

IMPRESSIONS OF A UNESCO CONFERENCE

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Miss Conway, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation and a Director of the Canadian Education Association wrote this article about half way through the Conference. She did not intend it to be in any sense a report of the proceedings but rather a series of impressions received by a Canadian participant.

In Paris, the Hotel Raphael, a quiet and comfortable centre, about a block from the Arc de Triomphe, is the headquarters of the Canadian Delegation. It was here that General Eisenhower stayed when he was in France during the closing phases of the Second World War.

Across the street is UNESCO House, where the sessions are held. This building, formerly the Majestic Hotel, has been converted into offices and assembly rooms; the shining mirrors, glistening chandeliers and carved woodwork of the walls and ceiling remind us of the historic days of nineteenth century France.

Impressive Setting

The setting of the first full meeting was impressive. At the front of the chamber hung the flag of the United Nations, while at the sides, in two groups of 32 and 33, hung the 65 flags of the member states of UNESCO, forming a rich background of colour. There are, at present, actually 59 states with voting rights. Amid the blazing lights of film-cameras and the flashing bulbs of press-photographers, Mr. Howland Sargeant, the retiring president of UNESCO and head of the United States delegation, declared the General Conference open. Readers may be interested to know that Mrs. Sargeant, who followed the sessions closely as a spectator, is Myrna Loy, the film actress.

The presence of numerous interpreters and the use of special equipment for simultaneous translation made it possible for delegates to listen to addresses in English, French and Spanish. Mr. Sargeant said that UNESCO had enjoyed seven years of steady growth. Through the work of 61 national commissions, through the interest of non-governmental organizations and through its own efforts, the organization was becoming known to people throughout the world. We must continue, the speaker declared, the unremitting search for ways of educating people to live as citizens both of their own nations and of a world community. We must learn to devote the creative spirit of mankind to the achievement of peace and security. To give some notion of what UNESCO was doing to forward these purposes, Mr. Sargeant briefly reviewed some of UNESCO'S activities in Korea, the Middle East and other parts of the world.

Much of the time, delegates were engaged in planning and putting into operation a "World Good Neighbour Programme". In such an atmosphere, one became acutely aware of the broadening horizons of the world. On my left sat Princess Ping Peang Yukanthor of Cambodia, a good neighbour who, following the continental custom, shook hands with me at least four times a day. Occasionally she rose to address the assembly in French. Before important votes, she and I would consult together and she never failed to understand my few French phrases.

Election of President

H. E. Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, chairman of the delegation from India, was unanimously elected president of the Conference. Ten vice-presidents were elected by secret ballot. Fifty-five countries voted, and I am proud to report that Canada headed the list, with 54 votes, a tribute to both Dr. Doré himself, who is admired by his colleagues, and to Canada as a nation, which enjoys cordial relations with many countries throughout the world.