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# INTERNATIONAL REGULATION OF WOMEN'S WORK

History of the Work for  
Women Accomplished  
by the International  
Labour Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the world war gave the peacemakers an opportunity to do something bigger for humanity than merely to put an end to the fighting. In nearly every country promises had been made to many sections of the community that peace should bring them better conditions than had existed before the war. In particular, it was clear that Labour both claimed and deserved special treatment, and the result of the recognition of this fact was the inclusion for the first time in history of a "Labour Charter" in a treaty of peace. This Charter is contained in Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles, which established the International Labour Organisation in which Governments, employers and workers were to participate. It is the high duty of this Organisation to frame international agreements for the improvement of labour conditions and, in particular, for the levelling up of backward countries so that they shall cease to be an obstacle in the way of those who desire to improve their own conditions.

In the words of the Treaty, the International Labour Organisation consists of:

"(1) A General Conference of Representatives of the Members.

"(2) An International Labour Office controlled by a Governing Body . . . constituted as follows:

"Twelve persons representing the Governments;

"Six persons elected by the Delegates to the Conference representing the employers;

"Six persons elected by the Delegates to the Conference representing the workers."

The Conference, which must meet at least once every year, is composed of four representatives of each of the member States, two being Government Delegates and the others "representing respectively the employers and the workpeople of each of the Members." Its duties are to draft conventions and "recommendations" capable of being adopted with the briefest possible delay in the domestic legislation of the respective countries. It thus constitutes a kind of international legislature for labour matters. The conventions are for submission to the "competent authority" in each country (normally the national parliament) with a view to ratification and incorporation in domestic legislation, while a "recommendation" is intended merely as a guide to governments in framing legislation and administrative decrees.

Though the war was responsible for turning millions of peaceful citizens into trained soldiers, it was also instrumental in giving women a new importance and wider experience in the field of industrial employment. It was natural, therefore, that the framers of the Peace Treaties should have wished to incorporate in the constitution of the International Labour Organisation special provisions dealing with women. Accordingly, women's organisations were given an opportunity to express their views to the Peace Conference. A deputation was sent to Paris for this purpose by the International Council of Women (in agreement with other associations) to submit a number of proposals to the Commission on International Labour legislation. There is no doubt that these proposals influenced not only the Treaty of Versailles but also the work of the International Labour Organisation from its early days. Of this there is ample proof, as may be shown by one or two illustrations.

Thus, there is in the Charter a clause which provides that "when questions specially affecting women are to be considered by the Conference, one, at least, of the (technical) advisers should be a woman" (v. Art. 389 of the Treaty of Versailles). This novel provision was put in on the proposal of Miss Margaret Bondfield, the first woman to hold the post of Minister of Labour in Great Britain. Again, the Charter declares, even more precisely, that a certain number of the staff of the International Labour Office "*shall*\* be women." While it is to be regretted that certain States Members of the Organisation have not always acted in accordance with the recommendation addressed to them, it is satisfactory to note that some of them have faithfully observed it, or have even gone further than the provisions of the Treaty. Women have played an important part in the Conference in all its general sessions, and not merely on the occasions when a problem of particular interest to women is discussed. At the 1929 Conference, for example, Madame Kjelsberg, Norwegian Inspector of Factories, was the Chief Delegate of the Norwegian Government and was elected Chairman of the whole Group of Government Delegates. The other clause of the Charter which relates to women has also been applied, and there are to-day about equal numbers of women and men, all grades considered, on the staff at Geneva. Men and women are recruited on the same basis. No less than thirteen nationalities are represented in the ranks of the female personnel of the Office, namely, Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Great Britain, the Irish Free State, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia.

#### WOMEN'S PLACE IN INDUSTRY

Female labour is no new phenomenon. Women have always played a conspicuous part in the productive work necessary for the maintenance of the family. They worked, and still work, in the fields; in the patriarchal type of society it was the woman who was responsible for the preparation not merely of food, but also of numerous other necessary items—particularly articles of clothing.

