

JOINT MARITIME COMMISSIONLORD LEATHERS AND MR. BEVIN MEET DELEGATES

Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport, and Mr. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, today met the delegates of the Joint Maritime Commission of the International Labour Office, which has been meeting in London and is composed of representatives of shipowners and seafarers, and welcomed them on behalf of the British Government.

Lord Leathers

Lord Leathers said he was glad to think that the International Labour Office had not allowed the war to interfere with its meetings, particularly those of the Joint Maritime Commission.

He was delighted to welcome in London at their first meeting of the Commission the representatives of the United States for he felt that the Commission was strengthened by their presence.

He welcomed the resolution adopted by the Commission on the provision of life-saving appliances in merchant ships, which was one of great immediate importance in wartime. His Department had produced a draft collection of safety rules and he was glad to find that many of the suggestions put forward agreed with those recommended in this country.

Much had been done during the war for the welfare of non-European seamen and it was right the governments, shipowners and seamen of the United Nations should cooperate and see that seamen were properly treated. Both sides of the industry had been asked by his department to produce plans for the handling of post-war problems for, said Lord Leathers, "war-time improvements must not disappear".

Mr. Bevin

Mr. Bevin said that it was gratifying to see that suggestions for reform, put forward at the Maritime Sessions of the International Labour Conference at Geneva in 1936 which he attended as an Adviser, had been incorporated in a different but possibly better form in collective agreements and in other measures which had been taken.

The moral effect of the work for seamen at Geneva had been found of great benefit during the war. He pointed out that not only the comradeship between the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy was higher than ever in history, but also the comradeship of the whole community and seamen.

Notwithstanding what had happened in the last war the position of the seamen had not always been appreciated until this great struggle; and the expressions of feeling throughout the country whenever the seamen were mentioned were signs of the deep thankfulness and gratitude of the people of the whole Commonwealth.

Mr. Bevin added that this spirit must not be lost and that justice must be done to those who helped us to pass out of our difficulties.

As Minister of Labour he was anxious, although he did not depreciate all that had been done by charitable institutions, to see the seaman treated from the point of view of welfare on the same statutory and state basis as every other worker in the community. The seaman should not be in a separate class.

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Post-War Labour Regulation

The Maritime industry, Mr. Bevin said, could look forward to taking a far more important part in the post-war settlement than any other in the world, for it was the point of contact between peoples; and the Joint Maritime Commission was probably building better than it realized.

International regulation of labour conditions was no longer an orphan, but an important effort in trying to solve world problems and had come to the higher plane of contributing to a new order and new peace in the world.

Article V of the Atlantic Charter recognised the need to put labour agreements on the level of political and commercial treaties. Visualizing demobilization and resettlement as a far more difficult problem than mobilization, he had placed Sir Frederick Leggett in charge of a new Overseas Relations Department in his Ministry which would raise the status of regulation of international labour conditions to a higher point.

Mr. Bevin also declared that the seamen must never go back to pre-war conditions.

Commander Lee (United States) for the shipowners and Mr. Oldenbroek (International Transport Workers Federation) for the seafarers thanked the representatives of the British Government on behalf of the Joint Maritime Commission and both paid tribute to the work done by Mr. Bevin during his visit to Geneva.