IMPERIAL ECONOMIC CONFERENCE.

The Imperial Economic Conference opened at Ottawa on the 21st July and closed on the 20th August. It is hoped that the agreements achieved at this Conference will be the means of deepening the channels of trade both within and without the British Empire, and will point the way to a general betterment of world conditions.

The Department was called upon to prepare a considerable amount of information for the use of the New Zealand delegates who attended the Conference, and this necessitated a good deal of statistical research and investigation, and the carrying-out of a number of inquiries concerning the industries of this Dominion.

INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL BULLETINS.

During the past year the Department has continued with the issue of bulletins containing information on industrial and commercial subjects. As usual, the bulletins have been sent to the press, Chambers of Commerce, Manufacturers' Associations, prominent business executives, overseas trade representatives, and other persons and firms to whom they are likely to be of interest and value.

The issues made during the year were as follows:—

Bulletins Nos. 15, 17, 18, and 19: Summary of the Finance, Trade, and Industries of New Zealand for the Quarter and Year ended 30th June, 1931, 30th September, 1931, 31st December, 1931, and 31st March, 1932, respectively.

Bulletin No. 16: Trade with Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.

The last-mentioned bulletin was compiled by the Department from the report of the New Zealand Trade and Tourist Commissioner in Australia upon the prospects of developing the markets for the products of New Zealand in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES.

It is impossible in this report to cover all the activities of the Department during the past year. The inquiries received from day to day are numerous and of so wide a range that it is possible to mention in detail only certain of those which fall more or less under broad general headings. Many commercial and industrial inquiries carried out by the Department are of a confidential nature and for that reason cannot be referred to in reports for publication.

In general it may be said that the Department has been called upon to an ever-increasing extent during the past few years to supply general information relating to the Dominion's industries, commerce, and economic and social conditions, and particular information relating to specified industries. This information pertains particularly to the development of markets for our products both within New Zealand and overseas, and it may be said that the functions of the Department in this connection have been substantially extended in recent years, and that the importance and value of its activities in this direction to the commercial community have been materially enhanced.

The following list of a few of the inquiries of lesser importance made by the Department during the past year may provide some indication of the extensive variety of subjects with which the officers of the Department are constantly required to deal:—

Markets for eels, crayfish, flounders, soles, and passion-fruit juice in the United Kingdom; flounders and blue cod in Australia; lard, canned meat, frozen rabbits, rennet, and worsted yarns in Canada; eels on the Continent of Europe; passion-fruit juice in America; apples and pears in Ceylon; glycerine, woollen piece-goods, blankets, sausage-casings, &c., in India; seed potatoes in Egypt; scrap metal in Japan; livers for medicinal purposes; Southland-beech timber; Samoan cocoa-beans, &c.

Manufacture of nitrates, cellulose from *Phormium tenax*, wool-batt, macaroni, &c., in New Zealand.

Prices of drainpipes and fittings, bricks, tiles, sheep-dips, electric lamps, petrol, &c.

CONCLUSION.

While trade and economic conditions generally in New Zealand, as in most other parts of the world, have been unsatisfactory during the past year, it may nevertheless fairly be claimed that our banking and our external trade position, as disclosed by the statistics contained in the foregoing report and by the returns for the current year to date, are both sound and satisfactory. Economies have been made in as many avenues as possible in both public and private administration, and every effort has been made in numerous directions to reduce costs to a payable basis.

At present the gap between prices and costs remains too narrow to permit of any very rapid revival of trade activity and absorption of the unemployed in New Zealand, but it is gratifying to note that during the past few weeks there has been a stronger demand and an improvement in prices for certain of our principal exportable products. This improvement, if it continues, will do much to restore confidence and make for freer spending.

Some of the factors that have contributed to this movement are the results achieved at the Lausanne Conference, the success of the Conversion Loan in England, the general downward movement of money-rates in London in recent months, and the results of the Imperial Economic Conference at Ottawa. Advancing prices at recent wool-sales held in London and Sydney, together with increased prices for certain base metals, have also materially helped to stimulate recovery and improve the outlook for the future.

The economic recovery of New Zealand and the restoration of prosperity depend largely upon real improvement in values and staple prices, and this in turn is bound up with the general improvement in world conditions. When this definitely takes place the way will be paved for a decisive forward move in the Dominion's hitherto rapid march along the road to progress and prosperity.