

Before discussing this last-mentioned subject I wish to comment very generally on the first three ; and in the first place I wish to put upon record the fact that the Government attach the utmost importance to these recommendations, and have no hesitation in accepting them as the basis for future action or legislation, as the case may be. How far it will be found possible to take immediate steps in all cases, or to implement the recommendations in their complete detail, I am not able to say at present.

On the subject of unemployment the Conference recognized that the complexity of the problem called for further statistics and for further inquiry, which it suggested should be undertaken by a Committee. The Government entirely agree. Statistics have already been asked for, and the necessary steps to set up such a Committee are in hand. The recommendation that the Consolidated Fund should in the meantime provide the moneys required to cope with unemployment is in effect a recognition of the principle which is already in operation, and which we have no intention of disturbing while the need for special assistance remains.

With the recommendations as to immigration we are in general agreement, though considerable difficulty is expected in arranging for the medical examination of full-fare migrants as recommended. We are, however, now giving the necessary consideration to the method of putting the recommendations into force in so far as they differ from existing practice.

The recommendations on workers' compensation, again, recognize the complexity of the position. As honourable members are aware, a special investigation has recently been made into the Ontario legislation, and we have come to the conclusion that further information will be necessary before we are in a position finally to examine its possibilities. It will, I think, be generally agreed that the subject should be treated as a whole, and we propose to defer a decision on the questions of compulsory insurance, medical attention, and lump-sum payments until a final determination on the general question can be taken.

Our system of industrial arbitration, which was introduced by the Hon. Mr. Pember Reeves some thirty years ago as an industrial experiment, has been in operation for so long a period that any Government would hesitate before abandoning this system without adequate reason.

As honourable members are of course aware, however, in recent years there has been considerable criticism of the effect of the system upon the welfare of the Dominion, and it has been asserted, with some show of reason, that the artificial fixation of wages and other conditions of work is not in accordance with economic laws, that it has hampered the prosperity of the country, and has rendered impossible that elasticity which is essential to meet the varying conditions of the world's markets.

Again, the readiness with which both parties to industrial disputes have in the past been prepared to refer to arbitration the vital questions of wages and hours has, it has been said, militated to some extent against a proper understanding of the mutual difficulties. On the assumption that these questions would in any case be referred to arbitration there has not perhaps been that frankness and full disclosure that is of the essence of conciliation proceedings properly understood. In many cases, had both sides all the information available as to the financial and economic position of the industry on the one hand, and the individual difficulties of the workers on the other, a fuller appreciation of the realities and of the possibilities and impossibilities of the case must inevitably have followed.

The main object of the Conference was to find, if possible, a way of meeting these objections. We felt that if those concerned could find their own solution, this course would be preferable to any attempt to decide such a delicate and vital matter by legislation or other regulation from outside the ranks of industry ; and I might add that this point of view is becoming recognized with increasingly greater frequency in other countries which are faced with the same difficulties. If industry can itself show the way out, then a course so recommended must undoubtedly be welcomed by the whole country ; and I need not say that a scheme which meets with general approval has much greater prospects of success than any measure which might create suspicion or distrust on one side or the other.