

U.S. HAS COMPENSATION LAWS IN THIRTY STATES NOW THEATRES ARE EFFICIENTLY PROTECTED BY FIRE BUREAU

Review of Legislative Acts Passed Recently Shows Growth of Movement Toward Safeguarding Workmen.

To the list of twenty-two States in which workmen's compensation laws were already in effect, eight more States and the Territory of Alaska have this year added by the action of their legislatures during sessions which have just come to a close. This growth of the movement toward safeguarding the welfare of the laborer and his dependents is revealed in the summary of this year's legislative activities, which has been compiled by the Associated Press. The summary also shows progress in the abolishment of child labor and in the direction of limiting the working hours of minors.

The additional States to adopt workmen's compensation are Wyoming, Montana, Oklahoma, Colorado, Maine, Indiana, Vermont and Pennsylvania. Favorable action toward the enactment of such a measure was taken by the Legislature of Utah, which created a commission to investigate the question and report on it for the consideration of the next legislature. In the State which considered the matter, New Mexico, the proposed workmen's compensation law passed the House, but was defeated in the Senate. In Idaho the bill was vetoed by the Governor. Several other States revised their former laws in order to insure more efficient operation.

Somewhat different standards as to the way in which compensation should be awarded and the law administered are shown in the measures enacted this year, but this lack of uniformity is also a feature of various laws previously passed in other States. For instance, under the new Colorado statute injured workmen will receive 50 per cent. of their wages during incapacity through no fault of their own. In case of total permanent disability the compensation is payable through life. When death results from accident the worker's family is to receive a similar amount for six years with a maximum of \$2,500. In case of loss of eyes, hands, limbs or other members similar payments are to be made for a specified period, varying from a few weeks to four years, dependent upon the nature of the injury.

Employers are required to insure payment either in State insurance fund to be created or a mutual or stock insurance company. Administration is placed in the hands of an industrial commission of three members who shall adjust disputes and with authority to make awards if employers or insurance companies neglect to make payments promptly. Court proceedings are thereby practically eliminated.

The Maine law, however, awards the injured workman payment by the employer of not more than \$10 a week in case of total disability with a maximum of \$100. In case of death the family receive the same and the scale of payments for those partially disabled ranges from \$4 to \$10 a week.

Pennsylvania provided for the payment of 50 per cent. of wages, but not more than \$10 or less than \$5, with a maximum total of \$4,000. The act is elective and takes away from the employers the common law defense, but the people will vote in November on a constitutional amendment permitting the Legislature to make it compulsory. The act creates a State insurance fund, but employers are permitted to protect themselves in any other form of insurance or carry their own risks on approval of the Bureau of Workmen's Compensation, which will administer the law. Domestic and agricultural laborers are exempt.

The Indiana law provides no State insurance, but permits the employer to seek it where he chooses, or not at all, if he gives proof of his financial ability to pay the compensation. This is fixed at 55 per cent. of the average wage not to exceed 500 weeks, and in case of death, burial expenses to the defendant not to exceed \$100 and 55 per cent. of the weekly wages for 500 weeks. Domestic servants and agricultural laborers are exempt, and those engaged in interstate commerce. The law is elective with both employer and employee, and is administered by a State industrial commission.

Fifty per cent. weekly wage not to exceed 500 weeks is the basis of the Oklahoma law.

Alaska adopted an eight hour law for place miners and pensioned her aged and indigent prospectors.

Very few theatregoers know the numerous precautions taken by the fire department to see that theatres are properly protected. Behind the scenes of every theatre is installed an adequate sprinkler equipment over the stage and dressing rooms. The sprinkler heads would automatically open in case of fire and throw water in a quantity sufficient, except under very unusual circumstances, to extinguish the fire. In addition to this, there are many auxiliary fire appliances, hose lines, extinguishers, fire buckets, etc. In the basement of every theatre is a pumping device which begins to work automatically the instant any of the standpipe connections running through the theatre are opened. This pump is really a stationary fire engine capable of throwing not less than 250 gallons of water a minute. It continues throwing water at great pressure so long as the hose valve is open. This pump is operated by electrical control and responds instantly and unfailingly whenever the pipes are opened.

Independent of the powerful pump in the basement there is on the roof of each theatre a tank containing not less than 3,500 gallons of water. Should the water in this tank fall below a certain level an indicator rings. In this case the pump usually begins to work automatically and fills the tank to the required level.

On each side of the stage high solid brick walls run from the basement of the theatre up to 4 feet above the level of the roof, entirely cutting off the stage from the audience with the exception of the space occupied by the curtain. In the event of fire the asbestos curtain drops down and closes this opening, forming a complete wall to prevent the fire from reaching the audience. The asbestos curtain may be dropped instantly by the cutting of thin cords at the side of the curtain. Knives for cutting these cords are always in place.

