. The necessity for surveying this background has long been recognised in I.L.O. procedure, and an opportunity for doing so is provided by the discussion of the Director-General's Report. That Report constitutes his preliminary contribution to the proceedings of the conference in question. It enables him to make such general comments and observations as the circumstances may seem to suggest. Such comments and observations have in no sense a claim to be either exhaustive or definitive. Their object is to provide a starting point for a general survey of the underlying conditions in which any I.L.O. conference confronts its specific task, and it is for the members of the conference themselves, speaking with direct and
authoritative knowledge, to complete, expand, or correct the preliminary survey in the Report. It is only thus that a review of the main factors which form the social background of the deliberations of the conference can be obtained.

On the present occasion, the agenda of the conference has a somewhat special character. As the first of what it is contemplated will be a series of Asian conferences, this Conference has an agenda of a very comprehensive kind. The Office reports on the second and fourth items of the agenda—labour policy in general, including the enforcement of labour measures, and the economic background of social policy, including problems of industrialisation—in particular, cover many of the general questions which would normally call for treatment in the Director-General’s Report. When the agenda of a conference, as is usual in the case of the annual General Conference, is confined to a small number of closely defined technical items, some survey of social and economic developments constitutes a necessary complement to the technical documentation before the conference.

In the present case, such a survey from several angles constitutes the main task of the Conference; this Report need therefore touch only briefly on questions which are dealt with in the other Office reports, and can be confined to showing how the subject-matter of those reports is related to the general social picture and how that picture fits into the framework of the activities of the International Labour Organisation.

THE AGENDA OF THE PRESENT CONFERENCE

The first item on the agenda is problems of social security. This question is obviously of importance in-
as much as, especially since the last economic depression, the protection of all workers against the hazards of involuntary unemployment, incapacity for work owing to accident, illness or old age, and in the case of women workers, in respect of maternity, has become a pressing preoccupation in most countries. The widespread interest which Sir William Beveridge’s proposals for the organisation of social security in the United Kingdom aroused even in the midst of the war provides ample indication of the importance generally attached to this question at the present time. It has assumed much prominence in recent years in Asian countries. As a result of political awakening, there is a widespread and profound desire in these countries to raise their standards of living. It is an aim the attainment of which is of interest not only to the Asian countries themselves but to the world as a whole. For it is only to the extent to which these countries, wherein the larger part of the world’s population is concentrated, are able to increase their purchasing power that they can provide outlets for the export of products of the industrially advanced countries. The raising of the standards of living in which measures of social security can play a great part depends upon economic development. It cannot be permanently or effectively promoted without proper international co-ordination. The importance of an international basis for economic development in every part of the world is fully recognised by the International Labour Organisation, as is clear from the succinct statement in the Declaration of Philadelphia that “poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere”—a Declaration that was unanimously adopted by the General Conference of the International
Labour Organisation as the most authoritative statement of its policy for post-war reconstruction.

The existing economic conditions in the countries of western Europe and the Americas, on the one hand, and the Asian countries in the Far Eastern region, on the other, are so different as to render the same measures for the organisation of social security inapplicable immediately to both. The different social and economic organisation in Asian countries calls for a different approach to the question, and it is for representatives of these countries to determine the manner in which, and the extent to which, the general principles laid down by the International Labour Conference should be applied to meet their special needs. When these conclusions have been reached, the International Labour Office will gladly place at the disposal of the Asian countries its technical knowledge and experience in order to facilitate the application of the desired measures.

The second question on the agenda—labour policy in general, including the enforcement of labour measures—is designed to provide the Conference with a review in some detail of outstanding labour issues in Asian countries, as for instance, the position of the primary producer who plays an important part in the economic activities in these countries, the co-operative movement, the organisation of employment, the protection of women and children, the regulation of conditions of work in industry and of industrial relations, and the enforcement of labour measures. Action already taken in various Asian countries in respect of these questions is indicated in the Office report on the subject, and suggestions for future study are also made. It is for the Conference to consider and determine how the questions
covered by this survey should be pursued with a view to further action being taken in the near future.

The third item on the agenda is entitled "Programme of action over a period of years for the enforcement of social standards embodied in the Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference but not yet ratified or accepted by the countries concerned". The standards adopted by the International Labour Organisation take the form of Conventions or Recommendations. Their application is not, of course, a problem peculiar to Asian countries, and it is one which is constantly under review. But regional conferences can play a most useful part in examining any difficulties which have been encountered; the present Conference therefore provides a valuable opportunity to consider whether further progress can be made and to determine the steps to be taken to facilitate such progress.

