

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS IN THE MIDDLE WEST

Royal Commission on Industrial Relations has Now Completed Western Sessions—Views More Moderate Than in British Columbia

AS the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, which is now receiving evidence in Canada, moves eastward the views expressed before it appear to become less radical. British Columbia has, of course, been regarded as a centre for extremist agitation. This is more particularly true of the foreign element, and in lesser degree of the general wage-earning population employed in the mines and in shipping, but a suggestion which was made to the commission on May 1st by Frank W. Macey, a Vancouver architect, can only be called distinctly radical. He stated that a large industrial loan for the development and enrichment of the people should be floated immediately, and that by order-in-council the individual capitalist, the profiteer, the large loans, insurance, bank and industrial companies should be compelled to subscribe largely to this loan. Four per cent., he says, should be allowed, provided the industries so developed were able to earn sufficient profits, but no interest guarantee should be made by the government.

Alberta

Sessions were held in Calgary on May 3rd and 4th. A consideration of the coal industry occupied much of the time. A memorandum presented by the Western Coal Operators' Association recommended that the coal industry in the west should be controlled by an independent board, including one man thoroughly familiar with the problems of the operators and one man with the experience and qualifications necessary to act as chairman. It was pointed out that it is practically impossible to market the coal at the present high costs, owing to the competition from other fields. It was suggested that powers be given to this board similar to those possessed by Mr. Armstrong, war-time director of coal operations for the district. The operators are of the opinion that a joint council of employers and employees could not bring harmony in the industry at the present time because a large proportion of the operators are foreigners.

On May 3rd Mr. W. S. Henderson, representing operators of Drumheller, stated that he believed that nationalization of the coal industry would be worth seriously considering. A representative of the Canadian Pacific Railway telephone operators was in favor of joint control, as it would make for greater efficiency and harmony, and would enable men to learn the value of their own labor.

Mayor Marshall, of Calgary, expressed fear regarding the employment conditions next winter, and urged that Dominion, provincial and local governments should agree upon a common building policy. Regarding the city industries, he said the most conspicuous case of friction was in the street railway, which had resulted from only a part of the employees being members of the union.

Saskatchewan

The investigation in the province of Saskatchewan commenced in Saskatoon on May 6th. According to the evidence presented, there is less employment there than anywhere else so far visited. Various social theories, of course, were presented, but there appeared to be little dissatisfaction with present industrial conditions. Wm. Mill, president of the Local Trades Council, favored production for use, to be achieved gradually. He is not enthusiastic about the Whitley scheme. J. J. McGrath, the representative of the plumbers, was of the same opinion.

In Regina, on May 8th, one of the principal witnesses was Joseph Sambrook, secretary of the Trades and Labor Council. He considered that the Whitley scheme did not give the men sufficient control in management, as they acted merely in a consulting and advisory capacity. The business agents of the regular unions are, he said, in much better position to give such advice. The Rockefeller plan will not be considered, he said, because it insists upon the open shop, and, therefore, organized labor is antagonistic to it. Indus-

trial councils, he said, will contribute nothing toward a solution of the unemployed problems, but, by promoting efficiency and greater production, they will actually tend to aggravate the problem. These works committees, however, might very well serve a useful purpose in enabling workmen to become familiar with operating problems and in training them to qualify for eventual management of industry. The principal cause of present discontent, he said, is the rapid increase in the cost of living during the past few years, and he maintains that business-for-profit can never be satisfactory. The present methods, he thought, are being maintained through a system of publicity and propaganda which cultivates and perpetuates economic ideas which work to the advantage of its political parties and commercial enterprises.

In Moose Jaw, on May 9th, the blame for the evils of the present day was placed upon the federal government. One of the principal witnesses, Mr. James Somerville, representing the Machinists' Union, stated that the want of confidence on the part of the workers was an important factor. Control of industry should be public rather than private, and the joint council, he thought, might help. Thomas J. Oliver, of the Western Canada Interior Association, complained regarding civil servants, and he criticized strongly the Civil Service Commission. George C. Ingram, general manager of the Security Lumber Co., stated that the principal complaint was insufficient remuneration; he thought that the shorter day was curtailing production, but was, on the other hand, adverse to the introduction of cheap labor. Business at the present was above rather than below normal, he said. E. P. Cook, representing the Brotherhood of Railway Tradesmen, dealt with both unemployment and the wage scale in relation to the cost of living. The latter is due in part to the existence of too many middlemen, he said. Two other witnesses pointed to the fact that the supply of farm labor was not equal to the demand.

Manitoba

The Winnipeg session commenced on May 11th, just at a time when the city was being threatened with a general strike to enforce the principle of the closed shop. Mr. J. B. Hugg, K.C., who appeared on behalf of one hundred of the leading manufacturers and employers of the city, described the scheme drawn up by the employers. This scheme proposed joint planning councils for the adjusting of differences and establishing better relations between employer and employee. There would then be the provincial joint councils, including representatives of the government. Finally, there would be a Dominion joint council to deal with wider phases of industry. The government itself could go no further than make an authoritative report, as it could not compel a business man to carry on business at a loss, nor could it force labor to work under unsatisfactory conditions. There was nothing in such a scheme, he said, to prevent organization of labor.

On the afternoon of May 10th a radical witness appeared before the commission in the person of Mr. William Ivens. He advocated a parliament of workers, nationalization of all essential industries, a democratic judiciary and abolition of profits. He maintains that labor can be the only satisfactory basis of exchange. He maintained that the commission was not coming into sufficiently close touch with the actual life of the wage-earners in making its investigation. The chairman, Mr. Justice Mathers, admitted that this is the feeling of the members, but that their time is limited, as the government wants the report before the present session of parliament adjourns. In reply to a criticism by the witness that the commission was appointed by a government hostile to labor, the chairman pointed out that there were three representatives of labor among the members. The wage system, he said, has failed, and referred to the difficulty in the building trades in Winnipeg, where reasonable demands of the workmen could not be met without practically eliminating the industry. He was in favor of nationalization of all the essential industries, and in the substitution of labor in place of gold as a medium of exchange.