In the days when handicrafts began to be developed, we find the woman collaborating with her menfolk as, for example, in England just before the industrial revolution of the 18th century, when the wool industry of the country was carried on in numerous little rural workshops where the women and children were responsible for the weaving and the men for the spinning.

The industrial revolution, which replaced handicraft by machines and brought into being huge factories employing large numbers of people, gave rise to a big demand for female and child labour—a demand which has grown continually more insistent. The application of mechanical processes to operations previously the exclusive preserve of men, the rapid expansion in the demand for both skilled and unskilled labour, the industrialisation of certain products formerly prepared at home (lace, knitted goods, needlework, foodstuffs of various kinds, etc.) have all contributed to accentuate this evolutionary process which the Great War still further intensified. The shortage of male labour which this long-drawn-out conflict caused had its natural repercussion in a great increase in the numbers of women employed in industry. Professions from which they had hitherto been rigidly excluded were suddenly thrown open to them, and they found new employment in the metal and chemical industries, building trades, engineering, transport and, last but not least, the so-called "liberal" professions of the law, medicine and, in some cases, politics. The economic conditions obtaining after the war helped to perpetuate this state of affairs, for many married women found themselves obliged to take, or remain in,

\* Not italicized in the original.

work in order to eke out the meagre earnings of their husbands which were not sufficient to cover the family needs. It is also necessary to take into account the fact—broadly true, except in newly settled countries and colonies—that the number of women in the world exceeds the number of men. This state of affairs, which is by no means a new phenomenon, was aggravated by the war, and there is now a very considerable number of unmarried women who cannot dispense with paid employment. It is therefore not surprising to find that the proportion of women to men in gainful employment is to-day in Germany 35.8%, in Belgium 25%, in the United States 20.5%, in France 39.6%, in Great Britain (England and Wales) 29.4%, in Italy 28.6%, in Sweden 29.8%, in Switzerland 33.9%, and in Czechoslovakia 30.2%.

#### PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S WORK

This growing influx of women in industry, commerce and the "professions" has made it necessary to consider the effects of their exertions on the health and physical well-being of the woman worker. In particular, it is essential to know whether industrial work has any deleterious results for women for physiological reasons. Is the woman worker more subject to fatigue than the man by reason of her inferior muscular development and her more sensitive nervous equipment? What are the effects of her new mode of life on her capacity to perform the duties of motherhood? Again, does professional work render a woman less resistant to certain characteristic illnesses, such as anæmia and tuberculosis?

It is incontestable that, broadly speaking, women are not engaged in industrial work for so long a period of their lives as men are. On the other hand, however, they are much more susceptible than men to the effects of their work. This susceptibility may, no doubt, be traced to some extent to the low rates of wages in many women's trades and to the added strain of home duties which press more heavily on women than on men, but legislation has to deal with things as they are. Statistics establish the fact that women workers are more prone to sickness than men; that the average duration of illnesses is much longer for women than for men; that the percentage of deaths among women workers is above the average for the population as a whole, and also above that for male workers between the ages of 30-40—the limits of age for the large majority of women workers.

A detailed study of the causes of sickness among women workers shows the part played by sex in this question. The monthly periods are frequently disturbed by sedentary work both when women are obliged to remain seated for long stretches at a time and when they have lengthy spells of standing. The constant repetition of movements of certain parts of the body, as well as lifting heavy weights and engaging in unhealthy branches of industry, tend to make women liable to chronic ailments affecting the reproductive organs and to aggravate these ailments when contracted. It is also asserted that industrial labour tends to reduce the birthrate, to increase the number of miscarriages and premature births, to have an adverse effect on the infant mortality rate and the numbers of stillborn children, and to impair the health of the children who survive. An inquiry by the German Union of Textile Workers (two-thirds of the members of which are women and girls) has established the fact that out of 1,110 cases of confinement occurring at the due time, only 309 could be considered normal, while no less than 801 (72.16%) were accompanied by pathological symptoms. The after-effects of confinement are also stated to be particularly serious for the woman industrial worker.

