

Report of Commission on Industrial Relations

Investigators favor Complete Co-operation between Employer and Employee, with Industrial Councils settling conditions of employment in all industries.

The Dominion Commission on Industrial Relations, after holding sessions from Victoria to Montreal, reported to the Dominion House on July 1st. The Commission was composed of Judge Mathers, Senator Smeaton White, C. H. Harrison, Carl Riordon, Thomas Moore, John W. Bruce, and Frank Pauze. Senator White and Mr. Pauze did not sign the report, but turned in a minority opinion.

The majority report is well considered and is deserving of the thoughtful consideration of all interests concerned.

Workers are diligently studying economic questions, and while some of the literature they read may be unsound, or lack mental training of some workers may prevent their thorough understanding of it, the commissioners are convinced that the good sense and sound judgment of the majority enable them to discriminate, and hence extreme doctrines have been accepted only by a minority.

Unrest was found to be greatest where there was most unemployment, which was found in several large urban centres, though there is little in smaller towns and rural districts, in spite of the number of discharged soldiers and munition workers released. In some manufacturing centres such as Kitchener, Ontario, there was an actual scarcity of labor. Returned soldiers have to a large extent been reabsorbed into civil life, generally in their old positions. The scarcity of farm help is very pronounced. The commission work through lack of opportunity, sickness, invalidity or old age.

Owing to unsettled conditions, the commission found everywhere a great reluctance to risk unemployed capital in new enterprises or the expansion of existing ones. The high cost of living was assigned as one, if not the chief cause of labor unrest, which would largely disappear if living expenses more nearly balanced wages. At present any advance in wages is invariably met by increases in price of prime necessities of life which many people believe is due to profiteering, chiefly through cold storage plants, which intercept food supplies. They also blame the present expensive system of distribution, and declare there are too many middlemen. The commission notes with pleasure that this matter is being investigated by a special committee of parliament.

The commission approves of the labor declaration in the peace treaty, that "labor should not be regarded merely as a commodity or as an article of commerce." If this basic principle, the report continues, were freely and frankly acknowledged by employers, and acted on in good faith, it would go far to improve their relations with employees. Without any extraordinary upheaval, policies may be adopted which will ensure to the worker a fairer reward for his toil and a living wage, and insure him against want during temporary enforced idleness, from any cause, and during old age. The minimum wage law now administered by boards in Manitoba, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Quebec should be extended to all the provinces, and should cover unskilled labor as well as women and girls.

The commission believes that a shorter day is most needed in industries that are fatiguing, monotonous or under trying conditions such as heat, dust, cramped position, etc., and that the number of work hours should be based scientifically upon the demands of industry, and not upon mere ability to work such hours without undue fatigue. The eight-hour day has been recognized by the peace treaty and already adopted in many industries in Canada. The commission recommends that it be established by law throughout Canada with due regard for above considera-

tions. Such legislation should provide for a weekly rest of at least 24 hours, which should include Sunday whenever possible, and should not interfere where a shorter day is now worked, or with its extension.

The commission believe the day has passed when an employer should deny his employees the right to organize—a right claimed by employers themselves and not denied by workers. Employers gain nothing by opposition, because employees organize anyway, and refusal only leaves in their minds a rankling sense of injustice. The prudent employer will recognize such organization and deal with its duly accredited representatives. Distrust and lack of confidence have been sometimes caused because trade agreements have not been faithfully observed; charges were made on both sides to this effect. In some sections, also, local trades unions' representatives have advocated extreme measures—such men and measures being the logical outcome of unjustifiable opposition by some employers, and the sympathetic strike principle has been adopted because of the refusal of groups of employers to grant the claims of organized workers. These factors have been assigned as the chief causes of the non-observance of contracts entered into by workers in numerous cases, especially in western Canada. This policy is not recognized by the international trade unions, who believe in strict observance of agreements. It cannot be denied that trade unions generally have brought many solid advantages to workers in the form of increased wages, shorter hours and improved conditions. When employees have a central organization, a bargain between the two groups would have the advantage, from the point of view of competition, of equalizing wages, hours and other conditions affecting costs.

The commission defines collective bargaining as the right of workers to group themselves for the purpose of selling their labor power collectively, instead of making individual agreements with the employer. For this purpose men have organized themselves into trade unions, and many of these are federated into central councils such as the Metal Trades Council, etc. Employers, in like manner, sometimes control one factory, sometimes a chain of factories, and in some instances are organized into larger associations of their industry, which again sometimes become part of federations, with local branches, such as the National Association of Building Contractors and Supplymen. Collective bargaining is negotiating for and reaching an agreement between employers or groups of employers, and employees or groups of employees, through the representatives chosen by the respective parties themselves. In the case of larger organizations of workers—for example, where a building contractor employed 19 different classes of tradesmen, all organized into different trade unions—it has been found mutually satisfactory for workers to combine their demands and present them to the employer through the medium of a building-trade federation, and thus settle at one time the conditions for the entire industry.

Many trade unions keep in their employment trained men for the purpose of negotiating their different schedules. As the employer has the right to select any representative or bring in any assistance he may desire in carrying on such negotiations, the commission think there is no logical reason why workers should be denied such right. The employer is justified in knowing that the schedule is presented to him with the concurrence of a fair proportion of his employees, but it does not matter whether it is put before him directly by a committee of his employees, or by a direct representative of the trade union to which they belong, or through the committee of a federation of trade unions, of which their publication forms a part. Entering into agreements and bargaining collectively with trade unions does not mean recognition of the "closed shop" un-