

Permanent Committee of the Inter-American Conference of Social Security

NINETEEN COUNTRIES were represented at the second meeting of the Permanent Committee of the Inter-American Conference of Social Security, held in Mexico City July 23-28. This was the first meeting of the Committee since it was established in July 1942 at the First Inter-American Conference in Santiago, Chile, to provide a continuing organization between the regular sessions of the general Conference, to carry out the Conference decisions, and to promote cooperation among the social security institutions of the various countries.

The delegate from the United States was Arthur J. Altmeyer, Chairman of the Social Security Board and Chairman of the Inter-American Committee. Wilbur J. Cohen, Assistant Director of the Bureau of Research and Statistics of the Social Security Board, attended as technical adviser to the United States delegate. Robert Watt, member of the American Federation of Labor, attended as the labor representative on the tripartite delegation of the International Labor Organization.

The other countries represented were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Representatives of the International Labor Organization, the Pan American Union, and the Pan American Sanitary Commission also attended as members of the Committee.

Opening Session

Some 5,000 persons crowded the Hall of Honor of the Palace of Fine Arts for the first plenary session, which was formally opened by Mr. Altmeyer as Chairman of the Committee. The President of Mexico, Manuel Avila Camacho, was guest of honor and delivered the principal address. Other guests included officials of the Mexican Government and representatives of employer, labor, and scientific organizations. In his opening speech Mr. Altmeyer referred briefly to the developments in the field

of social security¹ in the Western Hemisphere during the past few years and spoke of the responsibility with which the Committee was charged by the Inter-American Conference and the recent Conference on the Problems of War and Peace, not only to encourage the creation of new systems of social security and improvement of those already established but also to watch that, in building or rebuilding the systems, the principles of a sane economy, a permanent financial stability, and a just and modern social viewpoint shall be maintained. "We also have," he concluded, "a grave responsibility to our own countries, which we can fulfill only if we here reaffirm our faith in the inter-American organization of social security and if we give it the tools it must have to accomplish its objectives."

The task of the United Nations, President Avila Camacho declared in his address, did not end with the overthrow of the Axis armies. Universal and lasting peace can be achieved only in a society based on a stable foundation, in which man does not live to conquer his fellowman or to exploit him but, rather, to encourage, help, and work with him in mutual helpfulness and hope. To guarantee freedom from anxiety, ignorance, the scourge of illness, and the uncertainties of the future, collective political security must be based on comprehensive social security. That security must be a right in which all share, without distinctions of race, sex, age, country, or religion; it must benefit alike wage earners, women and children, mothers and widows—in a word, all elements of society.

The President concluded by saying that the hopes of Mexico would not be limited to the action which could be taken in the field of social security in his country. It was his hope that the Committee's deliberations would help advance and perfect the existing systems in the hemisphere and that its activities would make possible the

establishment in the Americas of "the groundwork of a new life, founded on a continental solidarity free from the anguish of exploitation, from the baseness of selfishness, and from the ignominy of injustice."

In the name of the delegates, G. Monrroy Block, Bolivian Minister of Labor, Health, and Social Insurance, responded to the Presidential address and predicted the success of the deliberations about to be inaugurated. Jef Rens, Assistant Director of the International Labor Office, spoke in behalf of that organization, and Pedro de Alba, Assistant Director of the Pan American Union, spoke for the Union.

Regular Sessions

The work of the Committee, which centered mainly on planning for the next meeting of the Inter-American Conference, election of officers, and adoption of a budget for 1946 operations, went forward in the eight sessions following the inaugural gathering.

Committee regulations.—Regulations governing the work of the Permanent Committee were unanimously adopted. They included the decision that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman should be elected from the members of the Committee by a majority vote; that the Committee should decide the order of business for the meetings of the general Conference, as well as the place and date; that it should name whatever technical commissions were considered necessary and fix the number of members, the composition, and the field of action of each commission; that the annual budget should be approved by a majority vote of the Committee members; and that the Executive Committee, created by statute of the Conference, should consist of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and four other members of the Permanent Committee, and a representative of the country in which the next meeting of the Conference is to be held, if that country is not already included among the members named. During the course of the debate on the last point it was made clear that, though these representatives would be appointed by the government of each country, consideration should be given in the appointment to officials of existing social security institutions.

¹ See Altmeyer, Arthur J., "The Progress of Social Security in the Americas in 1944," *International Labour Review*, Vol. 51, No. 6, June 1945, pp. 699-721.

Officers.—Arthur J. Altmeyer was unanimously reelected Chairman of the Committee. Ignacio García Téllez, Director General of the Mexican Institute of Social Security, was elected Vice-Chairman. Alejandro Flores Zorrilla, of the ILO, continued as Secretary-General.

