

DOMINION INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

THE Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, which was appointed some weeks ago by the Dominion government, has now completed its sittings in important cities throughout Canada, and the report is expected shortly. The field was limited to the relation of employer and employee, and what is looked for is some constructive solution of the difficulties which continually arise regarding wages and the hours and conditions of work. The commission was under the chairmanship of Justice Mathers, of Manitoba, and included representatives of labor and of capital.

The members of the commission had an unparalleled opportunity to secure suggestions as to the methods of avoiding the difficulties, and representatives of some of the largest firms in Canada and of some of the leading labor organizations gave evidence before it. The members, however, could not fail to be impressed with the fact that the evidence was of a very conflicting nature, and the same thing is apparent to anyone who has followed the reports. It was conflicting, both as to the cause of the peculiar difficulties of the present time and as to possible solutions. Two or three points stand forth, however, as being generally accepted throughout the Dominion. In the first place, labor unions have taken an aggressive stand for substantial shorter hours of work and indefinitely increasing remuneration and other reforms in the way of insurance against unemployment and old-age pensions. The view is unfortunately prevalent in some quarters that there is no limit to measures of this kind, apart from the opposition of employers. Such is not the case in fact, as there is only the amount produced available for distribution, and any tendency to forcibly reduce the return on capital will prevent further investments, and will drive away such capital already invested as can be easily transferred.

A second conclusion which may be drawn from the evidence is that it is ignorance of actual conditions which has caused a large part of the difficulty. The undue publicity given to certain cases of large profits, for instance, has not been offset by a proper setting forth of the large number of industries which have not been successful, and also of the number which have secured no more than reasonable returns. The report of the Cost of Living Department on the milling industry is an instance of this kind. Here it was found that a price sufficiently high to maintain an adequate volume of production enabled certain manufacturers operating under unusually favorable conditions to obtain large profits. The only way to make such enterprises contribute a portion of their gains for the public welfare is by taxation, and even here some reward must be left for success.

The necessity for provision for depreciation is also not sufficiently realized. In most industries at the present time there is always the possibility that some equipment may have to be scrapped at any time, and proper reserves for this purpose are essential. In addition to provision for the ordinary wearing out of equipment, the unusually high prices prevailing have also made it necessary that reserves be set aside to counterbalance probable losses on materials in hand.

While many radical views were expressed, there was no general support of revolutionary activity. Property-owners still constitute too large a portion of the Canadian population to permit of the success of activities of this kind. The results of the general strike in Winnipeg, which is now practically disorganized, illustrate this, and the other sympathetic strikes declared in western cities have failed.

COMPULSORY HEALTH INSURANCE OPPOSED

THE agitation for a system of state and provincial health insurance which has emanated largely from organizations interested in public health, is meeting with strong opposition from several quarters. At a recent meeting in New York of the Social Insurance Department of the National Civic Federation, the president, Mr. Warren S. Stone, stated that labor organizations were opposed to it. Mr. Stone is Grand Chief of the International Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The reasons attributed are the system of espionage that accompanies it, compulsory medical examinations, and lack of freedom in choosing physicians. He expressed the belief that such a system would destroy the initiative of the industrial worker, which is so necessary to successful development.

Among the alternative suggestions for consideration made at the above meeting were: the prevention of unnecessary illness through education of the public concerning health matters, through the assistance of ministers, employers, government agencies, public health nurses and moving pictures; securing an actual record of absenteeism due to sickness as a basis of correct estimates upon cost of health insurance; providing for payment of wages or financial benefits during illness, better medical care, greater efficiency in state health departments; improving and developing all voluntary methods of insurance including trade union funds, fraternal, employers' establishment funds and those of industrial insurance companies; creation of health schools throughout the union, whereby health officers and others might receive instruction upon public health matters.

Attention was called to the failure of the system of compulsory insurance in England and Germany and the Federation was urged to send a second commission to England, representative of all American elements concerned, to bring back facts for the information of legislators and employers now confused by misleading propaganda disseminated by the group of social reformers which has undertaken to promote compulsory health legislation.

Exception was taken to the statement widely circulated that sickness is one cause of poverty. It was urged that the problem is economic and that the workman should be put upon his own feet and permitted to purchase his medical attendance in his own American way. In support of this contention, while agreeing with the idea that the period of illness is the one when the worker needs the most and receives the least financially, the result of a first hand investigation in England was cited to show the utter fallacy of collective or group medical service, and that in England it is a sham and disgrace, thus proving the necessity of keeping in this country individual relations between the doctor and the patient.

It was pointed out that the campaign for health insurance in New York State, Ohio and elsewhere is built upon gross misstatements of fact and delusions; also that to put compulsory sickness insurance and practically pauper medical service upon the American workingman will cause universal dissatisfaction and injure the public health. The representatives of labor emphatically claimed that the only way is to have sickness insurance voluntary in every respect and that no workman should be forced into such an association.

It is possible that the Lacombe and Blindman Valley Railway of Alberta will be sold to the Canadian Pacific.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION

The construction of new lines to a length of about 340 miles has been announced by the Canadian National Railways. The new lines are mostly in Saskatchewan and consist principally of the following:—

The Amaranth extension, 35 miles, on the west side of Lake Manitoba; Melfort, northeasterly line, 30 miles, in Saskatchewan; Humbolt-Melfort line, Saskatchewan, 32

miles; Eslin, southeasterly, 35 miles, in the Lake country, Sask.; Oliver-St. Paul de Metis, 22 miles, Alberta; Peebles, southerly towards Lampman, Sask., 20 miles; Hanna-Medicine Hat, Alta., 72 miles; Acadia Valley line, 25 miles, from a point a little southeast of Alsask, Sask., running westerly into Alberta; Swift Current extension, 27 miles; Duck Lake extension, Sask., southwest from Dumblane, 22 miles; Turtleford extension, 2 miles. This is the extension of the line North Battleford to Turtleford.