

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 1920.

MR. M. J. SAVAGE, M.P., examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you kindly present to the Committee such evidence as you propose to submit in support of the Bill?—One of the purposes of the Bill is to provide for the formation of Dominion unions. It has been suggested that this indicates intention to form what has been described as “one big union.” Any one who knows anything about the “one big union” idea will recognize that there is as much difference between that and the proposal in my Bill as there is between north and south.

2. *Hon. Sir W. H. Herries.*] Did you see the statement by Mr. Grayndler in the *Maoriland Worker* about two weeks ago that they were working for one big union?—No.

3. *The Chairman.*] What you are contending for is one Dominion union in each industry?—That is the idea. The principle seems to me to be fairly obvious, because there is a good deal of overlapping and expense in connection with the running of the unions. Where you can get one union for an industry it makes for scientific handling of business, both by unions and by employers. Instead of having a lot of small bodies here and there, all fighting in their own way and very often conflicting, it is better to have one union for one industry right through the Dominion, with branches in each locality. That is the provision of clause 2 of the Bill. Clause 3 deals with the appointment of Clerks of Awards. It proposes to appoint one Clerk of Awards to act for the whole Dominion. At present a Clerk is appointed for each industrial district. Under the Bill there would still be a Clerk for each industrial district, and in addition you would have one for the whole Dominion. Clause 4 deals with section 16 of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1908, which gives a Magistrate power to dismiss any charge he may consider trivial or excusable. The complaint against that is that too many charges have been found trivial or excusable, and it is almost impossible to get a conviction. We want the part cut out which deals definitely with the power of the Magistrates to dismiss. Clause 5 relates to section 35, subsection (8), of the Act of 1908, which provides against the Conciliation Commissioner having a vote in the making of a recommendation for the settlement of a dispute. The clause proposes to give the Commissioner that power. To be candid, I am not enthusiastic about his having it. However, that will be a matter for evidence to show.

4. Do you mean that the Commissioner could put new material into the matter to be put before the Arbitration Court?—No. Certain proposals are discussed before the Conciliation Council, and they are unable to come to an agreement—there is a deadlock. Under this proposal the Commissioner would have power to give his vote, one way or the other, in making a recommendation.

5. You do not suggest that the Commissioner should have power to insert any section in connection with the dispute—that is, to build up any addition?—No. If he had that power the other people might as well stay at home.

6. You want to put him in the position of a chairman: where they do not agree he should have a casting-vote?—Yes. Clause 6 of the Bill proposes to amend subsection (1) of section 42 of the 1908 Act, which provides that in the event of no settlement of the dispute being arrived at the Commissioner shall, not earlier than one month or later than two months, notify the Clerk of Awards that no settlement of the dispute has been arrived at. The clause in the Bill proposes that it shall be not later than one week or earlier than three days. There seems to be no reason why so long a period should elapse before notifying the Clerk of Awards, and as things stand every one is left in a state of uncertainty. Clause 7 deals with section 61 of the Act, which provides that where a worker has been paid at a lesser rate than that provided for in an award or industrial agreement no action to recover the difference shall be taken by the worker against the employer save within three months of the day on which the wages claimed became due and payable. We want the three months struck out and six months substituted. It is also proposed in the clause that where the worker has been a party to such an underpayment the amount due shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund, and not to the worker. Clause 8 of the Bill deals with section 71 of the Act of 1908. That section provides that “No award or industrial agreement made after the commencement of this Act shall affect the employment of any worker who is employed otherwise than for the direct or indirect pecuniary gain of the employer: Provided that this section shall not be deemed to exempt any local authority or body corporate from the operation of any award or industrial agreement.” Under that clubs are exempted to-day. We want clubs to be brought under the provisions of awards or industrial agreements. Witnesses will be able to give evidence on that point. There are a lot of workers employed in clubs and there is no hold upon them at all. I have now stated the whole purpose of the Bill.

FREDERICK CORNWALL examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am secretary of the New Zealand Federated Painters and Decorators' Association.

2. Will you make a statement as to the proposed Amendment Bill?—I am asked by the New Zealand Federated Painters and Decorators to endeavour to get Parliament to make it possible for them to have one union for the Dominion, instead of thirteen as at present. Our desire is to be able to approach the employers as one body, and have one award. There are two or three principles involved in this matter. At present it is impossible to get a Dominion award, and we submit that if we had power to form one union for the trade we would be in a position to approach the employers, who would also, probably, be one union. They are in much the same position as we are at the present time, having unions in practically every centre. We find that the present system is exceedingly expensive, and most unsatisfactory to both sides. That is our sole object in trying to get this amendment put into operation—so that we should have one union, and be able to carry out our business more satisfactorily and more beneficially, we contend, to both parties. In order to further that object we desire an amendment of section 33 of the principal Act, to make provision for a Dominion Clerk of Awards. Some years ago an amendment of the Act was made which most trades-