

MICHAEL JOHN REARDON examined. (No. 20.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Whom do you represent?—I am representing the Trades Council Conference.

2. We have already heard the representatives of the Trades Council Conference?—We had a letter read at last night's meeting of the Wellington Trades Council stating that one of its representatives would be heard to-day.

3. But you said you represented the Trades Council Conference?—Well, we are endorsing the opinions of the Conference. I appear instead of Mr. Westbrooke, as it is impossible for him to attend.

4. Then you support *in toto* the recommendations that were laid before us by the gentlemen who represented the Trades Council Conference three weeks ago?—Yes. Do I understand that the whole of the Conference's proposals were laid before this Committee?

5. They were laid before us with such scrupulous exactness that, when one member made a mistake, another one, going over the same matter step by step, made the same mistake. In fact, it was parrot-like, and this has made the Committee a little careful about having the evidence duplicated. We shall be glad to have any help you can give us, but we scarcely want repetitions and recommendations such as have been given before. Give us the views of the Trades and Labour Council so far as you possibly can?—I will pass over proposed minor amendments, and go to clause 17 of the Bill, in reference to the penalties going to the parties. We in Wellington have had considerable difficulty at times in getting the Labour Department to see eye to eye with us in the matter of breaches. We do not say that we are always right, but we often think we are right and that the Department is wrong. We have of necessity to take cases before the Court ourselves, and we feel that if we go to the expense and trouble of doing so the penalty should go to the union if we win. Then, in the matter of appeals—clause 18—we feel very strongly that we have quite enough litigation, and are anxious to avoid as much as possible appeals from decisions given by the Magistrate. We object strongly to the fines being deducted from moneys due to the workers. There are many unions—I might almost say the majority—the members of which only receive a very small wage. I have a union of about 1,300 members, and I am safe in saying that not more than one in twenty of them earns £2 8s. a week all the year round. Now, if one-fourth of that man's wages were deducted it would be a serious matter for his family; and we feel also that to deduct one-fourth of £2 8s. would be going contrary to the existing law, and we feel keenly in regard to this matter of overriding laws which have been passed by Parliament.

6. What method would you suggest to take its place?—We say that the Crown should have no greater privilege in this respect than the coal-merchant or grocer.

7. He can attach wages over £2?—If he can get an order from the Magistrate, but there are very few Magistrates who would feel disposed to make an order in the case of men who are only earning £2 8s. a week and have wives and families to keep on that in the cities. We object, of course, to these drastic provisions for the collection of fines. We take it that a union is in the same position as a limited-liability company, and, if a limited-liability company fails, the creditors can claim no more than what the company possesses; they cannot fall back on the private funds of the shareholder. We also feel very strongly on the subject of the abolition of Boards of Conciliation. We say that they have sat for years, but have never had a fair chance. We want these Boards to be given a fair chance before we utterly condemn the principles of conciliation and arbitration. We have stood by the principle for many years although we have not got all we might have expected. We still stand by the principle, but we say, Give us a fair chance before the Boards of Conciliation.

8. You say the Boards have not had a fair chance: will you give us what you think are the reasons for that?—The facility with which cases are referred to the Court. As an illustration of this I might say that in May last I took a case for the General Labourers' Union in the country districts before the Board. We thought the recommendations made by the Board would be accepted, but two days before the month which is allowed under the Act for appeal an appeal was made by five or six employers in Napier. A few days afterwards, in Wanganui, where no appeal came from the employers, the general labourers went out on strike, believing that they were entitled to the 1s 1½d. an hour which had been recommended by the Board instead of 1s. There is an argument in that why only a majority of the employers should be able to make an appeal, because I am quite satisfied that a very large number of those cited in the whole industrial district were ready to accept the Board's recommendations. We had evidence from the employers that they were quite prepared to pay what the union asked, which was above what the Board recommended. In the same case there is also evidence of the injustice of holding a union responsible for strikes. I knew nothing about this strike in Wanganui until I got a telegram stating that the men were out, and then I found that not one of them was a member of the union, although it was generally believed at the time that they were and that the union would be responsible for the strike. As you are probably aware, the Wellington Trades Council and the Trades Council Conference decided that it would be wise to endeavour to induce the Labour Bills Committee to strike out the whole portion of the Bill dealing with Conciliation Councils.

9. Right down to clause 44?—Yes. I had an illustration in Invercargill last week of how unsatisfactorily these special Boards would work. I was down there to help the timber-workers with their case. The three members of the Timber-workers' Union who were with me were men well versed in the work, but they were not versed in the technicalities of business, and had pitted against them admittedly the keenest business men in Southland. After spending three days with them in going through their case I felt quite convinced that the representatives of the union would have been no match against the employers in a Board set up under this system of Councils of Con-