

CHILD-WELFARE.

The Members of the Fifth Committee took a very keen interest in the discussions of this complex problem, in which fundamental social and economic questions are constantly involved (*e.g.*, family allowances), education (*e.g.*, the cinema), public morals (*e.g.*, the status of the illegitimate child). They realized the necessity of proceeding with caution and of preparing people's minds for a discussion of the various questions before formulating suggestions. The studies of the Child Welfare Committee have been designed to encourage the various countries to examine the spirit and methods that obtain there in the treatment of child-welfare questions and to introduce amendments, whenever necessary, in their laws and administration. It was important, the Committee considered, that normal children should be the main subject of the inquiry and that the constructive side of child-welfare should be insisted upon quite as much as the more limited, although vital, question of protecting children against harmful influences or shameful exploitation.

As I have already indicated, the Child Welfare Committee and the Traffic in Women and Children Committee are now merged into one organization, to be known as the Advisory Committee on Social Questions. It was agreed that this latter Committee in the sphere of activity of the suppression of traffic in women and children and that of child-welfare should be—

- (1) A centre of international documentation, in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences, methods, and results between the Governments and voluntary organizations ;
- (2) A centre of study which would conduct, direct, or simply provoke international or national inquiries on social questions ;
- (3) A centre of action, to organize co-operation between Governments, prepare conventions, agreements, international conferences, &c., and establish co-operation between private organizations dealing with international social questions.

The Fifth Committee in its conclusions after an extensive exchange of views stated that, while recognizing the utility of encouraging the work of the voluntary organizations, follows with interest the development of social consciousness and of the feeling of social responsibility. In social work old methods are being replaced by new ; the development of social action on a scientific basis is conferring a greater importance to the professional character of certain forms of social work. But the Fifth Committee greatly appreciates the activities of the voluntary organizations which are devotedly pursuing their activities in social service. These organizations serve, in the most fortunate manner, as a complement to the official social service, and undertake experiments outside the sphere of activity of that service. The Committee also noted with satisfaction that preventive action is a factor which is everywhere added to the conception of social work carried out on scientific lines.

Last year the Committee drew the attention of the Advisory Committee on Social Questions to the importance of considering, in the first place, the normal child, and it suggested certain directions in which its work might be developed in order to attain this object :—

- (1) A comparative study of the organization and conduct of child-welfare work, with reference to the competence both of the authorities and of voluntary organizations ;
- (2) The extension of child-welfare work to populations living in other than large urban communities.

The Fifth Committee noted that the Advisory Committee on Social Questions, owing to its reorganization, had not dealt with the substance of this question. It expressed the opinion that the protection of normal children will have to engage the particular attention of the Advisory Committee on these questions. Taking into account the salient points of the discussion, the Fifth Committee noted certain well-defined tendencies which reflect the considerations now chiefly prevailing among Governments—namely, that social conditions are closely related to economic factors and peace in the political sphere. At the same time it noted the special attention which several Governments pay to child-welfare in rural districts.

The Fifth Committee further noted with satisfaction that the problem of housing, which is of essential importance to the moral, social, and physical development of children and young people, had engaged the attention of numerous Governments, and in view of these facts it considered that the Advisory Committee on Social Questions, in making a choice among the new questions to be studied, should direct its attention to those problems which have aroused such general interest.

In view of the great interest displayed by Governments, as reflected in the discussions on the subject, it was of the opinion that the extension of child-welfare work among the population living in other than large urban communities might be one useful point of departure in guiding the Advisory Committee's activities towards the problems connected with normal children. The aim of such a study would be to find out whether children living in other than large urban communities are at a disadvantage so far as child-welfare measures are concerned. It should also endeavour to ascertain how far in small and large communities the work of voluntary organizations makes good the shortcomings of the provisions of legislation or local regulations.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the multiplicity, complexity, and interdependence of the problems relating to child-welfare have led several Governments to a constantly increasing co-ordination of research, supervision, and technical direction. Some fifteen countries have centralized their child-welfare under a " Council," and some have even set up a " Ministry of Child Welfare."

A thorough study of the experience gained by certain countries, when brought to the knowledge of all, might facilitate further results.

The Fifth Committee therefore suggested that one of the first subjects to be considered by the Advisory Committee should be " the study of the general organization of child-welfare," a study to comprise a comparative examination of the results obtained in this sphere for the purpose of presenting the different solutions susceptible of being found for the problem of the organization of child-welfare.

It was further considered that, with a view to better co-operation between the Advisory Committee and other organizations dealing with different aspects of social questions, it would be necessary to establish liaison with other commissions and committees when questions likely to concern the Advisory Committee were being discussed.