

of business people and traders. We do not take the advice of candidates for the Legislature all over the country: we take the opinion of business men and others. I simply again have to express regret if we have to resort to extreme measures; but I am sure we shall have the power of the colony at our back, and the members of the House. I was present there last night, and the remarks made by the members who spoke all tended to show that our requests were considered very fair and reasonable indeed. While thanking you for one or two points or concessions—very small after all—your replies to several of our communications are not altogether what we expected. I wish to put this before you: You said our proportion with regard to boy-labour would enable you to employ a larger number of boys, and that the number proposed would displace a large number of men. Our object is to limit the number of boys. It would not only displace men, it would simply give you a larger number of boys for the purpose. But we will simply resume the hours of labour. I ask again whether you will meet us in this matter. At the present time you are both judge and jury. You are hearing a case practically against yourselves, and you are, as one of my colleagues points out, deciding in the matter. Now, where there are two points in dispute, it is usual to refer the thing to a different party. Now, as the matter refers to the Government, and will cost the people a lot of money, and as you have by your reply said the request is not unfair, I think we should submit the proposal to arbitration, and save the country the cost of extreme measures. I do not think it is worth while taking up your time, gentlemen, unless my colleagues would like to put their opinions before you.

*Mr. Owen:* We have had advice from and consultation with some of the largest bodies of men in this colony, and we are in association with large bodies on the other side; and I do not know what they would do and think of us if we attempted to meet you. I think they would drown us if we got on the other side of the water.

*Mr. Winter:* That is a point on which I propose to touch. The Maritime Council is very hot for the eight hours, and so are others; and we claim to be recognised as a portion of the trades unions. If we were to go and accept a thing like that, and go back to Christchurch and advise the Executive to accept the concessions you are pleased to make, we would be working in direct opposition to the great principles laid down by the labour federations. We should be looked upon as undoing what had been done in the past. It is contrary to reason to do it. Also bear in mind that, if there is the slightest tendency in the direction of adopting extreme measures, not only will the Maritime Council assist us, but they will urge us to do, and almost compel us to do, from a union point of view. This is a point which ought to be considered before we depart for the day.

*Mr. McKerrow:* The Commissioners are entirely in favour of eight hours' work, but we discriminate between eight hours' continuous work and intermittent labour. We have already pointed out that in the locomotive department and running department it is almost impossible to confine the work to eight hours a day. It was admitted that there were exceptional cases that could be treated as exceptional, but it was also pointed out that there were so many exceptional cases that they would almost form the rule. Suppose we agreed we simply could not observe it, and it was agreed that it would be very absurd to have two sets of men, two stationmasters, &c. With regard to extreme measures, I am glad to see that you deplore them; but I can hardly see that the Commissioners, who are intrusted with this great property of the colony—worth fourteen millions sterling—and pressed on all sides by the settlers to reduce the rates, so as to enable them to traffic their produce to the markets—I do not see that we could accept the responsibility of adding to the expenses of the country, and on that account the Commissioners have given the matter very careful consideration, and really hesitate to go further than they have already done. We have already added several thousand pounds to the expenditure of the country, as referred to in the forenoon, and I think you will see that, by allowing for standing time, and so forth, we have gone a long way towards meeting your demands. I quite agree with Mr. Winter that you are part of a great organization, and that it would be difficult for you to say why you departed from the letter of your instructions; but as reasonable men you will be able to see the difficulty in connection with continuous and intermittent labour.

*Mr. Hoban:* Well, then, what you practically say is that you absolutely decline to make eight hours a day's work, or forty-eight a week's work.

*Mr. McKerrow:* Yes.

*Mr. Maxwell:* For intermittent service.

*Mr. Hoban:* Then the next question is: Would you be prepared to submit it to independent parties?

*Mr. McKerrow:* I think not. We have been intrusted with the service, and it is no part of our duty to delegate or shirk its duties. We must take our responsibility for the administration of this great service.

*Mr. Hoban:* You talk a great deal about pleasing the settlers, and this and that person, but do you not think also you should consider the employés as well.

*Mr. McKerrow:* That is exactly what we are trying to do. We are holding the balance between the two parties.

*Mr. Hoban:* You say you made £63,000 last year: why not spend some of that in this way? You admit the demands are reasonable.

*Mr. McKerrow:* Not exactly. We have said all along eight hours' continuous labour—ten hours intermittent. We consider that a fair approximation to equality.

*Mr. Hoban:* You also say this eight hours is a fair system?

*Mr. McKerrow:* Yes; continuous hours.

*Mr. Hoban:* No; eight hours. As unionists we must press this.

*Mr. McKerrow:* I said you are co-operating with them and demanding eight hours, and your difficulty is to explain to them what is the difference between continuous and intermittent labour.