

Legal Protection For Agricultural Workers.

(By Dr. di Palma Castiglione, International Labor Office.)

In the course of the sitting of the International Labor Legislation Commission of the Peace Conference, the wish was repeatedly expressed that the Permanent Organization of Labor should extend its action so as to embrace agricultural laborers.

Moreover, the commission approved a declaration that the general principles of labor legislation enunciated in the second part of its proposals (Article 437 of the Peace Treaty) should be made to apply equally to agricultural laborers.

In the course of its sitting of the 25th November, 1919, the International Labor Conference, then meeting at Washington, discussed the following motion:

At last, at the Paris sitting of January 28, 1920, of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, the Italian Government delegate, Baron Mayor de Pisanche, introduced that the question of the protection of agricultural laborers should be included in the agenda for the next meeting of the conference.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNING BODY.

The governing body has now to decide:

(a) If the question is to appear on the agenda for the meeting of 1921.

(b) In what shape and with what scope it shall be brought up for discussion.

(A)

1. It hardly seems doubtful that the adoption of protective laws with regard to agricultural laborers will be an effectual means of bringing to an end, or at any rate of decreasing, the exodus of the country-people from the country to the towns, a tendency which has become alarmingly pronounced, especially during the war.

Moreover, legislative measures in favor of the agricultural worker should tend to increase production.

2. The protection of agricultural laborers concerns both industrial workers and land-owners: the former because it tends to diminish the competition arising out of the continual migration from the country to the towns; the latter because it allows them to make sure of having the necessary labour.

In almost every country today there are complaints as to the ever-increasing difficulty of finding agricultural laborers. The most effectual remedy is to raise the economic and social status of the agricultural-laborer as much as possible to the level of that of the industrial worker.

To the land-owners the cost of the protection of the laborers who work their land stands for a premium of insurance against the risk of finding themselves without the necessary labor.

3. Finally, the fact must not be lost sight of that in several countries an interesting trade union movement has grown up amongst agricultural laborers, and has already brought

establish a sanitary inspection service, devoted exclusively to the maintenance of the dwellings and work places of agricultural laborers in a hygienic condition.

(b) In the respect of protection against accidents, illness, disability and old age, the condition of the agricultural laborer is identical with that of the industrial worker.

(c) A draft-convention by which the members who have already a system of insurance against accidents, illness, disability and old age with regard to industrial workers should undertake to extend the benefit of these measures to agricultural wage-earners; and

(d) A recommendation to the effect that such members should be called upon to extend the scope of this insurance system to embrace small-holders, farmers and "metayers" who work their own land without hiring laborers, or who hire no more than two laborers at the maximum.

Special measures which could be taken in favor of agricultural wage-earners.

1. A guarantee to agricultural laborers of the right to form unions and to strike, and the right of personal liberty.

In many countries up to quite recently the agricultural workers had not the right to form unions. In Germany the Prussian law of 1854 by which agricultural laborers who formed a union with a view to strike could be condemned to a year's imprisonment was only repealed on January 30, 1919; similar laws existed in other states of the German Empire.

In other countries there is no law limiting the insertion of clauses in agricultural laborers' contracts restricting the personal liberty of the laborer.

In England there are wide-spread complaints that the entire lack of regulations concerning the "tied cottage" system limits the liberty of the wage-earner.

At present time the employer gives his employees the use of dwellings belonging to him, sometimes rent-free, sometimes in return for rent, and he is entirely free to turn them out when he chooses—save in certain cases when he is bound to give them a mere week's notice.

The English Unions of agricultural workers demand a law by which every time an employer wishes to recover the use of a dwelling occupied by one of his laborers he shall be bound to give the latter three months' notice to quit.

From the above it seems desirable that the conference should propose to the members in the form of a draft-convention that they should formally undertake to guarantee full and entire personal liberty, liberty to form unions and the right to strike, to the agricultural wage-earners, by repealing or altering all the provisions in laws tending at the present time to hinder this.

A decision of this nature would explicitly strengthen the second general principle set forth in Article 437 of the Peace Treaty.

2. Regulation of Working Hours for Agricultural Wage-earners.

For some time the unions of agricultural wage-earners have been carrying on an active propaganda to obtain such regulations. Many countries (the Czechoslovak republic, Germany, and Italy) have already taken steps in this matter.

In consideration of the special exigencies of agricultural work (and the peculiar natural conditions which govern it, and in consideration also of the variety of work it comprises (ploughing, stock-rearing, etc.) it does not seem wise to propose a measure to the Council that would fix a definite working period for agriculture which could never be exceeded.

