

*Mr. Winter:* The statement that there is no quarrel in New Zealand seems to me so utterly absurd that I should not refer to it were it not for the fact that it is continually brought up times out of number and harped upon and dwelt upon until a large number of people are induced to believe that there really is no quarrel. So far from there being no quarrel, I think thousands and thousands of people are painfully aware that something has considerably gone wrong in New Zealand, and you can only draw one conclusion—that it has gone wrong because capital and labour have quarrelled. Now, I think the real object of this Conference has scarcely been touched upon this afternoon. The real object is to arrive at some satisfactory basis of settlement in this quarrel. So far there have been simply accusations and refutations; it has been a sort of duel between the Union Steamship Company and the maritime officers. That, I consider, was almost absolutely necessary as a preliminary, leading up to the real object of this Conference. Before I go any further I might indorse the remarks of previous speakers as to the absence of employers. I sincerely regret that none of the rest of the employers of labour have seen fit to be represented here to-day, and if the Conference proves a failure, if no good result is derived from it, those capitalists and employers in the colony who are not represented here to-day must bear the whole of the blame. To say they are satisfied with the existing state of things seems to me criminal, because we are all agreed upon this: that the present state of things is not conducive to the well-being of the country at large. And if there is a way of effecting a settlement—if there is a mode by which the two opposing parties can meet and arrange an amicable settlement of the difficulty—I think it is the equal duty of the employers and capitalists to come and make advances as it is for the labour side to make advances. They should have been here to hear what we had to say, tried to refute our arguments, produced their own arguments, and endeavoured to convince us of them, and by mutual agreement we would no doubt have arrived at a satisfactory conclusion. However, as they are not here, I presume we shall have to do our best under very difficult conditions. We want to find out first, before we introduce other questions, what was the real object of bringing on this present struggle. When you come to review the matter dispassionately one cannot arrive at any other conclusion than that the thing must have been to a considerable extent premeditated. At least, as far as I am concerned, I can come to no other conclusion than this: that proper plans were laid down long before the thing came to an actual issue. It seems to me, as to the statement of the Hon. Mr. McLean, that his company had arrived at the conclusion that it was time they regained command of their own boats—that this sentiment has been at the bottom of this struggle. Employers of labour and capitalists in general have found that unionism was gaining ground so rapidly, and, through our affiliation with each other, was becoming so strong, that in a very short time it would be almost irresistible, and the object evidently was to crush this thing before it became too powerful to be crushed by any means. And when you consider the systematic manner in which we were all pushed into it, and the systematic manner in which employers of labour combined so rapidly to assist in the matter, one cannot arrive at any other conclusion than that premeditation was resorted to beforehand. I have never heard of any one society or union that admit that they were not drawn into this quarrel partly against their will. The Maritime Council admit that they were pushed into it, and the other unions admit that they were simply drawn into it because they had to assist the Maritime Council from a unionist point of view. The Railway Servants' Society was unquestionably drawn into it for the same reason. And here we have all got into the meshes of this struggle; and the meshes were drawn around us by the capitalists and employers of labour for a purpose, and that purpose was to crush individual unionism, or, if not to crush individual unionism, it was affiliated unionism, which they knew in a short time they could not compete with. Now, let us ask if unionism is desirable for the good of the community. We have heard from the various employers that they admit that unionism has done a certain amount of good; and, when we consider the matter a little while, we can easily conclude that it has done good. We simply ask the question, are the conditions of the wage-earners better now than they were before unionism became a power in the land? and we must at once admit, and all the employers must at once admit, that unionism has done something, and, indeed, a good deal, towards bettering the condition of the workers. If unionism is good and has done good, if from a moral aspect it is desirable, why should it be crushed? Why, if the thing is good, should it not develop and spread itself all over the land, and should we not raise its power so that we could get the maximum amount of good from it? And is not the affiliation of unionism the only way in which unionism can gain its maximum strength? If employers and capitalists are desirous of seeing the condition of the masses improved, they should, instead of crushing affiliated unionism, foster and assist it, and the employers' unions and labour unions should meet together, sit in solemn conclave, and aim at bettering the condition of the people. Unfortunately, this is not the case with us here this afternoon. The employers hold aloof and say, "If you have a quarrel—if you want us to come to you, you must first of all commit suicide, and then we will come and talk to you." How much talk there would be in a man when he has committed suicide, I will leave you to imagine. I feel, sir, that where the other side are to blame is in this: that they do not meet us in a kindly spirit. They say, in fact, "You had no right to set yourselves up as a power; you should have submitted to our dictation." They deny our right to be in existence or have power as a union. The conditions laid down, it is plain on the face of it, are simply to negative unionism to the fullest extent. The strength of unionism at present lies in the fact that it refuses to work with non-union labour. There are some societies who have not adopted that rule, and find they can work without it; but in such societies as those of the miners, seamen, and wharf-labourers they find it indispensable to maintain their power that they should not work, except under certain restrictions, with non-union labour. The capitalists and employers will tell us that, if we say to a man, "You must become a unionist or you shall not be allowed to earn your living in the same manner as unionists," it is interfering with the liberty of the subject. We do not say that he must not earn his living in any way whatever because he is not a unionist; we only tell him he must not seek his living in such a way as will interfere with those who are unionists. In endeavouring to obtain our own comfort,