

DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT.

POINTS FROM THE DEBATE.

The main debate of the Conference is the discussion which takes place on the Director's report. This report is an annual one, and is circulated to member States prior to the Conference, copies being made available through them to the delegates. A time-limit of fifteen minutes is imposed on delegates' speeches, but the rule is used with care by the President, who is in a position to gauge the depth of interest which is being taken by the Conference in the remarks of any speaker who has exceeded his time.

No restraint is placed upon the choice of subjects for the speeches, but they usually deal with social problems and progress in the speakers' countries, and with points from the Director's report.

The report is in the nature of a world survey of social and economic matters, and is written in a manner which brings a lively interest into what could be a rather dry subject. Delegates find it either stimulating or provocative, according to the views which they hold, but none complain of its dullness.

Seventy-three speakers took part in the debate, and they included five Ministers of Labour.

Evidence given by delegates from various parts of the world of social developments in their countries showed, comparatively, that, while New Zealand has done a good deal in the past eighteen months to regain its former pride of place as a leader in social reform, it cannot yet claim full leadership in all departments. Remarkable developments have occurred in countries which we in this part of the world have been prone to regard as backward ones.

This development is in most cases fairly recent, and there is no doubt that, in framing their new codes, the countries concerned have been able to build upon the experiences of countries which, like New Zealand, did pioneering work in this field.

Latvia has had no unemployment since 1935. In fact, it has had to introduce 45,000 foreign agricultural workers per year. This year family allowances have been provided for agricultural workers' children under twelve years of age. Subsidies are given to farmers who build homes with a suitable area of garden. Rural workers receive free radio licenses, from ten to fourteen paid holidays annually, and free medical services. Regarding industrial workers, the Government three years ago prohibited any reduction in wages. If an undertaking goes bankrupt, wages due to workers are paid from a Government fund. Besides other expenditure on holiday camps, the Government pays a subsidy in respect of each child under twelve years of age which farmers accept on holiday during the summer months from a working-class home. Labour disputes are settled through the channel of a "shop-steward," the trade-union, the Chamber of Labour, or finally by the Government. Special rest-homes for workers while on paid holidays have been provided in rural areas, in towns, and at health resorts. To utilize the spare time of workers theatrical performances, operas, concerts, sports, and excursions are organized at very low cost to the workers. To improve nutrition there is a system of distributing meals very cheaply to workers. Free legal assistance is provided for workers.

Mexico decided in 1936 that the weekly rest day for workers must be paid for, and that the minimum age for admission to employment was to be fifteen years. Payment for the weekly rest day had increased wages by 16 per cent.

According to the *Yugoslavian* Minister of Labour, who took part in the debate, about thirty decrees bringing about improvements of the agricultural and industrial situations had been promulgated in Yugoslavia. Steps had been taken in regard to fixing wheat-prices; settlement of farmers' debts; fixation of interest-rates; issue of Treasury bonds; reorganization of certain co-operative societies; protection of financial establishments and their creditors; insurance of workers against invalidity, unemployment, and old age. The capital of the unemployment insurance fund is invested in the establishment of hospitals, workers' dwellings, &c. The issue of Treasury bonds had had a very favourable effect on the money-market. Trade had increased by 14.1 per cent. in 1936, and the average wage of workers had recovered. One important decree dealt with the fixing of minimum-wage rates, the conclusion of collective agreements, conciliation and arbitration. In its provision was made for fixing of minimum rates below which wages could not fall. Collective agreements covered at least half of the undertakings, and half of the workers in an occupation could be applied to the whole of the occupation throughout the territory, and if the parties did not come to an agreement the proper authority could fix a wage-rate. Provision was made for compulsory conciliation and optional arbitration both for workers and employers before stoppages occurred.

The Government delegate from *Brazil* stated that prior to 1930 Brazil's social legislation had been slight, but since then they have reduced excessive hours of work, improved conditions of work, extended the workers' compensation to all workers, and given to various groups compulsory insurance against invalidity, old age, and death. Efforts had been made to give holidays with pay. Employers and workers' organizations have been given new rights and the number of their unions (less than 100 in 1930) have increased to 700. The number of employers' organizations included in this figure is about 400. Wages have been improved and the case of agricultural producers has been improved by creating co-operative societies.

The *Chinese* Government delegate gave evidence that during the most critical period of unemployment his country undertook a vast plan of national reconstruction including the employment of a million workers on hydro-electric works, the building of 29,840 kilometres of roads, flood and drought protection, and telegraph and telephonic communications. He mentioned incidentally that the population of China equalled one-quarter of the total population of the world.

Notwithstanding the regrettable internal situation with which the *Spanish* Government is contending, that country sent a delegation of fourteen members to the Conference, and gave assurances of its hearty support to the Forty-hour Week Conventions. Mrs. Palencia, the Spanish Minister at