CONTENTS

Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation, New Delhi, 27 October-8 November 1947 ............................ 425

Vocational Guidance in Sweden, by Ejnar NEYMARK .... 438

Reports and Enquiries
Family Allowance Schemes in 1947: II ....................... 456

Industrial Committees
Indian Industrial Committee on Cotton Textiles ........... 478

Industrial and Labour Information
International Labour Organisation: Application of International Labour Conventions — Inter-American Conference on Social Security — The United States and the Organisation — Publications of the Office .... 481

Social and Economic Policy: Great Britain: Nationalisation — Japan: Coal Production — Poland: Association for Social Policy ....... 491

Industrial Relations: China: Arbitration — Belgium: Status of Works Councils ............. 495


Employers’ and Workers’ Organisations: Second Conference of the Caribbean Labour Congress — The Workers’ Movement in Latin America — Canada: The Trade Union Movement ....................... 528

Statistics
Wages and Hours of Work .................................. 541

Bibliography
Book Notes .................................................. 557
Books Received .............................................. 563

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Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation

New Delhi, 27 October-8 November 1947

The International Labour Organisation has from its inception given special attention to the improvement of conditions of work in Asian countries. An important step towards consolidating and reinforcing its efforts was taken when the Governing Body of the International Labour Office decided to include the convocation of a regional conference in Asia in the programme of work of the Organisation for the years immediately following the termination of the war. This Preparatory Asian Regional Conference was held at New Delhi in October and November 1947. By the comprehensive nature of the agenda, the number and the influential character of the persons taking part in the proceedings, and the far-reaching nature of the conclusions reached, the Conference has aroused great interest in the Asian countries of the Far East in the work of the International Labour Organisation and has given impetus to the intensification of the Organisation's activities in this region.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposal to hold an Asian Regional Conference was first made by the Indian workers' delegate to the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1930, in the form of a draft resolution, which, however, failed to be adopted by the Conference for want of a quorum. The Indian workers' delegate to the next Session of the Conference in 1931 moved a similar resolution, which was adopted, but for various reasons it was not found possible to proceed with the proposal at that time. The proposal was again revived during the war years and accorded a favourable reception both at the New York Session of the Conference in 1941 and at the Fifth Session of the Emergency Committee of the Governing Body of
the International Labour Office held in London in 1942. Having regard to these developments, and to the social and economic repercussions of the war in Asian countries, the Director-General of the International Labour Office included the convocation of an Asian Regional Conference in the programme of work for the Organisation for the years immediately following the war, which the Office submitted to the 26th Session of the International Labour Conference held at Philadelphia in 1944.1 This proposal was welcomed by representatives of Asian countries at the Conference, and a resolution was adopted by the Conference requesting the Governing Body to take the necessary steps to give effect to it.2 The convocation of such a conference while hostilities continued presented many difficulties, but shortly after the end of the war, at its 98th Session (Montreal, May 1946), the Governing Body accepted the invitations extended to it by the Indian and Chinese Government members, on behalf of their respective Governments, to hold a Preparatory Asian Regional Conference in India and the First Asian Regional Conference in China. The Governing Body also decided at its 99th Session (Montreal, September 1946) that a mission of officials of the International Labour Office should visit some of the Asian countries concerned as part of the preparations for the first of these two Conferences, with a view to verifying and amplifying, by discussion with local officials on the spot, the information contained in the draft reports that were being prepared by the Office. This step was deemed the more necessary because of the interruption of normal communications between the Office and Asian countries during the war years. The mission, which was one of the largest sent out by the Office, visited China, India, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, the Malayan Union, the Philippines and Singapore. It has been generally recognised that this mission served a most useful purpose not only by elaborating the information contained in the draft reports and bringing it up to date, but also by preparing the way for a conference of the International Labour Organisation at which a number of countries were represented for the first time. The mission was also useful in enabling officials of the Office to acquire a direct knowledge of conditions in Asian countries—an experience which will be very useful to them in their work.

At its 102nd Session (Geneva, June 1947) the Governing Body decided that the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference should open at New Delhi on 27 October 1947.

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Composition of the Conference

The Governing Body decided at its 98th Session (Montreal, 1946) that the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference should be tripartite in character and that invitations to send delegations to the Conference should be addressed to the three Asian States Members of the Organisation—China, India and Siam—as well as to the other two States Members in the Far Eastern region—Australia and New Zealand. It was further decided that an invitation should be extended to the Commonwealth of the Philippines, which is a member of the United Nations.