The experience gained by the International Labour Organisation since its inception, and more particularly the events during the years between the two world wars, have demonstrated the importance of economic development for social progress. An essential difference in international organisation before and after the last war is the much greater attention at present given to economic questions, consequent upon an increasing appreciation of the indivisibility of world economy. Such questions are now dealt with not only by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and other bodies set up by that organisation, such as the European Economic Commission and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, but also by specialised agencies affiliated to the United Nations, such as the Food and
Agriculture Organisation, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund, and the proposed International Trade Organisation. The establishment of these organisations for the consideration of economic questions has made it more, and not less, incumbent upon the International Labour Organisation, which is especially concerned with social policy, to bring to their notice the economic implications of social development. Accordingly, item IV—the economic background of social policy, including problems of industrialisation—has been included in the agenda of the present Conference.

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION AND ASIAN COUNTRIES

As already pointed out, it may be anticipated that this Conference will be a precursor of many similar Asian regional conferences. This expectation makes it all the more desirable that the present opportunity should be utilised to review the relations between the Asian countries and the International Labour Organisation since its inception over a quarter of a century ago. Already at that time, the Constitution of the Organisation was based on the concept of "the one world", a concept which it will be remembered made a powerful appeal to public opinion in the democratic countries during the Second World War. As an inevitable corollary to this broad conception, equality of representation was accorded to all States Members at the Conference. No distinction was made in respect of status or of representation between the economically developed and underdeveloped countries. Any such differentiation would
obviously strike at the very basis of the Organisation—the unreserved recognition of the sovereignty of all the States Members and their equality one with another. How has this arrangement worked in actual practice? What social developments have taken place in Asian countries as a result of their association with the International Labour Organisation?

To give a complete answer to these questions, it would be necessary to enumerate all the labour laws and regulations which have been adopted in these countries and to examine how far they may be considered to have resulted either directly or indirectly from the decisions of the International Labour Conference.

It is necessary to recall in this connection that under the Constitution of the Organisation, not only the Asian States Members, but also metropolitan States with territories in Asia, are under an obligation to consider carefully, one by one, the Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the Conference with a view to their ratification or acceptance. In respect of Conventions which are ratified, the Member States are under an obligation to take any steps which may be necessary to implement them by means of national laws and regulations, and they have, moreover, to submit annual reports to show that this obligation is being duly discharged. In the view of an impartial committee of experts which reviews the situation every year, these obligations have, as a rule, been satisfactorily fulfilled. It must be further borne in mind that most Asian countries are vast in extent and have federal or quasi-federal Constitutions, necessitating the establishment of an elaborate framework for the co-ordination and administration of labour measures. The list of laws and regulations adopted in
Asian countries which it can be claimed are a result of the decisions of the International Labour Conference is a long and impressive one, and it will be generally admitted that the social framework evolved by this network of legislative and administrative measures is a valuable foundation for the future development of the countries in question.

After the experience of the two world wars, no one can deny the importance of world stability and peace for uninterrupted social progress. Nowhere do wars and violent economic and social upheavals have more disastrous consequences for the working population than in the economically underdeveloped countries. The need for the adoption of measures for the promotion of world peace and stability is, therefore, imperative, and it is an essential part of this process that social evolution in Asian countries should be influenced by the same factors as those affecting countries in other parts of the world. The value of machinery for the co-ordination and integration of social standards on a universal international basis is thus apparent. But it often happens, that in a period of great social and political unrest, such as that following a world war, there is a great deal of impatience for immediate results. At such times, the value of the machinery which is indispensable for obtaining lasting benefits is apt to be underestimated.

During the course of the slow progress of mankind through the centuries, the great milestones have, however, consisted not of particular works—remarkable as some of these have been—but of institutions established to achieve the desired results. Until these institutions—courts of law for the protection of civil liberties, States for the consolidation of the interests of particular com-
munities, international institutions for the orderly development of relations between States—were established, the struggle for an improvement in the conditions of life and work of the common man remained confused, wasteful, and unavailing.

No attempt can be made here to survey in detail all the laws and regulations which have been placed upon the statute book in the different Asian countries as a result of their association with the International Labour Organisation. But a brief indication may be given of some of the more important labour measures which are in force in these countries and which have either been entirely based upon, or which closely correspond to, the provisions of Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference.

The beginnings of labour legislation in Asian countries may be traced back to the last century, but the nearly three decades following the conclusion of the First World War have been, for many of these countries, a period of crowded legislative activity, representing an earnest effort to regulate the conditions of life and work of the common man. During this period, in a number of Asian countries the labour laws and regulations have been considerably amended, extended, consolidated, and reinforced in respect of their effectiveness. During this period, it has been the almost invariable practice in these countries to bring all new legislation as far as possible into conformity with the regulations adopted by the International Labour Conference. Even where, on account of particular local conditions, it has not been found possible to give effect to Conventions and Recommendations in their entirety, as many provisions and as much of these measures as could be put into force imme-
directly have been embodied in the national or local labour code.

