

in were here to discuss it with us. I regret the absence of the Railway Commissioners, because the invitation of the House of Representatives was the invitation of the country. It was not the Government, but the House of Representatives, who, by the large majority of the votes of the country, requested the Government to invite us to come to this Conference. They are not here, and it is a slight on the country at large that they are not here to meet the representatives of the railway servants, seeing that there is a dispute between them. I only wish to say this: that I do not see why we should be asked to work with non-union men. Our experience in the past has been that our greatest source of weakness has arisen from the fact that we have had to contend against powerful capitalists, and against those who were supposed to be their friends and our enemies, who will work at any price. If we are to work with non-unionists the sooner we are all non-unionists the better. The only chance of protecting ourselves against unreasonable demands is by being thoroughly united and standing shoulder to shoulder. I would rather see all the organizations in the colony going to pieces than see us consent to work with non-unionist men. As far as the men are concerned, they will not do it if they have to leave the colony; they will not submit in any case to work with non-union men; and if the worst comes to the worst they will have to leave the matter to be fought out between the miners and the seamen, and we are just able to do it.

*Mr. Hoban:* The present discussion seems to have taken the form of explanation between both sides—the Union Steamship Company on the one side and the Maritime Council on the other. My colleagues and myself, representing the Railway Servants' Society, are perhaps out of place in making remarks on this occasion, seeing that we know little about the dispute except what we can gather from those present; and therefore in the dispute itself, perhaps, we are not competent to express an opinion. But I should like to make one or two remarks, sir, in regard to the absence of the employers at the meeting to-day. I agree with the speakers who have preceded me that their action in this matter is to be regretted, because, as Mr. Lomas justly remarked, the House of Representatives, representing as they do the whole of the people of the colony, have requested that the Government should call a Conference of employers and employés, that they might meet here and discuss the question. A certain portion of the public have been altogether against the employés, because, they say, "You are trying to prolong this struggle," and the employers have taken very good care to spread this feeling amongst the public; but the presence of the representatives of the employés here to-day shows that the employés themselves are only too anxious to settle it if they can with honour to themselves. The action of the employers is to a certain extent one that cannot be looked upon with credit to themselves. If we look at the letter received from the Wellington Employers' Association, in which it is stated that it contains the opinion of the whole of the employers' associations throughout the colony, we cannot think that they have considered the position from an outside point of view. Right throughout it seems to be devoted to one side of the question.

*The Chairman:* It is written by Wright.

*Mr. Hoban:* Yes; it was written by Wright, but I think he is a little bit wrong.—(Laughter.)—The expressions therein were such as should not have come from men of intelligence or fair-minded men. He says that when the men were called out—this is from the employers' association—they expressed complete satisfaction. He (Mr. Wright) then makes certain statements as to "the tyranny of the leaders of these organizations" in calling these men out. There was no tyranny exercised; they were asked by their officer, Mr. Millar, to come out. He said, "It is necessary for you to come out, because the Union Steamship Company have joined the Shipowners' Association, and are therefore acting in opposition to you;" and the men came out. Where was the tyranny in this? The men were only too anxious themselves to come out. Then the letter goes on to say that, beyond dispute, the present state of affairs has been brought about by the men themselves, and has been forced upon the employers. I am reading this to show you what must have been in their minds' eye when writing this letter—how unprejudiced they seem to be, or would seem to be in their own minds, in writing it in this form. They go on to say they cannot consent to sacrifice free labour, and that the restrictions placed on the employés by the union are inimical to the interests of the employers. The parties are, I gather from the dispute, the Union Steamship Company and the Maritime Council, and Mr. Millar stated here that the Maritime Council have done everything in their power to forward the interests of the Union Company in every shape and form; and this to a certain extent the company admits. Whenever a dispute has taken place Mr. Millar, as representing the Maritime Council and the Seamen's Union, has done everything in his power to settle the matter satisfactorily to both sides, and even in the question of demurrage the Maritime Council have put their hands into their own pockets and paid for the loss occasioned through their own men's fault. Can we say that the union in this case has been detrimental to the interests of the Union Steamship Company? Then, again, as to the entrance-fee, Mr. Millar stated distinctly, amongst other reasons, that this fee of £2 was imposed to prevent the men leaving home and foreign vessels and taking vessels here. There is another proof that the union considered the interests of the employers. And furthermore—Mr. McLean will bear me out in this statement—there has been so far the greatest good feeling between the employés and employers; and if the union had done no good, do you think there would have been that good feeling between the employés and the employers? When there was no union at all, was there good feeling? You found men grumbling because they had not sufficient pay; but when they got unions they became satisfied in this respect, and if the unions are as fair in the future as they have been in the past no one can complain about them. The Hon. Mr. McLean says every time there was a dispute they framed new rules, and in these new rules there were demands for increased pay; but, if these demands were unjust, why did the Union Company grant them? Then another point as to the restrictions: If the Union Steamship Company were so desirous of putting down these unions, why did they in the first place consent to all their men being union men? It shows you that the company must have thought themselves, "It is to our interest. We shall have competent men if they belong to the union." This clause in the employers' letter is not what