The Governing Body also deemed it essential to approach the metropolitan countries concerned, with a view to securing the representation at the Conference of the more important non-metropolitan territories in the region, in view of the size of the area and population of these territories, the very large measure of local autonomy enjoyed by them in the determination of labour policy and the far-reaching economic and social effects on them of the war.

Accordingly, after consultations with the metropolitan Governments concerned, it was decided that Burma, Ceylon, the Malayan Union and Singapore should be represented at the Conference by separate delegations from these territories, and invitations were addressed to them through the United Kingdom Government. It was also decided to address a collective invitation through the President of the French Republic, President of the French Union, to the French Union as a whole, and to Cambodia, Laos, Cochin-China, Viet-Nam and the French Establishments in India and New Caledonia, it being understood that these various parts of the French Union might send separate delegations where possible. As to Indonesia, it was agreed that the Netherlands Union as a whole would be represented, as at other international conferences, and that in the composition of the delegation the regional character of the Conference would be taken into account.

The Governing Body also decided that an invitation to send a delegation to the Conference should be addressed to the United Kingdom Government to secure the representation of British interests in Asia and the Far East not otherwise represented, and that invitations to send observer delegations should be addressed to the United States of America, in view of the important part played by that country in the war in Asia and the need for American assistance in the economic and social development of the region, and to Nepal, on account of its situation and close connection with some of the important countries in the region.
Subsequently, invitations were also extended to Afghanistan and to Pakistan when this latter State came into being as a result of the political developments in India in the summer of 1947.

The Conference was attended by a delegation from the Governing Body consisting of the Chairman, Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, Mr. C. Rhodes Smith, Mr. D. S. Erulkar, Mr. A. G. Fennema, Mr. F. Yllanes Ramos, Mr. P. M. Butler and Mr. N. M. Joshi, and delegations from Afghanistan, Australia, Burma, Ceylon, China, France, Cambodia, Cochinchina, French Establishments in India and New Caledonia, Laos, the United Kingdom, India, the Malayan Union, the Netherlands (Indonesia), New Zealand, Pakistan, Siam and Singapore. There were, in addition, observer delegations from the United States of America and Nepal, two representatives of the United Nations, and one representative of the Interim Commission of the World Health Organisation.

The members of the Conference included Mahn Wim Maung, Minister for Industry and Labour in the Government of Burma, (subsequently replaced by U Win, High Commissioner for Burma in India); Mr. Tran-Van Hue, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, Cochinchina; Mr. Thao Kou Abhay, Minister of Justice, Laos; Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Minister for Industry and Supply in the Government of India; Mr. Z. Husain, High Commissioner for Pakistan in India, as well as several Ministers of Indian provinces and States.

The total membership of the Conference was 223, composed as follows: six members of the Governing Body delegation; 37 Government delegates (including two observer delegates from the United States of America and one observer delegate from Nepal); 65 Government advisers (including two from the United States of America); 16 employers’ delegates; 32 employers’ advisers; 16 workers’ delegates; 36 workers’ advisers; and 15 representatives of Indian provinces and States. Two special representatives of the Government of India also attended.

AGENDA

The agenda of the New Delhi Conference determined by the Governing Body at its 98th Session (Montreal, 1946) was as follows:

1) Problems of social security;

2) Labour policy in general, including the enforcement of labour measures;

3) Programme of action over a period of years for the enforcement of social standards embodied in the Conventions and Recomm-
mandations adopted by the International Labour Conference but not yet ratified or accepted by the countries concerned; and

(4) The general economic background of social policy, including problems of industrialisation.

In accordance with the usual practice, reports prepared by the International Labour Office on these four questions as well as a Report of the Director-General were submitted to the Conference. The Report of the Director-General dealt especially with the question of the co-ordination of the regional activities of the International Labour Organisation with its general activities.

The Office report on the first item on the agenda dealt with social security as an objective of social policy, the existing social security provisions in various Asian countries, the development of income security and medical care services, the basic issues of policy concerning social insurance and social assistance, and the organisation of medical care.

A comprehensive survey of labour policy in Asian countries, in respect of such questions as the position of the primary producer, the development of co-operative organisations, industrial employment, the employment of children and young persons, the employment of women, conditions of work in industry, industrial relations, and the enforcement of labour measures, was attempted in the report on the second item on the agenda.

The report on the third item of the agenda consisted of a brief review of the extent to which the various Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference have affected social legislation in the countries of Asia.

