

object of the Act was to prevent wasteful strikes and lockouts; to substitute industrial arbitration for industrial warfare. How far has this object been attained? The history of the operation of the Act may conveniently be divided into four periods—1894 to 1906, 1906 to 1914, 1914 to 1921, and 1921 to 1928.

During the first period—twelve years—New Zealand was rapidly developing, the country as a whole enjoyed prosperity, prices were rising. The machinery of the Act came into operation and dealt with the workers' demands for increased wages and improved conditions proportionate to the general prosperity. There are two outstanding facts in relation to this period: First, there were no strikes or lockouts; second, the employers gradually, if reluctantly, accepted the idea of collective bargaining with trade-unions, and the relationship between the two became less hostile.

Entering upon the second period—1906 to 1914—prices became stabilized. The unions met with a greater resistance from employers to their demands for increased wages and met with less success from the Court. It may be said that the first real testing of the value of the system then began. In 1906–7 occurred the first strike since 1894. This affected practically the whole of the freezing-works throughout the Dominion. Although there was one industry alone affected, the strike is recorded by the Labour Department as twelve separate strikes; and again in 1912–13, when there was what might be called a Dominion strike in the same industry, the Department recorded the trouble as nineteen separate strikes. If this method of recording be not understood it is apt to be misleading. Any one not otherwise informed, reading that there were thirty-one strikes in the freezing-works from 1906 to 1913, would imagine a state of industrial unrest in that industry far beyond that which actually existed. In reality there were only two strikes—one in 1906–7, and one in 1912–13.

The freezing-workers' strike in 1906–7 was followed by a coal-miners' strike at Blackball in 1908, which resulted in a stoppage of work for eleven weeks. There were no other serious strikes until 1912. For the year ended 31st March, 1913, two serious strikes were recorded—the Waihi and Reefton gold-miners' strike, which lasted six months, and the strike, previously mentioned, in the freezing-works. In the following year occurred the so-called general strike which, commencing with the Wellington waterside workers, involved waterside workers at all ports, practically all coal-miners and seamen, and some building-trade workers in Auckland. As was the case of the Waihi strike in the previous year, this strike was marked by some disorder at the four main ports. It is to be remarked that but few unions registered under the Act took part in the strike, and that the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act assisted to bring it to an end, since new unions formed and registered under the Act took the place of the workers on strike.

The third period—from 1914 to 1921—embraced the four and a half years of the war and the post-war boom. The fourth period covers a period of falling prices. They must, however, be recognized as abnormal periods, and due allowance should be made for particularly difficult conditions. During the war there were few labour disputes which involved a stoppage of work, and those which did so were almost wholly confined to the coal-mines. The Arbitration Court met the necessities of the workers by a system of bonuses on award rates of wages, and acted as a governor acts on a steam-engine, controlling the rate of acceleration. Since the collapse of the post-war boom, in a period of seven years there have been four major strikes—the West Coast miners' strike in 1923–24, which lasted four months; the railway strike; the seamen's strike in 1922–23, which lasted two months; and the strike of freezing-works hands in 1926. The comparatively large number of petty strikes of from one hour to two or three days' duration recorded by the Department of Labour and quoted by recent critics in support of their attacks upon the arbitration system, while undoubtedly serious in their effect upon production, are such as are more or less inevitable in all industrial nations. Nothing short of revolutionary changes in human nature will prevent the recurrence of brief sectional strikes, some of which arise from petty causes, often of a personal nature. For instance, at one works about three years ago there was a stoppage of work every few weeks. Investigation revealed that the cause of all the trouble was an entire absence of tact on the part of the foreman who directly controlled the labour. When this cause was discovered and removed the trouble ceased. Each of those stoppages is recorded in the Department's records as a strike, and helps to make up the number quoted by the critics. No one with experience of dealing with labour could consider such happenings as having any but the slightest bearing on the general question of the value of arbitration. The class of strike which must be considered is that which arises from some real dispute between employers and their employees upon such questions as wages, hours, holidays, overtime, or general conditions of employment which are suitable for reference to and settlement by the Court of Arbitration. The only strikes coming within this description are those which have been mentioned. While it is necessary to make this point clear, it must not be assumed that the effect of a large number of petty strikes is negligible. On the contrary, petty disputes and short stoppages are a serious evil in trade and industry. There is need for clearer appreciation by both parties that the cumulative effect of these stoppages inevitably is to prevent the lowering of costs of production and hence of prices.

To summarize the foregoing: during the first twelve years of the operation of the arbitration system there were no strikes; during the next period of eight years strikes commenced again, but there were only five in all which should be considered; and during the last two periods—1914–21 and 1921–28—there were practically no strikes during the war years and only four of importance since the war ended.

It must be noted that while prices were rising and the Court was in a position to adjust wages upwards there were no strikes. This was only natural and to be expected. It does not, however, indicate, as certain recent critics have said it does, that the same result would have been obtained without an arbitration system. The industrial history of England during the last thirty years gives the lie direct to that statement. Every student of this subject should read Lord Asquith's book, "Industrial Problems and Disputes," which presents both a history and an exhaustive analysis of