

BRITISH DOCKERS' AWARD

An Interview With Ernest Bevin, "the Dockers' K.C."

The National Council of Port Labor Employers and the National Transport Workers' Federation of Great Britain, having failed to come to a settlement regarding the claims made by the federation on behalf of British dock workers generally on the subject of standard minimum wages and other conditions of employment, the Ministry of Labor was requested to constitute a Court of Inquiry into the whole matter. The Court of Inquiry was duly appointed by the Minister of Labor on January 22 last, and after sitting for 2 complete months, issued its award early this month.

Benefit of Public Inquiry. Bevin is sure that the new method of investigating the arbitration conditions and the demands of the workers in a particular industry by means of a public inquiry has advantages. "In having a public inquiry," he said, "the men and the employers themselves come to understand the difficulties which are bound to be present in all negotiations for wage advances and alterations in the conditions of employment. They realize much more easily what those who are concerned with the conditions are doing for them, and when those negotiations are carried on openly, than when they take place behind closed doors. They begin to appreciate the troubles of their leaders, and there is far less talk of those leaders having given the best of the men away to the employers, and nonsense of that kind, which can always be suggested when proceedings are private. There is the consent of the men to the award given to the court at each sitting is reported the following day. It is given in sufficiently easy stages for the concerned to assimilate the facts presented."

"How have you found the inquiry received by the dock workers from their side?" he was asked. "I have been about a good deal while the court was not sitting. Very well indeed. The men have thoroughly appreciated what we have done at the inquiry. Here is another point where publicity has been of advantage. On other occasions when I have been enquiring the merits of behind closed doors, I have had no more difficult cases, sometimes not so difficult, but when it has come to the award, or an agreement has been arrived at, the job has been to explain everything to the men afterwards. We have had to spend a lot of time explaining the merits of what has been secured, often with the knowledge that the men were not always satisfied that the best had been done for them, or that they were not pleased at the result of the inquiry, and though the strain upon him during the two months has been considerable, one can stand a lot of it when the result is one which fully justifies all the effort that has been made."

Publicity vs. Closed Doors. This Court of Inquiry brought into existence a new form of investigation into the conditions of employment in a given industry. Hitherto negotiations have been carried on between representatives of the employers and workmen concerned sitting behind closed doors. Little or nothing transpired until the conference came to a conclusion by agreement on the points at issue, or through the break-down of the negotiations. The Court of Inquiry into the conditions of dock employment has met under the chairmanship of Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, and its proceedings have been public throughout. The employers were represented by counsel in the person of Sir Lynden Macassey, K.C., and the men's case was championed by Ernest Bevin, the National Organizer of the Dockers' Union, who has become famous as "the Dockers' K.C." with James Sexton, M.P., as "junior counsel."

On the morning of the award, I had the good fortune to get hold of Ernest Bevin and secure from him a few observations and comments upon the inquiry. Our conversation, I need scarcely say, was frequently interrupted by telephone calls, messages of various kinds, and, in addition, the Dockers' Executive were in session, and Bevin had to attend to them as well. Naturally he was well pleased at the result of the inquiry, and though the strain upon him during

which we regarded the Court. These important points have got to be explained to the women who now have votes, if their support is to be gained for a Labor Government at a distant date.

"Now, the problem of casual labor, which seems to me not one of easy solution, how is that to be dealt with?"

"Casual labor," said Bevin, "has always been the curse of dock work. I know there are some who appear to prefer it to regular employment, but, as the award says, it is preferred 'only among those who have sunk very far and whom this system itself has demoralized.' Again—this is also from the award: 'If men were merely the mere matter of an industrial machine, this casual reckoning might be appropriate'—this refers to the convenience which a reservoir of unemployed labor undoubtedly is often to dock authorities and employers—but, it goes on, 'society will not tolerate much longer the continuance of human beings on these lines.'"

Remedies for Casual Labor. What remedies are recommended?

"The award makes two recommendations: a system of registration of all workers at the docks, such as the 'casual' laborers at Liverpool, and the adoption of the principle of maintenance to form part of the registration. There are a few among the dock workers fearful of losing their liberty under the recommendation of registration, but the only liberty they will lose will be the liberty of going home to their wives and families—with nothing! That is what 'liberty' means to the 'casual' laborer."

"Were you met at all by the contention that, if a minimum of 16s. a day were adopted at all British ports, trade would go elsewhere?"

"Yes, the 'casual' laborer has prepared evidence of how Rotterdam and Antwerp would compete with British ports, but, as it turned out, the award could not put their witnesses in the box, the dockers at Rotterdam went out on strike for 16s. a day. So then they put Antwerp forward; whereupon the Antwerp dockers secured an advance which brought them up almost to 16s. a day. The only port left to them, therefore, will be one where their ships will meet as they enter!"

