

ITEM No. 3: WEEKLY SUSPENSION OF WORK IN GLASS-FACTORIES.

This question has little application to New Zealand. In this country there is only one factory, at which the hours of workers are governed by an agreement; and, as only the most recent of modern machinery is installed, and tank furnaces are not in use, Sunday or continuous work is not necessary in the industry. The agreement, in fact, provides for working on five days a week only.

ITEM No. 4: NIGHT-WORK IN BAKERIES.

This matter had already proved to be a difficult one to handle, and the subject had been left over from the 1921 Conference. The proposed resolution before the Conference called for the prohibition of night-work in bakeries. It was suggested during the discussion that as in a score or so of countries night-work in bakeries is already strictly regulated, if not actually prohibited, the question should not present any special difficulties. The committee found it necessary, however, to sit on fifteen occasions before it succeeded in producing a draft which left plenty of scope for accommodation to the particular needs of individual countries. National practice varies greatly in regard to the prohibition or regulation of night-work in bakeries. While no one could be found to defend the regular and continuous practice of night-work, which in baking, as in other industries, is injurious, and can only be justified on the grounds of the strictest necessity, there was much diversity of opinion at the Conference (1) as to the desirability of permitting night-work where the shift system is in force, (2) as to the possibility of prohibiting the night-work of the owners who work alone, and (3) as to the hours of the night during which work should be forbidden. A great deal of consideration was given to the second question, where the matter of individual liberty arises, as it always does in such cases; but it was pointed out that a small baker working single-handed would gain such an advantage as to make it hard to apply the prohibition in other cases; and then, by the simple device of a fictitious partnership, it would be possible for larger establishments employing a number of bakers to claim exemption. The committee set up to examine the proposal decided by a large majority that the prohibition should extend to the owner also, whether working alone or employing journeymen bakers. Respecting the hours question the committee finally decided that the period of prohibition should be seven hours, which should include the hours between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., or, when it is required by the climate or season, between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m.; this allows a certain elasticity in fixing the hours of starting or finishing work, and the committee left decision on this point to the individual Governments. The Convention has been only provisionally passed, and comes up again for consideration at this year's Conference.

The Conference does not seem to have debated the question of the variation in quality that may result when bread is baked during the day on account of the additional lapse of time before it is delivered to customers: this has been a strong point in the master bakers' case against prohibition of night baking in both Australia and New Zealand.

The matter of regulating the hours of baking in New Zealand was brought before Parliament some years ago, when it was decided that, as no general agreement between the interests involved could be reached, the question should be held over.

STATISTICS OF REAL WAGES.

In the annual report for 1923-24 mention was made of the fact that the question of making a true comparison between the wages of various classes of workers in New Zealand and other countries had been considered; the difficulties were found to be too great to allow of any readily available comparison being made, owing to the difference in the standard of living and in retail prices as existing between one country and another. The International Labour Office, however, arranged that a Conference of Statisticians should be called in 1923 for the purpose of considering industrial statistics generally, and in April of this year the second such Conference met in Geneva. When the subject of real wages came up for discussion it was considered opportune to concentrate on the problem of international comparisons of real wages. The work entailed in this regard is being made easier by the co-operation of the appropriate departments of various countries with the International Labour Office in the publication by that office of index numbers of real wages in the capital cities of the various countries, on the lines of a resolution passed at the 1923 Conference. This resolution asked the competent statistical authorities of each country to furnish the International Labour Office at regular intervals (if possible, monthly) with statements showing (1) time rates of wages and normal weekly hours of labour current in a limited number of occupations, and (2) information as to the prices of a limited number of those items upon which the income of working-class families in most industrially developed countries is largely spent. A report since issued sets out the methods adopted to arrive at a uniform basis for the purposes of the comparisons, and states that it is so difficult to find similar wage data in similar occupations in different countries that the comparisons that have so far been possible have been limited to groups of male workers in the building, engineering, furniture-making, and printing trades. Limited comparisons such as these cannot be taken as indicative of the general level of wages in the area covered; moreover, the International Labour Office has been compelled to limit the basis of the comparisons to important articles of food, with an allowance for rent. So far, the comparisons have been confined to capital cities; and here again variations in the standard of living between town and country dwellers, lower prices of food in the country, and considerations of facilities for pleasure, must be taken into consideration, and the result would considerably nullify the value of any attempt at a comparison of the value of real wages. The question of establishing a satisfactory unit by which to measure the money wages in different countries has thus presented many difficult points.