

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.
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4908

No, my dear, 4908 is not somebody's telephone or house number. It is the number of the Bill introduced in Congress on December 5, 1945 by the Honorable Mary T. Norton, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey, which deals with fact-finding. It's official title is "Labor-Finding Boards Act." Millions of words have been spoken and written on the subject. It has inspired a substantial number of letters from people in all walks of life. Perhaps it might be both interesting and novel to make a very factual and unornamented analysis of this proposal. In effect, this Bill does three things:

CERTIFICATION OF DISPUTES.

Section 2 of this measure provides that when a labor dispute is going on or if there is a threat of a work stoppage which seriously affects the public interest or interstate commerce or the national defense, and the government mediators have been unable to bring about an agreement between the parties who are involved, the Secretary of Labor shall certify the facts and details to the President. In other words, if there is a strike or lock-out and government agents cannot settle it, the Secretary of Labor makes a complete report to the President on the whole matter.

FACT FINDING BOARDS.

Section 3 of the Bill provides that within 5 days after the Secretary of Labor has certified the case to the President, the President may appoint a Board to investigate the matter, get the facts and report the facts to the President together with the recommendations of the Board as to what should be done. Both sides to the labor dispute - that is to say both labor and management- shall have a chance to present their claims and have a full and fair hearing. The Board shall have the power of subpoena. That is to say that the Board shall have power to issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and to compel either party to present it's books and records. It is the granting of this power to the Board that has caused a great deal of controversy. Within 20 days after the Board is appointed, it must make it's report and it's recommendations to the President.

WAITING PERIOD.

Section 4 provides for a waiting period and that's the thing to which labor objects. For a period of 30 days - which begins 5 days after the Secretary of Labor has certified his report to the President and ends 5 days after the Board has made it's report to the President - the parties to a labor dispute shall continue or resume work on the terms and conditions which prevailed when the labor dispute began. And during that time, it shall be unlawful to induce or instigate or encourage a strike or lock-out. However, there is nothing in the Bill which would prevent any person from quitting work. That is to say, he cannot be compelled to work or perform service without his consent.

COMMENT.

Now, there is the substance of the so-called Fact-Finding Act. The controversy resolves itself around two items. Management objects to giving a fact-finding board the power of subpoena so that it may come in and grab it's records. Labor objects to the cooling period because it believes that it is an infringement on the unqualified right to strike. So, there is the whole story in brief.