

then completed—but our circular was met with decided opposition by the shipowners; and the Maritime Council then came together to see that we had fair-play. And I assert here now, as I honestly believe, that, unless the Maritime Council had been at our back with regard to seeing us righted in that direction, we should never have had the slightest consideration from the Union Steamship Company or any other company in Australasia. This is manifest in the fact that on the other side—as a remark fell from the honourable gentleman this morning—the shipowners there were in a disorganized state, and they themselves failed to make any interest out of the outlay they put forth. It is a known fact in Australia that the shipowners are in a disorganized state, and running their ships not only to the detriment of everybody who has to serve on board those ships, but to the detriment of themselves. They absolutely refused to recognise any demands on the part of the officers. It is not known to me that the Union Steamship Company and the shipowners in New Zealand in any way amalgamated with them, but their attitude led to the belief that they were so; and, with Mr. Millar's permission, I will here read a letter received by him as secretary of the Maritime Council from the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand:—

“SIR,—

“Referring to our several conversations as to the rates we propose paying our officers from the 1st August next, the Steamship Owners' Association have now placed me in a position to deal with the matter, and I enclose a statement showing in tabulated form the demands made by the Officers' Association, and our proposed scale of pay to officers in the various steamers of our fleet.

“There is also under favourable consideration by the directors the question of giving a bonus to chief officers in the first eleven steamers mentioned in the list, equal to £1 per month.

“The Steamship Owners' Association having passed a resolution against the affiliation of the officers with any other labour organizations, we decided to ask them to reconsider this with the view of exempting New Zealand from such resolution, so as to get all maritime labour under one organization. This we have done by cable, and hope to get a favourable answer.

“We agree to pay the wages as proposed on the understanding that such payments shall finally settle the dispute between the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association of New Zealand and ourselves.

“We have not put fourth officers in the schedule, as we are undecided how many we can carry, but those employed will receive £8 a month.

“I am, &c.,

“GEORGE McLEAN.”

You are aware that since the writing of this letter the Hon. Mr. McLean has openly stated and admitted to several of us that he has changed his mind about the affiliation of the officers with the Maritime Council. Here is a copy of a letter [producing letter] in which he says he has been negotiating with the steamship owners on the other side that the officers should be in the Maritime Council, and that all maritime labour should come under one head. This, I submit, is perhaps a policy admissible only on one side of the question. We are not allowed in any way to change our minds, but the shipowners or employers, after making a statement in writing that they are open to this idea and are thoroughly convinced it would be a desirable thing to be brought about, yet when the strife comes they turned round to suit their own ends, and changed their minds. I make this statement because it is obvious on the face of it. Here is a written statement which says that it is apparent to the leading steamship company of New Zealand that the officers should be affiliated with all other bodies. Doubtless there are many other considerations which they have come to possibly beforehand. After making this statement in writing there is a new face put on it when the trouble comes. I submit there has been too much capital made out of the fact of the officers affiliating with the Maritime Council. It would be a long course of detailed circumstances if I were to relate the numerous instances where officers have suffered to a very great extent owing to their not being affiliated with the Maritime Council: there was constant friction existing between the officers and all other bodies. The honourable gentleman referred in his opening address this morning to the fact that they had lost command of their ships. And why was it? For the reason that the officers individually had to fight other organizations. Here was the fact, as has been on all sides admitted. One cannot be accountable for every individual member of a union, as there may be some who will outstep the bounds, and possibly go to extremes. In the instance of one of these unruly members of a union being punished, and dissension afterwards arising, as has happened in the past, an officer, when he stood up for the company, was, owing to the absolute force of the union being behind the other body, put aside without any explanation whatever, to save trouble. And I attach to the Union Steamship Company, or any other shipping company of New Zealand, just as much collusion in the officers affiliating with the Maritime Council as to the officers themselves. The Maritime Council meets once a year; they have delegates from everybody—we send two delegates—and there is no rubbing shoulder to shoulder there. The different organizations have their different rules; they do but meet in common cause, and there is no upsetting of discipline. They do not meet all the year round; they meet on board their ships, but there is not the slightest question of the unionism of the Maritime Council entertained on board the ships. They meet once a year, and only once, and the general public and everybody should know this fact of the case. There has been no rubbing shoulder to shoulder and conniving with the other bodies affiliated with the Maritime Council; and I think the officers themselves on board the ships would, if they were asked, bear that out—that since there has been an association on board the Union Company's ships, before this trouble occurred, there was a better understanding between the officers and the men than hitherto had been the case. There is no doubt there is a great amount of feeling exhibited on both sides. The Hon. Mr. McLean has told us he has come here without any quarrel—he has no quarrel with any one. For my part, then, I must candidly admit I do not know what a quarrel is. He says it takes two to make a quarrel. I certainly know that, and, so far as I am led to understand, there has been an incessant quarrel going on during the last six months. We have been trying to get what is a fair understanding in regard to what should be expected of the ordinary human being; and this has been avoided from time to time until pressure has been brought to bear.