

*Mr. Elvines*: No; it is really a forced contract; that is the only name I can give it. Piece-work always has a tendency to reduce wages. If I might be allowed, I could explain what I used to do in London. In London I worked under the society of chairmakers, and the system there had been arranged by masters and journeymen, and we had to pay £2 10s. to work to those prices. I worked at them, and on some work I could not make more than £1 8s. a week, while at others I could earn £4 a week. If I could have got more of the £4 work I could have lived in London like a gentleman, without coming out here. I have earned £4 10s. one week and £1 8s. the next. That will give you an idea of the ridiculous way piecework is managed.

*Mr. McKerrow*: In London?

*Mr. Elvines*: Well, according to Mr. Winter, in Addington it is a hundred times worse. A contract is got up by the people, who give the work to the man, and they say, "There is so much work; you shall do it at such a price." I ask any gentleman here whether he would like to take it like that?

*Mr. McKerrow*: The actual fact, according to a return I have had made up, is that the men make, on an average, time and a quarter on the ordinary wage; so that it would appear to be rather in your favour that the price given is reasonable. I may just remark that there is a great deal of work in Addington and Hillside of a recurring nature—wagons, cars, and so on. The same thing occurs year after year, and the smith or carpenter and the fitter and painter who paint or repair one wagon do the same month after month, and it is easily ascertained what the man can reasonably do; and these men make time and a quarter. In the case of a job like repairing a locomotive it must be a matter of estimate, and it is just possible that in some cases the estimate may be wrong; but, generally speaking, I would assume that the foremen, before they get to those positions, ought to be able to estimate work pretty correctly. But do not by any means run away with the idea that piecework is the only mode of paying work in these shops. I ascertain that only about one-eighth of the work is done on piece, and it is of the class I have indicated—namely, work of a recurring nature.

*Mr. Elvines*: Well, we ask you to do away with that eighth.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I will just be quite candid with you. I do not wish to cast any imputation on our workmen, because I know there is not a finer body of men in the colony—I say that not to please or flatter you, but because it is my own observation—but wherever there is a large body of men, you know, there is always a tendency to drop down to what is called the "Government stroke."

*Mr. Elvines*: But these foremen, surely, should know all about the men in the shop, and what they are doing?

*Mr. McKerrow*: They do; but it is one thing to know the work, and another thing to get it done; and the piecework is a stimulus to the best men to do their best. A little practice is worth a great deal of theory. What is the practice in the great shops at Home? Both in private and company workshops piecework is resorted to—not in that small eighth degree, but almost universally. Then these magnificent steamers that travel round our coasts—all the engine-work in them, I am told, was made on piecework. The very notes that these gentlemen are so assiduously taking down will be set up in type by piecework. Your boots and clothes are done by piecework. It undoubtedly relieves men from that sense of servitude which is inseparable from the master's eye being always upon them. Instead of lowering, it is really raising the price of work—giving you the best opportunity of developing in the best way possible. For an inferior workman, to do away with it is playing into his hands, and bringing about in another form what Mr. Winter very strongly put—the injustice of one man contributing to another. Now, the system of day-wages tends to lower the reward due to a good workman to make up the deficiency of an inferior one.

*Mr. Elvines*: Most men have an aptitude for a particular kind of work, and it is the duty of the foreman to find out that particular aptitude, and give the man the work he can do best, not pit one man against another. Sometimes, if you give the same class of work to two men, one will be much quicker than the other, who would beat him at something else. When you have day-work you can choose your man for these jobs, instead of pitting men against each other. Only, your foreman should be able to see this.

*Mr. McKerrow*: So he is, no doubt.

The Conference, at 1 p.m., adjourned till 3 p.m.

Conference resumed at 3 p.m.

*Mr. McKerrow*: We were on the question of piecework: does any gentleman wish to make any further remark upon it?

*Mr. Winter*: This morning I tried to show you why we considered piecework unsatisfactory and pernicious, and the reason why we ask you, if possible, to abolish it. There are one or two points I may touch upon, in conclusion. It might not be altogether quite clear to you whether piecework does not reduce wages, or whether it might not, in all probability, in the end, reduce wages. You will find that Mr. Rotheram said this morning that at the end of each term—monthly or quarterly, I forget—

*Mr. McKerrow*: Monthly.

*Mr. Winter*: All the piecework was picked out, duly considered, and the prices regulated. If it was seen that there was too much money made on the piecework the prices were reduced. By that system it is very easily seen that the prices of piecework can be reduced from time to time, and yet the same stimulus will be required for the man to work harder and harder to keep up the extra money he has been making, until you succeed in reducing the price of piecework to the very lowest pitch; so that a man has to work extremely hard—as hard as he can—to make bare wages. Such, unfortunately, has been the effect in the Old Country. There men have to work at such a rate, and to such an extent, to make bare wages, or a bare living, that, in fact, when they go home