
NEW ZEALAND GASWORKS (OVER 12,000,000 CUBIC FEET OUTPUT) EMPLOYEES.—DECISION OF EMERGENCY DISPUTES COMMITTEE UNDER STRIKE AND LOCKOUT EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1939

In the matter of the Strike and Lockout Emergency Regulations 1939; and in the matter of a dispute between the Auckland Gas Co., Ltd., and members of the New Zealand Gasworks and Related Trades' Employees' Industrial Union of Workers relating to the rates of pay and other conditions of employment of employees of the said company.

THE Committee appointed to decide the above dispute met at Auckland on the afternoon of the 16th ultimo. After a discussion on points of procedure, Mr. Bell, on behalf of the

workers, asked for an adjournment to enable him to prepare his case. An adjournment was accordingly agreed upon until the 22nd ultimo, but the Committee spent the remainder of the afternoon of that day and the whole of the following day in making a thorough inspection of the Auckland and Devonport works.

The hearing of the dispute was resumed on the 22nd, and was continued on the 24th and 25th ultimo. Unfortunately, a majority of the members of the Committee found themselves unable to reach agreement, and the responsibility of making the Committee's decision was accordingly left to the Chairman.

For the workers who are members of the Auckland Branch of the union a claim was made for a general increase of 20 per cent. on the existing rates of pay. In support of this claim the workers referred to the rise in the cost of living and to the arduous and unsatisfactory nature of the general working-conditions. It was stated that owing to the rapid rise in the cost of living certain members of the branch had been compelled to work long hours of overtime under adverse conditions to earn a sufficient weekly income to keep their families. Reference was also made to higher wages being paid to workers in the industry at Wellington, where, it was stated, much better working-conditions prevailed. Stress was laid upon the arduous nature of the work in the retort-house, where the men were required to work in fairly intense heat, and in this connection it was emphasized that great difficulty was experienced by the Man-power authorities in persuading suitable men directed to the works to remain in the industry. The financial position of the company was touched on, the workers commenting on the relatively small turnover in proportion to the capital invested, which it was admitted made it extremely difficult for the company to earn a reasonable return for its shareholders. It was appreciated by the workers that if they were to receive reasonable remuneration for their labour, the works would have to be run efficiently and on a basis that would show a reasonable net profit on a reasonable working capital. With the object of improving the efficiency of the undertaking, the workers, it was stated, had from time to time made suggestions which in their opinion would have the effect of speeding up production and thereby reducing overhead costs in proportion to turnover, but it was alleged that in the past the management had declined to pay attention to such suggestions. These difficulties, they said, had to some extent been overcome recently by the appointment of a new manager, who, the workers agreed, takes a more

sympathetic interest in the welfare of the employees, and by the setting-up of a Production Council, which the workers thought would be likely to bring about a better understanding between the management and the men.

At the request of Mr. Worley, the manager, the workers' representatives prepared and placed before the Committee their proposals for reorganization of the works which, it was stated, would in their view go a long way towards improving efficiency and increasing production. These proposals are set out hereunder:—

WORKERS' PROPOSALS FOR REORGANIZATION OF GASWORKS

(a) The obvious lack of co-operation between the engineer and the departmental foremen and the lack of supervision by the foremen over men, brought about by the fact that in most cases the men in charge are not sufficiently conversant with the work to hold the confidence of those under them. Added to this is the lack of understanding and recognition of the problem of the men by the engineer has placed a barrier between the management and the workers which has had the effect of removing from the men's minds any interest in their work or the welfare of the company.

To alter this unfortunate position it is felt necessary to suggest that a complete reorganization of the company's staff is definitely essential to ensure a happier atmosphere in the industry. To do this we feel that the engineer must of necessity be relieved of the control of the workers.

Plant

(b) (1) *Yard*.—A better method of handling coke-skips.

Improved lighting conditions where men are required to perform work in bad light.

Better equipment with which to perform general duties—such as tools. Gum boots and coats for men required to continue work in wet weather.

Improvement to foundation where men are required to shovel or wheel.

In view of the danger associated with work on naphthalene plant and the fact that there are other duties to perform, we suggest that two men are necessary here.

There is room for considerable improvement in the condition under which the men under the receiving coal-hoppers are required to work.

Where men are required to bag coke on a Saturday morning, we feel that they should receive overtime rates, as, in our opinion, this work is not covered by the "exemption clause" in the award.

It is suggested that to improve conditions in the change-house that showers be removed from the bottom floor to outside extension or second and top floor and the bottom floor to be used as a dining-room.

That provision be made for another lavatory, the position of this to be decided by the Production Council.

(2) *Tar Plant*.—Adequate lighting.

Necessity to devise means of overcoming oil-fumes from tar-cookers.

Proper travelling-way on top of all tar-cookers.

(3) *Retort-house*.—The vital nature of this department calls for special consideration, and we propose to call witnesses to deal as effectively as possible with this branch.

