

not only affects the parties directly concerned—it affects the nation as a whole ; and power should be given to some controlling authority to compel the parties to meet in conference with a view of ending the dispute. This has been in operation in Australia, and has proved successful in ending many industrial disputes which have occurred there in recent years.

We now come to consider the question of the concessions given by the Court of Arbitration to the wage workers of New Zealand. We have stated previously that the wages have not been increased in accordance with the cost of living since 1914, and we desire to emphasize at the outset that the labour movement is satisfied that the workers were entitled to a higher standard of living than that which they were receiving in that year.

The Government Statistician, Mr. Malcolm Fraser, published a booklet in 1915 entitled “ Report on Cost of Living, 1891–1914,” and he pointed out in that book that from 1911 to 1914 the increase in the cost of living was 11·4 per cent. This increase was not conceded to the overwhelming majority of workers prior to the outbreak of the war ; yet the Court of Arbitration based wages on the 1914 standard, and completely omitted to take into consideration that 11·4 per cent. increase in the cost of living. But even if that 11·4 per cent. increase were conceded prior to the outbreak of war, and the Court of Arbitration fixed wages on the 1914 basis with that increase added, and wages were increased in accordance with the cost of living since that period, the workers have still a further claim. New methods of production and new machinery have been introduced, and the workers are entitled to receive a share of the prosperity created by the improved methods of production. Improved machinery displaces labour and causes unemployment ; it therefore makes work more casual. The wages of the workers are consequently reduced through lack of continuity of employment. Generally speaking, the position of the workers is worse when improved machinery and new methods of production are introduced. The industrial organizations contend that instead of the introduction of the machine being a hardship on the workers, it should assist their general prosperity and welfare as well as lighten their burden of toil.

In short, what the workers claim is an improved standard of living commensurate with the improved economic opportunity due to new methods of production. If this were conceded to the workers it would mean more prosperity all round, for the purchasing-power of the worker would be increased and these periods of depression which we have experienced would not occur. There would be a greater demand for the commodities which the farmers produce, together with those which are produced by the manufacturers in New Zealand. More money would be in circulation, and instead of depression and economic pessimism we would have prosperity and progress.

*Powers of the Court.*—We are of the opinion that the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act as it is at present constituted gives too much power to the Court of Arbitration. The labour movement considers that the Act should be amended in such a way that the Court shall be compelled to follow certain definite rules. At the present time the Arbitration Court has no standard rule either for wages, hours of work, or conditions of employment. Although the principle of the eight-hour day has been recognized in New Zealand for at least forty years, the Court of Arbitration has never established that rule during the whole of its career, for we find awards being made where the workers are compelled to work as high as seventy hours per week. Indeed, the awards of the Court range from forty-four upwards to seventy. The same applies as far as wages are concerned. We have wage-rates for so-called unskilled adult male workers from £3 10s. to £4 5s. per week. Why this differentiation in the rates of pay should exist we cannot understand. It is only the plainest common-sense to recognize that the cost of living must apply equally to all workers.

The reply given by the Court and the employers of labour to our argument on this question is that the Court only lays down the minimum wage, and the employer is empowered to pay a higher wage than that awarded by the Court if he so desires. But what are the facts ? Minimum rates in recent years have become the standard rates in the overwhelming majority of industries.

Preference to unionists is, as a rule, conceded by the Court of Arbitration at the present time, but power to refuse or concede preference should not be given to the Court. This should be a basic principle of the arbitration system, and a direction given to the Court that it must concede preference to unionists in all industries, and that when an award is made the common rule shall apply—that is to say, an award should govern all workers engaged in the industry and all employers carrying on business in the industry governed by the award.

The recent proposed amendment to the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act suggested that workers engaged in the dairying and farming industries generally should be excluded from the operations of any award or industrial agreement under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. The reasons put forward for the exclusion of these workers was that primary produce was subject to fluctuation in a world market over which New Zealand legislation had no control. We have to point out that in Australia the rural workers are organized into trade-unions, and have been for a number of years past. They have received increases in wages in recent years to a greater extent than workers engaged in other industries, and are at present working under awards of the Court. The Australian producers have to compete in a world market the same as New Zealand producers ; indeed, the same applies to all New Zealand's competitors in the London market generally. Therefore, the argument put forward by the primary producers in this respect cannot be accepted.

The labour movement has considered the question of the exclusion of the rural workers from the operations of any of our industrial laws, and we desire to state that in our opinion, if these workers were excluded from the operations of any of our industrial laws, or whatever protection is offered by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act—in other words, if these men were outlawed as far as that statute is concerned—the sympathy of the workers in other industries with those engaged in the agricultural and pastoral industry would be such that there would probably be a demand on the part of the larger labour organizations to cancel registration under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and thus make this law to a great extent inoperative. In the past the Court of Arbitration has refused to make awards for farm labourers ; but, instead of excluding the rural workers from the operations of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the labour movement claims