

similar conference recently held in the United Kingdom. Mr. Ben Turner said, "The Conference should not be a debating society or a mental boxing match, but a serious move made by representatives and responsible men and women to preserve the nation's industries, to find ways and means of getting out of the present industrial chaos, and putting the people and the country's trade on the highway to comfort and prosperity."

The members of the Parliamentary Committee which was set up at my suggestion last session have realized this fact, and all their decisions have been arrived at by mutual good will and after free discussion. Each member of that Committee has recognized the necessity for forbearance and for mutual understanding. I trust that the same spirit will animate this Conference, and that the country will greatly benefit by its discussions, and I hope by its decisions.

The Parliamentary Committee which has had in its charge the details of this Conference has decided, in my opinion very wisely, that the whole of the business of the Conference and its methods should be entirely in the hands of the representatives present. The printed agenda paper which was forwarded to you is intended for your consideration, but you will not, of course, be bound by it. It is hoped, however, that you will take it as a basis from which to work and on which to build.

In conclusion, I wish merely to lay before you the question of the chairmanship of the Conference. That is a matter entirely in your hands; you may elect one Chairman or you may think fit to adopt the course that was taken recently in the United Kingdom and elect different gentlemen to preside on different days.

I earnestly trust that the deliberations of the Conference will be of value to our country and to everybody in it.

Election of Conference Chairman.

Right Hon. the Prime Minister: Now, gentlemen, you have the agenda papers before you. I may say that they are suggestive only—there is nothing hard-and-fast in them—but the Parliamentary Committee thought it would possibly save time if they gave the Conference a lead. I should like to explain here that the Hon. Mr. Barr has been appointed Manager of the Conference: that is to say, he is at your disposal in order to assist in the organization, and to attend to detail matters concerning your comfort and your business, and to arrange for such printing as may be considered necessary by the Conference. You are a self-contained body, responsible only to yourselves. The next business is the election of a Chairman or Chairmen for the Conference.

Mr. Polson: I would like to move, sir, that the Hon. Mr. John Barr be appointed Chairman of this Conference.

Hon. Mr. T. S. Weston: I have pleasure in seconding the motion. I think Mr. Barr is well qualified to hold the position. He has identified himself with the Labour party, he holds very broad views, and is thoroughly conversant with the working of Committees, being the Chairman of a Committee in the Legislative Council. I do not think we could find a more suitable Chairman for this Conference.

Mr. Roberts: I am afraid that we cannot at this juncture agree to the appointment of Mr. Barr as Chairman of the Conference. In your statement, sir, you said that you did not think that any person connected with the Government or with parliamentary life should be connected with this Conference. For that reason we have not considered the appointment of the Hon. Mr. Barr as Chairman, and we cannot at this juncture agree to the motion. We have not considered his appointment to the position because we cut out altogether every person who was taking an active part in parliamentary life.

Right Hon. the Prime Minister: Have you an alternative, then, Mr. Roberts?

Mr. Roberts: Yes. We have the names of three gentlemen whom we would suggest to this Conference, any one of whom would suit us. The first one is Mr. J. A. McCullough, of Christchurch. He has had considerable experience in dealing with labour matters on the Court of Arbitration for a number of years: he knows the employers' side and the workers' side. We believe that he would be able to handle this question as ably as any person whom we know.

Right Hon. the Prime Minister: I think probably it would be better to come to some unanimous arrangement as to the Chairman or Chairmen. Originally the Parliamentary Committee made the suggestion that it would be wise to follow the custom in Great Britain, where they had an alternate Chairman each day—a Chairman chosen from each side alternately. Whether that system would be acceptable to you I do not know. But the Parliamentary Committee finally decided that this matter should be left entirely to the Conference to decide.

Mr. Roberts: We have also discussed the question of alternate Chairmen, and we do not think it would be successful, nor do we think it is necessary. We believe that there are a number of men in New Zealand who could take the chair at this Conference with perfect fairness to both sides. We would like a Chairman to be appointed to carry the Conference right through. Although it was done in Great Britain, the appointment of a Chairman from day to day seems to be against the very spirit of the Conference, because it recognizes parties in the Conference. We would prefer the Chairman to be appointed for all the sittings. I think I can express the opinion of the employees whom I have met as being in favour of one Chairman. We do not think that the appointment of a Chairman from day to day is necessary or desirable: one man should carry out the whole of the proceedings, and I think we can agree upon that man.

Right Hon. the Prime Minister: Is it the general wish of the Conference that there should be one Chairman appointed for the whole of the Conference?

Delegates: Aye, aye.

Right Hon. the Prime Minister: Now, I have one nomination—that of the Hon. Mr. Barr, moved by Mr. Polson and seconded by the Hon. Mr. Weston. Is there an amendment to that, or how would you like to settle the question of your Chairman? I think it is very important that the matter should be settled more or less unanimously: we do not want to have any dispute to commence with.