A very serious aspect of the problem is the effect on the progeny of the woman industrial worker. It is claimed, for example, that the offspring of mothers employed in factories are less vigorous and their average weight considerably lower than is the case for other women workers. In addition, many experts assert that the tissues of the female frame are more easily impregnated than the male by noxious fumes given off by certain industrial products, and that the effects of this impregnation are more serious, seeing that they tend to be transmitted to the foetus and to the new-born infant.

It will thus be readily seen how essential it is that the International Labour Organisation should take up the question of the peculiar dangers to health to which women workers in industry are liable, and should try to place on the international statute book not only the more general enactments applicable to all classes of labour, but also special protective measures designed to meet the particular needs of women.

#### INTERNATIONAL REGULATIONS AFFECTING WOMEN WORKERS

"If it is true," declared the well-known economist Wolowski, as long ago as 1868, "that the nations of the world have been driven by the necessity of maintaining economic equilibrium to exploit in competition one with another, the infant, the adolescent and the woman, it would indicate the necessity of seeking an international agreement which would put a stop to such a shameful business, as has been done in the case of the abominable scandal of the slave trade."\*

The International Labour Organisation exists to ensure that the necessary steps will actually be taken. The Treaty of Versailles specifically states in the Preamble to Part XIII that "an improvement . . . is urgently required" in the conditions of work "of children, young persons and women." And among the nine "General Principles" enumerated in Article 427 are to be found the following:—

"The principle that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value." (Seventh.)

"The standard set by law in each country with respect to the conditions of labour should have due regard to the equitable economic treatment of *all*† workers lawfully resident therein." (Eighth.)

"Each State should make provision for a system of inspection in which women should take part, in order to ensure the enforcement of the laws and regulations for the protection of the employed." (Ninth.)

In acting thus, the authors of the Treaty of Versailles have carried a stage further the ameliorative efforts the beginnings of which date back to the earliest attempts at social legislation. The first international action in this field was the Berlin Conference of 1890, called by the German Government, which interested itself mainly in child and female labour. Indeed, all its decisions dealt with these classes of labour except one which was concerned with the establishment of a weekly rest-day. Although the resolutions of the Conference were not put into effect, two subsequent gatherings at Berne—one in 1906 and the other in 1913—called under the auspices of the International Association for Labour Legislation, kept the matter to the fore. Of the two draft conventions adopted in 1906, one forbade night work for women industrial workers, while one of two drafts investigated by the Conference of 1913 dealt with the hours of work of women and young persons. The war, however, put an end to the negotiations.

\* *Wolowski*, "Le travail des enfants dans les manufactures," 1868, p. 31, quoted by *Justin Godard*, "Les clauses du travail dans le traité de Versailles," 1920, p. 21.

† Not italicized in the original.

Immediately after it was established, the International Labour Organisation resumed the study of the limitation of the hours of work, extending its investigations, however, to all workers in industry, in accordance with the agenda of the first session of the Conference of the Organisation which was drawn up at Versailles and forms an annexe to Part XIII of the Treaty. The agenda of the first session (which met at Washington in October and November, 1919) also included a series of questions relating to the employment of women "(a) before and after childbirth, including the question of maternity benefit; (b) during the night; (c) in unhealthy processes." Items (a) and (b) formed the subject of two of the conventions adopted at Washington.\* The third was dealt with in a Recommendation.

#### PROHIBITION OF NIGHT WORK FOR WOMEN

Let us first consider the question of night work for women, which had already come before the Berne Conference in 1906. The agenda at Washington contained an item calling for the "extension and application of the International Convention adopted at Berne in 1906 on the prohibition of night work for women employed in industry." The Washington Convention, on this subject, followed the lines of its predecessor (which had already been ratified by several industrial countries before the war) with one important exception. At Berne, all industrial establishments employing less than ten persons, or comprising solely the members of a single family, had been excluded from the scope of the Convention. At Washington, only the second of these exceptions was maintained, experience having shown that the most harmful conditions for women were often precisely those existing in the smaller establishments.

