

## Convention News

THE discussions on the draft document on the social mission of the Church started in a flurry of controversy. The voting on the set of recommendations which resulted from the more than 30 meetings of Working Group 7 was very tame by comparison. Many of the delegates confessed to being somewhat daunted by the huge number of recommendations (there were 125 of them!) and by the sometimes rather technical issues they were asked to decide on.

Perhaps as a result of this many refrained from commenting on particular recommendations and instead preferred to sum up their feelings in a general comment at the end of the voting paper. But whatever the reason more general comments were made on this set of recommendations than on any of the previous ones. The pattern of voting was also a little different from the usual one.

The tone of the comments was favourable but with a number of important reservations. "These recommendations are in general acceptable," wrote one delegate, "but there are far too many of them." "They sound all very well in theory," wrote another, "but how many of them do we seriously think can be put into practice?"

Other typical remarks were: there are too many repetitions; the proposals are too detailed and specific — they are too professional, i.e. they can be understood only by a few trained in the fields of social work, social action and medical care.

"These recommendations are wonderful," enthused one Sister. "They are a lot of wishful thinking," maintained your plain blunt man. Obviously it is not easy to please everybody.

One of the delegates summed up his reactions in this way: "All the recommendations have a lot of good in them, but to implement them all would require a large community of saints with the organising ability of the heads of General Motors, the political sagacity of a Wilson or a Nixon and the leadership of a Churchill! Many of the proposals are so idealistic as to be quite impracticable." Another delegate had similar thoughts: "The ideas are excellent," he wrote, "but to implement all of them would need the manpower of China and the wealth of the USA." (And this was before the devaluation of the dollar!)

Overwhelmed by the mass of suggestions, some delegates expressed the fear that the effort to cover every aspect of our social situation might well turn out to be self-defeating. There was grave danger, they thought, of our being bemused and doing nothing. They urged therefore the need to pick out the few more important proposals and to try and get action on these first. "We should sieve through the recommendations and pick out the most urgent ones and recommend these," was how one voter put it, adding that if the proposals are few but important and urgent, "it will be easier to get something done."

A lay delegate pointed to what he termed the "key recommendation." This is a proposal which (when liberated from the jargon that almost succeeds in stifling it) urges, apparently, the setting up of a small group of energetic and well-informed persons whose job it would be to keep under constant review the more urgent social problems of Hong Kong and to bring them to the notice of parish social action groups. Their aim would be above all to get things done. In addition they would take an official stand when new developments crop up and in times e.g. of natural disaster, etc. would coordinate efforts aimed at relieving distress. This same delegate felt that it is from here that we should make a start.

One or two delegates were a little uncomfortable on reading through the recommendations. They considered that the proposals set out by a Diocesan Convention should be addressed to the diocese and its people — those with authority and those without — and they saw little point in a body like ours urging ideal solutions to grave problems that could be brought about only by Government action, if at all.

Looking at the tabulated results of the voting, the *yes* votes appear in the overwhelming majority. There are a large number of abstentions (many felt that some of the points raised were of too technical a nature and beyond their competence to decide). The number both of reservations and of *no* votes was very small. These latter, however, tended to concentrate on a few of the proposals, and not necessarily on the most important ones.

One of these recommendations, for example, suggests that agencies which furnish assistance to 'clients' in economic difficulties should consider the possibility of providing a 24-hour service. Many delegates thought this an exaggeration; they were in agreement that these agencies should remain open for longer hours, but felt that emergencies that arise in the middle of the night might best be left to the police or to the hospitals.

Another proposal urges that workers should be encouraged "and even financially rewarded" for reporting violations of legislation aimed at improving working conditions in factory and workshop. Some delegates, while welcoming the idea behind the suggestion, were opposed to any notion of monetary reward. "We do not want paid informers" was the way one respondent put it.

In the section dealing with the rights of labour some delegates expressed the view that a word might profitably have been added—however unpopular or reactionary it might sound — about workers' duties and responsibilities. One delegate felt that in this same section there was a certain confusion between the living wage, the just wage and a share in the profits. "Everyone who works according to his ability, however minimal, he asserted, "is entitled to a living wage." Most workers, he went on, make a contribution to the activity of the company which entitles them to much more than a living wage, i.e. to a just wage. But, he claimed, the wage contract prescinds from profit and loss and therefore of itself does not give the right to a share in the profits. He therefore hoped that the recommendations on this point would be rewritten in more precise terms.

A final proposal to which a good number of delegates objected urged the setting up of a diocesan Anti-Corruption Enquiry Committee, whose function would be to answer questions from the public regarding anti-corruption and to conduct preliminary investigations into complaints made by the public and to assist complainants to collect evidence of corruption. Only a few delegates indicated the reason for their opposition to this proposal. It was impracticable, they said, or not necessary, or it duplicated existing channels or was much more complicated than it appeared, requiring special training and qualifications in those forming such a group.