

get into a union. No doubt it did appear to him very hard that the managing director of a large and powerful company should not be able to put whom he chose into the union. But Mr. McLean should recollect that there might be other reasons for the union refusing to admit anybody that even an influential person should recommend. The unions have had experience that when they admitted such a person another member very soon had to leave one of the boats. Another reason might be that the union were expected to recommend only competent hands for employment. If they sent an incompetent person on board any one of the company's boats they would very soon be asked for an explanation why they sent such an incompetent person there. If it is expected that union men of experience should be compelled to work beside non-union men, that is a proposal that cannot be entertained for a moment. It is to the advantage of the employers themselves that the average of competency should be high. Take, for instance: In discharging coal the proper thing is four men and five baskets to the ton. I saw six of the "flower of New Zealand" at it the other morning, and there were ten baskets to the ton, and they came up at about the same rate that beam-girders would be raised out of a hold. Would it be fair to ask our men to go and work beside such men as those? It would be impossible, for the result would almost immediately be that three-fourths of the burden would fall on the good men. Could a union be kept up to find such incompetent men as I refer to employment? If we sent them to do good men's work they would be returned on our hands with indignation, and we should be told that they were not "flowers" but "weeds."

The Chairman read the following correspondence:—

"SIR,—

"Wellington, 2nd October, 1890.

"I have the honour to transmit to you copy of a resolution passed at a meeting of the Labour Conference held this day—viz., 'That the Hon. the Premier be requested to invite the Railway Commissioners to attend the Conference, and to urge the Commissioners to accept such invitation.'

"Awaiting the favour of an early reply,

"I have, &c.,

"The Hon. the Premier, Wellington."

"D. P. FISHER, Chairman.

"SIR,—

"Premier's Office, Wellington, 2nd October, 1890.

"I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this day's date, enclosing a resolution requesting that the Government will urge upon the Railway Commissioners to attend the Conference.

"The Government did not ask the Railway Commissioners to attend the Conference because they did not consider that they came within the scope of the resolution of the House of Representatives, which seemed to them to refer to private employers.

"The reason why the Railway Servants' Society was asked was, because they had affiliated with the Maritime Council, and had so become, to some extent, mixed up with the unfortunate difficulties now existing.

"The Government are of opinion that they should in no way become a party to the present disagreement; their duty is impartially to maintain the law, and do anything that may be in their power to facilitate a settlement; but they have grave doubts whether the presence of the Commissioners at the Conference—being, as they are, an important department of the public service—would facilitate a settlement of the difficulties.

"I have, therefore, felt it my duty to forward your letter, to which this is a reply, to the Commissioners, leaving the matter of attending the Conference entirely to their own discretion.

"I have, &c.,

"The Chairman of the Labour Conference,

"H. A. ATKINSON.

Wellington."

*Mr. Ansell:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—The point I wish to touch upon is the coal question, which is at issue at the present time. In his speech this morning the Hon. Mr. McLean stated that the only interest which the Union Steamship Company held in the colony in regard to coal was in the Grey Valley. That, I believe, is an actual fact at the present time; but it is only right that the delegates present should know the exact state of affairs which is alleged to exist, and which will most likely take an important part in the deliberations of this Conference, as dealing with the monopoly of the Union Steamship Company. In 1885 the Union Steamship Company acquired the Koranui Mine at Westport, and it was still in their name in July, 1889.

*Hon. Mr. McLean:* It was sold years ago.

*Mr. Ansell:* I say it is credited to you, Mr. McLean.

*Hon. Mr. McLean:* We have no interest in it.

*Mr. Ansell* quoted an extract from a report issued by the West Coast Coal Committee, stating that the Koranui Mine was in the possession of the Union Company, and then proceeded: I believe that the Union Steamship Company has parted with this mine on some conditions to the Westport Coal Company, and I understand that a part of this compact was in order that the Union Steamship Company should acquire the fleet of boats held by the Westport Coal Company. We know very well that the Koranui Mine was closed a short time after the Union Steamship Company became owners of it, and, as Mr. McLean stated this morning, they have adopted the course which they have taken on the West Coast in order to assist the prosperity of the West Coast. Now, I am sorry to say that in the closing of this mine a large number of men were thrown out of work at Koranui, and a number of them came down to the Grey Valley, and we had to share the work with them. In order that the gentlemen present may know the facts of the case, I may say that Captain Williams, an owner of ships in Wellington, purchased a large number of shares of the Coalpit Heath Coal Company, and the Westport Coal Company in time acquired the Coalpit Heath Mine. Somewhere about the same time the Union Steamship Company acquired the boats of Captain Williams. Mr. Martin Kennedy at that time owned a fleet, and also the Brunner Mine, and I believe, in regard to the Brunner Mine, there was some arrangement come to with the Union