On the other hand it appears

right that consideration should be given to the possibility of fixing the normal duration of the agricultural working week according to the different seasons, allowing that laborers may be called upon to do extra hours of work, but stating that these hours must be paid at a higher rate than that paid for the hours comprised in what is declared to form the normal working week.

3. Establishment of Courts of Agricultural Experts.

The establishment of courts of agricultural experts is of ever-increasing necessity, owing to the number of disputes between employers and land-workers in every part where a large agricultural proletariat is in existence, and owing to the fact that the contracts for agricultural labor and agriculture itself have an ever-increasing tendency to specialization.

The Conference should be asked to consider whether a recommendation could be approved that would call upon the members to institute courts of agricultural experts composed of an equal number of employers and laborers, and presided over by a local magistrate.

4. Measures to be Taken to Promote and Reduce Unemployment.

The decisions taken at Washington on the question of unemployment, including those engaged in agricultural pursuits.

Nevertheless, the agricultural laborers in almost all countries are not provided for special measures to prevent unemployment, showing that they are situated differently from the industrial workers.

They insist chiefly that they should be given facilities for buying small holdings, and that encouragement should be given to the co-operative agricultural associations which aim at buying or renting land for cultivation.

They demand also that the State should dispose of the owners of land which is uncultivated or insufficiently cultivated.

It would be desirable to consider a Recommendation concerning the facilities to be granted for the establishment of small-holdings and co-operative agricultural associations for the purchase or renting of land.

5. Measures to be Taken to Protect Women and Children Employed in Agriculture.

1. At the next meeting of the Conference a proposal could be brought in to the effect that the Members should be called upon to regulate the employment of children in agriculture, taking into account the exigencies of their education.

2. So as to protect children employed in agriculture, the Conference could consider a Recommendation to the effect that the Members should be called upon to regulate the employment of children in agriculture, taking into account the exigencies of their education.

3. A permanent league secretariat will be established at Geneva as soon as possible.

4. An international finance conference will meet at Brussels, September 24.

5. The Allies are to be asked to designate the manufacturing or the former German colonies after which a permanent commission will be organized to supervise execution of mandates.

6. Organization of a naval and aerial consulting commission was announced. It has already taken up prohibition of use of gas in war.

7. The appeal to the league by the Government of the Hedjaz was replied to with the message that Syria is not under league jurisdiction because it is a province of Turkey and is still waging war.

Dr. Nansen's report was heard, expressing hope that most of the 200,000 held prisoner in Siberia and the 100,000 Germans held prisoner in Russia will be repatriated before winter.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE GOING ROUND AND ROUND.

In the course of a notable address Sunday afternoon in Pinetore Park, St. Thomas, at a sacred concert in connection with the Michigan Central railroad employees' annual excursion, James Murdock, vice-president of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and late member of the Dominion Board of Commerce, made some caustic remarks concerning the business men of the nation, in commenting upon the recent wage increase granted by the special Compensation Board, or Tribunal, of the railway men in the United States which amounted to approximately \$1 a day or \$30 a month.

While the public in general were of the opinion that the award was liberal, Mr. Murdock took a different view. If the award were received by the railway men without attendant increases in other lines of business men, but, in his opinion, it only assisted in keeping going the endless cycle of increase in the high cost of living. It merely meant that for the \$12 the increased remuneration he received the railroad man was going to be asked \$22 more a month to live, so that in the end the real state of the railway man will be that he is poorer than he was before the award was made.

BRITISH LABOR PARTY HAS BECOME A GREAT POWER.

During the course of an address before the Canadian Labor Press in Ottawa on Saturday last, Mr. Robert Donald, editor of the Yorkshire Observer and one of the leading delegates to the Imperial Peace Conference, said that in addition to all the problems of Empire the British Government is now faced with more than a share of the legacy of the war. In Britain itself the Labor party has become a great power and the view of many of its most brilliant men was that the Government had attempted to do too much. Britain should have left Russia alone. The most advanced labor leaders had gone there and had returned denouncing Bolshevism as more autocratic than czarism. The situation in Europe was more serious than before the war and there was a race and class hatred in the European nations which threatened grave trouble. The war had resulted in the abolition of Austria-Hungary but had set up in its place four or five nations which had practically gone mad with their new independence. In most cases they would be more impeded or expelled by the majority of the people were officials and others had no opportunity of working.

MINERS PLAN STEPS TO PREVENT WARS

International Congress of Miners Meets at Geneva.

The twenty-fifth International Congress of miners' delegates from America, Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Holland and Czechoslovakia was held at Geneva, Switzerland, last week.