Delegates from Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru were named to serve, along with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, as members of the Executive Committee.

Technical commissions.—An important aspect of the Committee's deliberations was the decision to create two technical commissions—one on social security statistics and one on medical problems. It was left to the Executive Committee to name the eight members of each commission.

Concerning the commission on statistics, the recommendation placed before the Committee outlined the problems facing the user of social insurance statistics, especially the discrepancies among data from different official sources, even different organizations in the same country. It was emphasized that any country which wishes to establish or make changes in its social insurance system must base its actuarial and financial estimates on comprehensive statistical data, which are not uniformly available. The statistical commission, the recommendation declared, should have as its objectives the determination of the minimum data necessary for each social insurance institution; comparability of statistics in this hemisphere and their possible standardization; and elaboration and development of a common plan for such statistics in the Americas.

The proposal to establish a commission on medical problems pointed out that the commission had a practically unlimited field for its labors. As a first step, it should study the question of a nationally organized medical service—the agency to direct and control the program; the unification or coordination of medical resources under this agency; the basic organization of the services; determination of the regions in which the services should be established and of the special characteristics of each region; the type of regional service as well as the material, equipment, and person-

nel necessary; and the consideration of these problems at the local level.

Budget for 1946.—It was voted that the participation of each country in financing the work of the Committee would be based on a system of budgetary units, such as is in effect for membership in the ILO, and that each country would pay on the basis of the units assigned for ILO participation.

A budget of \$30,000 was adopted for 1946. More than half of this sum will be used to pay the costs of the meetings of the two new technical commissions. Almost one-fourth of the budget will be devoted to publications. It was voted to drop the provisional designation of the Committee's *Provisional Bulletin*, of which seven issues have already been published, and continue it as a regular, official publication.

In the course of the budget discussion, it was made clear that the Committee and the Conference have been able to function on so small a budget only because of the help received from the ILO through the Committee's Secretary-General, as well as the assistance given by the countries in which the meetings of the Committee and the Conference have been held.

Next Inter-American Conference.—The invitation from the Brazilian Government, extended by Fioravanti A. di Piero, to hold the next meeting of the Inter-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro was accepted by the Executive Committee. The meeting will be held toward the end of 1946, at which time the Permanent Committee will also have its next meeting. Several topics were proposed for the agenda of the Conference, including social security statistics, insurance of occupational risks, and unemployment insurance and related matters.

In accordance with the practice established for the Santiago meeting, when Chile, Peru, and the United States prepared reports for presentation at the Conference, the Executive Committee requested the Canadian delegation to develop a report on unemployment and related problems and the most efficacious means of achieving and maintaining full employment; the Mexican delegation was asked similarly to prepare a report on insuring occupational risks through social rather than commercial insurance.

The Permanent Committee also ap-

proved the proposal of the Central American delegations that a meeting be held in Central America, under the auspices and technical direction of the Committee. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss common problems, stimulate the creation of social security systems, and so far as possible unify the plans and structures of the programs already established or proposed.

Other Committee action.—During these sessions, reports on social security developments in their own countries were made by various members of the Committee, including Edgardo Rebagliati, Technical Adviser of the Social Security Fund of Peru; Oscar Pacheco, Adviser to the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Mexico; Napoleón Viera Altamirano, Ambassador from El Salvador; César Mesa, Technical Adviser to the Guatemalan delegation; Guillermo Padilla Castro, Assistant Director of the Social Security Fund of Costa Rica; Benjamín Carrión, Chairman of the Institute of Social Insurance of Ecuador; C. C. Ebberts, Second Secretary of the Canadian Embassy in Mexico; and Alfredo Almada, Chairman of the Pensions Institute of Uruguay. Representing the International Labor Organization, Philon Philon spoke as the government representative, Fernando Yllanes Ramos for the employer group, and Robert Watt for the labor group.

Several delegates spoke movingly of the outstanding contribution made by the late Osvald Stein, Assistant Director of the ILO and the Committee's first Secretary-General. It was voted to commemorate his services in a bibliography of social security, to bear his name. Other expressions of gratitude were voted to the ILO, for its continuing interest in and assistance to both the Conference and the Committee, and to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and especially to its former Director, Nelson D. Rockefeller, for the financial assistance given the Committee. At the final session a unanimous vote of thanks was extended to the Mexican authorities, and especially the Mexican Institute of Social Security, for their part in making the meeting a success, and also to the press, both Mexican and international, for its intelligent and comprehensive coverage of the meetings.