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NEW ZEALAND.

## INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE, GENEVA, 1937.

### REPORT OF NEW ZEALAND WORKERS' DELEGATE.

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.*

DEAR SIR,—

It is with great pleasure that I submit to you my report as workers' representative to the twenty-third session of the Conference of the International Labour Office held at Geneva from 2nd June to 23rd June, 1937.

Prior to the opening of the Conference a meeting of the workers' group was held on 1st June to discuss matters that were to come before Conference. One of the questions discussed concerned the shorter working-week, and I took the opportunity to explain that the shorter working-week had been one of the objectives of industrial and political labour in New Zealand for a number of years. I was able to point out that it was not until the change in Government two years ago that the industrial objective was achieved. The Labour Government had been in office only a short time when the legislation was brought down in connection with the forty-hour week and put through all stages in face of fierce opposition. I explained that provision was made in the Bill for cases of hardship to be determined by the Arbitration Court. I also explained how the Government had put its own employees on the forty-hour week, with the result that a larger number of men were able to find work. Spending-power was created which helped New Zealand along the road to prosperity which she was now enjoying.

The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, Minister of Labour, who piloted the forementioned legislation through the House, represented the New Zealand Government at this Conference.

M. Leon Jouhaux, France, said that he was pleased to hear the statement on the shorter working-week from the New Zealand delegate. The forty-hour week was responsible for 65,000 more men finding employment on the railways in France.

After further discussion it was decided to invite Mr. Armstrong to address the group.

In the afternoon I was elected an officer of the workers' group, an honour which I considered a tribute to the country I had the privilege to represent. The representatives on the committee of the workers' group were as follows—Chairman: M. Mertens (Belgium). Officers: Messrs. Anderson (Sweden), Dash (New Zealand), Diaz Munoz (Mexico), Serrarens (Netherlands), Watt (United States), with Mr. Schevenels as Secretary.

Conference opened officially on 2nd June, when Mr. Necas, Chairman of the governing body of the International Labour Office, presided. Mr. Necas said:—

“The International Labour Conference, a world assembly of all those who have a part in that magnificent aspect of human activity, productive labour, has come together for the twenty-third time. It has met to continue the work of previous sessions of the Conference, thereby helping to improve the living and employment conditions of workers.”

The session of the Conference was attended by 97 Government delegates, 36 employers' delegates, and 35 workers' delegates, who were assisted by 247 advisers. The number of persons entitled to take part in the work of the Conference was therefore 415, representing fifty-one countries. The figures were a substantial increase on those recorded the previous year at the opening of the twentieth session, which was attended by 389 delegates and advisers from forty-eight countries.

It is worthy of note to mention the fact that among those who were representing their respective Governments at the Conference were Ministers directly concerned in shaping the social and industrial politics of their countries. Finland sent Mr. Kato, Minister of Labour; Irish Free State sent Mr. Lemass, Minister of Industries and Commerce; Latvia sent Mr. Alfredo Bergins, Minister of Social Affairs; Luxemburg was represented by M. Dupong, Minister of Finance; Yugoslavia by M. Tzvelkovitch, Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health; France by M. Lebas, Minister of Labour; England by Mr. E. Brown, Minister of Labour; and New Zealand, the most distant country, represented by its Minister of Labour, Mr. Armstrong.

The first business of the Conference was the election of President. On the nomination of Mr. O'Grady (U.S.A.), supported by the spokesmen of the employers' and workers' groups, Mr. Lemass (Irish Free State) was unanimously elected to the position. Following the thanks of the President-elect, the Conference adjourned to enable the groups to elect committee members.

Mr. Armstrong and I were elected to the Public Works Committee of the Conference, and on this committee I was able to assist by my knowledge of public works as carried out in New Zealand and the latest Public Works statement presented to Parliament by the Minister, the Hon. R. Semple, and its schedule of wages and working-conditions. I attended every meeting of the Committee to deal with the planning of public works in relation to employment.

The point under discussion was how best to plan public-works programmes over long periods in such a way that when depression threatened and large numbers of workers were in danger of losing their jobs, the State might step in and speed up its public-works programme to provide them with employment and at the same time keep up the volume of purchasing-power. The present moment seemed to be a particularly appropriate time to consider the proposal. The plan involved knowing well in advance exactly what public works should be undertaken when the critical moment approached and having adequate funds in reserve to finance the work.

