

1928.

NEW ZEALAND.

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE.

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER (RIGHT HON. J. G. COATES) ON LAYING THE REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 28TH AUGUST, 1928.

Laid on the Table by Leave of the House.

In laying upon the table the report of the National Industrial Conference I wish to take the opportunity of placing upon record my appreciation, and that of the Government, of the impartiality with which the delegates to that Conference entered upon their highly important task, and of the spirit of mutual understanding and toleration with which its proceedings were conducted throughout.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the object for which the Conference was called. The relations between employer and employee are receiving most anxious consideration at the present time practically throughout the whole world, and in these days of intense competition the country which is able to solve the problem of industrial peace will most certainly have a great advantage in the struggle for trade against those peoples who still remain imbued with the ancient idea—now very largely exploded—that the interests of the employers lie in confining the remuneration of labour to the lowest possible limit, and that the interests of the workers lie in constantly attacking the employers.

The object of the Government in calling this Conference was to bring out as clearly as possible the very real identity of interest between the employers and workers of New Zealand, and their responsibilities to the whole Dominion, and to give those concerned in industry the opportunity of solving, by agreement among themselves, many of the problems that are facing us to-day. It was with no little anxiety that the Conference was decided upon, and the fact that both sides were able to meet in a spirit of amity and good will must be regarded by all as a most promising indication of what may be possible along these lines in the future.

There can be no denying the real advantage of getting all parties concerned in a controversy to meet man to man round a common table. The personal contacts so established, and the readiness with which opposing points of view may be explained and understood, undoubtedly facilitate a settlement of the most difficult and controversial questions; and this principle must apply not only to a Conference such as that held this year to decide matters of policy, but also to similar meetings to decide the practical details of industrial conditions in any industry and locality.

The agenda which was placed before the Conference was a very comprehensive one, but in the final result it was found that the deliberations of the Conference were largely confined to the four subjects of unemployment, immigration, workers' compensation, and industrial arbitration, of which the last was, of course, the most difficult. On three of these subjects the Conference presented a unanimous report, but no agreement was found possible on industrial arbitration.