Through the solid brick wall that extends from the basement to the roof various apertures must be cut in different places for the passage of people back and forth, though no door can be cut in the proscenium wall above the stage level. Every door in these apertures is a "fire door." It is usually made of wood, covered with tin, lock-jointed so as to prevent fire from passing through it. These doors are kept in position by counter-balanced weights. A mechanism known as a "fusible link" is attached to the chains holding the doors in position. This link will melt when exposed to 165 degrees of heat. In melting it releases weights which close the doors automatically.

Over the stage of each theatre is a skylight so arranged that it will open automatically when fire occurs. This lets out the heat and smoke and draws the fire up and out of the theatre, away from the audience. The cutting of a single cord, or its burning away by the fire itself, or the melting of a "fusible link" opens the skylight and thus allows the free passage of air, smoke and flames.

Each theatre has special fire alarm boxes connected directly with fire headquarters. Any alarm sent from a theatre is sure to be responded to in a few seconds.

Exit doors in theatres are required to be kept unlocked or to be equipped with an ingenious device called a "panic bolt," which opens the door should any one on the inside fall against it. This bolt is connected to a long bar running across the door. The panic bolt yields to the least pressure from within.

To every performance in every theatre where there is a stage and scenery is used the fire department sends a uniformed fireman. He must reach the theatre one-half hour before the performance begins and must make a complete inspection of the entire building. He must open and shut all exits, try all fire doors, examine the asbestos curtain with rope attachments, skylights and extinguishers and make a general survey of all the protective devices. He must make at least three tours of the building during the performance and see to it that halls and exits are not blocked by stowaways.

Greater New York has 200 theatres and 951 moving picture houses, with a combined seating capacity of 712,684. In addition to these places there are in all boroughs 791 dance halls, with a combined capacity of 164,058.

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Clause 8 allows any company transacting life assurance to obtain repayment of so much of the tax paid by it on the interest income as is equal to the

amount diverted from their foreign investments reinvested by them outside this realm, writes a correspondent of the Economist, the greatest investors of all, the life assurance companies, have been compelled to consider their position as to the incidence of the tax. To many private investors in foreign securities the order to bring such reinvested income into tax is a mere brutum fulmen. A millionaire deriving his income from American gold bonds can pay his London bills by cheques on New York or Paris or Rome without a single official at Somerset House becoming aware that he has one farthing invested out of the jurisdiction. But life assurance companies are always ready and willing to make a full return; indeed, they cannot escape the obligation in view of the annual returns which they are compelled to make to the Board of Trade.

In round figures, about one-half of the interest income of these companies is derived from foreign investments. Until recently all this income, if reinvested abroad, as it was, escaped income-tax in view of the House of Lords' decision in Gresham Life Assurance Society vs. Bishop. Whilst this state of things existed the companies transacting purely life assurance business were content to allow the tax on their investments in the United Kingdom to be deducted at the source. The composite companies, however, ascertained and paid tax on the profits and gains of their life departments, and apparently Somerset House raised no objection to this obvious course. Mr. Lloyd George's Budget speech intimated that all were to be put on the same level, but did not explain how it was proposed to remedy the inequality, and details have only just become available. The new Finance (No. 2) Bill certainly puts all on the same basis, but does so by abolishing altogether any question of ascertaining the real profits of life insurance and fixing on all life offices the permanent taxation of the whole of their interest income as if interest income in a life office were profit.

Should Restrain Exchequer.

There is no doubt that the true course of the Life Insurance Association and of the Associated Scottish Life Offices would have been to have obtained the highest judicial decision with the object of restraining the Exchequer from levying taxation upon them other than on the amount of their profits and gains. This would have been the easier to attain in view of the fact that the composite companies had been so assessed. But litigation is a costly process, and it was felt that the case of the companies was so clear and so reasonable that a few interviews with Mr. Lloyd George and the Somerset House officials would necessarily bring the Treasury round to the managerial view. Income-tax under Schedule D is a tax on profits and gains. No one could pretend that the interest income of a life office is either a profit or a gain, seeing that in most cases at least 3 per cent. is required to be earned in order that the business may be carried on and claims settled in due course. These interviews were friendly, but the officials were adamant, and their only reply to the argument that the composite offices are taxed on a legitimate basis was that these also would in future be taxed on the same basis as the life offices, so as to avoid any further complaint of undue preference.

Clause 5 of the new Bill is the first which affects the point under discussion. It places composite companies in line with pure life offices and treats the interest income as a "gain," which is the very question that has been at issue, and should be fully threshed out in the House of Commons if time can be found for discussion.

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