

Proposal 45.

The Secretary of Labour read a letter from the New Zealand Federated Builders' and Contractors' Industrial Association of Employers, which had been received by the Minister and minuted to him to put before the Conference for consideration. The letter conveyed the following resolution passed at the last annual conference of the Federation held recently: "That this Federation of master builders desires the abolition of the Apprentices Act and the reversion to the apprentices clauses under the old awards which were in operation prior to the Apprentices Act coming into force."

Mr. W. H. WINSOR said that in the opinion of the master builders of the Dominion, which industry was the second in the land, the Apprentices Act had not in any shape or form done one jot or tittle to improve the training of apprentices since it had been brought into force. Not one single thing could they point out in which the apprentices had been improved as regarded their training as craftsmen. They had been faced with the work of administering this Act, and there was no use or good arisen from it. He therefore formally moved: That in our opinion the Minister of Labour should see that the Apprentices Act is repealed.

Mr. W. MADDISON moved, as an amendment: That the letter be laid upon the table and formally acknowledged.

The amendment was carried, Mr. WINSOR expressing the hope that his vote would be recorded against it.

Proposal 46: That in the opinion of the employers the unjustifiable practice of compelling an employer to pay apprentices for time spent in attending military training-camps when the apprentice is already being paid by the Defence Department should be abolished; and employers should not be compelled to pay apprentices for time not worked through any cause over which the employer has no control.

Mr. F. CORNWELL's amendment, "That this Conference recommend to the Minister the abolition of the compulsory military service Act," was not accepted by the Chairman.

After some discussion the Conference approved of the Chairman's suggestion that the matter be circulated to the various organizations throughout the Dominion for an expression of opinion.

Proposal 47: That the Minister of Education be asked to include four members of Apprentices Committees on the Technical Schools' Advisory Committee, two from the North and two from the South Island.

Carried after a short discussion.

Hon. W. A. VEITCH (Minister of Labour), in closing the Conference, said that he had only a very few words to say to them at that juncture, and they would be of more or less a complimentary character. They would understand that, in connection with every feature of the agenda paper—indeed, all the business that had been referred to the Conference—the Government had not desired to impress anything upon the Conference, but to give it the freest possible scope for thought, consideration, and expression of opinion, in order that the Government might get the benefit of the experience of the delegates in the administration of the Apprentices Act. He had read with a great deal of interest the discussions that had taken place. As far as he could judge of them they were of the character that one would expect from an ordinary community of British subjects—every man spoke his opinion very freely and very fully, and very definitely; they had fought the matter out, and had come to their conclusions, and he sincerely believed they were better friends at the end of the Conference than they were at the beginning, although they had each in their own way expressed definite and conflicting opinions. The conclusions that had been arrived at by the Conference had of course been recorded by the Secretary of the Labour Department, who would have their decisions and recommendations and conclusions put into manuscript form, and placed upon his table in due course. He, the Minister, would certainly go through them with very great care; he would consider every item passed on to him in the light of a decision by a body of men who had a wide experience in the administration of apprenticeship matters. He regarded the apprenticeship problem as one of great importance and intense interest to the people of New Zealand at the present time. They had to find, as far as they could, avenues of employment for their young men. He sincerely believed that as the years went by there would be an increasing demand for skilled artisans. He was quite convinced that the weakest feature of their educational system was the fact that it did not provide as much as it might be expected to provide in the direction that he had indicated. However, all of the features of their decisions would be carefully considered by him as having come from a body of responsible men, who had made their decisions not from a sectional point of view but with the full belief and consciousness of their responsibilities in making these recommendations for the general good of the public of New Zealand. On behalf of the Government, and himself particularly as Minister of Labour, he thanked the delegates very cordially for the services they had rendered, for the careful consideration they had given to the business of the Conference, and for the fact that they had sufficient interest and sense of responsibility to their country to come there, at some personal inconvenience and expense, to serve the people as members of the Conference. He would further like to express his appreciation of the fact that a considerable amount of restraint and good will must have been exercised by all, otherwise the business of the Conference, he was sure, would have lasted a great deal longer.

The Conference concluded at 4 p.m. on Thursday, the 9th May, with votes of thanks to the Minister and the Chair.

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