

"In fixing hours the Court has by no means made the forty-hour week universal. There are a large number of exceptions. I cannot take up the time of the Conference in quoting them all, but there are a few to which I should like to refer.

"The whole of the retail trade has been granted a forty-four hour-week. Wholesale warehouses have been granted a forty-two hour-week. The printing and typographical trades have been granted a forty-four-hour week. The Court held that it would be impracticable to carry on these industries efficiently on the basis of a forty-hour week.

"Cheese and butter factories, part of the most important industry in New Zealand, have been dealt with in a similar way. In cheese-factories the hours awarded by the Court are fifty-two for nine months of the year, forty-four for one month, and thirty-eight for the two slack months of the year. In the case of butter-factories the hours are forty-eight for seven months of the year, and forty for five months.

"In the next most important industry, the freezing industry, including fellmongeries and tanneries, the hours are forty-four all the year round.

"In the case of workers such as storemen and packers, and motor and horse drivers, the Court has awarded a forty-four hour week, with the proviso that if attached to a factory or industry in which the hours are less the worker shall enjoy the shorter hours.

"The whole of the waterfront workers, including those engaged in the repair of ships, work a forty-four-hour week.

"In industries in which the ordinary hours of work have been fixed at forty, a good deal of overtime is being worked. In works such as engineering works, for instance, overtime is necessary for several reasons: in some cases because experienced workers are not available; in others because British manufacturers cannot supply the additional plant necessary to enable the work to be done in a forty-hour week; and in other cases because the work offering cannot be dealt with in a forty-hour week.

"It is too early to say that the new legislation is a failure. I am not saying that at all, but it is certainly too early to say that it is a success. The employers of New Zealand are doing their best to make it a success, because it is natural that employers should do everything in their power to carry on their businesses profitably.

"I should like to point out that the legislation was introduced at a time of rising prices, at a time when the country already had advanced a long way out of the depression. The people at large and the traders were short of goods, and had commenced buying to make up shortages which had accumulated during the depression years. Personally, I believe that the traders generally were buying more than their normal requirements, in anticipation of rising prices. The new regulations regarding hours therefore were introduced under favourable conditions, which we doubt will continue. Our factories are small compared with those in advanced industrial countries. They have been established successfully under reasonable labour conditions—the majority in the face of overseas competition—but it is doubtful whether these young industries can continue to compete successfully with overseas countries now that labour costs have been increased considerably.

"If any industry finds itself unable to carry on successfully in the face of overseas competition, or for any reason is unable to carry on efficiently, application can be made to the Court for an extension of hours. The legislation clearly says that if we cannot carry on an industry efficiently we can go to the Arbitration Court, and if we prove our case the Court can grant us a forty-four-hour week. It may be necessary to do this when the present orders fixing hours expire. I should like to make that clear: That in New Zealand we have the right to go to the Court at any time and ask for a forty-four-hour week, and the Court must grant it if satisfied that it is impracticable to carry on the industry efficiently on the basis of a forty-hour week.

"The Conventions which are before us are very different. They impose a hard-and-fast forty-hour week. There is no elasticity in them as there is in our New Zealand legislation. Therefore, I do not think I would be acting in the interests of employers of New Zealand if I supported Conventions which take away the very valuable and very sensible loophole provided in our legislation, and which is particularly necessary in our country, where we are trying to carry on industries efficiently in the face of overseas competition.

"Coming to my second point, the principal industries in New Zealand, of course, are those concerned with the production of butter, cheese, lamb, mutton, and wool. The prosperity of our country depends almost entirely on the ability of Great Britain to buy the greater part of our surplus produce. We find that when industry in Great Britain is prosperous, and when the workers there are employed full time at reasonable wages, Great Britain is able to buy more of our produce and to pay good prices for it. When British industry is not prosperous and there is unemployment in Great Britain, the quantity of produce which Great Britain can buy from us falls, as does the price paid for it. I am told by the employers who represent the chemical and textile groups of industries in Great Britain that in order to carry on successfully they must retain their share of the export trade, and they tell me that if a forty-hour week were introduced in their factories they would be unable to retain a fair share of the export trade against countries which are not members of the International Labour Organization, or, being members, will not ratify the conventions. Therefore, I would not be acting in the best interests of New Zealand if I supported a proposal likely to injure or embarrass British industry.