The main provisions of the Convention on night work for women are as follow:

Women, without distinction of age, shall not be employed during the night in any public or private industrial undertaking. The word "night" is defined as a period of at least eleven consecutive hours, including the interval between ten p.m. and five a.m. Exceptions may be made in the case of "force majeure" or in consequence of unforeseen interruptions of work which are not of a recurring character, or when work is being done on perishable articles which might suffer from a break in the process of manufacture. For seasonal industries, the night period may be reduced to ten hours on sixty days of the year. In those countries where the climate renders work by day particularly trying to the health, the night period may also be reduced provided that compensatory rest is accorded during the day. A special clause permits India and Siam to suspend the application of the Convention in respect to factories as defined by the National law.

The 1921 session of the Conference adopted a Recommendation to extend the application of this Convention to women employed in agriculture, though on a more limited scale. Thus, the length of the rest period is put at not less than nine hours—if possible, consecutive—instead of eleven consecutive hours. The reason for this is that the fact had to be taken into account that work on the land is dependent on climatic and atmospheric conditions, and that in certain climates it is impossible to work in the middle of the day.

By November, 1929, the Convention on night work for women had been ratified

\* It may be pointed out that these two conventions were not the only ones adopted at Washington which concerned women workers. Most of the questions upon which decisions have been taken by the Conference, not only at Washington, but also at subsequent sessions, are applicable without distinction to women as well as men—for example, the Hours Convention establishing the principle of an eight hour day and a forty-eight hour week. The same applies to the Conventions on a weekly rest-day in industry, on free public employment exchanges and unemployment insurance, etc.

by the following nineteen countries:—Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cuba, Estonia, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, India, the Irish Free State, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Czecho-slovakia and the Union of South Africa.

Twelve of these States have already enacted the new legislation necessary for bringing the provisions of the Convention into operation.

In addition, ratification of the Convention has been recommended to the competent national authority by the Governments of Germany, Argentine, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Paraguay and Uruguay. Several of these countries, Germany, for instance, have already adopted regulations on the subject of night work for women, and only slight modifications are necessary to enable the Convention to be ratified. In Japan, a new law, passed in March, 1926, came into force during 1929, bringing the regulations into line with the Convention.

The Recommendation of 1921 on the subject of night work of women in agriculture has formed the basis of a number of legislative and other measures taken by the following Governments: Australia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Siam, Sweden, and Czecho-slovakia.

#### MATERNITY BENEFIT

The question of maternity benefit had not been the subject of international deliberation until it came before the Washington Conference in 1919. Nevertheless, it was found possible to draft a Convention relating to women workers before and after childbirth.

The scope of this international agreement extends to all industrial and commercial undertakings other than those in which only members of the same family are employed. The Convention provides that no woman, whether married or unmarried and whatever her nationality, shall be permitted to work in any such undertaking during the six weeks following her confinement, and she is similarly entitled to leave her work if she produces a medical certificate stating that her confinement will probably take place within six weeks. During these twelve weeks, the woman worker must receive adequate benefits for the maintenance of herself and child. The exact amount of these benefits is to be determined by the competent authority in each country, and is to be provided either out of public funds or by means of a system of insurance. The benefits must continue even if the doctor has made a mistake in estimating the probable date of confinement. A woman is also entitled to free medical attendance or the services of a midwife. It is not lawful for an employer to dismiss her during this period or during any further period of absence certified as arising out of her pregnancy or confinement.

The principles of this Convention were extended to women agricultural workers by a Recommendation adopted in 1921, requesting States Members of the Organisation to take measures to ensure to this class of worker protection similar to that already accorded to industrial and commercial workers. The eleven States which have so far brought their domestic legislation into harmony with this Recommendation are Australia, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Siam, Sweden and Switzerland. Those which had ratified the Convention by November, 1929, were Germany, Bulgaria, Chile, Cuba, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxemburg, Rumania and Yugoslavia. Ratification has been recommended by the Competent Authority in the Argentine, Brazil, Paraguay, Poland, Czecho-slovakia and Uruguay.

