

## The Economic Conference at Geneva

THE report before us of the World Economic Conference at Geneva is distinctly disappointing. If 194 men attended by 157 experts drawn from fifty countries of the world can offer nothing better than this the outlook for human intelligence is dark indeed.

The President in his introductory thanks the members for their generous efforts at *rapprochement* by which the dangers of controversies were eliminated. Perhaps this is the explanation of why so little appeared that touched on fundamentals. Now and then something is said that indicates a more or less clear perception of the real problem. The following, for instance, might lead to something more of vital significance, but the subject is pursued no further:

"No machinery for the settlement of international disputes can be relied upon to maintain peace if the economic policies of the world so develop as to create only deep divergencies of economic interest between different masses of the world's population and a sense of intolerable injury and injustice."

When we look for something on Free Trade we find under "Liberty of Trading" the following:

In the first chapter of "Commerce" the Conference makes a number of recommendations under "Liberty of Trading"—an expression not to be confounded with Free Trade but embracing all measures calculated to liberate international commerce from artificial restrictions and obstructions."!

And the report definitely says:

"In enumerating the causes and ideas which are responsible for the super-protectionism of post war years the International Economic Conference does not attempt to pass judgement on the fundamental principles of protection and free trade respectively."

The Report indicates an opposition to "excessive" protection and that is all. But the Conference fought shy of any discussion that would lead to an examination of the claims on which tariffs are founded. The avoidance of all consideration of fundamental economic principles must strike the reader of this Report as typical of the whole proceedings.

It must not be thought, however, that there were not some speakers who gave utterance to real principles showing that an increasing number of public men in all lands are not without clear convictions on economic problems. From this point of view the Conference may be said to have served a useful purpose even if officially the pronouncements seem ridiculously timid and hesitating.

We cite a few of the extracts from remarks made at the Conference and printed in the June number of our contemporary *Land and Liberty*, of England.

The President, Mr. G. Theunis: We have long been familiar with the singular contradiction between the enormous efforts made by nations, working tenaciously for the means of communication for passengers and goods,

by constructing railways, ports and canals, and the fiscal and administrative measures by which they are apparently striving to render their heavy expenditure and their persevering labors nugatory.

Prof. Karl Gustav Cassel, (Sweden): We shall have to deal in the Conference every day and almost at every step in our deliberations, with forms and effects of monopolization. (But he failed to develop this point, so we do not know just what Prof. Cassel meant.)

Mme. Freundelich, (Austria): Barbed wire entanglements have given place to new frontiers in the form of high Customs tariffs which imprison goods and men as if in a trap and prevent national economic life from developing on normal lines.

M. Shidachi, (Japan): We must of necessity make it our national policy to remove Customs barriers and to establish freedom of communication and commerce, as far as possible in co-operation with other nations. . . . As the development of natural resources through the freedom of economic enterprises is extremely important for the promotion of human contentment, it is the duty of every nation to bring about this realization.

M. Urzua, (Chile): Political economy holds the magic key to the enigma and has in its hands the vast treasury of the laws which rule the moral world, as physical laws create the wonderful harmony of the universe. . . . Neglect of the principles of justice lies at the root of the social upheavals and fratricidal wars which have marred the course of centuries. The general tendency of this Conference is to seek a solution in liberty in certain forms of economic activity. This ideal has prompted the suggestion to do away with the useless or dangerous Customs barriers, which stand in the way of commercial and industrial progress.

M. Tibbaut, (Belgium): Countries of dense population and intense culture, for example, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, produced special products, which they used as an exchange for raw materials and for the cereals necessary to feed their dense population. Small holdings must be encouraged by removing fiscal and legislative obstacles to the acquisition of land. Agriculture must be on its guard against protectionism, for which the demand was greater in industry than in agriculture.

Professor Hight, (New Zealand): gave the reasons for the rapid development of agriculture in New Zealand, including an enlightened system of land tenure, the encouragement of land settlement by taxation of large and unused holdings, assistance in the provision of loans, provision for scientific research, the organization of credit, the official grading of produce for export and the thorough co-operative organization of the dairy industry.

Mr. Weber (Switzerland), Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions: The resolution made no mention whatever of the problem of the rent paid for agricultural land, which was the most important question before the Committee. Almost every advantage obtained for agriculture by Customs tariffs, subsidies and other measures were reflected in an increase in agricultural rents. Even an improvement in credits and the work of co-operative associations had the same consequence over a period of years.

"NO man shall be received into our commune who sayeth that the land may be sold. God's footstool is not property."—*St. Cyprian (Latin, A.D. 200-258).*