

Mr. Brechin : But if I follow your system of fertilizer-use I displace labour. I cannot afford to buy fertilizer and use labour. Is the labour party sensible to the grave issue at stake? They say, "Use fertilizers to produce more," but if we use fertilizers to produce more, then we displace the worker.

Mr. Nash : The answer to that is that I do not know a dairy-farmer in the Dominion, nor any other type of manufacturer or employer, that can increase production without labour—

Mr. Bishop : Mr. Chairman, could not this cross-fire be cut out of this discussion and taken in committee? There is a short paper to be read by Mr. Acland, president of the New Zealand Sheep-owners and Farmers' Federation. I understand that Mr. Acland is very anxious to leave for the south by the steamer this evening. The suggestion is that this paper be taken now before the Conference adjourns, and that the questions upon it be answered by Mr. Williams to-morrow.

The Chairman : Are you all agreed that this paper be now taken under these conditions?

Delegates : Aye, aye.

Sheep-farmers' Delegates' Statement.

Mr. H. D. Acland read the following statement on behalf of the delegates appointed to represent the sheep-farmers :—

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the delegates appointed to represent the sheep-farmers I wish to express our thanks to the Government for calling this Conference, and for having given those interested an opportunity to confer before any alteration in our present industrial legislation is placed on the statute-book. I can assure the Prime Minister and the Government that we come to this Conference fully seised of its great importance to the country generally; and, while differences of opinion may be expressed, we trust that the giving expression to those opinions will not affect the cordial relations which are so necessary to be maintained between the workers and their employers if efficiency and a reasonable standard of living for the community generally is to be maintained; and I wish to stress the fact that my federation is not now, nor ever has been, opposed to arbitration in cases of industrial or any other dispute; but we have steadfastly refused to admit the soundness of the underlying principle of the present Act, which provides for the compulsory fixation of conditions in industry and costs of production by a tribunal clothed with statutory authority, and under which in actual practice compulsion can be enforced on one party only. The unfortunate results of the application of this unsound principle have been increasingly apparent to us over a long period of years, and the cumulative effect of compulsory fixation of production costs, irrespective of the selling-value of the product of the labour, is to throw out of balance our whole economic system; primary producers having gradually lost that margin of profit and security of position which was available to them in pre-war days, and, as practically the whole of our national income comes from the land, it will be obvious that this question must be dealt with in the interests of the whole community. We have been made to realize that the main source of this trouble is this same fixation of costs of production within the Dominion without means having been devised for meeting that cost on the markets available overseas, or for the maintenance of a sufficiently high purchasing-power within the Dominion to ensure that all industry can be profitably employed, whether working for export or for our domestic requirements within the Dominion. The result, we think, is that, as industry generally is unable to profitably employ all available labour at the price fixed, chronic unemployment to a greater or lesser degree has resulted in almost every industry.

We can see no reason for the retention of the compulsory clauses in the present Act, and are of opinion that all requirements in the interests of all parties can be met under a system of voluntary arbitration somewhat along the lines already laid down in the Labour Disputes Investigation Act. After meeting in conference, the parties to any dispute could submit their case to the Conciliation Commissioner or an umpire mutually agreed upon, and failing a decision being acceptable to either party at the Conciliation Council, the dispute could be submitted either to the Arbitration Court by consent of the parties or to the arbitrement of public opinion, which would by this time have been fully informed of the merits of the dispute.

In our opinion no one is better able to handle questions affecting the interests of any particular trade or industry than those directly engaged in it, and the only persons competent to deal with wages and conditions in any individual business are the contracting parties themselves. No tribunal can lay down a definite wage or cost in any industry to cover periods of three years without risk of doing an injustice to either one or the other party during some part of that period. While it has only been found possible in a few cases to frame awards for the farming industry, the indirect effect of the fixation of costs of production within the Dominion has been detrimental to primary producers generally, as we cannot pass excessive costs on, being dependent on world's parity for our prices.

I may say that during the war period our experience with the workers' representatives was a very happy one, agreements being made which were satisfactory to both parties, each recognizing the needs of the other under the special circumstances, and we are of opinion that if the same spirit of conciliation and good will which obtained during that period could be assured in the future, that difficulties would be reduced to a negligible quantity, if not entirely eliminated.

I assure you, sir, that the delegates present as representing sheepowners are here with the sole object of endeavouring to come to some arrangement which will be of some assistance to our Legislature when dealing with this important matter, and that we come prepared to work in a conciliatory spirit, in the hope that the anomalies which at present exist may be removed, that every section of the industrial community may receive equally fair treatment, and that the real welfare of the great body of workers in industry may not be detrimentally affected.

The Conference adjourned at 5 p.m.