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Untitled Internal Memorandum, 1930?

In the year 1929, compensation for industrial injuries was awarded 940 minors 16 and 17 years of age. Injuries which resulted in permanent impairment was suffered by 224 youths and four died as a result of their injuries. In over 35% (331) of the 940 cases, machinery was the cause of the injury. Of the 224 cases of permanent injury, 128 or 57% were caused by machinery.

Metal working machines were especially hazardous. 124 children were injured by them and of these, 54 suffered permanent injuries. A striking illustration is found here of the effect of protective laws and the lack of them. Under 16, no child may work on such machines. Only eight cases were compensated under 16 (illegal work receiving double compensation) while 124 children 16 and 17 years of age received injuries – an enormous advance.

To dispose of the argument that “falls” and “falling objects” are more hazardous than certain types of machines, it is only necessary to look at the figures and to realize that in spite of the fact that all workers in industry 16 and 17 years of age are exposed to this hazard, only 25 suffered permanent injuries and 101 temporary ones- a total of 126 from these causes as compared with 331 from machinery of which 124 were caused by metal working machines.

The same universal exposure of all at work exists with regard to injuries caused by “handling of objects and tools” while the total is large and undoubtedly could be reduced by supervision of young workers, it is not as serious a menace to the individual young worker. The same thing is also true of injuries caused by vehicles though here both the total injured and those permanently injured is much less. With as common a hazard as this, only 67 minors suffered compensable injuries. Two were killed and 15 permanently injured. Compare these figures with those for presses (punch and other) 87 youths were injured and 48 of them were permanently injured – and this by only one type of machine.

This bill is designed to prevent young persons 16 and 17 years of age from becoming what is known as “handicapped workers” or “rehabilitated workers”. Think what it means for a boy or girl to go through life as a handicapped worker, as hundreds, yes, thousands are now doing, as the figures on accidents to minors now show. If this bill will not have the effect of remedying this, we do not want to pass it, but any arguments which dwell on the undesirability of keeping minors from work, are not impressive when you place against that the employment in an occupation too dangerous. If as some contend, vocational school graduates will be kept from employment, we say that it would affect very few as the experience of other states prove, but granting that some would be affected, it is true that all laws work hardships on some individuals and what must be considered is the greatest good to the greatest number. If the question is raised why stop at 17, go on prohibit work to every one under 21, we will say this is nonsense and not sincere reasoning. The U.S. Department of Labor from its investigations proves that it is the 16 and 17 year old group which suffers the most accidents and that more of these

accidents are permanent or fatal than in any other age group. Obviously the 18 and up age group has better judgment, more experience, better coordinated muscles. Of what advantage is it to a person to give him employment in an occupation in which his chances of permanent disability or death are high. That there is work not dangerous to youth is obvious from the fact that the NJ State Department of Labor's figures show that 17,688 children, 14 and 15 years of age received certificates to work in 1929, and probably found work which they must do or return to school, in spite of the fact that a very long list of occupations is prohibited under 16.

“While machinery, materials and tools have become more dangerous, it has become common practice for industrialists to discharge older and more experienced men and engage young, unskilled or semi-skilled workers at jobs beyond their capacity for good judgment and safe practice/mass production and the mechanization of industry have not decreased industrial accidents. This deadline at 40, of which we have heard so much of late, has undoubtedly increased our industrial accident rate. I have been greatly impressed by the casual way in which human beings with hands, feet and eyes are supposed to carry on in a hazardous trade. I think the time will come when in efficiently managed industries there will be a demand for a large complement of older, experienced worker men in order to make the work safe for others.” (from a speech by Commissioner of Labor Perkins of NY State)

...Every occupation mentioned in this bill and a number of others was recommended to be prohibited to minors under 18 by the Committee on child labor at the 35th annual meeting of the Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Labor Laws. ...We are not asking for some new, experimental thing for the youth of New Jersey (NJ is notably conservative although interested to protect young workers as our present laws show). The industrial states around us, Pennsylvania and New York have found it necessary from their experience to safeguard minors 16 and 17 years of age by keeping them from work at proved dangerous occupations. Seven other states have prohibited up to 30 dangerous occupations and given the Commissioner of Labor power to extend the list.