

I candidly admit that we ourselves saw that, as an individual association, we were not capable of forcing the thing to an honest settlement. The Maritime Council collectively did that. There is an apparent instance of what combined unionism can do. And in the settlement of this difficulty the Hon. Mr. McLean says he is prepared to meet us in a very affable and amicable spirit; that he has no ill-feeling; there is no quarrel or anything of that: but still he openly asserted in his address that they were determined to keep these free labourers, or the "flower of the labour of New Zealand," on board their ships, in spite of what we might have to say or do. This stand made on the part of the Shipowners' Association—as I presume the Hon. Mr. McLean represents the steamship owners—has been met by assertions from other bodies that they will not work alongside of non-union labour, and just reason, in my mind, has been given for it. In regard to the officers, they have been forced into this position of saying they will not work with non-union labourers; and I can tell the Hon. Mr. McLean that the very men who left the Union Steamship Company's ships in the first instance—because this was not decided upon by one, but by many—the very men who left the ships in Dunedin and some other ports, and would not work with non-union labourers, are the men who are the first to return to their ships, thereby showing the amount of courage and worth which is contained in a body and mind of that sort. The Union Steamship Company is the company we are mainly concerned with in regard to the association; and I may say I take exception to some of the remarks of the Hon. Mr. McLean in this respect: He said they have remained passive, and have done nothing. I have in my possession several telegrams emanating from the Union Steamship Company which are instances of coercion, and they are worded much to this effect: "You must resign from your old and original society, and join the new masters' society." That was to those who resigned their position or who left their ships in the Union Steamship Company. This is only one or two instances which have come to our knowledge. I do not say that they have not their right, as we have, to do their best in order to gain their own ends, but I wish to point out to the different delegates here, in regard to the speech, so well put, plausible and so forth, that on the contrary this is not a child's game we are now entered upon, but it is a question of whether labour, talented or otherwise, is to have its righteous and right recompense in the future. There is no doubt in my mind—nor in any one else's mind who views the matter impartially—that there has been a combined attack by the shipowners and capitalists to crush out the present system of unionism. The shipowners themselves established a union, and in this light they are just as much unionists as we are. They have joined unions, having said, "We will join together and crush out the other machinery"—that is, all those they employ; and I maintain that we have clearly just as much right to join in an association for the mercantile officers to discuss matters for their benefit as the shipowners, or any other employers that may exist. And, further, I would like to point out, as the shipowners say they apprehend, from the fact that the officers have an association, they are going to in some way sever the alliance which exists, or should exist, between the shipowners and officers, that this is the first effort that has ever been made to strengthen the alliance, because the alliance never did exist between them before this. And that is the reason and outcome of this present association. The present Shipmasters' Association, who have sent a letter by their secretary to the Government, saying that, as their interests were identical with the shipowners', they did not think they could attend, are themselves evading the question. It would have been far better if they were here. If their interests are identical with the shipowners', I submit they have shown an act of cowardice in not coming here to support Mr. McLean. I should have liked to have seen representatives of the newly-formed Masters' Association here. It would have given us some opportunity then of asking why this new association was formed. Of course, we have our own imaginations and ideas as to the formation of that association. It is commonly looked upon outside, and I may say, by all nautical men, as having really originated, as I have before stated, with the Union Steamship Company, and got up under the favourable auspices of the directors of that company. There is nothing in the formation of the different associations that will be detrimental to the shipowners. All that they ask is this: that they shall have a fair remuneration for a fair amount of talented labour. Now, it is a well-known fact that there are in existence some shipmasters' associations in Great Britain which are solely governed by the Shipowners' Associations—that is, by the different shipowning companies. I myself belonged to two, and I regret having put my money into them, for no benefit accrued from it. The only benefit which accrued from it is this: that several officers who have been manly enough to go to the Board of these associations, into which they paid money, and express their opinions freely as to the views on board their ship, received shortly afterwards a note from their respective shipowners saying their services were no longer required. There is a sense of boycott in that, and it has existed in the shipowning circle for a long time. We do not claim to act in any way detrimentally to the shipowners' welfare, but all we ask is that they will kindly look into the statements of the officers on board the ships. I do not say the Union Steamship Company is a company which has treated its officers badly. There is no doubt about it, and it has been understood, that the Union Steamship Company is an excellent service. It is well equipped—there is no lack of anything in the store department in regard to the Union Steamship Company, and, in fact, I have no doubt it is one of the best-equipped coastal companies in the world. But what the officers really want is that the directors, or whoever has the power, will look into the vicissitudes through which they have to go. I stated in the papers openly that these officers, who have sometimes worked twenty hours, have gone on from twenty to twenty-six and even thirty hours straight on end; that, in the presence of the eight-hours movement which is revolutionising the whole world, I think the officers have a very just claim to ask the shipowners the number of hours they shall work, the number of hours they shall go on watch, and so forth. We candidly admit it is not as though the officers had to work laboriously with their bodies; we know they have not to do that; if they had to do it, it would be simply a case of lying down with fatigue: but every one knows that, if one has to supervise and be constantly on the spot to watch, it is almost as tiresome and equally tedious. Say an officer has arrived in port in New Zealand at an early hour in the morning—6 or 8 o'clock—and, having