

the whole of page 102, and in fact the main suggestion contained in the paper, is for a system of compulsory conciliation. Mr. Williams says in his paper: 'With compulsory conciliation in force, and voluntary arbitration as a possible sequel, conciliation would become the king-pin of the system.' If compulsion destroys the spirit of conciliation now, would not compulsory conciliation equally destroy the spirit and create antagonism under his proposed system?" That question hinges on my statement contained on page 102, where I say, "Compulsory conference is now provided for by the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, and there is no objection to compulsion to that extent. With compulsory conciliation in force, and voluntary arbitration as a possible sequel, conciliation would become the king-pin of the system." I might have been wiser if I had used the word "conference" there again instead of "conciliation." "Conference" is what is meant in that connection, and I think the sense is obvious. The compulsion extends to this extent: that no man can refuse to meet his employers, and no employers can refuse to meet their employees in conference to discuss their difficulties or demands.

The next question is that asked by Mr. F. R. Cooke, who asks whether the loss of rural population is not due mainly to the advance of machinery and also the skill of the workers. No, it is not—*emphatically not*. I question whether any of these gentlemen who live in the cities have any idea of the immense amount of work to be done in New Zealand to-day. As soon as costs can be reduced in one direction money is available for production in another direction. It is quite clear that by the use of fertilizers, instead of the plough, for instance, certain ploughmen will be thrown out of employment, though they are really not thrown out of employment, for they are placed in other branches of the same industry. It is an economical question which must be considered for the benefit of the country. The immediate result is the employment of more labour in other directions.

Mr. Robinson asks whether I am aware that it is most unusual for the Court to fix conditions, and that, failing an agreement in Conciliation Council, the Court frequently refers these matters back to the Conciliation Council in order to give the parties an opportunity of agreeing amongst themselves. I am quite aware of that fact. I simply stated that the Court has power to fix any conditions it chooses. It is the power of the Court that we are now complaining of, and not whether that power has been used or not by the Court.

The next question is that asked by Mr. Parlange, who asked whether I was in favour of giving an industrial agreement made by collective bargaining between employers and workers in any industry the force of an award of the Court of Arbitration, so that it would apply to and be enforceable against all employers and all workers in such industry. This question brings us down to the consideration of the machinery of the system of the Act that will be created when this compulsion of which we complain is cut out of the Act. The machinery will have to be provided, and we are quite willing to co-operate in the drafting of the provisions for machinery for carrying out the Act in an equitable manner. It is far too big a question for me to say here what machinery we would suggest. I shall suggest machinery when we are in committee.

Then, the next question is whether I contemplate that unions on either side should be forced to register if they do not wish to do so. That is another question I decline to answer at this juncture, because it is too big a subject. I would want to think that over before making a statement on the matter. My statements have to come as from the Sheepowners' Federation.

The next is Mr. F. Cooke's question as to what is responsible for the transfer of the workers from the rural districts to the cities. It is suggested that it is due to bad conditions provided by country employers. I know that it is not due to that, and I also know that the sheep-farmers are agreed upon that point. It is due to the bad conditions of our trade at the present moment. We cannot meet the wishes of the men without incurring losses. I would qualify that by saying that if our prosperity was such as we hope it will be we could give better conditions in the country. There is no doubt about that. Under the present condition of the industry we cannot do so.

*Mr. F. R. Cooke:* That is an admission that the conditions are not satisfactory.

*Mr. Williams:* It is not, and I do not admit it for one moment. I think that the conditions ruling in the country at present are very satisfactory. In my neighbourhood the men are well treated, and that is proved by the general present state of the rural workers.

Mr. Semple asked, "How can the sheepowners square the attitude taken up by them in 1913 with their attitude to-day?" I was not concerned with the attitude taken up by the sheepowners generally at that time; but, at all events, I prefer not to go into the past. We are here to-day to consider steps for the present and the future, and I see no good in going back to 1913.

Mr. Tucker asked, "What is meant by public opinion," and he was referring to Mr. Acland's paper. Well, that is a general expression contained in the paragraph mentioned. Everybody here knows that a strike or a lockout is largely subject to public opinion. A strike or lockout is not entered upon unless the parties are pretty sure that public opinion is at their back, and that is a vast protection against strikes and lockouts. It is a greater protection than our Arbitration Act has proved to be.

*A Delegate:* Take a referendum of the people.

*Mr. Williams:* I think that is not necessary. In the absence of the Act, and in view of public opinion, strikes, as under present conditions, would disappear, and lockouts would not be necessary.

I have three questions here from Mr. Kennedy: "Are men paid on what they produce? How would you pay men who produce nothing—professors, for instance?" My reply to that is that any one who says that the Professors of Economics did not produce anything yesterday has got me beaten. One of those papers has produced enough to send me pretty well over to Porirua.

*A Delegate:* Would not you pay them for that?

*Mr. Williams:* My executors would have to pay. But I ask the same question: Would not the same argument apply to union secretaries?

*A Delegate:* Hear, hear.

*Mr. Williams:* Another question from Mr. Kennedy relates to breaches of agreements. He asks, "Can you tell us how many breaches of agreements or awards have been committed by