Legislative or administrative measures have been adopted in China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, Indonesia, the Malayan Union, and Singapore for the organisation of employment in accordance with the aims and objects of Conventions Nos. 2 and 34 and Recommendations Nos. 1, 42, 71, and 72. Mainly as a result of the experience gained in the organisation of the employment of skilled workers in particular, and of manpower generally, during the Second World War, public employment offices have been established in a number of Asian countries, to ensure the proper co-ordination of the demand for and supply of labour. Employment service organisation has now become a prominent feature of the labour policy in these countries. In the organisation of the employment service, the principles laid down in the measures adopted by the International Labour Conference are usually adhered to as far as circumstances permit, and the usefulness of these measures as a guide to action is generally admitted.

The provisions of Conventions Nos. 50 and 64 and Recommendations Nos. 46, 58, and 70, which are concerned with the regulation of the recruitment of workers with a view to the elimination of abuses often arising from the operation of systems for the recruitment of large numbers of workers in non-metropolitan territories, are applied in varying degrees in Ceylon, Indo-China, Indonesia, and the Malayan Union. Substantial progress has also been made in these and other territories towards the abolition of penal sanctions for workers for breaches of contracts of employment, and the
regulation of forced or compulsory labour, in accordance with the provisions of Conventions Nos. 29 and 65 and Recommendations Nos. 35, 36, and 70.

In India and Burma, the hours of work in industry are limited in accordance with the provisions of Convention No. 1. It may be noted in this connection that although this Convention, which was adopted in 1919, contains a special clause for India permitting hours of work in industry in excess of the 8-hour day and 48-hour week laid down as the general rule, the present position in India as regards the hours of work prescribed by statute is in conformity with the rule about the maximum week. The maximum working week laid down in this Convention is observed in practice in Ceylon, where wages boards determine the hours of work in several industries. An 8-hour day was established in Indo-China by two Decrees issued in 1936. Efforts are being made in China for the establishment of a maximum working week, as determined by the international regulations; at a general meeting of representatives of local labour unions and Government officials held in Shanghai in May 1946, the Chinese Minister of Social Affairs mentioned the 8-hour day "as a principle to be realised", among the points which formed "the fixed labour policy of the Government".

Provision for a weekly rest in industry in accordance with the stipulations in Convention No. 14 and Recommendation No. 74 is made in the laws and regulations in force in China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, the Malayan Union, and Singapore.

Holidays with pay for workers, on the lines of the provisions of Convention No. 52 and Recommendation Nos. 47 and 74, are provided for by the Chinese, Indian,
Indo-Chinese, Malayan Union, and Singapore legislation.

Legislation has been adopted, or is under consideration, in China, India, Ceylon, Indo-China, the Malayan Union, and Singapore to give effect generally to the provisions of Convention No. 59 (Convention No. 5 revised) concerning the protection of juveniles and young workers by fixing the minimum age for admission to industrial employment.

Measures for the prohibition of the employment of young persons in industrial occupations at night, in accordance with the provisions of Convention No. 6 and Recommendations Nos. 14 and 70, have been adopted in China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, Indonesia, the Malayan Union, and Singapore. In all these countries, steps have also been taken to prohibit the employment of women at night, in accordance with the provisions of Conventions Nos. 4 and 41.

The labour laws and regulations in force in these countries further contain maternity protection provisions analogous to those of Convention No. 3 and Recommendations Nos. 12 and 70, while the underground work of women in mines is prohibited in China, India, Burma, Ceylon, and Indonesia, in accordance with the provisions of Convention No. 45 and Recommendation No. 70.

In China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, Indonesia, the Malayan Union, and Singapore, measures have been adopted in conformity with the provisions of Convention No. 27 concerning the marking of the weight on heavy packages transported by vessels, and of Convention No. 32 relating to the protection against accidents of workers employed in loading and unloading ships. Industrial safety legislation, comprising several
of the provisions contained in the other Conventions and Recommendations on the subject, has also been adopted in these countries.

Workmen's compensation legislation on the lines of Conventions Nos. 17 and 18 is in force in these countries, although all the provisions of the Conventions have not, as yet, been applied in all of them.

Detailed regulations for the protection of migrants for employment, generally in accordance with those laid down in the Conventions and Recommendations on the subject, have been adopted in India, Ceylon, Indo-China, Indonesia, the Malayan Union, and Singapore.

Of the Conventions dealing with the conditions-of life and work of seafarers, China has ratified Conventions Nos. 7, 15, 16, and 23, and India Nos. 15, 16, and 22. Burma is also bound by the last three ratifications. In China, India, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, and Indonesia, a system of laws and regulations for the protection of seafarers has been gradually evolved.

Convention No. 11 concerning the rights of association and combination of agricultural workers has been ratified by China and India. This Convention is also binding on Burma. Legislation on the same lines as those laid down in the Convention has been adopted in Ceylon, Indonesia, the Malayan Union, and Singapore.

