

An Informal Talk on Meeting in Geneva

By

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I am indebted to the Management of Hindustan Lever Co. for providing this opportunity to speak to nurses in Bombay about my visit to Geneva.

I would also thank my firm for making it possible for me to accept the invitation to attend this important meeting in Geneva.

I felt myself very lucky to have been invited by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization to attend the Expert Committee meeting on *Conditions of Work and Employment of Nurses* that was held at Geneva from the 6th to the 11th of October.

Geneva, the Capital and the famous Tourist Centre of Switzerland, is like a picture postcard. The lovely lake Geneva studded with graceful swans, flows through the entire length of the town. The various shades of greens with the red roofed houses peeping out of them beyond which lie the snow clad mountains, adds to the enchanting beauty of the place. The people, extremely friendly, go to great length to help tourists. Although a rich country, the men and women here work very hard. The shops and hotels are spotlessly clean and the service is excellent. My first impression was that it is a land of Watches, and Wine, for wherever one went one saw shops with thousands of watches and clocks ranging from the Grandfather Clock to Wall Clocks down to tiny watches inset in cuff-links and buttons and feminine jewellery. Going from a country of prohibition, it was interesting to watch the public in the bars with rows and rows of chairs and tables arranged on the foot-path with men and women of all ages refreshing themselves with drinks. Occasionally a sort of a wagon drew up by the side of busy thoroughfares and the man at the wheel got off to pour out his wine in tiny glasses. I was told this is the brewing season and people were sampl-

ing the fresh wine from the brewery.

The meeting was held in the I.L.O. Office. This is a building with four floors having a hundred rooms in each floor arranged in a rectangular shape, very artistically decorated with Venetian glass lamp shades and huge panels paintings on the walls depicting the life of workers. At the entrance and here and there on its extensive grounds, are statues representing various types of work. At the fringe of this lawn flows the lake Geneva and the famous snow clad Mount Blanc is clearly visible against the sky line in clear weather. Practically all requirements such as Banks, Post Office, Travel Arrangements, Canteen and Sweet Shops etc. are housed in the building.

Why the Meeting was arranged

Some of you may wonder how I.L.O. came to consider this question on nursing. For some years now I.L.O. and W.H.O. have been working in close co-operation. In 1951 when the W.H.O.'s Expert Committee on Nursing met at Geneva for its very first session, attention was drawn to the close link between recruitment of candidates for nursing and the living and working conditions of Nurses. This Committee urged W.H.O. to invite the co-operation of the I.L.O. in a joint investigation of this problem of nursing personnel. In the meantime, the I.L.O.'s *Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers* also took up the question of studying the working conditions of the Hospital and Health Service Personnel and in its second and third sessions in 1952 and 1954 they tabled this question for a Special Study when the opportunity offered. In 1957 at its third session due to considerable pressure from the *International Federation of Unions of Employees in Public and Civil Service*, the Committee, requested the Director General to undertake a study of the general conditions of employment of salaried non-medical

Hospital and Health Service personnel. The Director General arranged for a comparative study of the employment and conditions of work of nurses and also agreed to convene an *Ad Hoc* Committee Meeting of Experts to consider the results. In consultation with W.H.O. Miss Kruse, a Professional Nurse of Denmark, was appointed by the I.L.O. and after 10 long months of relentless work, produced a report running into 182 pages giving an overall picture of nursing all over the world. This report, of course, was prepared on the basis of a questionnaire circulated to the various countries and covers 54 countries in all parts of the world. This valuable study brought to the forefront many of the problems and provided the background for discussion and exchange of views.

Our *Ad Hoc* meeting was opened by the Assistant Director of I.L.O. after a short speech focussed on the importance of the question we were to discuss. Fourteen countries participated and there were nine observers. English, French, Spanish and Russian were the four languages used by the delegates. It was thrilling to follow the running commentary of the translators who started and stopped with the speaker. The fluency of language and the choice of the most appropriate words gave one the impression that the translator was reading out a draft of the speech.

The Canadian delegate was chosen to be Chairman and the Liberian delegate the Assistant Chairman while the Philippine representative was elected the reporter. The whole question was divided under four headings providing the subject for four days. The fifth and sixth days were for checking up the minutes and to frame resolutions.

The first day subject for discussion was:

(i) **The Employment Situation:** This included the shortage of Nurses—influence of marriage on employment. Part time employment etc.

The discussion for the second day:

(ii) **Conditions of Work** which included contract of employment, hours of work remuneration and social security.

(iii) Economic and social status of nurses, professional nurses and auxiliary nurses.

(iv) **Recruitment Policy.**

It was quite evident that members had come well prepared and though there was complete freedom of speech, no member wasted time in irrelevant talk. Often there would be a heated discussion, but courtesy and consideration to arrive at a solution that would satisfy all countries, were never lost sight of. In fact, sincere co-operation was the key note of the entire meeting. The observers took no part in the discussion, but were given the option to give their opinion on the subject at the close of each day.

It may interest you to know that of the 14 countries that participated, 5 had their professional associations registered with the Trade Union of the country.

Three had a divided membership while Sweden had the Employees Federation. The five Eastern countries were the only ones that were free of Trade Union influence.

Of the 9 observers 3 were Trade Union members. In this limited time, it would not be possible for me to give you technical details of the resolutions. In all 26 resolutions from the Committee were put up to be placed before the I.L.O. Governing Body; these will be made available in due course.

Before I conclude I would like you to know that the I.L.O. met all the expenses for the delegates and our stay was made extremely comfortable. We were entertained to a Cocktail party which was attended by the other I.L.O. Officers and their wives. Mr. Ghatak and Mr. Mirany, who represented India at the I.L.O., both came to see me with their wives and took me out in the evening to show me round Geneva.