

FARMERS AND THE 40-HOUR WEEK

Behind the Scenes at a Controversial Broadcast

ON the evening of Monday, December 1 — when the farmer has fed the pigs, made the hay, taught the pullets and hens to lay, shorn the sheep, sown the crops, lopped the leaves off the turnip-tops—he will be able to sit back and listen to a discussion from 2YA, 2YH, 2YB, and 2ZJ on *Farming and the Forty-Hour Week*. Four experienced agriculturists will say what they think about the possibilities of a shorter working day for farmers and their helpers, and its effects on production, and a fifth speaker, their chairman, will sum up. This session will be one of the series of broadcasts on controversial topics recently started by the Talks Department of the NZBS.

The discussion group consists of the Hon. Ben Roberts, of Parkvale, Carterton, former Minister of Agriculture; E. W. McCallum, of Inaha, South Taranaki Provincial President of the Federated Farmers; George A. Walsh, sheepfarmer, of Cambridge, and member of the National Council of the Federated Farmers; the Hon. R. Eddy, M.L.C., former President of the New Zealand Workers' Union; and L. J. Wild, formerly Headmaster of the Feilding Agricultural High School and

past-President of the Royal New Zealand Agricultural Society (chairman).

Among the listeners who will agree or disagree with what these people have to say, there will no doubt be many who will wonder why such a topical subject is not discussed at greater length. But they will not be familiar with the many difficulties that have to be overcome before a five-handed debate can be broadcast at all.

In this case the panel spent two hours or so on the morning of the session talking the subject over and marshalling their separate ideas. Each man supplied the chairman, confidentially, with a broad outline of his views, so that the chairman could frame his questions. The panel was told that only a certain amount of time could be allowed, and that this time-limit must be observed as closely as possible.

When the time came to make the recording, the members settled themselves round the microphone, arranged



THE DISCUSSION GROUP IN SESSION (left to right): The Hon. Ben Roberts (Carterton), E. W. McCallum (Inaha), George A. Walsh (Cambridge), the Hon. R. Eddy, M.L.C., and L. J. Wild (chairman)

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heavy. For example, coal is more than £3 a ton and 35 tons are burnt on a trip.

From my own observations trawling is tough, but providing a person can laugh it can be pleasant. The crew work in all weathers. The skipper of the Maimai has not lost a life since he started trawling, but tragedy often visits the trawling fleets in Britain. Sometimes men are washed overboard because they have to work with the ship lying broad into the heavy swell. Spikes out of the fish get into the hands and occasionally poison them. Sleep is snatched at odd times. Sometimes salt-water boils spring up on the arms and neck. Doctors say that the sea and the chafing of oilskins cause them.

John Carndo and I had many an interesting talk. "Skate is excellent when fried," he told me, "but oddly enough there is no demand on the market for it. In Scotland, however, skate is considered to be one of the best eating fish." What do fishermen get for their fish? They are paid 4d per lb. for top fish and 1½d per lb. for rough fish. It is the old story: the middleman gets his cut and that is why the price of fish is high. A big quantity of fish caught means good pay for fishermen. Two hundred cases a week would not pay. Indeed there are times when things look black for them, but at the moment the crew is getting handsome pay-cheques. To whom does the Maimai belong? Well, in 1945

she was up for tender. Built in 1943 for the Government as a minesweeper she did vital work on the coast. Five ex-servicemen and another man formed a group and were successful with their tender. They then persuaded a few shore-owners to put their capital in. All fish is taken direct to market. The fishing-grounds in winter are between Napier and Wellington, between Cape Turnagain and Castlepoint, and in summer between Kaikoura and Cape Campbell, about 60 miles away. Incidentally, no wharf labour is employed in discharging fish. Coaling and all wharf work is done by the crew, so that whatever the Maimai makes out of a voyage is equally shared among them apart from one half-share of the profits taken by the shore-owners.

No Fishing on Sunday

The fisherman laugh and laugh often, but almost everyone of them is God-fearing. While I was working on the Maimai one said: "I never say to my missus that I shall see her on a particular date. I simply tell her that God-willing I may see her after the trip." It is said that seamen do not greatly care for religion, but fishermen know that from the moment of leaving port their lives are in the hands of the Lord. Born in Inverallochy fishing village near Aberdeen, John Carndo has been fishing since a lad. As I went ashore he said: "In Scotland no fishing is done on Sunday. We intend to observe that custom here, too. Now I shall get some sleep."

their rough notes, and the needle in the cutting-room next door began to cut the blank disc. The chairman introduced the subject by asking, "Can the 40-hour week be applied to the farming industry?" and suggested that the discussion should start by each member saying what he considered the farmer's present working-hours to be.

Four "Guesstimates"

Mr. Roberts thought they would total about 55; Mr. McCallum reckoned from, say 60 to 65 per week, for a dairyman; and Mr. Walsh said he could put the average at from 60 to 70, perhaps. Mr. Eddy, referring to mixed farming, caused his colleagues' and the chairman's eyebrows to rise when he declared that farmers probably put in no more hours than the city industrial worker.

Asked to explain how he got that idea, he said that after the city man had done his 40 hours for his employer, he went home to put in a few more hours doing odd jobs about his house and garden; and that would push his total hours up to the average farmer's working week.

It would have to be agreed, said the chairman, that the figures given were more or less "guesstimates." Mr. Roberts maintained that it was both possible and desirable to adopt the 40-hours-a-week principle as it was applied to other industries; but he emphasised the word *principle*. And Mr. Eddy said he could hardly feel that the 40-hour week would be initiated immediately following their discussion, but he could not see why farmers should not enjoy some leisure as well as others.

But, said the chairman, the cows simply won't conform: they're unreasonable creatures.

The dairy-farmer's outlook was the gloomiest. For him it was maintained that he put in 40 hours a week in the cowsheds alone. And on top of that were the pigs, crops, fence-mending, weeding, and innumerable other duties. How on earth could he call it a week after 40 hours?

But compensation was paid for work in excess of 40 hours in other industries, interjected Mr. Roberts, who didn't see why the dairy-farmer should quibble, because his compensation came from his butterfat returns.

Quite impossible economically, was the next contribution. The dairy-farmer could not get the necessary price to pay for work in excess of 40 hours. And the representative of the sheep-farmers contended that it would mean doubling the male working population on the sheep station.

It seemed to Mr. McCallum that one of the essentials was getting people to go into the country, and the inducement would be better accommodation. Yet that, he said, might result in the over-capitalisation of farm lands.

The discussion went on to analyse the effect of a 40-hour week on the price of foodstuffs, its effect on overseas markets, and the raising of costs. It was suggested that if the principle attracted more people to farming, it would, at any rate, serve one useful purpose, for the country life helped to develop in people characteristics of immense value to the nation.

And what conclusion was reached? We will leave that for listeners to find out for themselves, by tuning in to 2YA, 2YH, 2YB, or 2ZJ at 8.20 p.m. next Monday.