This summary description of the labour laws and regulations in Asian countries in the Far East, which have been adopted for the most part during the past 25 years, should be sufficient to provide an indication of the principal features of the labour code as it has evolved in these countries. This code, which is an invaluable foundation for the further development of social legislation, is mainly based on the International

The value of the influence of the International Labour Organisation in the promotion of progressive social legislation in Asian countries in the Far East has been frequently and fully admitted by representatives of these countries. Dr. T. K. Djang, Chief of the Bureau of Factory and Mining Inspection in the Chinese Ministry of Social Affairs, has observed:

As early as February 1931, less than two months after the [Chinese Factory] Act was promulgated, the Ministry of Industries invited the International Labour Office to send experts on factory legislation and inspection to give technical assistance and advice on the organisation of factory inspection. A Mission.... accordingly visited China in the autumn of that year. They spent much time in investigating industrial conditions in Shanghai and elsewhere and made valuable recommendations to the Ministry, considerably influencing thereby the course of Chinese factory inspection... The International Labour Organisation thus gave much valuable assistance to the cause of the regulation of industrial conditions in China at a time when its help was greatly needed.1

An official of the Department of Labour for the Government of India—Sir Andrew Clow—who played a prominent part in the preparation of Indian labour legislation for nearly two decades after the conclusion of the First World War, has stated:

The International Labour Conference cannot compel countries to accept its conclusions, but its procedure and the fact that its Conventions and Recommendations have ordinarily to be submitted to the legislature in each country ensures the regular examination, both by the executive Government and by popular representatives, of numerous schemes for the amelioration of labour conditions... The submission at intervals, of conclusions reached by the Conference to the Legislative

Assembly has been instrumental in stimulating public interest in labour questions and at times in initiating measures which might not otherwise have been adopted.¹

A former president of the All-India Trade Union Congress—the late Mr. C. F. Andrews—writing in 1928 in *The Hindu* newspaper of Madras, placed on record his opinion on the influence of the International Labour Organisation on the evolution of labour legislation in India:

I have said more than once in public, and I would again repeat the fact, that the amelioration of labour conditions in India, by direct legislation has gone forward more quickly in the last ten years since the I.L.O. was established than was possible in the fifty years before the establishment of the I.L.O. While up to the year 1919 it seemed quite impossible to obtain any more humane conditions with regard to labour in mines, factories and mills, after 1919 every door seemed to be suddenly thrown open, and we have been pressing forward from one act of factory legislation to another, and all these have been on the whole in the right direction.

The veteran Indian labour leader, Mr. N. M. Joshi, who has been associated with the International Labour Conference and the Governing Body of the International Labour Office since the inception of the Organisation, has said:

A...powerful urge in favour of progressive labour legislation...has undeniably come from Geneva. India's desire to prevent being classed at the International Labour Conference as a backward country in matters of social policy has led to the initiation of labour measures which might not otherwise have come up for consideration at all.²

Sir Bhupendra Nath Mitra, who was for a time Member in charge of Labour in the Viceroy's Executive Council and who was no means an uncritical student of inter-

¹A. G. Clow: *The State and Industry* (Government of India, 1928).
national affairs, stated at a public meeting held in London in July 1934, that whatever improvements had taken place in the conditions of workers in India in recent years had been largely due to India's association with the International Labour Organisation. He also stated that he was even inclined to attribute to that connection the appointment in 1929 of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, many of whose numerous recommendations, based on a comprehensive review of the situation, have since been implemented. It is noteworthy that in making these recommendations, the Royal Commission paid close attention to the decisions of the International Labour Conference, and that the Government of India recently stated that it has likewise paid heed to these decisions in the preparation of the proposals which it has at present under consideration for the revision of the Indian Factories Act.

Finally, it may be mentioned that Sir Atul Chatterjee, who represented the Government of India for very many years at meetings of the International Labour Organisation, who was elected as President of the Conference and as Chairman of the Governing Body, and who brought to bear on his work at Geneva his great experience of the administration of labour questions in the Indian provinces as well as in the central Government, in an article on "Federalism and Labour Legislation in India" which he contributed to the April-May 1944 issue of the International Labour Review, has remarked:

The stimulus provided by the International Labour Organisation was... instrumental in securing unprecedented legislative activity on the part of the Government and Legislature. Almost the first business transacted by the new Legislature in February 1921 was the consideration of the draft Conventions and Recommendations passed at the Washington Conference in the autumn of 1919. With the enthusiastic support of the
new element among the legislators... the Government was able to carry through all its proposals for reform. As a result, during the next seven years several important legislative measures were enacted. The Royal Commission on Labour in India, set up in 1929, observed in its Report that "nearly the whole of the present labour code on India dates from 1922 or later".

It may further be remarked in this connection that in his report on his visit to India, Ceylon, Malaya and Indonesia in the winter of 1937-38, the then Director of the International Labour Office, Sir Harold Butler, was able to state:

... the incipient labour codes of every Asiatic country bear plain traces of the inspiration derived from Geneva. Wherever I went, I found Government offices well supplied with the literature of the International Labour Office, and Ministers and officials responsible for labour matters anxious to preserve and develop their contacts with it.

