

We now summarize the decisions on the subjects on the agenda :—

WAGES, HOURS, AND MANNING

The following exclusions operate :—

- (i) Ships under 500 gross register tons.
- (ii) Wooden vessels of primitive build such as dhows or junks.
- (iii) Vessels engaged in fishing or operations directly connected therewith.
- (iv) Estuarial craft.

Where in any law, award, custom, or agreement between the shipowners and seafarers more favourable provisions concerning wages, hours of work on board ship, or manning are made, those provisions are not to be prejudiced.

Ratification, which can be concluded on the basis of collective agreements, by a number of listed countries (but subject to a tonnage qualification) is necessary before the convention comes into operation. The practical effect of this is that ratification by Great Britain or the United States of America is a prerequisite to the convention becoming binding.

As New Zealand seamen enjoy wages and conditions in advance of those agreed upon, and as adoption of the convention by backward countries will have the effect of raising the standards of the workers of these countries, also because the text had the approval of the workers' group (with a few dissentients), the New Zealand Government delegates voted for the adoption of the convention.

Wages.—The adoption of £16 (sterling) or \$64 (United States) a month as a minimum wage for an able seaman marks the first occasion that the amount of the wage has been set in an international convention. Associated with this decision was the determination to adopt the method used in respect of the International Monetary Fund as a means of translation from sterling or United States dollar currency to that of the other member. It is open to considerable doubt whether adoption of these two decisions was wise, as the purchasing-power of currencies vary so widely. Apart from the possible inaccuracy, the result of this translation method, there are other dangers—*e.g.*, the setting of a wage standard for seafarers that is in advance of that enjoyed by industrial and other workers within a country may upset the whole wage structure and bring as a result undesirable industrial upheavals. Again, the preferential position in relation to other workers accorded to seafarers should depreciation of the domestic currency occur is not wholly fair. It is true that seafarers necessarily spend some money overseas and are entitled to protection against higher price levels perhaps obtaining there, but it appears that the major portion of their income would normally be spent in their home territory. Further, as both sterling and United States dollars are given as a base, there will be complications should they vary in terms of each other. Adoption of the double basis was no doubt to guard against possible depreciation of one or the other.

During the discussions it was argued that the minimum wage should be determined with reference to the standard of life of the country. Apparently the speakers had in mind such nationalities as Indians, Chinese, &c. While, in our opinion, cost of living should undoubtedly be taken into account, it is not proper to base an international minimum wage upon the extremely low living standard of some countries.

The New Zealand Government delegates voted for the £16 minimum, though they realized the difficulties of the position. This figure is below that at present operating on New Zealand ships, and the country's wage structure is therefore in no way involved. At the same time, it sets a legislative aim before some carrying countries that, up to the present, are paying less and therefore are competing unfairly with our ships when on international runs.

In respect of Asiatic seamen, it was decided that the basic pay for an A.B. shall be the adjusted equivalent of the £16 sterling to be fixed in accordance with the principle of equal pay for equal work, with due allowance for (a) the extra number of ratings of these groups employed and (b) any increase or decrease in cost to the shipowner consequent on the employment of such groups.