

Labour Problems

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LABOUR PROBLEMS.

By THÉO CHOPARD.

Some weeks ago, the Swiss Chamber of Representatives, or Lower House, finished its debate on the Draft Bill of a Law on Disablement Insurance. This insurance will be the natural complement to the existing Sickness and Accidents Insurance and will fill a serious gap in the social equipment of the Swiss Confederation. The principle of disablement insurance was entered in the Constitution as far back as 1925. Thirty-five years will have elapsed by the time the Disablement Insurance comes into force on 1st January 1960. This slowness in taking action shows that, in a country which has not known the horrors of war and has not seen millions of mutilated persons, it takes a long time for public opinion to become convinced that it is the duty of society to do all in its power to render available the maximum utilisation of all the possibilities still remaining to a man, after his capacities have been reduced through disablement.

The astounding results obtained abroad, since the end of the war, in the domain of the rehabilitation of disabled persons, have finally brought about a sudden change of opinion in Switzerland. It has now been admitted definitely that efforts made with a view to reintegration are preferable, in every respect, to measures of relief, and that everyone, however cruelly dealt with by fate, preserves the possibility of being useful to society. It has been realised that an aid which is purely financial, even if it be guaranteed by the State, still smacks of charity. On the other hand, the disabled person who is rehabilitated — even if only partially — is once more participating in the life of the nation. He is no longer living on the fringes of active life. He — or she — is a citizen, like all the others.

It is this idea which has inspired the new Law. Swiss Disablement Insurance lays stress on the medical and technical measures required for rehabilitation. Allowances will only be paid in cases where the degree of disablement renders the handicapped person incapable of working or of earning sufficient for his own livelihood and that of his family. In the latter case he will receive an allowance that will bring his earnings to the requisite amount. The payment of allowances will only take place in the last resort.

What is essential, is *rehabilitation*. With this end in view, the insurance will cover all medical and pharmaceutical expenses, as well as all the charges incurred as a result of treatment and board in hospitals and sanatoria, in so far as these are connected directly with the rehabilitation treatment. The insurance will also pay for all the additional charges arising out of the training of *young disabled persons* for a suitable job and the rehabilitation of a worker who, as a result of an illness or an accident, is obliged to change his job. The insurance will finance special schools for disabled children and adolescents. Handicapped persons will be provided with the auxiliary means required for the exercise of their trade or profession, such as artificial limbs, special tools, vehicles, etc. The insurance will contribute towards the added charges of such firms as have to adapt their technical equipment for the requirements of disabled workers. In cases where technical rehabilitation takes a long time, the disabled persons will receive a daily allowance, sufficient to keep them

and their families, during this period of training. As a result of financial grants, the insurance will make it possible for educational establishments to take into account, to a greater extent than hitherto, the particular requirements of disabled children and adolescents, and to give them the same possibilities as those enjoyed by able-bodied scholars, by receiving the training which is the most appropriate to their condition and which, moreover, is in accordance with their personal preference. This last point is of particular importance. For it is only natural that a person should feel happier and better reinstated in society if his job is one that he is really keen about. Disabled children and young people should, whenever their handicap makes this possible, be able to benefit from the same training as their able companions, and, whenever possible, in their company. They should only be separated if their infirmity prohibits the training in common of able and disabled children and young people.

The constant increase in the number of new machines and the automation of industry are steadily opening up new possibilities of work for disabled persons; of work, moreover, which is *paid for at normal rates*. The progress achieved in technique now makes it possible to adapt all the machines and appliances as well as the various plants, to the different kinds of disablement — in industry as well as in offices. The new Swiss Law on Disablement Insurance opens up a way for getting hold of such possibilities and for reintegrating disabled persons effectively into economic activities and thus putting an end to the humiliating discriminations to which they are still far too often subjected.

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