This impression is confirmed by reports which I have received from officials of the Office whom I sent out early this year to a number of Asian countries, in accordance with a proposal which I made to the Governing Body and which it approved, to verify and amplify the information contained in the draft reports drawn up by the Office for this Conference by discussions with local officials, and generally to prepare the ground for it. This mission was one of the largest ever sent by the Office to any region. I am convinced it was also one of the most useful, judging by the results of its efforts to obtain full, accurate, and up-to-date information on the numerous questions dealt with in the reports and to awaken interest in the activities of the Organisation in the countries visited.

Having regard to the close association of the International Labour Organisation, ever since it was established, with Asian countries of the Far Eastern region,
and to the fruits of this association, it is not surprising that the Asian Relations Conference, which was convened by the Indian Council of World Affairs and met in New Delhi earlier this year, recommended the formulation of fair labour standards for Asian workers, with the standards laid down in Conventions drawn up by the International Labour Conference as a basic minimum.

**Universality of the International Labour Organisation**

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the universal character of the International Labour Organisation. It ensures in actual practice the recognition of sovereign equality between States Members in the orderly evolution of international relations for industrial development.

Besides this, there are other factors which make the universal character of the Organisation of great value for the promotion of social progress. Past experience has shown the utility of defining social objectives at general International Labour Conferences for raising the standards in individual countries to the general level. As representatives of Asian countries have themselves admitted, the influence of the International Labour Organisation on the development of labour legislation in these countries has been very great. It should be borne in mind, in this connection, that the general standards embodied in the International Labour Code, constituted by the Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference, are not arbitrarily laid down. These Conventions and Recommendations represent a compromise—the greatest common measure of agreement over the issues dealt
with—reached by accredited representatives of the Governments, employers, and workers of the States Members as the result of a free exchange of views between them, with the technical assistance of experts. The extension of the provisions of this Code to Asian countries, or the adoption of analogous provisions by them, is an essential part of the hitherto slow, but at present urgent and inevitable process of building world unity on the secure basis of the rule of law. As it is the declared objective of the United Nations to promote efforts for the establishment of economic as well as political conditions favourable to the development of democracy throughout the world, it is very necessary that each country should conceive its social policy boldly and pursue it with determination. While social policy must be inspired by cardinal principles from which there can be no deviation, the application of these principles is necessarily experimental in character. For the effective implementation of policy, the system of application should be drawn up in the light of the fullest information available on the trend of opinion, and of the results of experiments made in respect of each question. The wider the area surveyed, the more useful the material gathered is likely to be. A universal organisation obviously facilitates comprehensive surveys of this kind.

History has repeatedly shown that, in the long run, a world community can be securely founded, not on force and declarations of policy alone, or on pacts or treaties, although these may be necessary; not even on common economic interests, essential as they are; but on the basis of a social outlook shared by all the members and on ways of life so firmly rooted in
every part of the commonwealth as to render inconceivable any wanton or unpremeditated departure from the accepted values. No single influence is better calculated to establish the strong social foundations on which world unity can be built than that which fashions the social structure of its different parts according to a well-tried and well-proved pattern. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the long and close association of Asian countries with the International Labour Organisation has led to the development of trade associations of workers and employers and to the establishment in these countries of tripartite bodies for the consideration of social policy. This development is not, in the main, the outcome of any legal obligation which they have assumed, but the natural consequence of their association with countries in which the democratic ideal prevails and the regulation of industrial relations rests on a voluntary basis.

Furthermore, the international character of world trade is a factor which cannot be ignored. If, in the past century or more, there has been an unprecedented improvement in social standards in all or most parts of the world, it is very largely due to the increase in production and to the growth of exchange between countries. Admittedly, there is great need at the present time to organise production and trade. When the industrial revolution was in its comparatively early beginnings and was confined to a relatively small area of the world, it was not perceived that its unregulated development and the absence of any international co-ordination must cause wasteful conflict and grave detriment to all parties concerned.

It does not follow, however, that autarky is the only alternative. It is indeed easy to demonstrate that, more
often than not, autarky is apt to defeat its own ends. There is little hope for the development of economically underdeveloped areas of the world except with the aid of capital resources and technical skill available from the more developed areas. In the case of Asian countries in particular, the pressure of population on the land is already so great and the population is growing so rapidly that, unless economic development is well ahead of the expansion of population, there can be no real improvement in the average standard of living. For such rapid development, local resources can by no means be adequate, and outside assistance is indeed indispensable. Consequently, autarky holds no promise, especially in the case of the thickly populated larger countries of Asia. The case of Germany in the thirties provided an object lesson, which the world is not likely to forget for a long time, of the disastrous consequences of autarky in practice, whatever the initial assumptions may have been. Nor should it be forgotten that even in the case of Germany, the pursuit of autarky was made possible to no small extent by the extensive investment of foreign capital in that country during the chaotic aftermath of the First World War. This sad story is not likely to be repeated again anywhere after the experience of the Second World War. Out of the sufferings of the people during two world wars has come the profound recognition of the imperative need for the reconstruction of world economy on an international basis. If world economy and world trade are to be reconstructed on an international basis, the determination of universal social standards is more important than ever before. In every country, imports are essential for economic development, and in the long run they
have to be paid for by exports; and no country is prepared to accept today imports from another with markedly inferior social standards.