It will no doubt be noted that the number of ratifications so far accorded to this Convention is smaller than that obtained for the Convention on night work for women. An investigation carried out by the International Labour Office, however, has shown that the influence of this piece of international legislation is really far greater than would appear on the surface. In addition to those which have actually ratified the Convention, quite a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere have adopted new rules on this subject, or have improved existing laws since the Convention was drawn up. It is true that in many cases the new regulations differ, to some degree, from the terms of the Convention. Nevertheless, it is incontestable that great progress has been made. Indeed, it is fair to say that, thanks to the initiative of the International Labour Organisation, the right of the working mother to some protection is now recognised by the legislation of the great majority of civilised countries.

#### THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN UNHEALTHY PROCESSES

For the protection of women and young persons working in unhealthy occupations a Recommendation was adopted at Washington calling upon Governments to forbid the employment of this class of labour in a number of trades which it enumerates in detail, and which relate to such industrial uses of lead and zinc and their compounds as expose the worker to the risk of lead poisoning. In addition, if women or young persons under eighteen are employed in trades in which lead salts are used, certain precautions named in the Recommendation should be taken—among them being a periodical medical inspection, compensation for any worker who contracts lead poisoning and a certain minimum standard of hygiene for the workshop. This Recommendation has inspired legislation in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, France, Great Britain, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, Siam and Sweden.

The prevention of lead poisoning was also the aim of a Convention adopted at the third session of the Conference in 1921 on the use of white lead in paint. In view of the special susceptibility of women to this serious malady, a clause was inserted forbidding the employment of women and young persons under eighteen in any painting work in which white lead or sulphate of lead or any product containing either of these pigments was used. Nineteen States had ratified this Convention up to November, 1929, viz., Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Cuba, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Latvia, Luxemburg, Norway, Poland, Rumania, Sweden, Czecho-slovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary, the last-named conditionally. Ratification has also been authorised by the competent authority in Italy and the Netherlands.

It should be added that in Germany, Norway and Uruguay, legislation is in course of preparation which will enable the Convention to be ratified, while in several countries the employment of women in painting work is already forbidden.

#### WOMEN AND FACTORY INSPECTION

When the Conference of the International Labour Organisation took up the question of factory inspection in 1923 it was not merely content to define the duties which factory inspectors ought to perform; it expressly associated women with this class of work by inserting in the Recommendation on the General Principles of Factory Inspection the following paragraph :—

“That, in conformity with the principle contained in Article 427 of the Treaty of Peace, the inspectorate should include women as well as men

inspectors; that, while it is evident that with regard to certain matters and certain classes of work inspection can be more suitably carried out by men as in the case of other matters and other classes of work inspection can be more suitably carried out by women, the women inspectors should in general have the same powers and duties, and exercise the same authority as the men inspectors, subject to their having had the necessary training and experience, and should have equal opportunity of promotion to the higher ranks."

Nineteen States have so far informed the International Labour Office that they have taken the necessary steps to put this Recommendation into effect, viz., the Union of South Africa, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, India, the Irish Free State, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Rumania, Siam, Switzerland, Czecho-slovakia.

### PROTECTION OF WOMEN EMIGRANTS

In yet another direction the Conference of the International Labour Organisation has taken up the question of the protection of women. At its 1926 session the Conference adopted a Convention designed to simplify existing methods of inspecting emigrants on board ship, and it rounded off its action on this occasion by a Recommendation to ensure the protection of women on board ship. The actual text of this Recommendation is as follows:—

"Where fifteen or more women or girls unaccompanied by a responsible person are carried as emigrants on board an emigrant vessel a properly qualified woman who has no other duty to fulfil on board shall be appointed to give such emigrants any material or moral assistance of which they may stand in need without in any way encroaching upon the authority of the master of the vessel. She shall report to the authority making the appointment, and her report shall be available for the use of the Governments which may be concerned."

This Recommendation is of too recent date to have borne much fruit as yet. Nevertheless, ten countries have already announced that they have put into operation measures complying with its provisions. They are Belgium, Great Britain, Holland, India, Irish Free State, Japan, Norway, Siam, Sweden and Czecho-slovakia.

