

Law as to Wages Is Kept Intact, He Tells House

Names Firms Cited at Ottawa Probe, and Moneys Paid

REGULATIONS UPHOLD

Minister of Health Is Critical of Other Witnesses

Complete vindication was given in the Legislature yesterday by Hon. Dr. J. M. Robb, Minister of Health, to ten firms recently accused, before the Stevens Committee at Ottawa, of offending against the Ontario Minimum Wage Act, which governs women workers' pay.

One by One.

Instance by instance, Dr. Robb denied charges made at Ottawa by A. W. Laver, Toronto Welfare Commissioner. At Ottawa, Mr. Laver had cited the nine cases of girls who applied for relief, allegedly because they were underpaid by their employers. The list, with Dr. Robb's comments, follows:

The List.

Canada Packers Limited: "This employee allegedly received only \$9 per week. Investigation made by our inspector discloses that, from July 27 to Dec. 20 last, this woman averaged \$11.50 per week. Then from Jan. 11 to March 1, 1934, working part time only, she averaged \$10 per week. The woman was correctly paid, according to the requirements of the Ontario Minimum Wage Board."

T. Eaton Company, Limited: "The woman in question was alleged to have received \$10 per week. Investigation by our inspector discloses the fact that, from July 13 to Dec. 22, the day she applied for relief, this woman received for the 24 weeks an average of \$10.65 per week. Out of the 24 weeks she worked only 8 full-time weeks; the balance were on short time. This woman was correctly paid, according to our requirements."

Toronto Feather and Down Company: "This girl was alleged to have received \$5 a week. Our inspector went through this firm's books from June, 1933, to March 15, 1934, and could find no evidence that this woman received as low as \$5 a week. Her average earnings for the whole period were 30 cents an hour, whereas all this firm was required to pay under our orders is 25 cents an hour."

According to Law.

Midland Whitewear Company: "An employee was alleged to receive only \$5 per week. Our inspector reports that this employee earned 25.1 cents an hour from July 29 to March 17, 1934. This woman's weekly earnings only on two occasions from Sept. 1 amounted to less than \$7, and on these two occasions she worked a very short week. This woman was correctly paid, according to our requirements."

Rite-Way Hand Laundry: "A woman was alleged to have received \$6 a week. Our inspector visited this plant and found that this woman had been paid \$10 a week up till recently and for the last month \$12.50 a week. This woman herself, upon being interrogated, said that she had not applied for relief, consequently could not have made the statement that she was only paid \$6 a week. She did, however, admit that her husband had applied for relief, but what her husband said to the Relief Officer she was unable to say. It was apparent that although this woman appears to have applied for relief she was not interviewed by the Relief Department."

George H. Hees & Company: "This girl was sister of the girl working at the Toronto Feather and Down Company, another relief case. This woman was alleged to have received \$10 per week. Our investigator found that from September to Jan. 3, this employee received \$11.30 per week and from Jan. 3 to date \$12.50 per week. This woman was correctly paid, according to our requirements."

F. W. Woolworth Company: "This woman was alleged to have received \$8.50 per week. From September, 1933, to date, this employee only once received wages as low as \$8.50 per week, and then it was for thirty hours."

Allen Hairdressing Establishment: "A woman, it was alleged, received \$7 per week. Our investigator found that Mr. Allen has a small hairdressing establishment and does all the work himself. For some years he had not employed any female help. The lady mentioned in Mr. Laver's report is a sister, whom he helps out from time to time with gifts of money. She has never worked for him regularly, has certainly not put in a full week's time, but occasionally if her brother has two appointments at one hour she relieves him. This girl herself admitted that she is not employed by her brother."

Colgate - Palmolive - Peet Company, Limited: "This girl, it was alleged, received from \$11 to \$11.50 per week. The facts are as revealed by their records, that this employee received 31 1-2 cents per hour, whereas our minimum rate for this plant is 25 1-2 cents an hour."

"Mr. Laver in his evidence at Ottawa stated that the National Picture Frame Company normally employed twenty girls, that it had discharged seventeen and replaced them with boys. As a matter of fact, this firm has never employed as many as twenty female employees. In July, 1933, they employed nine; in August, six; in September, eleven; in October, thirteen; in November, fourteen; and in December, twelve."

"At present they employ nine girls and state that at no time have they replaced women with boys. Whether that be true or not, the fact remains that before the strike in October, they had fewer female employees than they have had since."

Professor Cassidy's Evidence.

Before concentrating on Mr. Laver's allegations, Dr. Robb had discussed the evidence given before the Stevens committee by Professor Cassidy of the University of Toronto, acting for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. The professor, he said, "had intimated that he had had a hard time getting his information, unverified statements of individual workers." A strong trade unionist, Professor Cassidy had reported not much violation of the Minimum Wage Act in union shops, but elsewhere, he charged, the law was not obeyed and starvation wages paid to needle workers. "I don't know Professor Cassidy's idea," said Dr. Robb, "but he has stood on C.C.F. platforms, and they're arguing against capitalists. It is a fair question to ask whether he went before the Stevens committee with an unbiased mind." Dr. Robb suggested that the point overlooked in the professor's evidence was whether the women were working on full or part time basis.

Investigations had been undertaken on a number of complaints received since the Stevens investigation began. Three plants in Hamilton had been given a clean bill after an inquiry on the complaint of one "Well-Wisher." A Welland firm pay-list had been approved after "Fervent Liberal" had complained. Further, "a respectable citizen known to 90 per cent. of the members" had alleged an instance of low wages paid girl workers, and conditions below the standard of health. The departmental investigation had revealed compliance with all requirements of the law. "In other words," said Dr. Robb, "there was not a word of truth in the statement of one of the outstanding citizens of Toronto."

Act Is Strengthened.

Dr. Robb's speech was made on second reading of his bill, tightening provisions and increasing penalties under the Minimum Wage Act. He explained the difficulties which confronted the department, but praised R. A. Stapells, Wage Board Chairman, for his meeting of those difficulties. He cited figures to show the progress in improving wages which had been made by the board.

The Minister denounced "the irresponsible statements of the Liberal Leader outside the House when he promises to do away with child labor. There is no child labor in this Province. There is no condition here like in the mining country of Pennsylvania or the cotton industry of the Southern United States." Again quoting figures, he showed a declining employment figure for children in Ontario. Only two below the age of 14 had to be dismissed last year.

Progressive Leader Nixon asked if Dr. Robb had investigated wages paid in a Stratford packing plant, the cause of the strike there. Dr. Robb assured Mr. Nixon that there had been an investigation on complaints of the Mayor of Stratford.

Dr. Robb recalled the complaint of a Mr. Cook, accusing retail and department stores of unethical practice and low wages. The Minister said he had learned that Mr. Cook, prior to this, had appealed to the board asking a reduction in the minimum wage. "His request was refused."

The department asks for the cooperation of the public and of employers, the Minister said, in conclusion, and it is only fair to give warning that those who do not cooperate must take the results. "Give us the facts, and we will investigate," he promised.

H. S. Colliver (Conservative, Prince Edward), although protesting his loyalty to the Minister and to the board, mentioned tomato-canning conditions without drawing inferences. The minimum wage, he said, caused disturbances between male and female labor, and hours in the canning plants were affected by seasonal demands. Mr. Colliver argued that Quebec products, produced under a different minimum wage law, were flooding the market, and "we cannot compete." Several canning factories, he claimed, had been moved into Quebec because of cheap labor.

Praise for R. A. Stapells was offered by Wilfred Heighington (Conservative, St. David's), who referred to the Chairman's charitable and civic activities. He should not be criticized unless given better legislation, the Conservative member contended, claiming that at present "even we humble lawyers can drive a cart and horse through it."

Welfare Commissioner A. W. Laver stated last night when he was asked to comment on Mr. Robb's statement that he preferred to make no reply until the figures had been checked.

R. A. Barker, a former Welfare Department employee, now employed by the Federal Government in checking up statements made by Commissioner Laver before the mass buying committee at Ottawa, refused to make any comment either. He intimated that the statements of the Minister would be sent to the Federal Government.