It is sometimes assumed that autarky is a necessary concomitant of planned economic development. Far from this being the case, a planned economy, which is now widely recognised as necessary for the development of many parts of the world, including western Europe, is likely to achieve a considerably larger measure of success if it is organised on a world basis rather than on a restrictive scale. The fact that political difficulties may sometimes hinder or restrict such planning in the economic field in no way weakens the argument, and consequently the need for the regulation of social standards on a universal basis retains all its validity.

The Regional Approach

Largely as a result of changes wrought by the Second World War, the regional approach to international economic and social organisation has assumed considerable prominence. This is not, however, an altogether novel approach. It was not overlooked by those who were responsible for framing the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation. Paragraph 3 of Article 19 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation lays down that—

In framing any Recommendation or draft Convention of general application, the Conference shall have due regard to those countries in which climatic conditions, the imperfect development of industrial organisation, or other special circumstances make the industrial conditions substantially different and shall suggest the modifications, if any, which it considers may be required to meet the case of such countries.

In accordance with this provision, special clauses applicable to India were incorporated in Convention
No. 1, adopted in Washington in 1919. Special clauses relating to Asian countries have also been included in other Conventions adopted at succeeding sessions of the International Labour Conference. For various reasons which need not now be discussed, this special provision in the Constitution has not been resorted to as frequently as might have been expected. Any proposals for special provisions were, perhaps, apt to be critically regarded by the large majority of members of the Conference, including some representatives of countries for which they were designed; and this tended to discourage those who were convinced of the desirability of such provisions from pressing their views. This is not an experience peculiar to the International Labour Organisation, but one which finds its counterpart in other democratic organisations, national as well as international. It is, however, no doubt true that in the earlier days of the Organisation's existence the Conference did not contain an adequate number of members sufficiently familiar with conditions in the different regions to enable them to formulate, with the full basis of knowledge required, appropriate provisions of the kind in question. It was also inevitable that in its early years, when the Organisation had to build up its machinery and procedure, it should have been more preoccupied with establishing a series of general standards than with concentrating on variants to meet special conditions. With increasing experience, however, it became clearer that any adequate examination of regional needs could only be secured by means of regional conferences, meeting in the region concerned and thus able to secure a much wider attendance of members fully acquainted with regional characteristics and needs than
could be secured at any general conference. The first such regional conference for the American continent was organised at Santiago de Chile in 1936, and it was immediately recognised that it fulfilled a real need. Proposals to convene an Asian regional conference had been put forward by representatives of Asian countries at the International Labour Conference as far back as the early 'thirties. The uncertainties of the inter-war period, including in particular those caused by the economic depression, the disturbed political situation just preceding the war, in which international initiatives were paralysed, and the war itself, made it difficult to pursue these proposals actively. The war had, however, the effect of bringing into prominence the importance of economic and social development in Asia. Indeed, even before the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East, Sir Shanmukham Chetty renewed at the New York Conference of the International Labour Organisation in 1941 the proposal to convene an Asian regional conference. The proposal was repeated by Mr. Lall, the present Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Labour, at the meeting of the Emergency Committee of the Governing Body in London in 1942, and it was strongly supported by the other Asian members at both meetings. With this evidence of support, I was able to include a proposal that an Asian Conference should be convened as early as possible, in the Report which I submitted to the Philadelphia Conference in 1944, and to urge that such a Conference would have a special value in view of the changes brought about by the war in the Far Eastern region and of the necessity for an authoritative and systematic consideration of labour problems in Asian countries as soon as the war was over.
The Philadelphia Session of the Conference welcomed the proposal, and the Governing Body of the International Labour Office approved it. Indeed, when the proposal was under consideration in the Governing Body, Sir John Forbes Watson, one of the members of the Governing Body associated with the activities of the Organisation since its early days, went so far as to characterise the Governing Body's decision to hold an Asian Regional Conference as the most important initiative that the Organisation had taken in its history. Sir John's remarks are an indication of the measure of goodwill extended to this Conference by the Governing Body, and also of the expectations entertained as to the outcome of its deliberations.

