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The Final Report of the Dutch Labour Commission

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Source: *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 14 (Jun., 1894), pp. 335-337

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Royal Economic Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2956019>

Accessed: 28-06-2016 09:24 UTC

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The Economic Journal

ment; and they were, in direct defiance of its provisions, idle for periods of from three weeks to six or seven weeks, causing very serious disturbance of business. Their wage-rate had fallen as already stated from $57\frac{1}{2}$ above the standard, at which it stood in August, 1891, to 10 per cent., as shown in the table above; a loss of $47\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. (on the standard; not per cent. of their wages) during less than two years. During the whole of this period the English miners had maintained their wage-rate intact; and as the Federation agents had been active in propaganda throughout South Wales, dissatisfaction was general; and the strike resulted.

An agreement on more favourable terms, such as would avoid heavy reductions of this nature, cannot be made because the men's unions are weak; and they are weak because, so it is alleged, the men will not subscribe when they know that a scale agreement has been arrived at. Their reason is: 'Oh, the wage-rate is fixed; why should we pay into the union.' It won't benefit us.' Short-sighted as is this argument, it is general, and is the operative cause of 'union' weakness. The unions have practically no funds; and on the last two occasions when negotiations for re-modelling the agreement had been carried on, the miners have been confessedly too weak to stand out for better terms. Not being in union, and not being possessed of funds, they have had to accept little better than what the masters originally offered.

Summary.—The sliding-scale is discouraging to unionism; lack of union leaves the men too weak to exact terms; and unsatisfactory terms, by producing discontent, endanger the existence of the scale, which for the sake of retaining our trade ought to be kept in operation.

In dealing with questions affecting the South Wales coal trade, an important diversity of practice should be remembered. Prices in England are quoted 'at the pit's mouth'; but in South Wales the quotation is 'f.o.b. Cardiff' or other port. So that the Welsh price includes cost of carriage to the port, and of putting on board ship, say 1s. 6d. per ton, on the average. The circular of the Labour Department, sent out during the English strike, ignored this difference of practice, and asked for prices 'at the pit's mouth,' but these could not be supplied from South Wales.

H. READ

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE DUTCH LABOUR COMMISSION

By Royal Decree of April 8th, 1890, a Commission of thirteen members was instituted for collecting materials concerning the social condition of labourers, the relations between employers and their working-men in different branches of industry, and the sanitary conditions in factories and workshops. Since that date the Commission, divided into three sub-committees, has been engaged in

taking evidence in different parts of the country. In 325 sitting days no fewer than 2,694 witnesses and experts have appeared before the Commission to give evidence. A complete verbatim report of the proceedings has been issued in twenty volumes, and by the care of the Commission accurate abstracts have been compiled, giving the results of the investigation in a condensed form, arranged according to the subjects treated. By a Decree of September 1892, the commissioners were authorised to propose such legislative measures as they deemed necessary to cure or alleviate the evils, whose existence had come to their knowledge in the course of the investigation. And in the beginning of 1894 the very laborious work of the Commission has been crowned by the publication of a Final Report, containing the proposals, which have been approved by the majority of its members.

In the first place some alterations are proposed in the law of May 5th, 1889, the so-called 'Labour Law,' containing provisions not only concerning factories and workshops, but in some cases also for domestic labour. The principal of these amendments are the following:

The minimum age for working in any industry,—agricultural and kindred operations excepted,—is raised from twelve to thirteen years, except for those children who have completed the curriculum of the elementary schools.

Children below sixteen can only be employed in factories and workshops, when they follow a course in schools for more extended instruction for at least six hours in every week.

In the same cases the hours of labour of persons below sixteen years of age are reduced from a maximum of eleven to one of nine hours daily, and in future it will not be possible to grant exceptions to this statute by administrative decree.

In turfmaking, an employment as yet not reached by the law, the minimum age for children will be fourteen years.

On Sundays no driving of engines by mechanical power will be permitted in factories and workshops.

The present number of factory-inspectors,—only three for the whole country,—seems inadequate to the Commission; either their number should be increased, or assistant-inspectors appointed.

Further, the Commission recommends provisions for protecting labourers in factories and workshops and in the building trades against the various dangers of their calling. Employers are required to take precautions against fire, against engines in motion, inadequate scaffolding, etc. Already a Bill for this purpose has reached the legislature.

While the hours of labour of full-grown male persons are now left to free contract, it is proposed to regulate the hours of all persons in the service of transport-companies, to whom a concession for a railway has been granted. Moreover it is thought advisable to take

into consideration similar measures, in the baking trade, in the work of loading and unloading sea vessels, and in other trades where the abuse of excessive hours is proved to exist.

Concerning working-men's insurance the Report proposes a compulsory insurance against injury, to be paid by the employers, and the opening of an insurance agency by the State. Besides, it recommends the organisation of an insurance against invalidity and old age,—the premium to be paid in part by the employer and the workman, in part by the State,—after some experience will have been gained by the working of the insurance against injury. One of the sub-committees goes farther, and wishes to see those subjects taken up immediately.

Chambers of labour are to be organised as public bodies, with an equal number of members chosen by the employers and by the workmen, to prevent and to remove differences arising between the two classes, and to give advice to the Government on questions of social legislation.

The Commission, composed of members belonging to many political parties, has decided by a great majority to advocate the introduction of compulsory primary education, a measure which the liberal party, to whose platform the measure belonged for many years, had failed to carry, owing to the opposition against the public schools, where religion does not belong to the subjects taught. Some exceptions, however, are granted, *e.g.* in cases where only public schools exist in a locality.

Pending the necessary change in the act on expropriation of property, more extended powers will be given to local authorities to remove bad dwellings, and it will be sufficient to pay to the owners the value of the materials, leaving them in the possession of the building site.

Concerning some other proposals of the Commission, it would be difficult to make the matter clear without entering into the details of Dutch law. Among them are enactments for preventing truck; for defining more minutely the rights and duties of both parties to contracts of labour and contracts of apprenticeship; for simplifying the procedure, if disputes arise out of such contracts, etc.

In the proceedings and the reports of the Labour Commission Parliament will find material for much useful work for years to come. Just now a bill is under discussion which will bring us a very great extension of the suffrage. There can be no doubt that the new electorate, the majority of which will belong to the labouring classes, will soon take in hand many of the measures for social reform, which we have rapidly indicated above.

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