Devonport Works

(4) Suggest that generator be provided for the purpose of providing better lighting facilities.

Better means of handling ashes, and improvement to floor.

Hoppers to carry fuel for boilers.

Change-house.—Removal of oil-store from change-house; built-in lockers; roof and windows to be repaired.

Management to rearrange type of work done by employees.

Suggestion *re* organizing of staff to be as mentioned in Auckland works.

Coal-boat.—That necessary alteration as suggested by the workers to boat structure be effected, and that conditions of work of these men be reviewed.

Conclusion

(c) To elaborate fully on the conditions of the industry in general would require considerable time and thought. We feel that, with the assistance of the Production Council, the general efficiency of the industry should be considerably improved.

With reference to the allegation contained in paragraph (a) above—namely, the “obvious lack of co-operation between the engineer and the departmental foremen”—Mr. Collins, the engineer, denied that this was the case, and suggested that some evidence should be brought before the Committee in support of the charge. Several foremen were accordingly called and examined on the point, but in my opinion there was no definite evidence to substantiate the allegation. There was, however, some evidence of a lack of co-operation between the foremen and the present works superintendent, and it may well be that this is where the real trouble lies. Clearly there is some room for improvement in the internal management of the manufacturing branch of the industry, and in my opinion a thorough investigation should be made by the management into the serious allegations made by the workers. It is in the interests of the company that such an investigation should be held as early as possible.

Regarding the items other than the above enumerated in the workers' proposals for reorganization, it was considered that these were matters that should be discussed by the newly constituted Production Council. Mr. Worley, the manager, freely admitted that during the inspection of the works he had noticed a number of matters that required attention, and he promised that improvements would be effected at an early date. He indicated also that sympathetic consideration would be given to the other matters set out in the workers' proposals when they were brought before the Production Council.

As to the workers' claim for a general increase on the present rates, I am unable, having due regard to all the existing circumstances, to make a decision increasing wages generally.

I was impressed, however, by the hot and heavy nature of the work in the retort-house and by the fact that higher wages were being paid in Wellington not only to retort-house workers, but to labourers, and in making my decision I have brought the Auckland rates more into line with the rates at present prevailing in the industry at Wellington. At Wellington the lowest-paid workers receive, in addition to their ordinary rate of 2s. 4d. an hour, a bonus of 6s. 8d. a week. Where such a worker is employed for less than a week he receives a proportionate payment by way of bonus. In the retort-house at Wellington the operators are paid £1 3s. a shift and the fire-cleaners £1 2s. 4d. a shift. At Auckland the present rates are £1 1s. 8d. a shift for the stokers, operators, &c., and £1 1s. 6d. a shift for the fire-cleaners. Since inspecting the Auckland works I have had the opportunity of inspecting the Wellington retort-house, and I am unable to see any reason for a differentiation in the rates. I was particularly impressed by the arduous nature of the work of the fire-cleaners at Auckland, and I am of the opinion that their rate should be brought into conformity with that of the stokers and operators, &c. The retort-house workers at Auckland are at present working under a temporary arrangement under which they receive payment at the rate of 2s. per shift for each retort worked over the normal number of eighteen retorts. It is my opinion that upon the discontinuance of this temporary arrangement all retort-house workers, including fire-cleaners, should have their rates increased to £1 3s. per shift.

At the hearing an offer was made by the management to pay all workers employed on Saturday mornings at overtime rates, and a provision to this effect has been included in the decision.

My decision is as follows:—

(1) Workers at present being paid at the ordinary rate of 2s. 4d. an hour shall be paid, in addition, a bonus of 6s. 8d. for a full week's work. Where such a worker is employed for less than a week he shall receive a proportionate payment by way of bonus.

(2) Upon the discontinuance of the present temporary arrangement whereby retort-house workers receive payment at the rate of 2s. per shift per retort worked over the normal number of eighteen retorts, the undermentioned classes of workers shall be paid at the rate of £1 3s. per shift:—

Horizontal retorts: Power stoking-machines—

Charging and pushing machine operators, stokers, retort patcher and scurfer, pipe-jumpers, water-gas operators, and coke-transporter men.

Fire-cleaners regularly employed on shift-work or day-work.

Vertical chamber ovens—

Other operators and water-gas operators.

Fire-cleaners where regularly employed on shift-work or day-work.

(3) All work performed on Saturday mornings under the first proviso to clause 2 (a) of the award shall be paid for at overtime rates.

(4) The provisions of paragraphs (1) and (3) above shall be deemed to have come into force on the 1st day of November, 1943.

In making the above decision I have had regard to Regulation 6 of the Economic Stabilization Emergency Regulations 1942, Amendment No. 1 (Serial No. 1943/38).

Dated this 17th day of December, 1943.

[L.S.]

J. A. GILMOUR, Chairman.
