

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

TUESDAY, June 1, 1926.

The Select Standing Committee on Industrial and International Relations met at 11 a.m., the Chairman, Mr. McIntosh, presiding.

JOHN WALKER MACMILLAN, Chairman, Ontario Minimum Wage Board, called and sworn.

THE WITNESS: Mr. Chairman, and hon. gentlemen, I have here the minutes of evidence of one of your sessions in which Mr. Gerald Brown gave a sketch of the situation throughout the world generally, in respect to minimum wage legislation, so I need say nothing about that.

The driving force of minimum wage legislation is merely the principle of the assertion of the preciousness of human life, its popularity and its strength. Since 1894 when, as a practical plan, it was suggested in New England, it has spread with rapidity over practically the whole world of western civilization. Its driving force has not been that it is a wise economic expedient, or anything of that sort, but that within the realm of industry, it has asserted the right to live. The essential principle of the minimum wage is the same as the essential principle, for instance, of the law against murder, which is based, of course, upon the preciousness of human life. At bottom, the minimum wage does not ask how profitable an industry is, although in practical administration that has to be considered, nor does it ask how effective the protection of the worker is, but again in practical administration that has to be thought of. It asserts the right of a person to live, and where one gives his time and strength in certain employment, to then demand that that employment shall return to him at least enough to provide for his necessary human wants; that he shall have enough to eat, enough to wear, sufficient shelter, and such modest comforts and conveniences as are accepted by the society in which he lives, as being necessary to wholesome subsistence.

Mr. Chairman, I have, during seven years, now and more, been active in this work. I was Chairman of the Board in Manitoba for two years, and I have been Chairman of the Board in Ontario for five years and a half.

*By the Chairman:*

Q. What years were you in Manitoba?—A. 1917 to 1919. We began there. We began in Ontario in 1920. We have in both places followed the plan of consulting employers and employees; we have in both these places covered employers' association wherever we found them, and we have found a great many where there were no organized associations of employers, and we have there done our best to select representative employers. We have over forty orders issued in Ontario. The number was less than that in Manitoba, but it was a considerable number, and I wish to state to the committee that I have not heard in any one of these consultations with employers or employees, this principle challenged. Universally, employers have told us that they do not want workers to work for them unless they pay them enough to live on. So, I would like to make it plain in the beginning of my remarks here, that the very convincing appeal which the Minimum Wage principle makes to the world, is of this nature; it is the assertion of the preciousness—or if you prefer, sacredness; the supreme sacredness of human life,—the right of the worker to live from his work.

[Dr. J. W. MacMillan.]