### THE MINIMUM WAGE

In the early days of the industrial revolution when large numbers of wage-earners began to be congregated in huge factories it was customary to bewail the gradual disappearance of handicrafts. The system whereby people worked at home with their spinning-wheels, their handlooms and other primitive appliances was idealised and became part of the polite fiction known as "the good old days" to which are supposed to belong all the virtues. But the experience of more than a century has considerably modified this earlier conception of bygone ages. In the industries in which the worker still does work at home, the conditions are too often so bad that the authorities have found it necessary to interfere with a view to putting an end to the abuses and "sweating" of the unfortunate workers, who, it may be added, are generally women.

The Conference of the International Labour Organisation has also had to tackle this problem and at its eleventh session, in 1928, it adopted a Convention on the methods of fixing a minimum wage for industries which are insufficiently organised, and particularly those in which work is carried on at home. The Conference thus redeemed the pledge given in Article 427 of the Treaty of Versailles which requires

the payment to the employed of a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of living as this is understood in their time and country.

This Convention is applicable to both sexes, but it is of special concern to women because the greater part of the trades with which it deals are ones in which women form the majority of the workers. In addition, however, the Conference drew up a Recommendation with a view to fixing certain general principles which would facilitate the application of the Convention, and among them are several provisions dealing specifically with female labour.

Thus, it is stated in Part One of the Recommendation, that:—

"Without prejudice to the discretion left to the members by the Draft Convention to decide in which trades or parts of trades in their respective countries it is expedient to apply minimum wage-fixing machinery, special regard might usually be had to trades or parts of trades in which women are ordinarily employed."

Furthermore, Paragraph IID. of Part Two declares that:—

"Wherever a considerable proportion of women are employed provision should be made as far as possible for the inclusion of women among the workers' representatives and of one or more women among the independent persons mentioned in the same paragraph (that is to say, the persons who should be included in the membership of the wage fixing body so that their votes can ensure effective decision being reached in the event of the votes of the employers' and workers' representatives being equally divided)."

Lastly, in its final paragraph (Part B), the Conference "thinks it right to call the attention of Governments to the principle affirmed by Article 427 of the Peace Treaty that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value."

### THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

The preceding pages have been devoted to a brief account of the various measures of protection for female labour which have been secured as a result of the activities of the International Labour Conference. Only incidental reference has been made to the work of the permanent Office at Geneva. The International Labour Office, as it is called, does the spade work for the Conference, watches the application of its decisions in the different countries, seeks to promote the ratifications of the Conventions and, last but not least, is responsible for the investigations and research work which form the basis of the efforts of the Organisation towards carrying out the principles laid down in Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles.

With a view to securing the universal acceptance of the Conventions and Recommendations which provide the nucleus of an International code of law for labour matters, the International Labour Organisation invites the help of professional organisations and groups interested in the questions with which it is concerned. The Trade Union is naturally the chief ally upon which the Organisation can count in this matter. But it is open to all those who are anxious to secure for female labour its rightful place in the economic scheme of things to give their assistance.

It may here be mentioned that the activities of the Organisation are not confined to female labour in the narrower sense of the term. The Organisation co-operates in the general economic and social work of the League of Nations, notably in such matters as the White Slave Traffic. It also assists the Health Committee in dealing with the question of popular instruction in the principles of hygiene, the protection

of maternity, infancy and the child of pre-school age, the study of occupational cancer, the prevention of tuberculosis and venereal disease.

From its earliest days the Organisation has been in touch with organised women workers, to whose conferences it has always sent a representative. It has also maintained direct contact with the women's sections of various international as well as national Trade Union groups or such bodies as the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations in Great Britain, as well as with such organisations as the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Young Women's Christian Association, the International Association of Girls' Friendly Societies, etc.

One of the women members of the staff of the International Labour Office has been specially deputed to keep in touch with these organisations.

It is necessary to say a few words here about the attacks which have been launched during the past three years, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon countries, against the very principle of special protection being accorded to women workers. The majority of the organisations just referred to take a friendly interest in the improvements brought about in the regulation of female labour as a result of the various Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Conference. Some of them, however, have categorically rejected the idea of special protection on the ground that it is not in harmony with the principle of absolute equality between men and women for which they stand, and because in their view such protection tends to close certain avenues of employment to women and thus militate against their earning powers. This was the attitude taken up, for example, by the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship at its Congress in Paris in 1926, when a resolution was passed to the effect that no regulations different from those applying to men should be imposed on women.

