

Archives of the International Labour Office

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THE files and documents of the International Labour Office are preserved in: (1) the Registry (correspondence, some documents); (2) the Director-General's Office (personal correspondence of the Director-General, confidential political questions); (3) the Personnel Service (personnel files, statutes, engagements, contracts, holidays, reports of various administrative committees); (4) the Library (books, newspapers, documents, iconography); (5) the Sections and Services (technical documentation); (6) the Financial Service (account books and papers); (7) the Application of Conference Decisions Section (original texts of the Conventions and Recommendations adopted, signed, and applied); (8) the Editorial Section (manuscripts of articles and reports); (9) the Public Information Section (publicity material); (10) the Purchase and Maintenance Section (tenders, specifications, insurance contracts); and (11) the Distribution Service (printed or processed I.L.O. publications).

REGISTRY

I. *Archives*

The Registry preserves in its official files: (1) the correspondence (with the internal minutes, drafts of letters and reports) concerning the admission of States to the Organisation and the methods of communication employed, relations between the employers' and workers' organisations and the international organisations, the contributions of the States, general finances, publications (subscriptions, exchanges, etc.), general administrative questions, missions and reports thereon, general or technical information supplied to the various Sections and Services of the Office and information for external distribution, conferences, the despatch of the texts of Conference decisions, their ratification and their application, diplomatic privileges (the legal status of the Organisation, passports, taxes), the purchase of books and material equipment for the Office, sub-

scriptions to periodicals and publications in various countries; (2) the preparatory documents for various meetings, the records (draft or signed records) of the committees, the documents on the origin and constitution of the Organisation, the regulations of the conferences and the committees.

The Registry preserves in its confidential files the correspondence concerning certain administrative questions (pensions fund, administrative tribunal), questions of relations, diplomatic privileges, correspondence preparatory to conferences, as well as any other matters requiring confidential treatment.

The Registry also preserves signed copies of the treaties and agreements made by the Organisation.

The files opened and maintained during a certain period in the Director-General's office (political questions) or in Sections or Services (correspondence used in editing special reports) are sometimes sent back to the Registry where they are classified and preserved. For each of these files, a card is inscribed with the title given to the file and the alphabetical and numerical references. These cards are of two kinds: (1) a numerical card (on which is inscribed in chronological order the names of the persons or Services to whom the file has been sent, and the date on which it was sent); and (2) a reference card (subject, form, name, country, town, etc.). A glance at the numerical cards shows how often the files have been used and helps to classify them under the various headings.

When a file is opened whose permanent usefulness is at once apparent, one of the two following inscriptions is made on the file and on the corresponding number card: "Pa" (active preservation), or "Pi" (inactive preservation) according to whether it may be consulted frequently or only at very rare intervals. They are placed in different filing cabinets. These cards "Pa" and "Pi" are of different colours and are easily recognisable when transfers are subsequently made.

Finally, the Registry preserves the register lists of letters received, copies of letters despatched, and mail statistics, which are bound periodically.

II. *Division into Categories*

There are three categories:— (A) The *active* category (active files regularly demanded), general files "Pa" (statutes and regulations, relations and methods of communication between governments, ratification of Conventions, diplomatic privileges, etc.) and

newly-opened files. A revision of this category takes place every ten years and lasts two years. (B) The *intermediate* category (semi-active files not demanded during the period of revision). This category is operative only during the period of revision, at the end of which the cards and files are distributed under the new *active* category and the *inactive* category. (C) the *inactive* category: (1) files preserved for their administrative value or their historical interest; (2) files still necessary but only rarely demanded at infrequent intervals. A revision of this category also takes place every ten years. Some of these files are destroyed. There is a card-index corresponding to each category. During the various revisions some of the cards are transferred from one card-index to another. Finally, there is a card-index containing the cards of the destroyed files. The date of destruction is marked on each card.

III. *Active category — Revision*

The ten-yearly revision lasts for two years. It is made automatically and progressively as the new files are opened and demands for old files are received from the Services. As soon as revision begins, a new *active* card-index (for example A. 1950-60) is opened. The existing *active* card-index (A. 1940-50) is closed, and thenceforth becomes the card-index for the *intermediate* category. No new card is placed in it. On the contrary, these are withdrawn: (1) immediately and *en bloc*, all the cards of the "Pa" files (coloured cards bearing the letters "Pa"); (2) progressively as demands for files are received from the Services, all the corresponding cards. The cards of the new files are also placed in the new *active* card-index according as they are opened. The files are distributed in the filing-cabinets according to the same system as the cards in the card-indexes. The date of the revision is marked on all the files and cards.