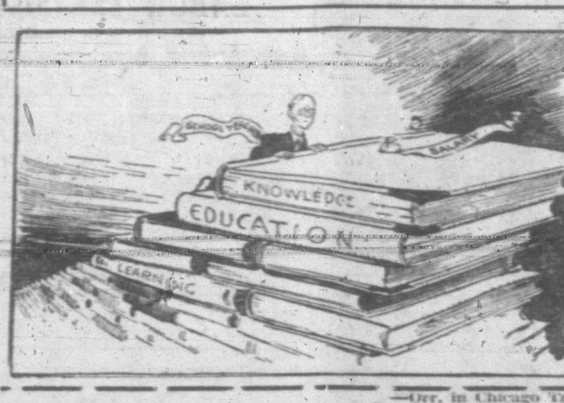
"Referring to witnesses," Bevin added, "that reminds me that one weak point has been revealed in the transport workers' inquiry. These courts will not be the success they could be if the method now employed is followed. The employers are represented by counsel, we presented our own case, and I was responsible for the facts we submitted. But counsel, of course, goes by his instructions, and is not personally responsible for any evidence he has to bring out on behalf of his side. Consequently a very great deal of time is taken up by counsel having to put all the statements through witnesses. This naturally tends to prolong the proceedings, and, in urgent cases, might easily weaken the power of such Courts of Inquiry for good."

The Trend of the Changes. "What now happens to the award?"

"It goes to the Minister of Labor. Then the two parties will have to come to an agreement upon it. The transport workers' delegates accepted the award last night. It is now for the employers to accept it also. I am quite sure that it means the beginning of a new outlook. It will help to equalize the docks to be regarded as national institutions for the benefit of the world's goods. The changes now begun will tend to make our docks and our ports a means of real social transactions to the mutual advantage of all, until they are no longer run for the profit of the few."

There was another ring at the telephone, and as I had obtained the information I needed, I left after expressing the hope that Easter would afford Bevin a little relaxation from his labors of the last two months.—H. W. L., in Justice.

AFTER YEARS OF CLIMBING!



—(In Chicago Tribune.)

CO-ORDINATION OF LABOR LEGISLATION CONFERENCE

Continued From Page One.

had served a useful purpose, but it was just a question whether the time had not arrived when some of its clauses should be seriously reconsidered and amended. South Africa and Australia had already amended their original legislation with beneficial results, and their was much more recent than that of Canada. It was necessary for success that the deliberations of the conference should bear promptly result for, said Mr. Moore, "workers are becoming suspicious of commissions and committees devised by politicians for the solving of problems and whose deliberations and reports get nowhere."

When the Mathers Commission was appointed there was a very general feeling that it was a camouflage. I had the misfortune to be a member of that commission and our report was promptly made. It has never been challenged and yet up to the present time very little concrete legislation can be found on the books as the result of its labors.

Labor Wants Action. "As a representative of the workers I want to say candidly that we cannot enter upon the work of this commission with as much confidence or enthusiasm as we could have if the report had some tangible results of the last year's commission of the National Industrial Conference."

Mr. Moore then went on to say that the Government must regard the report of this commission as the pronouncement of a responsible, serious body, and act upon it without members of Parliament taking the time to thrash the proceedings out all over again for themselves. "Representatives of labor are prepared to remain in Ottawa as long as may be necessary to finish the work assigned to them. I do not demand any assurances but I do ask that when we have reported there shall be some definite action to justify our work."

On Tuesday morning's session of the board appointed to consider the unification of provincial industrial laws, Dr. W. A. Riddell, chairman of the business committee brought in a report, which was adopted, recommending daily sessions from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2.30 to 5.30 p.m.; that the press be excluded from the sessions, and all reports of the press be given out on approval of a committee representative of the Government, employers and employees; that consideration of unifying labor legislation be taken up in the following order:—(a) Workmen's Compensation; (b) Factory Legislation; (c) Regulation of Mines; (d) Minimum Wage Legislation; (e) Industrial Disputes Act; all these questions first to be considered by the committee as a whole, and then, if thought necessary, to be referred to sub-committees for further consideration and report.

The following committees were appointed after discussion of the broad features of each of the questions:—

Committee on Workmen's Compensation:—Messrs. Macdonald, Melvin, Francis, Hall, Iqbal, Leckie, McNeill and McVey.

Committee on Factory Legislation:—Messrs. Logan, Robinson, Guyan, Pridell, McGrath, Somerville, McCreath, McNeill.

Committee on Mines and Mining Laws:—Messrs. Gillis, McLean, Lowe, Halford, E. Robinson, Malloy, Striding and Coulson.

Press Committee:—Messrs. McNeill, McNeill and France.

Mr. Gerald Brown acted as chairman when the agenda was called away by official duties.

President Tom Moore, of Dominion Trades and Labor Congress, at Tuesday afternoon's session stated that he considered it would be a backward step for the Dominion authorities to lend themselves to decentralization of the powers which they have acquired through the provincial acceptance of the Industrial Disputes Act. He also expressed himself as favorable to standardization for the provinces through the medium of one law, which should be enacted by the Federal Government.