A general consideration of the present stage of economic development in Asian countries, with an analysis of some of the main pressing problems, was the theme of the report on the fourth item on the agenda, which dealt with such topics as income and productivity, agricultural and plantation economy, traditional and modern industries, economic effects of the war, ways and means of increasing productivity and income, the population question and some international aspects of the economic development of the region.

Officers of the Conference

The Conference unanimously elected Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Minister of Labour in the Government of India, as its president. Although

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Mr. Jagjivan Ram had not yet fully recovered from the injuries he sustained in an aeroplane accident while returning a few months before from the 30th Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva), he fulfilled his duties with patience and an unaffected sincerity that won him the confidence and esteem of all three groups of the Conference.

The following were elected vice-presidents: Mr. Pao Hua-kuo, Director of the Bureau of Factory and Mining Inspection in the Chinese Ministry of Social Affairs; Mr. L. Cresson, President of the Manufacturers' Association, Singapore; and Mr. A. M. Malik, President of the Eastern Pakistan Trade Union Federation.

The Conference held 14 plenary sittings, at which the Director-General’s report and the report on the economic background of social policy were discussed. It appointed a selection committee, of which Mr. S. Lall, Indian Government member, was elected chairman, and Mr. B. Ponniah, Ceylon Government member, reporter. The Conference also set up three committees to consider the first three items on the agenda. The chairmen and reporters of these committees were respectively: Mr. Fang I-chi, Government member, China, and Mr. K. Mujtaba, Government member, Pakistan (committee on social security); Mahn Wim Maung, Government member, Burma (succeeded by Mr. G. L. Nanda, Government member, India), and Mr. Hah Hsungwen, Government member, China (committee on labour policy); and Mr. E. B. Taylor, Government member, New Zealand, and Mr. Djang Tien-kai, Government member, China (committee on programme of action in respect of the third item on the agenda).

ADMISSION OF PAKISTAN TO THE ORGANISATION

The Conference was held in the Council House at New Delhi, where, about two months before, the Indian Constituent Assembly had met to draft a new Constitution for the Indian Union which came into being on 15 August 1947. The proceedings on the opening day were attended by several Ministers and senior officials of the Government of India and members of the diplomatic corps. These proceedings were marked by an inspiring address from the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, immediately after the Chairman of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office had formally declared the Conference open. This address set the keynote to the entire proceedings of the Conference—the importance of determined efforts to promote social justice in the present phase of social and political evolution in Asian countries and the role of the International Labour Organisation in assisting
these countries in the pursuit of that ideal. A communication was received by the President during the Conference from the Director-General of the International Labour Office to the effect that Pakistan had formally accepted the obligations of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation in accordance with paragraph 3 of Article 1 of the Constitution and had consequently become a member of the Organisation from 31 October 1947. The Conference extended a warm welcome to Pakistan.

**DISCUSSION ON THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND THE REPORT ON THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL POLICY**


The discussion ranged over a wide variety of topics, and several statements of general interest were made. Mahn Wim Maung, Minister of Industry and Labour in the Government of Burma, stated that the Government of Burma intended to apply for membership of the International Labour Organisation as soon as the impending constitutional changes in that country were completed. Mr. M. W. H. De Silva, Government delegate, Ceylon, made a similar statement regarding Ceylon. Mr. Pao Hua-kuo, Government delegate, China, extended an invitation on behalf of the Chinese Government to hold the first session of the Asian Regional Conference in China in 1949.

Several speakers availed themselves of the opportunity to give accounts of existing social and economic conditions in their respective countries, and called attention to such matters as social legislation, the development of trade union organisation and the co-operative movement and schemes for promoting social welfare at present under consideration. The need for industrialisation was emphasised as well as the several problems associated with it. Some speakers referred to the necessity for close collaboration among all the parties for increasing production.

Many speakers emphasised the importance of agriculture and cottage industries in the economies of Asian countries. The view was expressed that the International Labour Organisation had as

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1 For the text of this address, see *Provisional Record*, No. 5, Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation, New Delhi, 1947.
yet given scant attention to the conditions of agricultural workers, and that adequate representation had not been accorded to them at the Conference. It was observed that no substantial progress could be made in the improvement of the social and economic conditions of agricultural workers unless prevailing agricultural techniques and land tenure systems were reformed. The Conference adopted a resolution inviting the Governing Body of the International Labour Office to consider the question of securing adequate representation for agricultural workers and workers engaged in cottage industries at regional conferences in Asia.

