

81. Supposing something cropped up like the Auckland Tramway dispute, which involved matters outside an award, would the Public Conciliator go and deal with a case like that if the Arbitration Court was not available?—There would be a danger in that. I would not put the Conciliator in such a position that he would be able to override any decision of the Court. So long as the Court is in existence it ought to be the final authority.

82. It is impossible for the Court to be in all parts of the country at one time: supposing a dispute takes place, or something happens which aggravates and irritates the men to such an extent that they feel justified in striking during the existence of an award, and there is no possible chance of the Court getting to the place where it happens for two or three months, by what means would you endeavour to prevent that strike taking place?—So long as it was not a breach of an award and was connected with some matter outside the provisions of an award, the Conciliator would be the right man to deal with it.

83. You think it would be a great deal better in the interests of the community that such a man should go and settle a difference like that than that there should be a cessation of work in the particular industry?—Certainly; but the important thing would be to get the right man.

84. You want a man with a very evenly balanced mind, a man with a good commercial knowledge and who would understand the conditions of labour, and he would be a difficult man to get?—I think you could get such men among the Stipendiary Magistrates, so long as you could be sure that they would devote themselves to the work and make themselves proficient in it. It would be distasteful work to many, and a man requires to put his heart into it.

85. It is somewhat difficult to get all the qualifications in one man?—It is very difficult, but I believe one man by himself could often bring about a settlement in cases where the Conciliation Boards or Arbitration Court, or any other kind of tribunal, would fail.

86. During the last eighteen months there has been a steady growth in the number of private meetings between employers and employees to settle differences?—Yes.

87. I think we have fifty-three agreements now entered into and sent on to the Court?—Yes, that is a method greatly to be desired.

88. Supposing we do not admit the Conciliator principle, but provide that a Magistrate shall be allowed to sit on such a Board without voting-power, leaving the representatives of the employees and employers to settle their own trouble?—That would be a distinct improvement on the present system.

89. Just to let him sit as chairman without any vote at all?—Yes, that would be an improvement; but I should like to see men set specially apart, because they would gain experience in that special kind of work. If you called on a Magistrate you might get a man to whom the work was distasteful, and he would do more harm than good. Some of the Stipendiary Magistrates are busy men, and have not much time to devote to work outside their usual duties.

HARRY GREIG, of Manawatu, flax-miller, examined. (No. 10.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Have you seen this Bill?—Well, it is really special evidence I desire to give in connection with our special industry of flax-milling.

2. And it will not touch the Bill except in so far as it affects the workers in your industry?—No. We feel that our industry at the present time is in rather a languishing condition, and that any help which can be given to it at such a crisis should be given, and we felt that some relief might be obtained by interviewing the Committee and giving evidence while labour matters are before the House. To give you an idea of how the industry is languishing, I will give you the comparative figures for the six months ending June, 1908, and for the corresponding months of the previous year. In 1907 the output of hemp was 18,802 tons, of a total value of £566,376; for the corresponding period of 1908 the production was 11,853 tons, of a total value of £279,437. I quote these figures in order to show the great loss the revenue of the country is suffering through the languishing condition of the industry. Of course, there are different phases of the question to be considered. There is the owner of land on which the raw material is produced, there is the miller who does the manufacturing, there is the large body of employees engaged in the industry, and there is the general revenue of the country, which are all involved in this matter. It has been asserted in some quarters that the industry is being throttled by the heavy royalties charged by owners of flax land, but I think this has no general bearing on the question. I will quote you some of the figures taken from Government valuations of property of millers who own their own lands, and show you how I get at the cost of the green flax for milling. The capital value of 789 acres, together with the flax growing thereon, is £15,815. In borrowing money on this class of land we cannot make a better arrangement than 6 per cent. Six per cent. on this property is £984 18s. a year. It is also necessary to maintain drains in a proper state of efficiency, and to do this on this particular property costs at least £200. Local rates—this is not including the land-tax—represent £80. Now, the average production of green flax on this land for the last two years has been 1,960 tons. I work it out that the green flax has cost per ton 12s. 6d., and, assuming that it takes 8½ tons of green leaf to produce a ton of fibre, the cost of the green leaf on that particular property per ton of fibre is £5 6s. 3d.

3. *Hon. Mr. Miller.*] That is above the maximum, 8½ tons, is it not?—Most flax-millers assume that 9 tons is about the average. I know millers on the Motoa Estate take it as up to 11 tons. On another property adjoining the cost per ton of green leaf has been 16s., representing £6 10s. per ton of fibre, assuming still that the quantity of green leaf taken is 8½ tons. Now, it might be suggested that if we cannot make the properties pay for flax-milling purposes the best thing we can do is to grub the flax-roots out and sow grass, or something of that kind. The properties I have quoted are subject to flooding, and the land would have very little value for grazing. The land has been submerged during the last few weeks with five or six feet of water.