

REPORT BY THE DELEGATES OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

WE have the honour to present the following report on the Twenty-sixth Session of the International Labour Conference.

INTRODUCTION

The Conference, which opened on 20th April, 1944, and closed on 12th May, 1944, was the first regular session of the Conference since 1939, and met on the invitation of the United States Government. It was held in the Mitten Hall, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Because of the unique tripartite structure of the International Labour Organization, the Philadelphia Conference was perhaps the most widely representative international gathering of recent years. In many respects it was also the most important session of the Conference in the entire twenty-six years of the I.L.O.'s existence. This was partly because of the purpose for which the meeting had been called; partly because of the circumstances under which it took place. The certainty that in the coming months and even weeks the gathering offensive against the forces of oppression in the East as well as in the West would enter its final and decisive stage was in everybody's mind when the Conference opened.

There was a keen awareness, too, of the responsibility referred to by President Roosevelt when he said in his message of welcome: "It is to the I.L.O. that we shall look as the official international organization where ideas, experience, and movements in the field of labour and social development may find practical and effective expression." Proceedings were consequently marked by a sense of extreme urgency—an impatience with any tendency to delay or postpone difficult decisions—a feeling on the part of all those assembled at Philadelphia that this Conference presented both an opportunity and a challenge to do something definite towards ensuring that the social objectives for which so many had sacrificed so much are built enduringly into the foundations of the peace.

The special session of the Conference which met in New York in October, 1941, had given the Organization a mandate to contribute to the establishment of a people's peace. In the two years that followed, however, leaders of Government, industry, and labour among the United Nations, faced with the heaviest responsibilities ever thrust upon free men and women everywhere, had little inclination or opportunity to give serious and detached thought to the principles and policies that should govern a reconstruction programme. The waging of the war and the task of organizing a total effort absorbed their undivided energies and attention.

By the end of 1943, however, this total effort had been substantially achieved; more and more the problems of the post-war period were beginning to exercise the minds of forward-looking people. Such problems could no longer be ignored, nor could consideration of them be indefinitely postponed. There was the fullest realization that a long and costly struggle still lay ahead. But at least a beginning had been made in the direction of concerted international action to deal with post-war issues, as in the Food Conference at Hot Springs, the establishment of UNRRA, the submission of detailed proposals for post-war monetary stabilization, and the Moscow Declarations, which were followed soon afterwards by the declarations from Cairo and Teheran.

In the light of this changed situation and in the belief that, by defining the steps to be taken by the United Nations in giving effect to the social principles of the Atlantic Charter, the I.L.O. had a unique opportunity of carrying out its 1941 mandate, the Governing Body decided at its Ninety-first Session, held in London in December, 1943, to call a general conference of the Organization for the following April. "The profound change in the whole war situation made it imperative," in the Governing Body's opinion, that, "on the one hand, international consideration should be given to the social problems that will arise during the last period of the war and after the close of hostilities, and on the other, that the I.L.O. should define its own future policy, its programme and its place and status."

THE AGENDA

The Agenda drawn up for the Twenty-sixth Session was therefore framed in the light of these two general considerations. Although the subjects set down for discussion covered an enormously wide field and presented many questions of a controversial and technical character, it was recommended that the Conference should "proceed immediately to a general examination of social policy and that the discussions should not be confined to generalities, but should deal courageously with the practical problems which are certain to arise and on which Governments are entitled to look to the I.L.O. for advice and guidance."

The record of the Conference proceedings suggests that this Recommendation was very much in the minds of the delegates throughout their discussion of the following seven-point Agenda:—

- I. Future policy, programme, and status of the International Labour Organization.
- II. Recommendations to the United Nations for present and post-war social policy.
- III. The organization of employment in the transition from war to peace.
- IV. Social security: principles and problems arising out of the war.
- V. Minimum standards of social policy in dependent territories.
- VI. Reports on the application of Conventions (Article 22 of the Constitution).
- VII. Director's Report.

Special importance was attached to items I and II of the Agenda, with respect to which it was not intended that the Conference should follow its normal practice of aiming at the adoption of International Conventions or formal I.L.O. "recommendations," but merely that the decisions reached should be formulated in a series of resolutions.

REPRESENTATION

Forty-one countries were represented, including Costa Rica, which was readmitted to the I.L.O. by action of the Conference. In addition, Iceland, Nicaragua, and Paraguay were represented by observers. The Danish Minister attended in his personal capacity. Twenty-six of the 41 delegations at the Conference included workers' and employers' as well as Government delegates. The 132 delegates were accompanied by 228 technical advisers, making a total assembly of 360 persons. Among those attending were 11 Ministers of Labour and 6 other members of national Cabinets or Ministries.