

1937-38.
NEW ZEALAND.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE, GENEVA, 1937.

REPORT OF NEW ZEALAND WORKERS' DELEGATE.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

DEAR SIR,—

It is with great pleasure that I submit to you my report as workers' representative to the twenty-third session of the Conference of the International Labour Office held at Geneva from 2nd June to 23rd June, 1937.

Prior to the opening of the Conference a meeting of the workers' group was held on 1st June to discuss matters that were to come before Conference. One of the questions discussed concerned the shorter working-week, and I took the opportunity to explain that the shorter working-week had been one of the objectives of industrial and political labour in New Zealand for a number of years. I was able to point out that it was not until the change in Government two years ago that the industrial objective was achieved. The Labour Government had been in office only a short time when the legislation was brought down in connection with the forty-hour week and put through all stages in face of fierce opposition. I explained that provision was made in the Bill for cases of hardship to be determined by the Arbitration Court. I also explained how the Government had put its own employees on the forty-hour week, with the result that a larger number of men were able to find work. Spending-power was created which helped New Zealand along the road to prosperity which she was now enjoying.

The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, Minister of Labour, who piloted the forementioned legislation through the House, represented the New Zealand Government at this Conference.

M. Leon Jouhaux, France, said that he was pleased to hear the statement on the shorter working-week from the New Zealand delegate. The forty-hour week was responsible for 65,000 more men finding employment on the railways in France.

After further discussion it was decided to invite Mr. Armstrong to address the group.

In the afternoon I was elected an officer of the workers' group, an honour which I considered a tribute to the country I had the privilege to represent. The representatives on the committee of the workers' group were as follows—Chairman: M. Mertens (Belgium). Officers: Messrs. Anderson (Sweden), Dash (New Zealand), Diaz Munoz (Mexico), Serrarens (Netherlands), Watt (United States), with Mr. Schevenels as Secretary.

Conference opened officially on 2nd June, when Mr. Necas, Chairman of the governing body of the International Labour Office, presided. Mr. Necas said:—

“The International Labour Conference, a world assembly of all those who have a part in that magnificent aspect of human activity, productive labour, has come together for the twenty-third time. It has met to continue the work of previous sessions of the Conference, thereby helping to improve the living and employment conditions of workers.”

The session of the Conference was attended by 97 Government delegates, 36 employers' delegates, and 35 workers' delegates, who were assisted by 247 advisers. The number of persons entitled to take part in the work of the Conference was therefore 415, representing fifty-one countries. The figures were a substantial increase on those recorded the previous year at the opening of the twentieth session, which was attended by 389 delegates and advisers from forty-eight countries.

It is worthy of note to mention the fact that among those who were representing their respective Governments at the Conference were Ministers directly concerned in shaping the social and industrial politics of their countries. Finland sent Mr. Kato, Minister of Labour; Irish Free State sent Mr. Lemass, Minister of Industries and Commerce; Latvia sent Mr. Alfredo Bergins, Minister of Social Affairs; Luxemburg was represented by M. Dupong, Minister of Finance; Yugoslavia by M. Tzvelkovitch, Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health; France by M. Lebas, Minister of Labour; England by Mr. E. Brown, Minister of Labour; and New Zealand, the most distant country, represented by its Minister of Labour, Mr. Armstrong.