Mr. Smille, of the British Miners' Federation, presided, and, in his address, said he hoped that the press of some countries which expected the congress to break up without having accomplished much would be disappointed. He trusted that the congress would be one of reconciliation and not of rearmament.

The miners' twenty-fourth congress was held in 1913 at Karlsruhe and during those 24 years of work, the miners of Europe and America had been eliminating bitterness and uniting in comradeship. Their ideals were not satisfied merely with a shortening of hours and the securing of minimum wages, for decent living and legislation for the safety of miners. The federation had discovered that more was necessary and it aimed at freedom from papal influence and work for nations—not for individuals. This will become an international aim as it is already in separate nations.

Mr. Smille said that the time will come when some definite steps must be taken to prevent a threatened world crisis. He trusted that all workers in different nations should cease work until the nations agreed to settle their quarrels by arbitration.

Mr. Smille and Mr. Ashton in Brussels in 1914 tried to call such a congress, but their telegrams failed to reach their destinations. It was the International Socialist Congress, now meeting, a lesson in solidarity. He announced that Mr. Frank Hodges introduced the subject, and representatives of Germany, France, Belgium, Holland and Austria spoke. Reports of strikes, bores and conditions of working in different countries were also submitted.

BRITISH FARM LABORERS REMOVE SLEEP FROM THEIR EYES.

F. E. Faulkner, organizer for Gloucestershire of the Agricultural Laborers' Union, of Great Britain, in the course of an address, said that in the past the agricultural laborer was always looked upon as the bottom dog, but when they remembered that it was they who were the first to organize in Marlborough and district, they ought to feel proud of the local branch of the union.

The fact that the union now had a membership of 200,000 showed that they had removed the sleep from their eyes and that they were

Hodges said that the emancipation of the miners from the capitalists is the main purpose of the Miners' International Federation. Albert Thomas, the French Minister of Labor and secretary of the Labor Bureau of the League of Nations in Geneva, was invited to the congress and asked to speak. He said that his bureau aims to keep in touch with the syndicates of workers in the different movements. The problems discussed at the miners' congress are of the utmost importance to civilization and his office.

The French and Belgian delegates endorsed Mr. Smille's policy, of reconciliation and not of rearmament but insisted on a settlement during the congress of means of making war impossible. Mr. Smille proposed a strike of the international miners when war threatened, and Mr. Hise proposed that this be referred to a committee before voting, as it would have immediate consequences on account of Poland being at war and France and Germany apparently at the eve of a conflict.

On Tuesday the subject of the nationalization of mines was dealt with and following the resolution unanimously passed: "This congress is of the opinion that each country should definitely strive for the nationalization of mines in every country, for the overthrow of capitalist ownership and the establishment of the control and administration of the industry, jointly with representatives of the consuming public."

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determined not to return to those horrible days of 1919, when agricultural workers were only getting about 12s 6d a week. They did not want a wage that meant a mere hand-to-mouth existence, but a wage that would enable them to give their children a good education in order that they might grow up to be useful citizens, and not merely the wage-slaves of an idle and parasitic class.

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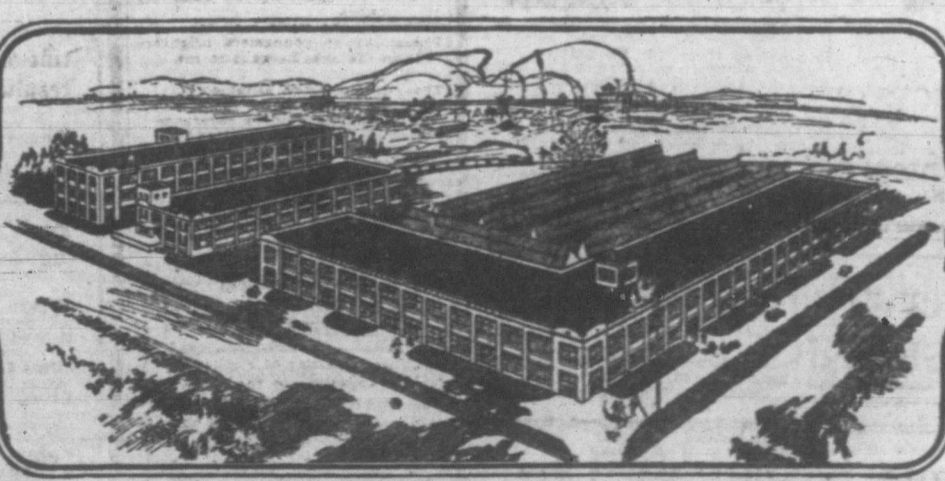


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