

The fifth session of the International Labour Conference was held in October of last year at Geneva, when the following matters were included in the agenda presented to the delegates for consideration :—

- (1.) Development of facilities for the utilization of workers' leisure.
- (2.) General principles for the organization of factory inspection.
- (3.) Equality of treatment for national and foreign workers as regards workmen's compensation for accidents.
- (4.) Weekly suspension of work for twenty-four hours in glass-manufacturing processes where tank furnaces are used.

Regarding No. (3), in New Zealand foreign workers are already entitled to equal rights under the Workers' Compensation Act; while respecting No. (4), the provisions as to glass-manufacturing processes have no practical application in this country. Coming to No. (2), the organization of factory inspection, the Conference adopted a recommendation urging it to be the duty of the various members to institute a system of inspection to enforce the laws and regulations dealing with the conditions of work and the protection of employees while engaged in their work. A number of methods were suggested as being calculated to promote the development of an instructive understanding between employers and employees, and to educate the workers concerned to a higher appreciation of the nature of their work. Taking the recommendation as a whole, the principles to be acted upon by the adopting nations are of a very general nature, and beyond the suggestion that inspection should progressively discard police methods of investigation as adopted in various countries there is nothing that could with advantage be applied to New Zealand. A great number of the legislative steps already taken for the protection of health and freedom from the risk of accident of workers in New Zealand are far in advance of anything done by other members of the International Labour Organization.

The following recommendations of the Conference are, however, of interest :—

That, in view of the difficult scientific and technical questions which arise under the conditions of modern industry in connection with processes involving the use of dangerous materials, the removal of injurious dust and gases, the use of electrical plant and other matters, it is essential that experts having competent medical, engineering, electrical, or other scientific training and experience should be employed by the State for dealing with such problems.

That, in view of the complexity of modern industrial processes and machinery, of the character of the executive and administrative functions entrusted to the Inspectors in connection with the application of the law, and of the importance of their relations to employers and workers, and employers' and workers' organizations, and to the judicial and local authorities, it is essential that the Inspectors should in general possess a high standard of technical training and experience, should be persons of good general education, and by their character and abilities be capable of acquiring the confidence of all parties.

That Inspectors on appointment should undergo a period of probation for the purpose of testing their qualifications and training them in their duties, and that their appointment should be confirmed at the end of that period only if they have shown themselves fully qualified for the duties of an Inspector.

(In a sparsely populated country like New Zealand it is, of course, impossible to provide a sufficient staff of Inspectors to ensure that in each centre the Inspectors amongst them shall possess a knowledge of every industry carried on. Where expert knowledge of any particular industry is necessary, however, it is usual to appoint persons with that knowledge, who can, if required, perform general duties in addition.)

That, with a view to securing full co-operation of the employers and workers and their respective organizations in promoting a high standard in regard to the conditions affecting the health and safety of the workers, it is desirable that the inspectorate should confer from time to time with the representatives of the employers' and workers' organizations as to the best measures to be taken for this purpose.

FAMILY WAGES.

The various publications which are regularly received by this Department from both official and non-official sources show that the question of providing adequate maintenance for married men with families is receiving a wide degree of attention. This movement, which had its beginnings in France, spread to Holland, has been introduced in parts of Germany, and is receiving official attention and scrutiny in other European countries. The problem is one which the nations appear to be recognizing as one to be grappled with seriously if industry is to continue to recruit its labour from the ranks of its own nationals rather than depend on the surplus and often unemployed workers of foreign countries.

So far as can be gathered, the definite schemes that have been put into operation do not so far however, furnish sufficient evidence of practicability. In Holland, for example, it was stated, in reply to questions on the point submitted by the Department, that the extra remuneration provided for the men with the large families is paid for by the employers, but that there are no minimum rates of wages in operation such as those in New Zealand. The extra cost of the benefit given is, however, too small to be of great value, being only about 1 per cent. of the wages bill.

In France minimum wages are provided for in certain trades by custom and agreement, and it is authoritatively stated that wages in these trades have not been decreased by the payment of