

FORTY-HOUR WEEK.

According to the views expressed at the Conference by Government delegates, the following seems to be the attitude of the countries mentioned towards the question of reducing the hours of work:—

The *Netherlands* Government considers there is danger in reducing hours of work from forty-eight to forty, but appears to think the forty-hour week or even the thirty-hour week will come eventually.

Yugoslavia attaches considerable importance to the movement to limit hours of work to forty per week, is ready to apply it to all branches of industry to which it is applicable, and is studying the principles of the Convention for the limitation of hours of work. In the meantime, however, it declares it is unable to accept any international regulation on the matter.

The *United States of America* has at present under consideration by its Congress a Labour Standards Bill establishing in general a maximum working-week of not more than forty hours. Their experience under the National Recovery Act indicated the wisdom of establishing a maximum working-week rather than an average working-week, and of obtaining flexibility through overtime and penalty rates.

Japan is not yet in a position to agree to the application of a forty-hour week, but the Government is paying attention to the reduction of hours of work to the extent practicable in that country.

Spain is strongly in favour of the forty-hour week, and maintains it in many industries.

It was difficult to get any definite understanding of *Canada's* attitude owing to the fact that provincial Parliaments had to be consulted.

Switzerland is generally unfavourable to any reduction from forty-eight hours per week. It disagrees with the argument in favour of the forty-hour week that it would diminish unemployment and increase employment. It admits that the forty-hour week might be justified in certain large countries where working-conditions are quite different from those in Switzerland.

Egypt admits that normal hours of work there have not yet been brought down to the recognized international standard, but stated that public opinion was gradually beginning to realize the necessity for reduced hours in many branches of industry where they are at present excessively long.

Norway favours the forty-hour week and deplores the slowness of developments in that direction.

In *Cuba* certain industries are shortly to have a working-week of thirty-six or even thirty-four hours.

Hungary has already introduced Sunday rest and prohibited night work in bakeries, but cannot at present apply the forty-hour week. It intends to regulate hours of work by legislation based on the principle that hours of work shall not exceed eight in the day or forty-eight in the week.

In *Iraq* the forty-eight-hour week is almost universal, but this scale is to be reviewed early next year.

When the present Government of *Greece* came into office, the ten-hour day was still being enforced in several industries, particularly the textile industry, but from 4th August, 1936, the eight-hour day had been progressively extended and from May 1st, 1937, the eight-hour day and the forty-eight-hour week had been applied generally. In the offices of banks and limited companies, working-hours are fixed by law at seven a day and forty-two a week.

India is opposed to the forty-hour week.

Russia has been reducing hours of work from eight per day since 1927, and seven per day is now the maximum. The working-week has also been reduced, and 20 per cent. of the workers have one rest-day after every four days of work. Eighty per cent. have a rest-day after every five days of work. All have an annual paid holiday of from two to four weeks a year. Hours of work have been reduced by 30 per cent. during the past twenty years, without decrease in production. In fact, productivity has been quadrupled by mechanization. In dangerous and unhealthy occupations hours of work are six or less per day.

The *French* Minister of Labour informed the Conference that the French forty-hour week applies to workers and salaried employees, irrespective of age or sex, in industrial, commercial, handicraft, and co-operative undertakings of every nature, whether public or private, lay or religious, educational or charitable, including public hospitals and asylums. Underground miners are not required to work more than thirty-eight hours forty minutes a week. He claimed that the Act provided a particularly flexible method of application, permitting the adaptation of the new regulations to the needs of the various industries and branches. The method was the application of decrees adopted by the Council of Ministers after consultation with the National Economic Council and organizations of employers and workers. An announcement was first published in an official journal that the Minister of Labour was considering the application of the forty-hour week to any given occupation, and the employers and workers were invited to communicate their views within one month. When these were received the Minister drew up a draft decree which was submitted to the most representative national organizations of workers and employers. These organizations were then brought together in a joint Committee to discuss the provisions in the draft. The amended draft was then communicated to the National Economic Council for examination by representatives of employers and workers in the industries affected. After this stage the Minister submitted the draft embodying any amendments to the Council of Ministers and to the President of the Republic for approval. Fifty-six decrees had been prepared. A total of 7,800,000 workers and salaried employees were receiving the benefits of the Act. These represented more than 90 per cent. of the wage-earners covered by the Act. The forty-hour week applied throughout French territory. The Act stipulated that application of the forty-hour week should not lower the standard of living of workers nor their earnings both in terms of wages and other advantages. Speaking of the results, the Minister stated that in May, 1935, there were in France 441,600 persons wholly unemployed. In May, 1936, the number was 441,100, a reduction of only 500 during the twelve months, but in May, 1937, six months after the Act came into force, the number of unemployed persons in receipt of benefit decreased by 77,000, or 17·7 per cent.