The Governing Body's decision involved certain matters of special interest. Although the American Conferences constituted a general precedent, they did not offer a model which could be automatically followed, for instance, as regards the composition of this Conference. The Governing Body fully recognised the importance at the present time of ensuring that adequate representation was accorded at the proposed Conference to the vast populations of the non-metropolitan territories of South-east Asia. These territories enjoy a large measure of autonomy in respect of labour policy and occupy an important place in world economy on account of the valuable raw materials they produce. Negotiations were accordingly undertaken with the metropolitan States Members concerned, and it was decided that Burma, Ceylon, the Malayan Union, and Singapore would be represented at the Conference by their own separate delegations. To ensure the participation of the French Union as a whole and of French
territories in Asia, the French Government decided that, on the one hand, the French Union, and on the other, the principal States or territories of the French Union in Asia, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Cochin-China, Viet-Nam, and the French Settlements in India and New Caledonia, would each send a delegation. The Netherlands Government decided that, in accordance with its usual practice at international conferences, its delegation would be representative of the Netherlands Union, and that in the composition of the delegation, the regional character of the Conference would be taken into account.

The purpose of regional conferences of this kind is to devote particular attention to the special problems of the region and to consider ways and means of raising existing social standards to the level of the general international standards embodied in the Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference. While it is true that economic development is a necessary condition for social progress, the history of the earlier phases of the industrial revolution should provide sufficient warning against any facile assumption that such development will of itself bring about the desired results. Such progress can only be achieved by ensuring that the wealth produced by a community is used for the good of all its members.

The impact of the industrial revolution which was felt in Europe as far back as the eighteenth century has affected Asian countries only in the last few decades. Industrial development in these countries is likely to be markedly different from that in countries which felt the force of the industrial revolution earlier, if only because of the immense technological developments and
changes in the general social outlook since the First World War. Besides, industrial development in Asian countries is influenced to a great extent by some factors which render it substantially different from such development in Europe and North America. Not least among these factors are the climatic conditions, the greater dependence on water power than on coal, the absence of sufficient capital resources and technical skill for the rapid development necessitated by the present rate of the growth of population if its standard of living is to be raised quickly, mass illiteracy, and the tenacious social patterns rooted deeply in secular traditions.

In Asian countries, the development of agriculture by the application of modern scientific methods and by organisation designed to increase output is as important as the development of industry. Indeed, it is necessary to pursue both these tasks simultaneously. Unless the condition of the primary producer is improved, industry will languish for lack of markets; and if grave social consequences are to be avoided, it is necessary to provide an outlet, through the expansion of industry, for the employment of workers displaced from the land by the more efficient organisation of agricultural production.

It is certain that this process of economic development will give rise to many social problems. They cannot all be foreseen, and no useful purpose would be served by attempting to enumerate them and to prescribe theoretical solutions. They have to be dealt with as they arise, but administrative machinery to treat them effectively requires to be established. Such machinery should be representative in character, so that any decision taken
will be speedily implemented; it should have at its disposal the best expert opinion available; and it should be closely integrated with international machinery in order to avoid isolated action, which even at best can produce only partial results.

So far as expert opinion is concerned, the services of the International Labour Office will always be available to the Asian countries, if its assistance is sought. In the course of its normal functions, the Office receives, analyses, and co-ordinates a vast mass of information on labour conditions throughout the world; and many countries in various stages of development, including Asian countries in the Far Eastern region, have in the past availed themselves of the services of Office experts for the preparation of labour legislation or schemes of social betterment. As to the integration of national action with international action, the obvious course is for Asian countries to play an effective part in the proceedings of international organisations. There are signs that this is increasingly being done. Not only do international organisations function through the States Members, but the nature of their activities is inevitably determined by their constituents. At the present critical time in the history of the world, when attempts are being made to overcome the effects of the excesses of nationalism by the development of international government through international institutions, it is important that the rising nation-States of Asia should be fully associated with these institutions from the outset and that they should come to regard them as effective allies in their development.

It is significant, and of great importance for the success of the international effort on which so much depends,
that the leaders of the Asian peoples fully recognise this fact, as is evidenced by the action of the Asian Relations Conference, which was held in Delhi not long ago, in extending in no uncertain terms its support to the United Nations and to the International Labour Organisation.

**Co-ordination of Regional and General Activities of the International Labour Organisation**

The Governing Body of the International Labour Office recognises that in the present circumstances one of the results which may be achieved by regional conferences is to make the International Labour Organisation and its potentialities for service better known to the peoples of the various regions of the world. Such meetings can demonstrate to them that they are in fact an essential part of the Organisation and that it is not a far-off institution, dealing with their affairs in remote isolation. Nothing is better calculated to carry this conviction than close familiarity with the proceedings of some of the meetings held under its auspices. One of the principal advantages of regional meetings is, therefore, that they enable large numbers of peoples in the different parts of the world to see for themselves the machinery of the Organisation at work.