The discussions in Committee had been keen and interesting, and it was clear that many of those who took part had given years of thought to the problem. The Conference recommended that the planning of public works by the various public authorities in each country be properly co-ordinated, so as to enable a rational long-range plan to be drawn up, and it recommended also that an International Committee be set up to study the problem and that the various States should send regularly to the International Labour Office full information concerning their public-works programmes and policy.

#### PUBLIC-WORKS PLANNING AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION.

The International Labour Office had prepared a report on the question under review. This report contained a section dealing with a draft consultation of Governments, two draft Recommendations, and a Draft Resolution. The Committee consisted of 60 members, of whom 30 were Government members, 15 employers' members, and 15 workers' members. The Riddell system of voting was applied—that is to say, each Government member had one vote, and each employers' and workers' member two votes.

The Draft Recommendation on International Co-operation concerning Public Works was submitted to Conference. The preamble text, which was as follows, was adopted without discussion:—

“Whereas the advance planning of public works is a useful method of preventing unemployment and counteracting economic fluctuations; and

“Whereas action for this purpose can be effective only if it is based on adequate information and international co-operation.”

The Committee then dealt with the remainder of the text in various paragraphs outlined in a copy of the *Official Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 3, dated 15th August, 1937, supplied herewith, and after certain amendments outlined in the *Bulletin*, the Draft Recommendation on International Co-operation was then put to the vote and adopted without opposition, the Indian Government member abstaining from voting.

The Committee then went on to consider the Draft Resolution on International Co-operation concerning Public Works, and the Draft Resolution, after amendments, was adopted, the Norwegian and Indian Government members abstaining from voting.

The Draft Recommendation concerning the National Planning of Public Works was next considered. At the outset the New Zealand Government member stated that the Draft Recommendation was framed on the same lines as the policy which the New Zealand Government pursued. The various headings covered the timing of public works, the financing of public works, the employment of certain classes of workers, and the conditions of recruitment and employment, and, after amendments, the recommendation concerning the national planning of public works as a whole was then adopted without opposition, the Government member for India abstaining.

The Draft Recommendation concerning International Co-operation was then submitted to the Conference and carried, the voting being—For, 148; against, 0; abstain, 13.

The Draft Resolution concerning National Planning, outlined in the *Bulletin*, page 86, was adopted, the voting being as follows—For, 147; against, 0; abstain, 16.

#### HOURS OF WORK IN THE CHEMICAL AND PRINTING INDUSTRIES.

A committee comprising 30 members, including 10 Government, 10 employers', and 10 workers' members, was set up to examine the question of the reduction of hours of work in the chemical industry.

The Agenda also contained an item for consideration regarding the hours of work in the printing and kindred trades. A committee of the Conference was duly set up to prepare a report and submit a Draft Convention. Both the report and the Draft Convention were duly prepared, but when they were submitted to Conference they failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority for success, the voting being as follows—For, 72; against, 43; abstain, 41.

The report of the Committee dealing with hours in the chemical industry was no more successful than that of the printing and kindred trades, and the Draft Convention failed to secure the two-thirds majority, the voting being as follows—For, 76; against, 42; abstain, 47.

## SAFETY PROVISIONS FOR WORKERS IN THE BUILDING INDUSTRY.

The general Conference of the International Labour Office considered a Draft Convention on Safety Provisions in the Building Industry submitted by the Drafting Committee, following data supplied as a result of discussions at the previous Conference. Conference referred the question to a committee of 48, comprising 24 Government members, 12 employers' members, and 12 workers' members. The Draft Recommendation was submitted and adopted, the voting being as follows—For, 120; against, 0; abstain, 13.

## REDUCTION OF HOURS OF WORK IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY.

A committee was set up by decision of Conference to report on the textile industry. The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, New Zealand Government member, was elected Chairman of the Committee. Following the setting-up of the Drafting Committee, one of the elected members, Mr. Martin, British employers' representative, decided not to take part in the work of the Committee on the grounds that it was engaged not merely in the preparation of an account of the Committee's discussions, but also in preparation of the Texts of Articles of the proposed Draft Convention and the formulation of proposals for inclusion in the Convention.

In view of the fact that two other Committees of the Conference were considering proposals for Draft Conventions on the Reduction of Hours of Work in the Chemical Industry and in the Printing and Kindred Trades respectively, and of the desirability of securing as much uniformity as possible in the provisions of the texts which related to matters common to the three industries, the Committee decided to appoint representatives to act on a Co-ordinating Committee jointly with the representatives of the other two Committees. The Committee accordingly elected for this purpose Mr. Hinrichs, United States Government member, and Mr. Gorman, United States workers' member. The employers' members of the Committee declined to nominate a representative.