Many speakers stated that the International Labour Organisation had achieved much in the past and the discussion showed that there was widespread and genuine satisfaction that such a conference was being held. The speeches left no doubt that the Organisation had an important contribution to make in the promotion of social welfare in Asia. Several speakers considered that the Organisation had hitherto devoted insufficient attention to the continent of Asia, in which, it was pointed out, some 60 per cent. of the world's total population is crowded. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru remarked, for instance, in his address on the opening day, that "...inevitably perhaps, the attention of this Organisation has been concentrated—probably more than the facts of geography warranted—on problems other than Asian problems". The speakers were unanimous in expressing the hope that the New Delhi Conference would mark a change in the orientation of the I.L.O.

The absence of delegations from certain countries, such as Indonesia, Viet-Nam, Korea and Japan, was widely remarked on, and several speakers expressed the hope that these countries would be able to participate in the succeeding regional conferences.

Several speakers commented that the Conference was being held at a very opportune time, when several Asian countries had just assumed, or were about to assume, responsibility for their own affairs, and would be free to shape their own economic and social policies. Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Minister of Labour in the Government of India, said in his presidential address:

"Thus we meet more or less as a family of free people in this the first international conference to be held on Asian soil. I consider it a happy augury that this Conference should coincide with a radical phase of transformation in Asia, which is fast coming into its own.

There was a general determination to tackle the vast problems facing the various countries, to raise national incomes and standards of living, and to narrow the gap which existed between them and the economically more developed countries of the West. Such progress, it was felt, would be not only in the interests of the Asian countries concerned, but also in the interests of world peace and
The need for increased production and planned distribution in Asian countries was particularly stressed.

Although the regional approach was welcomed and its importance recognised by the Conference—as may be seen from some of the resolutions adopted—it was at the same time appreciated that such an approach was complementary to, and in no way a substitute for, the international approach to labour questions. Regional co-operation was merely a step towards international co-operation, and was designed to further it. Several speakers indicated the growing need for closer collaboration and co-operation between the countries of Asia and those of the West, and expressed the hope that the economically developed countries would provide material and technical assistance to underdeveloped countries.

**Reply of the Secretary-General**

In replying to the debate on the Report of the Director-General and on the report on the economic background of social policy, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Jef Rens, Assistant Director-General of the International Labour Office, expressed the grateful appreciation of the Office to the Government of India and particularly to the Ministry of Labour for the assistance provided by them in the preparations for the Conference. He said that the Organisation might have been unduly European in outlook in the past and suggested that it could extend its activities in Asia by such means as sending missions, convening conferences and committees and holding meetings in Asia from time to time. He informed the Conference that the recruitment of Asian nationals to the staff of the Office was receiving adequate attention, and that it was intended to establish a network of correspondents in the countries of Asia and to reinforce the staffs of the I.L.O. branch offices in Asia. He also stated that the Office appreciated the importance of agriculture and cottage industries in the economies of Asian countries and would address itself to the task of working out appropriate methods for dealing with the social problems of agricultural producers and workers engaged in cottage industries.

**Resolutions Adopted**

The Conference adopted 23 resolutions.

**Social Security.**

The resolution on social security emphasised the urgent need for the introduction of social security schemes in Asian countries, and recommended that income security should be provided through
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR REVIEW

social insurance financed by Governments, employers and workers, medical care being provided by a public medical care service without contribution conditions or the imposition of a means test.

Labour Policy.

The Conference adopted several resolutions dealing with various aspects of labour policy. These resolutions recommended, in the main, the development of employment services, including the extension of technical and vocational training facilities, the elimination of recruiting contractors, the furthering of collective agreements, and regular family budget enquiries. In outlining measures for the protection of children and young workers—an item of special interest in Asia—the Conference recommended the expansion of compulsory free education, with a planned development of educational facilities, the establishment of a network of free technical and vocational schools, the regulation of apprenticeship, the abolition of child labour in non-industrial occupations, the regulation of hours of work and of night work for young workers, and the establishment of welfare services for young workers. The resolution concerning the employment of women and maternity protection recommended the establishment of crèches and nurseries, the free provision of milk and layettes, the provision of safeguards against the effects of arduous work, the provision of separate washrooms and other facilities, the expansion of vocational training and basic educational facilities, and the recognition of the principle of equal pay for equal work. In respect of rural labour, the Conference recommended the eradication of forced labour and agricultural servitude, the amelioration of the conditions of the aboriginal tribes and untouchable castes, the study of land tenure problems, the enactment of legislation to improve the conditions of plantation workers, and the development, wherever possible, of small-scale domestic and handicraft industries. The Conference also recommended the development of co-operative organisations for improving the conditions of agricultural and cottage-industry workers, as well as of industrial workers.