In re-equipping and remodelling the International Labour Organisation for the tasks which confront it during this post-war period, the extension of regional activities has been especially emphasised. Another development of great importance, having also as one of its primary objects closer contact between the International Labour Organisation and men and women
engaged in industry, has been the establishment of tri­partite committees to deal with the problems of parti­cular industries of worldwide importance. The con­clusions reached by the regional conferences and indus­trial committees are referred to the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. This ensures that the resolutions adopted will not remain the expression of mere pious hopes, but that the Governing Body will examine what are the appropriate steps which can be taken to secure for them practical application, whether, for example, by referring them for action to the Inter­national Labour Conference under its constitutional powers, or by authorising the Office to undertake such studies or enquiries as occasion may require. The Governing Body is thus an essential link between the regional conferences and the action of the Organisation as a whole, and its co-ordinating function immensely strengthens the action of the conferences in question and their potentialities. Moreover, the action of the Governing Body is not now confined to action only within the framework of the International Labour Organisa­tion. The International Labour Organisation has been recognised as a specialised agency by the United Nations; and while it maintains its complete independ­ence, it has undertaken to co-ordinate its work with the United Nations and with the other specialised agencies. Under the Agreement with the United Nations, approv­ed on the one side by the International Labour Confer­ence and on the other by the Assembly of the United Nations, the two institutions are represented at each other’s meetings and may request the insertion of items on the agenda of such meetings. Thus, a much wider and more effective co-ordination of international effort
becomes possible under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations than hitherto. The importance of this to the regional conferences of the International Labour Organisation cannot be exaggerated. It is almost inevitable that such conferences should, in the course of defining their regional problems, often draw attention to problems on which effective international action can best be taken by international institutions other than the I.L.O. The Governing Body, when examining the conclusions of regional conferences, is therefore not restricted to securing action only on those matters with which the I.L.O. is equipped to deal, but can forward the observations and suggestions of the regional conferences to the appropriate international institutions, and can intervene in the proceedings of those institutions in order to ensure that matters so forwarded receive consideration. Thus, the regional conferences of the International Labour Organisation not only complete the I.L.O.'s machinery, but they take their place in the whole United Nations machinery, to the operation of which they have it in their power to make a valuable and effective contribution.

The combined and co-ordinated effort of the I.L.O. and other international organisations is of the essence of the development of intensive international organisation and of world government at present in process. In this process, Asian countries of the Far Eastern region are no longer silent spectators but active participants. Their ancient civilisations and secular wisdom make their contribution particularly valuable at a time when humanity is at the crossroads, and its future depends upon the unity of purpose it can attain.

There must be, there will be, a great deal of activity
in the Far Eastern region on the part of not only the International Labour Organisation but other international organisations as well, in order to meet the growing needs arising from the rapid development of Asian countries in this region. Let us bear in mind, however, that if this activity is to be useful to these countries, it should be undertaken in response to real needs, and that it should be informed by no exclusive or parochial spirit. Concrete questions will have to be carefully studied and effectively dealt with in the light of existing local conditions and in the wider context of world unity. As befitting the present age of developing world government, such regional activities should form part of general international activities and should be well integrated with them. Not the least of the services which the International Labour Organisation can render to Asian countries at the present time is to provide them with a well-tried and well-established machinery for this purpose.

There can be no doubt that this age of ours is one of the more important in the whole history of civilisation, perhaps without exaggeration the most important, if by civilisation we mean the long struggle of man to conquer his environment and to secure his right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". In historical perspective the victory of China over invasion and conquest and the emergence of independence for hundreds of millions of Asian peoples may well mark the final step to the foundation upon which we can really build our one world. But let us not forget that it is a foundation and no more. The great prize of independence pursued by a great spiritual urge and won by courage, patience, and self-sacrifice brings with it great responsibilities.
When a people takes control of its destinies, it becomes the responsible neighbour of all the other peoples which by one road or another, at recent or distant dates, have achieved the same goal. It becomes a member of the family of nations with adult status, and it assumes its inescapable share of the family responsibilities. May we not hope that the family will be strengthened by its new members and that it will be thereby encouraged to pursue with fresh ardour the struggle to secure for itself as a family what its members have achieved as individual communities, the effective control of its destiny and unity and faith in its future? The decision of the Asian Relations Conference to support the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation is of great promise. The Asian peoples have written their achievements large in the history of the arts and of science. Representatives of Asian countries have filled with great distinction important offices at meetings of the International Labour Organisation during the many years since its inception, and the capacity of Asia to produce international servants with the highest attributes of statesmanship and leadership cannot be doubted. And in the new institution of the United Nations in the last twenty-four months Asian delegations have manifested similar ability. Thus, while international institutions can do much for Asian peoples, the Asian peoples have it within their power to do much for these institutions and thereby for the peace and prosperity of the family of nations of which they are a part.

May we not therefore hope that this first Regional Asian Conference of the International Labour Organisation may have an importance far exceeding its immediate objectives; that it may mark the beginning of a
vital contribution of the Asian peoples to the success of the international effort; and that the emergence of independence over great areas and for immense populations in Asia may mean "a new birth of freedom" not only for those peoples themselves but for the world as a whole?

Edward PHELAN,
Director-General.

Geneva, 10 August 1947.