

AIDA 1982

World Congress - London

Finally, the great day had come. The Organizing Committee stands waiting outside the Royal Festival Hall for the Minister, the Lord Mayor and other official guests, nervously and with sweating hands, as three decorators are still on the stage positioning national flags and other decorations. Delegates arrive and register, the AIDA Presidential Council finishes its first meeting.

The official party - now complete - takes its seat on the stage. We have take-off - no more time to be nervous. Now it is to be proved whether three and a half years of meetings, discussions, correspondence, ideas, enthusiasm, plans and disappointments - in short, solid work - will produce the result we have aimed for.

After a welcome by Lord Justice Donaldson, the Congress's Patron and by BILA's President, Bob Sloan, opening addresses from Sir Christopher Lever, London's Lord Mayor, and from Dr. Gerard Vaughan, the Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs, formally launch the Congress; the work can start. For four and a half days delegates will consider in plenary sessions and discussion groups the two main subjects of the Congress, the working groups set up at previous Congresses will discuss their themes and will meet during a full social programme, including a concert, various receptions, an excursion day and a final Dinner.

What is the goal of such a Congress? Did we achieve it?

I see the main purpose in an in-depth study of the Congress themes, which should be subjects of topical, however lasting, general importance to the insurance industry. I am confident that we have met this target. The themes were obviously well chosen, stimulating the highest number ever of high-standard National Reports. This proved to be good working material for the General Reporters for their Reports of outstanding excellence: Professor Hugh Cockerell on "Insurance and the Liability of Providers of Services" and Professor Jan Hellner and Dr. Karoly Bard (on socialist countries) on "The Principles which should govern the Insurance of Persons". The General Reporters introduced their Reports in plenary session and the National Reporters were given the opportunity to make further comments on their own reports. Afterwards Discussion Groups took up various aspects of the main subjects, considered them and reported back to the General Reporters.

We had set up these discussion groups split into the various AIDA languages because we had learned from previous experience that plenary sessions lack the more intimate atmosphere needed for discussions and tend to foster monologues. In addition, one is always confronted by lack of time and even with the best of interpreters - ours were actually well prepared - simultaneous translations are at best a mixed blessing. When setting up the discussion groups we had some misgivings that the limitation to one language might make the meetings infertile gatherings of one national delegation. These, however, proved unjustified as a number of multi-lingual delegates crossed language barriers making these meetings quite vivid and enormously stimulating. Reporters in the discussion groups conveyed the gist back to the General Reporters who, during the concluding plenary session on Friday morning, included all the findings in their summings up. In all, the work on the two main Congress themes seems to have been very satisfactory to everybody.

In addition to the meetings on Themes 1 and 2, delegates participated actively in the six Working Groups set up at previous Congresses. These working groups are concerned with Insurance and Acts of Violence; Accumulation of Claims Payments (Double Indemnity) and Subrogation; Prevention and Insurance; Pollution and Insurance; Products (Manufacturers', etc.) Liability and, finally, Motor Insurance. Some of the working groups suffered from a change in participants since they had last met, which made a time-consuming briefing of new participants necessary. However, this only meant a short delay and generally proceedings continued successfully. As a consequence of the 1982 Congress, BILA is organising another working group which intends to study the Liability of Directors and Officers, a subject which seems to be of high topical value.

The National and General Reports (skilfully edited by Gordon Shaw) were presented to each delegate in two neatly printed and bound volumes (in each of the five AIDA languages). They form an important source for everybody interested in studying the two main Congress themes in depth.

Since the Congress, BILA has asked the General Reporters to condense all the contributions made during the Congress into a short additional report, which BILA intends to print as a supplement to the Congress documentation.

Despite various other congresses held at about the same time, and a generally diminishing enthusiasm for conventions, 573 delegates and 287 accompanying persons, 860 in all, attended: a good average for AIDA Congresses. Beyond the subjects on the agenda, the Congress proved to be a general forum for an exchange of thoughts, ideas, points of view. This was assisted by a social programme containing a concert by the Insurance Orchestral Society, various official and unofficial receptions, an excursion and a closing Banquet and Dance. About 620 participants had come from abroad, and it was disappointing not to see them outnumbered by participants from that country which is the classic world insurance centre. After generous financial support, the British insurance industry failed to take full advantage of this Convention being held on their home ground. I would have also expected a better coverage in the insurance press, which had been well briefed on the event. Is this the traditional, however erroneous, belief that law is to be left to the lawyers and is nothing practitioners should be concerned with?

However hard you try, blunders seem to be unavoidable. Were delegates just too polite to recognise them, or was it the sun shining permanently during Congress week which caused delegates to make so many friendly comments about the Congress. We will never know. What is important is that London has held this Convention of which the Congress documentation will be a momento of lasting value.

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