The Conference attached particular importance to the effective application of the principle of freedom of association, the maintenance of an adequate system of labour inspection, the preparation of national programmes of action in respect of labour policy, the extension of the scope of labour legislation and the progressive implementation in the region of the standards laid down in the international labour Conventions and Recommendations. The Conference recommended that international labour Conventions and Recommendations should be submitted to the competent national
or local authorities, including the appropriate authorities in the non-metropolitan territories represented at the Conference, in a manner which would enable adequate consideration to be given to their provisions.

**Co-operation between Employers and Workers.**

The Conference called upon Governments to consider the setting up of tripartite organisations in their respective countries, with committees to deal with special problems, to promote measures for improving the conditions of workers and increasing production in industry, and to advise the Governments on matters of labour and economic policy, including the measures necessary to implement decisions of international and regional conferences and industrial committees of the International Labour Organisation. The urgent need for increasing production and for securing close co-operation between employers and workers to achieve this end was expressed in one resolution. In another resolution the Conference emphasised the importance of securing proper conditions of life and work for Asian seafarers.

**Attainment of Social Objectives of the I.L.O.**

The Conference further adopted a resolution concerning the economic policies necessary for the attainment in Asia of the social objectives of the International Labour Organisation. It recommended the provision of industrial employment for the surplus agricultural population, the expansion of agricultural production, the fair distribution of agricultural income, fair terms of exchange for the export of primary products, capital formation, the checking of inflation, measures necessary for a sound and balanced industrial development, and international assistance and collaboration.

**Japan and the I.L.O.**

The Conference requested the Governing Body to consider the advisability of communicating through the appropriate channels to the Japanese Government the decisions and documents of the Conference, of authorising the Director-General to discuss with the appropriate authorities the desirability of sending to Japan a fact-finding mission of the Office, and of examining at an appropriate time the desirability of readmitting Japan to the Organisation. The Conference also pointed out the dangers of dumping and the desirability of taking steps to see that future industrial development in Japan would not lead to dumping.
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR REVIEW

I.L.O. Assistance to Asian Countries.

The Conference also recommended the preparation of various technical studies by the International Labour Office and the provision of technical assistance by it to Asian countries. By a resolution on the intensification of the Asian work of the International Labour Organisation, it requested the Governing Body to convene an Asian Regional Conference in China in 1949, to authorise the Director-General to arrange a mission to be sent to various Asian countries to prepare for such a Conference, to arrange a series of meetings of technical experts from Asian countries, to arrange for meetings of the International Labour Conference, the Governing Body, the Permanent Agricultural Committee, the Joint Maritime Commission and appropriate industrial committees to be held in Asian countries from time to time, to reinforce the research staffs of the Chinese and Indian Branch Offices and to establish a network of branch offices and correspondents in other Asian countries, to extend the facilities for giving appropriate assistance to Asian Governments, to arrange for the publication of the decisions of the Conference in appropriate Asian languages, to resume and extend the publication in Asian languages of selected publications of the Office, to draw the attention of the Director-General to the importance attached to the recruitment of an adequate number of nationals of Asian countries to the staff of the Office and to consider the advisability of constituting an Asian Advisory Committee and of authorising the Director-General to establish a small co-ordinating secretariat to facilitate the implementation of this programme.

CONCLUSION

It is generally agreed that the New Delhi Conference was most successful. It met at a time when most Asian countries were passing through a difficult time of political and social change and economic adjustment caused by the war. If the Conference was successful in spite of these difficulties, it was so because all the members were unanimous in their desire to express their appreciation of the work of the International Labour Organisation and in their desire that its activities should be extended to Asia in the fullest possible measure. The large number of resolutions adopted by the Conference provides a programme of such activity for many years. A feature of the New Delhi Conference was the desire shown by the Asian

1 In other resolutions the Conference requested the Governing Body to convene regional meetings of experts on social security, statistics, co-operation, and labour inspection.
representatives that a concerted international effort should be made to raise social standards in Asia. They not only expressed their readiness to receive assistance from the countries which are in a position to help in respect of social and economic progress in Asia, but went on to indicate their determination to make their own contribution to international solidarity. That the International Labour Organisation is fully alive to the importance of social and economic development in Asia is shown by the convocation of the New Delhi Conference by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office; but it was clearly necessary that accredited representatives of the Asian countries should themselves determine what their future social policy should be. In this respect, perhaps more than in any other, the New Delhi Conference served a most useful purpose.