IV. *Intermediate category — Division — Closing*

At the end of the period of revision the *intermediate* card-index from which some of the cards have been transferred to the *active* category, contains only the cards from the semi-active files which have not been demanded by the Services. These cards are divided into two groups (the corresponding reference, "Pi" or "R," is marked on the cards and on the files): "Pi" (inactive preservation), if they have not borne this inscription since opened, or "R" (retention). The reference "Pi" means that the files are to be preserved permanently; the reference "R" that they are to be preserved for a certain number of years only, then re-examined. The

cards and the files in this category are then transferred to the *inactive* category in the two groups already constituted: "Pi" and "R." The *intermediate* category is then eliminated; the new *active* category will become the *intermediate* category at the next ten-yearly revision.

V. *Inactive category*

(1) *Preservation.* The "Pi" files are preserved as they are; the "R" files have their covers removed and the papers they contain are simply pinned together. The "Pi" files are again put in order. Duplicates of letters, minutes and documents are eliminated. Excessively bulky documents which have been printed or roneoed and preserved in another service, are removed from the file and replaced by a cross reference. Documents rendered illegible by time are retyped. Excessively bulky and clumsy files are divided into two parts and the covers are examined and repaired or replaced if necessary. The titles of the files are revised, completed or changed according to developments in the matter of which they treat. The corresponding cards are altered in the same way. Certain files which contain only a few papers are grouped with others in the same series.

All the "Pi" and "R" files are removed from the filing cabinets and placed in cardboard boxes protected from light, dust and dampness. The filing cabinets are reserved for the *active* category. On the back of these cardboard boxes are inscribed the letters of the series and the number of files they contain. The boxes are placed on shelves like books in a library and are easily identifiable and accessible. If one of these files is later demanded by a service and again comes into regular use it is transferred with its card to the *active* category. If the old cover has been destroyed a new one is made.

The staff of the Archives is informed regularly of the opening of important new series of files or the arrival of a heavy batch of files (after conferences, missions, etc.) and can thus use the available space to the best advantage.

(2) *Revision — Destruction.* All the "R" files are examined each year. Those which have not been demanded for several years and are of no further importance from the political, administrative or documentary viewpoint, are destroyed with the consent of the Chiefs of the Sections and Services concerned. Lists compiled from the information contained on the numbered cards (the dates of demand, frequency of demand) and in the various categories, are

submitted to the Section and Service Chiefs, who decide what shall be done with them. The corresponding cards which are kept in a special card-index bear the date of destruction. To save space and allow rapid consultation, they are classified as far as possible in series. The other "R" files are kept for a later revision.

(3) *Maintenance.* At regular intervals the filing-cabinets and the cardboard boxes are checked and cleaned. The files are put in order, covers are examined and repaired if necessary, papers protruding which have got damaged are repaired and put back in the files. The files which are placed vertically in cardboard boxes are turned over regularly to prevent the papers from getting crushed.

VI. *Statistics*

At present the Registry has:

150,035 files (each year 7,000-8,000 new files are created); 258 metal filing-cabinets (1,032 drawers each containing, according to the size of the files, 25-90 files); 1,967 cardboard boxes (containing from 20-35 files); and 1,600 card collections containing about 750,000 cards.

The filing-cabinets, the card collections and the cardboard boxes extend for a distance of 450 meters around and in the middle of a large room. The cardboard boxes and the card collections are placed on the filing cabinets or on easily-accessible shelves.

The archives are contained in an airy and well-lighted basement. A goods-lift connects this basement with the Registry offices, enabling the staff to move the files and other material with the minimum of fatigue.

Every year statistics are obtained as to the number, the value, and the state of preservation of the files, and also as to the work done in this Service and the working conditions. Information is thus gained on the material means at the disposal of the staff, the space still available, and the quality of the ink, the type ribbons, and the paper used in the Office.

VII. *Microfilm*

As in all administrative organisations, the disposal of paper is a problem; already the Office is short of space. The use of microfilm however allows precious space to be saved. The film which can be substituted for a file occupies only one-fiftieth of the space, and it is easy, with the aid of a reader, to consult the film of any document. Microfilm is also used for preserving copies of valuable and unique documents.