Broadly speaking, however, it can be said that women's Trade Union organisations, whether national or international, have many times shown a desire to retain the special protection which is accorded to them under the various international conventions. This point of view was strongly affirmed by the conference of the International Federation of Working Women which met at Paris in 1927 under the auspices of the International Federation of Trade Unions. At the end of the same year a lengthy manifesto of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations of Great Britain took the same line. This manifesto declared "legislation has had to step in to give women a chance of achieving a more equal footing with men; without such protection it is not equality that the woman achieves but far greater inequality."

The same point of view was expressed in a resolution adopted by the Women's Committee of the Labour and Socialist International at Zurich in January, 1930, and in the Report prepared for and adopted by that meeting by the Standing Joint Committee referred to above.

The International Conference of Christian Women Workers which met at Munich in 1928 was of the same opinion, and, in a resolution calling the International Labour Organisation's attention to this problem, expressed its approval of the ratification of the protective conventions described above. Certain sections of the Christian Trade Unions have even gone so far as to assert that factory work by married women should be forbidden. Such a proposal no doubt springs from the most generous motives, but it scarcely seems in accord with the evolutionary tendencies of the present day.

There is thus general acquiescence among the main branches of women workers that the efforts of the International Labour Organisation on their behalf are on the right lines. In fact, far from rejecting the principle of special protection for female labour, there is a strong disposition to regard the measures enacted hitherto as insufficient. Thus at recent national Congresses motions have been brought forward by the General Federations of Trade Unions of Germany, France and Austria, at the instance of their women members, urging a still greater degree of protection. The Austrians on this occasion specifically affirmed that there was no essential contradiction between the principle that men and women should be entitled to equal pay and the principle that women should be protected by special legislation. "Women," they added, "in view of their physical constitution and of the possibility of maternity are entitled to adequate protection as workers, not only in their own interests but in those of society and the race."

The attitude of the International Labour Organisation on this controversial question is naturally that dictated by its Constitution and the objects for which it was established. It holds that the time has not yet come to deprive women of the special protection now being secured for them. Later on, when women wage-earners are better organised, when the whole industrial fabric has completed the process of rationalisation now in progress, it will perhaps be easier to discover the correct basis for a more perfect equalisation of the sexes in the sphere of social legislation. It will then be time enough to adjust the provisions of the various international conventions to the new situation. The Statute of the International Labour Organisation provides all the facilities necessary for such an adjustment.

For the time being, however, it seems certain that the absence of regulations would have dire results, and that those who would suffer most would be the workers with the lowest wages, precisely because they are the least able to defend themselves.

The considerable increase which has taken place in the numbers of women wage-earners would seem to indicate that the protective measures taken to date do not constitute a serious obstacle to the employment of women. There is, moreover, no doubt that these measures have facilitated the tendency towards specialisation which has been gathering force in recent years and which promotes the progressive introduction of conditions of work better adapted to the physical and mental attributes of the individual, whether man or woman. What happy results might be brought about if this tendency were directed into the channel of providing systematised courses of instruction for women, designed to make them proficient in trades which were not only really remunerative but also specially suited to their natural capabilities! In this way, women could find a far more dependable means of livelihood than in certain classes of night work and unhealthy processes, however well paid. The agitation in favour of throwing these trades open to them is calculated to endanger not only the woman worker's own health but the whole future of the race.

The rationalisation of industry, of which the specialisation referred to in the preceding paragraph is one of the phases, may reasonably be expected to result in better conditions for labour in general, and technical improvements will gradually tend to do away with many, if not all, of the dangers from which the International Labour Organisation is bound to try to save the woman worker. This, however, is something which only the future can show—a future for which the Organisation claims to be laying the firmest possible foundation.

The mission which the I.L.O. has set itself to accomplish on behalf of the woman worker is one which it is proud to think has its root in the best side of human nature. Its aim is not merely to protect the weak against injustice, misery and privation, but to prepare the highway of posterity and safeguard the future of the human race.

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