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COMPULSORY ARBITRATION OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC opinion with regard to the merits of the legal method of adjusting industrial disputes differs vastly in Great Britain and America on the one hand, and Australia and New Zealand on the other. In America especially the principle of compulsory arbitration is scarcely looked upon with favour either by employers or workers. It is true that arbitration to a certain extent is recommended by both sides, yet neither the one nor the other seem willing to forego, in the interests of the general public, the power of forcing a strike or lock-out, as the case may be, by according support to measures embodying this principle. But in the Australasian Colonies the principle of compulsory arbitration is more fully recognized and agreed upon. Perhaps, of all the measures introduced in a Colonial Parliament the most interesting and important, both from the point of view of the student of economics and of the practical politician, is the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of New Zealand. In this age, when labour problems, owing to the strenuousness of modern commercial conditions, are rapidly assuming an importance and a significance which they have attained at no previous period in the world's history, it is deeply interesting to watch the result of an experiment made in a British Colony with a view to the establishment of amicable relations between capital and labour, and the abolition of trade disputes in the shape of strikes and lockouts. It is neither possible, nor desirable, in an article of this description to explain the operation of the law in detail. It is only our intention at present to bring to the notice of our readers a few of the more salient features of the statute in question in the belief that any information upon a matter so important will prove of interest.

The disastrous strike of 1890, which left the industries of New Zealand in a disorganized condition, brought prominently before all classes of the community the urgent need of reform in matters affecting general labour. Naturally enough, bearing in mind the inconvenience and distress caused by former labour disturbances, the people decided that the arbitration of industrial disputes was a subject worthy of deep consideration. It was mainly due to the efforts of the Honourable W. P. Reeves, Minister of Labour, that action took the form of the introduction of the principle of compulsory arbitration. The first measure of this nature was introduced in the Legislature of the Colony by Mr. Reeves in 1892. It was carried in the lower chamber but suffered defeat in the Legislative Council. It was again introduced in 1893 and met a similar fate. The measure was brought down for the third time in 1894, when, the fact being recognized that the people as a rule sanctioned its passage, the opposition in the Council subsided and it duly became law. The Act was amended in 1895, 1896 and 1898, and was consolidated and revised in 1900. The law as revised in 1900 was amended in some particulars in the following year.

The chief features of the law are the provisions relating to industrial unions of workers and employers and to the formation of a Court of Arbitration and Boards of Conciliation, and the power given under the Act to the former to fix a minimum wage in the trades in which disputes arise.

In the first place it will be noticed that the Act does not recognize unorganized labour, and it provides that before workers can take advantage of the law they must be registered as industrial unions. This provision was adopted in order to prevent the working of the Act being jeopardized, as might happen should important privileges be granted to a minority. It was therefore considered advisable to place all on the same footing, and the workers were permitted to form new unions or register under the Act ones already in existence. In the case of employers any two persons, and in the case of workers, any seven can form a union, which, provided certain rules are complied with, may be registered, and then becomes for the purpose of the Act a body corporate. In order to prevent the need-