Hon. G. D. Robertson, Minister of Labor, who arrived shortly after the resumption of the sitting, defended the position which was held by the Government in respect to labor legislation. He stated that no Government could attempt to legislate progress in that class of legislation until it had been carefully investigated and the sentiment of the classes concerned had been ascertained. When this had been done the Government was prepared to go ahead and enact reasonable legislation but it could not accept one-sided suggestions. He discussed the proposed inadequacy of the Industrial Disputes Act, regarding industries not covered by the public utilities clause, and thought machinery should be established to deal with them.

Mr. F. A. Acland referred to the position occupied by police and firemen, who were outside the provisions of the act by a Department of Justice ruling, but he thought that something ought to be done to bring their inclusion. Mr. Acland dealt with the conflicting points between federal and provincial legislation. He pointed out that the Dominion Government could not exercise powers which had been delegated to the provinces. In spite of much discussion, the department had received no representations from the different provinces.

Mr. Tom Moore then dealt with the question of the police, who at present occupied a unique position, as their disputes could not be settled by board, since they were not classed as public utilities, although their work was that of a municipality. The only way in which they could rectify their present position was by resorting to a strike, which they did not wish to do. Consequently there was necessity for some arrangement by means of which they could receive impartial consideration of their demands. The full list of members of the board is as follows:

Dominion of Canada.
On behalf of the Government: F.

Melvin, secretary N. B. Federation of Labor, St. John.
Quebec.
Government.—Louis G. Gagnon, Deputy Minister of Labor, Montreal.
Employers.—John Lewis, President of Montreal Cottons Limited, Valleyfield.
Employees.—Gustave Franquet, editor Labor World, Montreal.

Ontario.
Government.—Dr. W. A. Riddell, Deputy Minister of Labor, Windsor.
Employers.—Samuel Harris, President of Harris Lithographing Company, Ltd. Toronto.
Employees.—H. J. Halford, vice-president Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, and fifth vice-president International Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers, International Union, Hamilton.

Manitoba.
Government.—E. McGrath, Secretary Bureau of Labor, Winnipeg.
Employers.—H. B. Loyal Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works, Winnipeg.
Employees.—E. Robinson, Secretary Trades and Labor Council, Winnipeg.

Saskatchewan.
Government.—T. M. Malloy, Secretary Bureau of Labor, Regina.
Employees.—R. K. Lecky, Regina. Employees.—James Semerville, International Association Machinists, Moose Jaw.

Alberta.
Government.—John T. Stirling, Chairman Workmen's Compensation Board, Edmonton.
Employees.—Walter P. McNeill, Commissioner, Western Coal Operators' Association, Calgary.
Employees.—Robert McCrae, Edmonton.

British Columbia.
Government.—J. B. McNeill, Deputy Minister of Labor, Victoria.
Employees.—John J. Coughlan, Vancouver; employees James H. McVeety, Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

MAKING THE ROUND TRIP.

In one of the leading churches of the city the pastor took for the text of his sermon, "Better Church Attendance."

The pastor held that the automobile has taken more people away from church than any other thing. He concluded with the exclamation: "The Ford car has taken more people to hell than any other thing that I can mention." Whereupon an old lady in the congregation began to clap her hands and moan: "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

"Praising the Lord, the minister said, the pastor.

The Ford never went any place that it couldn't make the round trip, and I am sure that all of those people in hell will be back. So praise the Lord.—Springfield (Ill.) Register.

ENOUGH TO GO ON WITH.

As a gentleman walked along a quiet country road, he noticed smoke and flames issuing from the upper windows of a secluded house.

Running up, he pounded on the door hastily, till an old woman opened it.

"Madam, your house is on fire!" he exclaimed, in great excitement.

"Oh! say your house is on fire!" He raised his voice several degrees.

She put her hand to her ear and leaned towards him.

"What?" she demanded.

"Your house is burning!" he roared.

"Oh! is that all?"

"That's all I can think of just now, madam," he gasped.

—Answers.

NO ELECTION FOR VACANCY TO BOARD

Act Amending School Laws Introduced by Hon. R. H. Grant.

PARLIAMENT BUILDING TORONTO, April 28.—An act amending some of the school laws was introduced in the Legislature today by Hon. R. H. Grant, Minister of Education.

The act provides that in municipalities where a vacancy occurs in one of the wards on the Board of Education, and leaves the vacancy to be filled by the board in the same way as in municipalities not divided into wards.

The bill makes an amendment to the High School Act by providing for the establishment of more than one high school district in a town in the neighborhood of a large city where conditions as to population justify the formation of a separate high school in the opinion of the minister.

There is also an amendment to the Continuation Schools Act which will provide for the participation by these schools in county aid in the same manner as high schools.

Legislation is also provided enabling cities to acquire property in adjacent townships which will be within the urban zone and in the course of time may become part of the city.

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