

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As mentioned previously, discussion on the Director's report, which is usually the first item on the Agenda, was the last item on the Agenda of the Conference. Thirty-two delegates spoke, discussion centring round existing and proposed social legislation in the countries represented by the various speakers, and round the difficulties of some of those countries in endeavouring to apply the principles laid down in the draft conventions and recommendations adopted by the International Labour Organization. Mr. Taylor, Government delegate, dealt with developments which had taken place in New Zealand on—

- (a) Rehabilitation of returned servicemen.
- (b) The appointment of a Commission to investigate apprenticeship matters.
- (c) The Annual Holidays Act, 1944.

PRESIDENT'S CLOSING SPEECH

It seems appropriate to include here the published text of the President's closing speech, which summed up in general terms the work and ideals of the Conference :—

" The Twenty-sixth session of the International Labour Conference is very nearly concluded. The past three weeks since the Conference convened have been strenuous weeks indeed. I feel as President of this historic gathering a deep and sincere appreciation of the way in which the delegates and their advisers, the officers of the Conference, and members of the Secretariat have faced up to their hard and exacting responsibilities.

" The Agenda has been a formidable one. The strain imposed by long and continuous meetings has been severe. It would have been clearly impossible to accomplish what has been accomplished if everybody who attended this session, no matter in what capacity, had not come to Philadelphia imbued with a spirit of high resolve and strong determination to ensure that the purposes for which this Conference was convened were fulfilled to the fullest extent practicable.

" As usually is the case with large and formal international gatherings of this kind, we were perhaps a little slow in getting under way, but we have been gathering momentum steadily, and now as we approach the final stage it is possible to look back on three weeks of solid and most encouraging achievement. I think the majority of those present feel as I do that virtually everything that this Conference could reasonably be expected to do has been done. I think, too, that all those who are present will share my feeling that the experience of the past three weeks has been unique. Men and women from forty-three nations have met together to try and find a way through the clouds that have overhung the world for so many years and for the past four years with unprecedented blackness.

" We can take heart, however, from the fact that at long last we can perceive the sunlight filtering through, with a vision of a different post-war world unfolding truly amazing possibilities of a better life for all of us.

" The unfolding of these possibilities is going to be a long and slow and a rather painful process, but if we face up to our post-war responsibilities with the same resolution and the same courage and will to win as so many men and women have displayed during the past four frightful years, it will at least be possible to avoid much of the suffering and chaos that previously characterized the transition from war to peace.

" The proceedings of this Conference and particularly the conclusions to which we have arrived convince me, as I am sure they convince you and the world, that this high and solemn responsibility is fully and widely accepted. Let us not deceive ourselves as to the difficulties which lie ahead. Serious men and women will see these difficulties, will determine to overcome them, will devote to this task all the good will, the energy, the skill, imagination, and inventive genius at their command.

" There will be times when the problems seem insoluble, when the difficulties are such that it seems as though we won't be able to overcome them. There were times during this Conference when the prospects of reaching general agreement on the road that should be followed seemed most remote. Yet, there is scarcely a major issue that has been discussed in Committees, in plenary session, in group meetings on which we have not in due course reached an accepted basis of agreement. Differences there may have been as to procedure, but as to basic principles, I know of no issue on which this Conference has found itself impossibly divided.

" May I say this, that I personally, with all the feeling that I might have from a political point of view, with regard to any ideology, believe that the employers and the workers and the Government representatives that have come here have come with the same heart and the same vision with regard to the possibility of doing the job that has to be done. The differences have been differences on the basis of how are you going to get there, and is the goal that you are driving towards a practicable one?

" From that fact, more than from any other that has emerged during these three weeks of intensive discussion, I find great hope and tremendous encouragement.

" If I judged the feeling correctly at the opening of the Conference, it seemed that we hardly knew one another. Many old friends, it is true, met in Philadelphia again. But as the days passed and the work of the Committees continued, understanding between the delegates grew more and more. This growing understanding, I believe, has been reflected in the spirit in which the work of the Committees has been carried out, especially during the last two weeks. This contributed tremendously to the completeness with which the Committees have reported on the matters referred to them and to the surprising unanimity with which their recommendations have been accepted.

" These Recommendations and Reports will, I believe, have greater significance in relation to post-war economic and social policy than the decisions of any previous international conference of a similar kind.

" It is difficult to single out one particular achievement of this Conference for special mention. It seems not too rash to predict, however, that the Declaration which we adopted on Tuesday will go down in history as one of the most significant documents of our time. It is, in my opinion, the greatest social charter that has yet been published. It does much more than merely restate the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization. It emphasizes some of the things that have still to be done, some of the conditions that have still to be fulfilled, some of the aspirations that have still to be realized before the ideals and objectives for which this war is being fought will have been safely and enduringly achieved. But the Declaration—and it is impossible to overemphasize this fact—will not be worth the paper it is printed on unless there is action, positive action, vigorous action, courageous action, to give effect to its principles.