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Reply to the Fifth Report of the International Labour Organisation

Motion for a resolution[1]
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee
Mr André MUTTER, France

1. 1955 - 7th Session - Second part

Draft Resolution[2]

The Assembly has taken note, with satisfaction, of the Fifth Report of the I. L. 0.

It has been particularly glad to learn that, since it has interested itself in the question of the ratification of International Labour Conventions by Member States of the Council and addressed recommendations on the subject to the Committee of Ministers, the number of such ratifications has actually doubled. This illustrates the usefulness to other international organisations of the Assembly's rôle as a parliamentary forum. In this connection, and in order to follow more effectively the state of ratification of international labour conventions, the Assembly would be grateful if the I. L. 0. would include each year in its report details of the state of the deposit of ratifications of conventions by each of the Member States of the Council.

Since the Assembly's views on this subject, as explained in Resolution 69 of 7th July, 1955, appear to have been misunderstood in certain quarters, it may be as well that they should be clarified. The Assembly shares the view of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom, who stated in the Assembly on 6th July of this year:

" ...here in Strasbourg is the forum within which the work of specialist groups can be discussed. Here is the place where two or three times a year the work of the experts who are not popularly elected can be reviewed by the parliamentary representatives who are elected by the people in their respective countries. Here it is that the complicated and technical questions can be brought into their proper perspective in relation to their underlying political implications. This seems to me the unique and special function of the Assembly— this and to debate the great issues of the moment, whatever they may be."

The same idea was expressed by the Assembly in its Opinion No. 13, when it stated:

" The Assembly has always considered itself qualified to provide the impetus and political guidance in connection with activities undertaken in Europe by world organisations."

Both the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers have expressed their satisfaction on various occasions with the practice whereby other international organisations present to the Assembly reports on their activities in Europe. If this procedure is to serve any useful purpose, it is in order that the Assembly should be able to express its views on those reports— for it is a consultative organ—and not merely bury them in its archives. In expressing such views, it must, naturally, give its opinion on the action taken by other organisations—and, more particularly, by the Member Governments of the Council acting through those organisations —in the various fields set out in Article 1 of the Statute of the Council.

When the Assembly exercises this " right of review " the opinions it expresses are not binding on the other international organisations concerned. For the Assembly is only consultative. At the same time, it is believed that those organisations cannot be indifferent to parliamentary opinion in the Member States, on the support of which they ultimately depend. Moreover, the Assembly is the only European parliamentary organ in a position to express that opinion, consisting as it does, of representatives of fifteen countries with a population altogether of 250 millions.

As stated in its Resolution 69, the Assembly's desire to be kept informed of the European activities of the I. L. 0. is not inspired by any desire to control the action of this organisation, which is done by other constitutional procedures; it is in order that the Assembly should keep itself fully in touch with the attitudo taken by the Governments of Members of the Council with regard to the work of the I. L. 0. What the Assembly, as a consultative body, can do, in its relations with other organisations, is to tender the advice of a parliamentary assembly, whose members are not the least influential citiziens in their own countries ; it will then be for the other organisations concerned to consider how far they wish to take account of that advice. On the answer which they give to the question will naturally depend the extent to which they will secure the support of parliamentary opinion in the Member States of the Council of Europe.

Relations between the Council and other organisations, however, are not just a matter of one-way traffic. The Assembly is glad to have the assistance, and hear the opinion, of other organisations with which it maintains relations on subjects of common interest. Once more it expresses its appreciation of the great measure of assistance afforded to the Council by the I. L. 0. in connection with its social programme.

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2. See 26lh Sitting, 26th October, 1955 (Draft Resolution adopted) and Resolution 84.