

eight hour law on all government contracts; but it is a matter of common knowledge that the labour organizations, and especially the Trades and Labour Council, will not stop there. They not only ask an eight hour law on government contracts but, by resolution adopted at the last meeting held in Halifax, they asked that that principle should also be extended to all individual contracts. Suppose we were to adopt an eight hour law in government contracts, that would be at once in conflict with provincial legislation as it stands. We could only pass such legislation as regards government works, because individual contracts come within the definition of civil rights, which are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. But what is the position at present? In my opinion the stand taken by the Labour Department in enforcing what is called 'the fair wages clause, is the most rational that can be taken under the circumstances and under our constitution. According to that clause, in every contract and schedule prepared by the officers of the Department of Labour is inserted the condition that the contractor shall pay the wages and adopt the number of working hours current in the district in which the contract is being executed. So that if in any one of the provinces, for instance in the province of Manitoba, the eight hour law were introduced by the legislature, the Department of Labour would insert in any Dominion contract in that province a schedule compelling the contractor to pay the rates of wages and agree to the working hours current in that province. So that our fair wages clause in all Dominion government contracts would agree with the provincial legislation as regards hours of labour and rates of wages. With the exception of the mines in British Columbia and Alberta where the eight hour system is in force, there is no province which has adopted that system, but there are customs which prevail in one province and another. In some, according to climatic conditions, workmen labour only nine hours per day. In others they work ten and in others eleven. In certain seasons of the year, the men work seven and eight hours and in others nine, ten and eleven hours. So that, by means of our fair wages clause, we can always suit Dominion government contracts to the circumstances existing in the different provinces. Whereas if we were to adopt legislation forcing Dominion contractors to adopt the eight hour system, we would be in conflict with usages and customs which exist in the different provinces. I claim that it is better to continue the present system of a fair wages clause and not to adopt a rule which would create serious industrial disturbances and perhaps industrial conflicts in some portions of the country. Let me give an instance.

I see the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Pugsley) in his place. He knows that dredging work is very common in the several provinces of this young country. We are building up our ports and are especially attracted toward the adoption of a proper scheme of transportation facilities. Now, dredges are being built everywhere; the dredge has become a great instrument of our future prosperity. Take the case of the Polson Iron Works—(I do not know if they are still in existence; I know I visited these works some years ago). We all know that into the construction of a dredge enter many parts, hundreds of parts small and great, and that hundreds of men are employed in the construction of one of these great machines. Suppose that the Minister of Public Works gives a contract to the Polson Iron Works for the construction of a dredge. The Polson works employ several hundred men. In the same factory, in the same shop, you will have ten or twenty shifts of men, some of them working on the several portions of the government dredge, and some of them working on other individual contracts. Will you not cause friction, will you not cause heartburnings, will you not cause, in the long run, serious industrial disturbances, if you have working side by side two shifts of men, one working for eight hours and the other for ten and eleven hours, at the same rate of wages?—for I do not suppose that my hon. friend (Mr. Verville) from the Trades and Labour Council anticipates that the wages will be decreased. Mr. Speaker, there is another consideration: Shall we introduce in this country an eight-hour law and expect to maintain the same rate of wages? I know that the labour unions will say: 'Shorter hours, better men, better skill, better help.' True. But the man who pays will say: 'Shorter hours, less work; less work less pay.' A measure such as the one contemplated by my hon. friend, if enacted, would naturally tend to restrict, and restrict very seriously, the supply of labour. If the prevailing day of ten hours were suddenly reduced to eight, it would be tantamount to cutting off one-fifth of our labour force, so far as our productive capacity is concerned. Estimating our population at 7,000,000, of whom, let us say, 1,000,000 are working people, it would be on a par with a proposal to deport 200,000 of our population. It seems difficult to understand how we can reconcile such a step with the immigration policy of the government which for years has been steadily directed toward getting people on the land.

Now, as regards this question of the rate of wages, although as I stated a moment ago, nothing is said on this point by my hon. friend from Maisonneuve, it goes without saying that one of the principles of organized labour is that the eight-hour day shall carry with it the same rate of wages