

It can safely be said that with few exceptions a return to longer hours is not desired by employers or workers where the shorter working-week has been adopted. Reduced hours of work to meet the great increase in productivity are becoming more and more an accepted basis of agreement between employers and workers. Some flexibility, however, is necessary in respect of certain industries, and with a proper tribunal to determine these industries and the nature of exemption to be applied any opposition to the shorter working-week should be largely overcome.

The New Zealand legislation provides that wages shall not be reduced on account of any reduction in the working-hours. In fact, wages have increased since the shorter working-week came into operation. Opponents of the forty-hour week predicted that the Government's legislation would raise costs of production to such an extent that many industries would be unable to carry on. The latest figures available on factory production—that is, for the year ending 31st March, 1937—show the value of production for the year as £106,000,000, a record level in the history of New Zealand, and far ahead of the previous record of £91,000,000 in 1929–30. The number of persons employed in factories in 1936–37 was 96,400, exceeding the previous record by 9,800. The number of factories—17,126—exceeded the previous year by 692. Salaries and wages paid amounted to over £18,000,000, also a record. There is, in fact, abundant evidence to show that reduced working-hours have not had the adverse effect on industry predicted by opponents.

I have already mentioned that Saturday work is to be eliminated where practicable. In some industries it is recognized that the average rates of output on a Saturday morning, where a holiday is observed after noon, are considerably less than on full working-days, and with the introduction of the forty-hour week the elimination of work on Saturdays has been found acceptable in many industries. I would mention, however, in passing that the five-day working-week has in a measure created a problem regarding the proper utilization of the leisure time. This is a matter to which the New Zealand Government is giving serious attention by encouraging sport and providing easy travelling facilities.

In the case of those classes of workers whose hours of work are not regulated either by Act of Parliament or by awards by the Court of Arbitration, provision of a different kind has been made. The Agricultural Workers Act, 1936, is designed to cover workers employed in farming operations. The Act does not specifically fix hours of employment for any class of farm workers. Minimum wages and other conditions, including accommodation, board, and lodging-allowances, are prescribed. However, as a set-off against the non-limitation of working-hours, provision is made for holidays of not less than seven days for every twelve weeks of employment. If, however, a worker receives a weekly half-holiday, then the annual holiday is reduced to fourteen days.

I am glad to notice that a full account of this Act and of the circumstances in which it was passed have been given in an article by Mr. E. J. Riches on "Agricultural Planning and Farm Wages in New Zealand" in the *International Labour Review* of March, 1937. As this article explained, the Act in the first place applied to dairy-farm workers only; provision was made, however, to bring other classes of farm workers under its scope after consultation with the organizations of employers and workers concerned. Practically all farm workers are now covered by the Act, including orchard workers and market-garden employees. In the case of orchard workers and market-garden employees maximum hours of work have been agreed upon. It is worthy of note that the conditions applying to each class of farm workers are based on agreements between farmers' and workers' organizations.

In accordance with a promise made by the Hon. the Minister of Labour to the Conference last year, Parliament was asked to ratify twenty-two Draft Conventions. Consent of Parliament was obtained, and the remaining forty Draft Conventions are now being examined with a view to further ratifications this year. I might also state that during the discussion on the resolution to ratify the Conventions, members on both sides of the House paid great tribute to the work and achievements of the International Labour Office.

In conclusion, I should like to recall that during the period from 1890 to 1910 New Zealand was recognized as being foremost in social and industrial legislation. Although a comparatively small country, experiments were tried, and these provided a high standard of living and of working-conditions that aroused interest in other parts of the world. The legislation adopted during the past two and a half years is an endeavour by the present Government to restore New Zealand to the proud position it once held.

I should like to mention that New Zealand, situated as it is so far from the centre of activities connected with the International Labour Organization, finds some difficulty in keeping in close touch with the work of the Organization. Our people are not fully conversant with the work of the Office and with the wealth of experience and influence in social and industrial matters exerted by the International Labour Organization. Too little information is given by the press, and very little is done to focus public opinion on the matters brought before the Conference. It is necessary to arouse more interest. I suggest that greater use might be made of the cinema, the broadcasting services, and other avenues of publicity, and that the Director or members of his staff should visit countries such as New Zealand periodically.