

7. *Mr. Ell.*] You mean that the metal-workers and moulders have considered the clauses of the Bill?—Yes. I may say that the executive of the unions considers all these proposals.

8. The executive of the Farm Labourers' Union only, not the members as a whole?—No. The executive makes proposals to the different branches.

9. *The Chairman.*] Did the Trades and Labour Conference, held in Wellington last week, consider the Bill?—Yes, very exhaustively.

10. You come here in the name of that Conference?—Yes.

11. You have seen the Bill, I suppose?—Yes.

12. Will you give us your opinion on it?—I may say I am here to give evidence on behalf of the Conference, and I am voicing the views of the Conference. We in Conference discussed the whole matter, and spent about two days in doing it. We went very exhaustively into it, and considered the whole position of labour affairs as they exist at the present time in New Zealand. We decided by a very large majority—I think only two members of the Conference voted against the decision—to recommend that the whole of Part I of the new Bill, dealing with strikes and lockouts, with the exception of section 8, be deleted from the Bill. Section 8 repeals section 15 of the Act of 1905, which deals with strikes. One of the reasons which actuated the Conference in urging the deletion of this part of the measure was that repressive and coercive measures are not going to provide any solution, or anything like a solution, to the labour problem. We contend that coercion and repression have an unsettling effect, and, instead of checking the desire on the part of unions to strike, they will in a very large measure constitute that which incites the unions to strike. We have had an instance of this in the experience of New South Wales since the passing of Mr. Wade's Industrial Disputes Bill. This was a coercive measure against strikes, and contained all kinds of penalties against strikers. The result is that, out of 130 unions existing in New South Wales, only five have registered under the new Act, while two strikes have occurred already—one the Balmain Coal-miners strike, which received the support of the trades-union movement throughout New South Wales, despite the fact that the Bill was very severe in reference to aiding and abetting and striking; and since the Balmain strike we have now the spectacle of the Sydney tramwaymen on strike, with the possibility that this strike will develop into a general strike right through New South Wales. We contend that this coming down with legislative chains, and shackles, and bonds to trip us up in all our trades-union actions has a decidedly unsettling effect, and falls very far short of what is required to meet the position. We desire to see section 8 retained, for the reason that circumstances do arise which are not provided for in law, and which justify the method of withholding labour from the market as a means of protesting against what we conceive to be injustice. As an instance of this, take the Auckland tramway strike. The men, according to the decision of the Commission of Inquiry, were absolutely justified in the stand which they took. Their comrades in the union were being sorted out and victimised. The present Act is simply futile to meet the position with regard to victimisation and discrimination against unionists, and in order to protect themselves against their employers the men came out on strike, and, according to the decision of this Commission of Inquiry, the men were absolutely justified in doing so. Now, take the question of the Blackball strike. Mr. Hickey is here, and will talk about that later on. Unionists contend that victimisation is not properly provided against in the present law, and that when a mining company or any other company comes along and deliberately sorts out prominent members of the union—men who are doing what they conceive to be right, and are sorted out for dismissal—we say that if the law does not provide for that, what can we do but resent by the strike these tactics of the employers? It is the only way we can do it. And other circumstances may arise which will justify us in coming out on strike against the employer; and, anyhow, as a matter of principle, the Conference came to a decision by a very large majority that any legislation which took away from us absolutely the right to withhold our labour from the market was not justified in morality at all. For instance, the employers can deliberately lock men out, but can give all kinds of reasons for locking them out, which exempt them from the operations of the law. Take, for instance, the case of Reid and Gray, of Dunedin. The Court gives an award which increases the wages of the men, but Reid and Gray were not going to employ the men at the money, and said, "We cannot afford to." Nineteen men were shut out simply because the award increased their wages. That was tantamount to a lockout, and yet the employers, because they said they could not afford to go on with their business under these wages, were exempted from the operation of the law. No one would think of compelling an employer to carry on his business at a loss; no one would think of compelling an employer to sell his products at a loss; and, because no one would think of expecting that, we say it is perfectly logical for a unionist to say that he shall not be compelled to sell his labour at what he considers to be a loss.

13. Then, your Conference held that you have the right to strike as a last resource?—Yes. Although we have approved of the principle of conciliation and arbitration as brought down by Mr. Reeves in the Bill of 1894, and we were unanimous in expressing the opinion that we would much sooner see our industrial disputes settled by arbitration than by strikes, at the same time we took up this position: that we do not wish to be compelled to lay down our arms, as it were. Mr. McLaren put the matter very clearly. He said that the nations of the world told us that they believed in arbitration and a peaceful method of settling disputes, but a great statesman said that, although he believed in arbitration for settling disputes, to disarm the nation would be foolish. Yet we are expected to lay down our arms and accept, without protest or complaint, anything the employers like to do to us, and anything the Arbitration Court likes to do to us. On these grounds we desire that all this part of the Bill be deleted, with the exception of clause 8.

14. Then you think it will be a cause of constant irritation. Do you think Part I will ever be effective?—I do not think it will be effective. I may say the temper of a good many of the unionists I know is such that anything like that put on the statute-book would not receive very