

The access of women to this last sphere of influence and service was the subject of an excellent report submitted to the fourteenth session. Based on the replies of 45 member states to a questionnaire sent out by the Secretary-General, the report covered all phases of women's employment in public service. In the modern state the government is one of the largest employers of women, and the report, therefore, was as meaningful in regard to economic opportunities for women as in regard to their political rights. The occupational distribution of the women in public services followed a pattern similar to that in the labour force as a whole, with the great majority engaged in clerical work and comparatively few women in the upper ranks of the administrative or diplomatic services. Except in the case of married women, there was little evidence of legal restriction on their employment.

Commenting on the influence of governments in the role of employers, the representative of the ILO observed that, where government policy was good, a constructive lead was given to private business and industry, but that, when it was bad, it had a deteriorating effect on employment conditions in general.

Advisory Services Programme

The report of the United Nations Seminar on the Participation of Women in Public Life held in Bogota, Colombia, in May 1959, was the focus of discussion of this item. The Canadian delegate, in speaking of the Seminar, drew upon the observations of Mrs. Abbie Lane of Halifax, the Canadian representative at the Seminar, who had found it a stimulating experience, which she felt she had been able to interpret to good advantage on her return home.

In anticipation of the 1960 Seminar, to be held in Addis Ababa in December, the Canadian representative expressed the hope that, as in Bogota, there would be adequate consideration of educational method and curriculum. She suggested exhibits of material and methods used in literacy education as well as in more advanced education in citizenship, and promised that, if such an exhibit were arranged, Canada, out of its extensive experience in this field, would be glad to contribute materials. Mrs. Quart commented also on the importance of distinguishing between the needs of women in urban and rural areas, particularly in Africa, where the pace of social change was affecting the lives of women so deeply. She stressed also the importance of planning for adequate "follow-up" of the Seminars at local and national levels.

Status of Women in Private Law

The most controversial, and in many respects the most challenging, question before this session had to do with the legal minimum age of marriage, the consent of the parties to a marriage and the registration of marriages. The subject had been referred to the Commission as a result of an enquiry into "the appropriateness of initiating a study of the question of marriage with the object of drawing attention to the desirability of free consent of both parties and of the establishment of a minimum age for marriage" made by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries