

FOR NEW ERA FOR LABOR.

Four Catholic Bishops Join in Program for Reconstruction.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13.—Adoption of minimum wage schedules, maintenance in general of the wage levels attained during the war, and permanent establishment of the National War Labor Board and the United States Employment Service were advocated as essentials of a just reconstruction in a report made public today by four Catholic Bishops, constituting the Administrative Committee of the National Catholic War Council.

While favoring, in the interests of health and morality, prohibition of child labor and reduction to the smallest practical limits of the employment of women in industry, the committee urged equal pay for women doing equal work with men. It declared also for insurance of workers against illness, old age, and unemployment until wages are high enough to tide over such periods, for abolition of monopolies, for continuance of heavy taxes on large incomes and excess profits, for co-operative merchandising in necessities to reduce the cost of living, and for Government-assisted colonization of unoccupied farm lands by demobilized soldiers and sailors.

As a measure outside its present reconstruction program but of value in solving the problems of capital and labor, the committee urged gradual participation by labor in the management and eventually in the ownership of industry.

The report was issued in the names of Bishops Peter J. Muldoon of Rockford, Ill., Joseph Schrembs of Toledo, Ohio, William T. Russell of Charleston, S. C., and Auxiliary Bishop Patrick J. Hayes of New York. As members of the War Council's Administrative Committee they represent the Catholic hierarchy of America in general direction of war work in this country and overseas.

While holding that "mere justice, to say nothing of chivalry," dictates that women who filled in industry the places made vacant by men called to war "should not be compelled to suffer any greater loss or inconvenience than is absolutely necessary" in the readjustment under peace conditions, the report declared that no female worker remain in an occupation harmful to health or morals. In this classification street car operation and the cleaning of locomotives were especially mentioned. An efficient national employment service, it was stated, would be able to shift to domestic and other suitable lines of activity women war workers whose circumstances required them to continue as wage earners.

The committee asserted that the average rate of pay had not increased faster than the cost of living, and that a considerable majority of wage earners, both men and women, were not receiving living wages when prices began to rise in 1915.

"Even if the great majority of workers," the committee said, "were now in receipt of more than living wages, there are no good reasons why rates of pay should be lowered. After all, a living wage is not necessarily the full measure of justice. All the Catholic authorities on the subject explicitly declare that this is only the minimum of justice. In a country as rich as ours there are very few cases in which it is possible to prove that the worker would be getting more than that to which he has a right if he were paid something in excess of this ethical minimum.

"So far as possible the insurance fund should be raised by a levy on industry, as is now done in the case of accident compensation. Any insurance scheme or any administrative method that tends to separate the workers into a distinct and dependent class, that offends against their domestic privacy and independence, or that threatens individual self-reliance and self-respect, should not be tolerated. Hence all the forms of State insurance should be regarded as merely a lesser evil, and should be so organized and administered as to hasten the coming of the normal condition."

Upholding the right of labor to organize and to deal with employers through representatives, the report urged a gradual recognition of the workers in the management and ownership of the industries of which they are a part. As a first step it suggested admission of employes to the industrial part of management through formation of shop committees to co-operate with owners of plants. The next phase, participation in ownership, the committee conceded was not of general value in a program for immediate social reconstruction. It classed private ownership as preferable to a collectivist organization of industry, which it characterized as a state of socialism which would mean bureaucracy, political tyranny, general social inefficiency and decadence, but asserted that the present system, producing "insufficient incomes for a great majority of wage earners and unnecessarily large incomes for a small minority of privileged capitalists," needed modification and improvement.

"It seems clear," said the committee, "that the present industrial system is destined to last for a long time in its main outlines, but the full possibilities of increased production will not be realized so long as the majority of the workers remain mere wage earners. The majority must somehow become owners, at least in part, of the instruments of production."

To bring about even moderate reforms, the Bishops asserted, both capital and labor must get a new viewpoint. The laborer, they declared, "must come to realize that he owes his employer and society an honest day's work in return for a fair wage, and that conditions cannot be substantially improved until he roots out the desire to get a maximum return for a minimum of service. The capitalist needs to learn the long-forgotten truth that wealth is stewardship; that profit-making is not the basic justification of business enterprise, that there are such things as fair profits, fair interest, and fair prices; that the laborer is a human being, not merely an instrument of production, and that the laborer's right to a decent livelihood is the first moral charge upon industry."