A lengthy general discussion then ensued in which the attitude of employers opposed to the adoption of the Draft Convention was expressed in speeches by the British, Netherlands, Indian, and Belgian employers' members of the Committee. At the close of the general discussion the employers' members of the Committee announced that, with the exception of the French and United States employers' members, they could not take part in the discussion or drafting of, or voting on any Article of a proposed Draft Convention, being convinced that the application of a Draft Convention to reduce working-hours would be impracticable, inequitable, and injurious to the textile industry. Following lengthy deliberations in Committee, the Committee then adopted on a record vote the text as a whole of the proposed Draft Convention for the reduction of hours of work in the textile industry, the voting being 73 to 40. The Committee accordingly proposed to Conference the adoption of the Draft Convention, the text of which is found in the *Official Bulletin*.

The Conference, having regard to the obligation imposed upon it by Article 19 (3) of the Constitution of the Organization—namely, that "in framing any Recommendation or Draft Convention of general application, the Conference shall have due regard to those countries in which climatic conditions, the imperfect development of industrial organization, or other special circumstances make the industrial conditions substantially different and shall suggest the modifications, if any, which it considers may be required to meet the case of such countries" requested the governing body of the International Labour Office to give immediate consideration to the question of the adoption of a special Draft Convention determining the modifications of the provisions of the Draft Convention on the reduction of hours of work in the textile industry for such countries with a view to the placing of this question on the Agenda of the Conference.

The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, in concluding the general discussion, said :—

"Now, the Committee worked very long and very hard in considering the proposals that were submitted to it. I am very sorry to say that the whole of the Committee did not work all the time, because on the first day the employers went on strike and decided that they were going to take no part whatever in the proceedings. They even refused to serve on the Drafting Committee or the Co-ordinating Committee, so that I am very sorry to say that, although the Committee was entitled to the assistance of the employers' just the same as they were entitled to the assistance of the Government and the workers' representatives, we did not receive that assistance at all, and I want just to point this out to the Conference. That is a very dangerous attitude to take up, because if the workers' representatives took up the same attitude, or if the Government representatives took up the same attitude, then the business of this Conference would be impossible and no business would be transacted at all. Not only that, but the people of the world would lose confidence in the organization altogether, and if that state of things were brought about it would be a very bad thing indeed for the world.

"There were two exceptions to the rule as far as the employers were concerned—namely, the employers' representatives from France and the United States of America. They did take part in the proceedings, and their assistance was very helpful indeed to the Committee. It surely has some influence on the representatives of other countries to know that the representatives of employers from the two countries mentioned, where they have considerable experience of the forty-hour week not only in the textile industry, but in other industries, are supporters of the reform, and they are acting under instructions from the employers of their respective countries. I think that is worth keeping in mind . . ."

Mr. Armstrong continued by enlarging his argument in reply to the cases put up by a number of the employers' members, and at the conclusion put the proposed Draft Convention Article by Article. The proposed Draft Convention was adopted by 72 votes to 42, and was then sent to the Drafting Committee for the preparation of a final text. The final text was adopted, the voting being as follows—for, 88 ; against, 41 ; abstain, 38.

#### CONCLUSION.

The International Labour Office is a wonderful and efficient organization, and to it the workers of the world must look for social justice. The framing of international industrial law sets a standard that nations individually would not adopt, but which economic conditions would still demand. Problems are being created in all countries with the rapid advance of science in its application to industry and agriculture. The world, in an economic sense, is rapidly becoming a single undivided area of exploitation while it remains divided politically. The International Labour Office is tackling these problems and, in initiating industrial legislation based on economic facts, is rendering mankind a service not yet fully appreciated by the trades-unions, employers, and Governments. I believe the day will come when the International Labour Office will have more influence in the cause of peace than the League of Nations. It should be the work of all trades unions to promote a greater interest in this great organization.

I desire to place on record my appreciation of the trades-union organizations responsible for my election to the New Zealand delegation, which was led by the Minister of Labour, the Hon. H. T. Armstrong. His thorough grasp of industrial questions was of great assistance in the work of the Conference, and his advice and sincerity was both valuable to and also made an impression on delegates present. At the conclusion of the debate and vote on the forty-hour week in the textile industry the United States delegates approached and congratulated the New Zealand delegation on the wonderful part played by its Minister and delegates in connection with this important question.

E. J. DASH, Workers' Delegate.

The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, Minister of Labour, Wellington.

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