

(e) PETROLEUM PRODUCTION AND REFINING IN THE COMMONWEALTH.

The question of petroleum supplies throughout the British Commonwealth had not received attention at an Imperial Conference since that held in 1918. Since then the world's production of petroleum had increased about two and a half times, reaching in 1929 a figure slightly over 200 million metric tons. Of this total, about 17 million tons of refined products (requiring about 21 million tons of crude oil) are consumed in the British Empire, while the production within the Empire of crude oil only amounts to about $3\frac{1}{2}$ million tons. Any practicable steps to reduce the dependence of the British Commonwealth on foreign sources for its supply of so important a product would therefore be of value.

The Research Committee of the Conference, who were consulted, expressed the view that technically the treatment of coal with hydrogen at suitable temperatures and pressures offered the most promising method of obtaining oil from coal. The commercial success of the method would depend, however, on a number of factors. The Research Committee also considered geophysical methods of surveying for oil, and advised that the employment of such methods in the search for mineral and oil deposits was justified, provided that the work was carried out under proper scientific supervision and in close association with the geological survey of the area concerned.

On the recommendation of the General Economic Committee, the Conference adopted the following resolution :—

“The Conference notes with satisfaction the progress which is being made in connection with the question of the extraction of oil from coal and the development of geophysical methods of surveying, and recommends the Governments concerned to support such steps as may be found practicable to promote the searching for and production of natural oil, and to increase the supply of refined oil produced within the Commonwealth, whether by the refining of oil or by the production of oil from coal.”

(f) OVERSEA MECHANICAL TRANSPORT COUNCIL ; ROADS AND ROAD TRANSPORT.

Under these heads the General Economic Committee considered certain questions brought forward by His Majesty's Government in New Zealand with regard to road transport in general. They also reviewed the work of the Oversea Mechanical Transport Council.

As regards the latter, the committee were informed that there would be a serious waste of past effort and expenditure if lack of funds prevented the Directing Committee of the Council from proceeding with the development of either of the two units with which they were experimenting. Sufficient money was available for the completion of the lighter unit, and it was thought essential that the work on the heavier vehicle should be completed.

As to the taxation of commercial vehicles, the committee were agreed in recognizing the importance of encouraging vehicles with low axle-loads, but recognized that there are other factors, including the type of tires, which are of great importance in relation to damage to roads. The committee did not feel competent, however, to express an opinion as to any uniform basis of taxation of commercial vehicles, either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

On the recommendation of the General Economic Committee, the Conference adopted the following resolutions :—

“I. The Conference takes note of the report of the General Economic Committee on the work of the Oversea Mechanical Transport Council and on roads and road transport, and, recognizing the importance of improved methods of transport to the production and marketing of primary products, especially in less-developed areas, recommends to the favourable consideration of the Governments of the various parts of the British Commonwealth the close study of methods for the improvement both of vehicles and of roads. It considers that much advantage is to be gained by interchange of information on these subjects, and it therefore welcomes the issue of the confidential bulletin on oversea mechanical transport by the Directing Committee appointed by the Oversea Mechanical Transport Council.