

§ 3. The Third Conference of British Commonwealth Statisticians, Canberra, 1951.

Conferences of the Government Statisticians of the British Commonwealth were held first in London in 1920 and then in Ottawa in 1935. The Third Conference was held in Canberra from 12th to 23rd November, 1951. Delegates were present from Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (including a representative of the Colonial Office). Ireland, the Commonwealth Economic Committee and the United Nations were represented by observers, and the Australian State Government Statisticians were also present. Unfortunately, urgent internal statistical problems prevented the Governments of Pakistan, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia from being represented.

Matters for discussion were decided in advance by the participating countries, which were also invited to prepare and circulate papers on agenda items before delegates left for Australia. When the Conference opened, extensive documentation was available on many items for discussion, including an historical summary of relevant recommendations by previous Commonwealth and recent International conferences.

The Conference reviewed statistical requirements and modern practice on many aspects of the following matters :—

Labour Statistics	Statistical Co-ordination
Production Statistics	National Income
Agricultural Statistics	Indexes of Prices
External Trade Statistics	Family Budget Inquiries
Retail Trade and Census of Distribution	Road Transport Statistics
Application of Sampling Methods	Recent Developments in Census Taking
	Mineral Statistics.

Whereas the earlier conferences prepared reports and passed series of resolutions aiming at improving and co-ordinating statistics throughout the Commonwealth, the report prepared by the Third Conference aimed at reaching as firm an expression of views as was consistent with unanimity, whilst at the same time mentioning different views which were expressed if unanimous conclusions were not possible.

The Report concludes with a General Review in which is expressed the realization by the Conference that complete uniformity in statistical practice could not be expected in a Commonwealth which included countries and territories in all parts of the world, and in which there was a great variety of geographical conditions and differing forms of economic and social organization. While aiming at general agreement on the best methods of achieving particular results, the Conference recognized that on many subjects different practices must perforce be followed in the different countries to meet their special needs. In Government affairs, in business and in all discussions of public policy the use of statistics was much more extensive now than at the time of the Second Conference, and during the intervening period important developments had occurred in the theory and application of statistical methods. Greater need existed for an exchange of views on technical matters between the Statisticians of the Commonwealth countries. In view of the advantages to be gained from meetings of these Statisticians, Conference decided that Commonwealth conferences should be held every five years and a co-ordinating committee was appointed to make plans for the Fourth Conference.

The Conference provided an opportunity for an exchange of views which should lead to statistical improvements in all countries represented, and its report should be of assistance to the Statistical Office of the United Nations and other organizations in their work of improving statistics on an international scale. While the tangible results of the Conference would be evident from the Report, the Statisticians felt that the intangible results of personal contact and discussion outside the sessions would be of inestimable value.