

from any one over whom I have control, that has been calculated to irritate any one; and I will further say that I believe the Union Company has the sympathy of almost every employé who walked out of their ships. That is no doubt the reason why the strike has been conducted so quietly, and of the success we have met with in remanning our steamers. This is a case in which our men left us—were taken out of our ships—and we could not object. But, whether we were obliged legally or not, we paid them up to the day they left. We deprived no man of his earnings. At all events these were our instructions: that every man should be paid his money no matter what course he might see fit to adopt. Therefore, while we must positively insist on sticking to the men now in our employment and to those who came back to us, we are just as ready to employ any of those who are still out should they choose to come back, according as we have room for them, and irrespective of the question whether they formerly belonged to a union or not. We have never on that account debarred them from coming back. We are ready to forget and forgive if they do come, and let bygones be bygones. There is no reason whatever why any one section of the community should not work with the other. When we have been short of a union steward or seaman in the past we have been allowed by the union to take on a non-union man until such time as we could get another, so that it is not anything new for union men to work with non-union men. The simple condition was that the non-union man was put ashore when we got a union man. I may just as well take this opportunity of giving you a little history of our company. I think that when I have finished the Union Company will command the just sympathy of all the gentlemen who are assembled here. From small beginnings we started this company. It has been conducted more like a Government institution for the good of the colony than as a speculation profitable to the shareholders. For a while we paid no dividend; after a while we paid 6 per cent., then 8 per cent., and in two or three good years we gave a bonus of 1 per cent. Then we came back again to 8 per cent., which we have been paying ever since. Now, a steamship company is to a certain extent a risky concern, and 8 per cent. is nothing extraordinary to pay to the shareholders. We have increased our capital to increase our fleet, and we have used a certain amount of the earnings of profitable trades in developing trades that are new, and, as you all know, for the time being unprofitable, instead of paying it away in dividends, as we might have done. The company has also been worked so as to concentrate the expenditure in New Zealand; consequently it is of as great a benefit to the colony as a Government institution, and should therefore command the sympathy of the whole of the people. We have not taken advantage of our position as monopolists to raise the rates of freight when we might have done so, but have divided the space amongst the shippers. The rates for carrying grain to Australia have been such that no other company cared to interfere. The principal market is Sydney, and the freight to Sydney is 10s. per ton, but when grain is carried in big bags that often reduces it to 8s. 6d. per ton. Nobody, I suppose, would grumble at that. The cost of discharging the vessels in Sydney has latterly, in some cases, been as high as 2s. 3d. per ton, and the charges for loading in New Zealand as high on an average as 1s. 3d. per ton; so you will see that the actual freight left to the ship is not an excessive one. As to our passenger rates, I venture to assert that they will compare favourably with those charged in any other part of the world, even in England and America, except in cases where there is extreme competition. The excursion fares have been particularly reasonable. With regard to our employés we have always endeavoured to keep them satisfied, and have never ground them down in any sense whatever, while the directors have taken every opportunity that presented itself of enabling the men about them to share the prosperity of the company. We knew that the men were well satisfied, but their leaders were always wanting something more. Consequently, a revision of the rules often took place, and this always meant a rise in wages, necessitating the drawing of more money out of the pockets of the public. Now, this could only be done to a certain extent, as, if the rates charged were too high, the public would not travel. Therefore if more revenue could not be got an increase of wages would be impossible. All that any company can do is to divide its earnings fairly amongst its employés and allow a proper margin for the capital employed. In every trade, whether it is a struggling trade or a good trade, the employés have a right to a fair share of the earnings—(Hear hear)—but if you go any further, and the money is not being earned by the employer, what do you do? You simply drive him into the Insolvency Court; the men are thrown out of employment; a young industry that ought to be fostered is nipped in the bud, and probably lost to the colony. You talk about “fighting capital!” Where is the acquired wealth in New Zealand? There is no such thing. It is only the hard earnings of the industrious that have been put into co-operative and limited-liability companies as investments. So, when men talk about fighting capital, it really means fighting their own earnings. Now to come to the history of this strike: We as a company, I think I may safely say, have few enemies. We have endeavoured by every means in our power to satisfy the public and our own employés, and to keep everybody in sympathy with us. I thought we had succeeded in that. When this unfortunate affair arose it was said, “Why should you be a member of the Shipowners’ Association?” Well, the truth is, we were forced into it. The labour organizations here had federated with Australian organizations, and were pressing unduly their demands upon us. Up to within a short period of the strike the arrangement between shipowners was not of a very binding nature. At the time when the Seamen’s Union was making demand after demand the fleets on the other side were all running against each other. They were not making money, and the owners warned their employés that any further demand would bring matters to a crisis. Now, this trouble started in Australia. A seaman and a steward had a quarrel on board a ship, and the owners, having investigated the matter, pronounced the seaman in the wrong. He was accordingly dismissed. The Seamen’s Union then demanded that he be reinstated. The owners offered to put him into another ship, but the officers of the union said No, he must be put back in the same ship. That is how the unions were working. In the same way there were difficulties amongst our own men which were likely to bring about the same state of things. Now, I say that it is absolutely necessary for us to get back the command of our ships and to hold the command of them. We are not going to do badly by those people who have left