

Discussion on Mr. Roberts's Paper.

Mr. Williams : Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask Mr. Roberts one question. On page 135, in the last paragraph but one, we find the following statement : " The labour movement insists on the right of the industrial unions to decide whether they shall register under the Court of Arbitration or not," and that they shall not be compelled by law to submit an industrial dispute to arbitration. I would like to ask Mr. Roberts why he should deny this right to the employers. It appears to me that, so far as one can see, there may be individual employers who are not all they should be, but as a class I contend that we are not inferior to the gentlemen sitting opposite—at least, I hope not—and I cannot quite see why labour should claim the right of such privileges under the law. I would like to ask Mr. Roberts whether there is anything particularly villainous about the employers, that such restrictions should be imposed upon them. One other question. On page 136, in the fourth paragraph from the bottom, referring to the minimum wage rates, Mr. Roberts says : " The reply given by the Court and the employers of labour to our argument on this question is that the Court only lays down the minimum wage, and the employer is empowered to pay a higher wage than that awarded by the Court if he so desires. But what are the facts ? Minimum rates in recent years have become the standard rates in the overwhelming majority of industries." I would like to ask Mr. Roberts does he not think that a very strong argument against fixation of minimum rates by Acts of Parliament. On his own showing the thing works unsatisfactorily, and as it appears to me it does constitute an argument against arbitration fixation of wages at all. I would like here to make one remark, and that is to say that Mr. Roberts's paper is very fine, and well worth studying, but I regret that it is impossible to find all the errors in it, and put questions on them, in the short space of three minutes.

Mr. Brechin : I also would like to offer my congratulations to Mr. Roberts. Next to the paper put in by the dairying section, I think his is the best yet. In our paper we made matters quite clear. In Mr. Roberts's paper he left one or two matters in doubt. Are the workers dissatisfied with the Court ? On page 136 Mr. Roberts says : " Generally speaking, the position of the workers is worse when improved machinery and new methods of production are introduced." I would like to ask, does Mr. Roberts disagree with Mr. Nash's suggestion with regard to improved methods being introduced on our farms ? It will be seen that there is a fundamental difference of opinion. Again, on page 136 Mr. Roberts deals—and I think he deals with the question quite honestly, but is ignorant of the exact facts, and I want to assure him and those associated with him that I think they are as genuine about the Conference as I am in hoping that we will arrive at some settlement—with the recent proposed amendment to the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. That amendment, he said, suggested that the workers who were engaged in the dairying and farming industries generally should be excluded from the operations of any award or industrial agreement under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and then went on to say : " The reasons put forward for the exclusion of these workers was that primary produce was subject to fluctuations in a world market over which New Zealand legislation had no control. We have to point out that in Australia the rural workers are organized into trade-unions, and have been for a number of years past. They have received increases in wages in recent years to a greater extent than workers engaged in other industries, and are at present working under awards of the Court. The Australian producers have to compete in a world market the same as New Zealand producers ; indeed, the same applies to all New Zealand's competitors in the London market generally. Therefore the argument put forward by the primary producers in this respect cannot be accepted." I would ask Mr. Roberts, is he aware that in Australia the town worker is compelled to pay from 4d. to 6d. per pound more for his butter than the farmer receives for that portion of his butter sold in London ? The whole point is this : that there is no comparison. Two-thirds of the Australian production of butter is sold in that country, whilst not one-quarter of ours is sold here. With regard to page 138, is Mr. Roberts in favour of profit-sharing in industry ?

Mr. Turner : Mr. Chairman, I want to ask Mr. Roberts a question with reference to this statement, made on page 135 : " We contend further that neither the Government nor the employer should be empowered by law to compel a majority of the workers in any industry to submit an industrial dispute to the Court of Arbitration, if the workers are opposed to this course." Then, further down on the same page, he says : " Dealing with disputes in industries where awards or industrial agreements are current at the time, if there is a stoppage of work through a strike or lockout, power should be given to either the Minister of Labour, the Registrar of Industrial Unions, or the Court of Arbitration to convene a compulsory conference of the parties." I want to ask Mr. Roberts whether those two statements do not in effect mean that he agrees with the suggestion made by Mr. Bishop in his paper read this morning, that we should drop compulsory arbitration and get on to voluntary arbitration and compulsory conciliation. It seems to me that there is no difference between Mr. Roberts and Mr. Bishop there, and I am pleased to see that particular phase of the discussion coming out at this point. I want to ask Mr. Roberts a question also with reference to the last paragraph on page 138, in which he talks about the right of labour to take some part in the management of industry : I want to ask him whether it is not the function of the worker to work and that of the manager to manage. It will be noticed that twice in Mr. Roberts's paper he suggests that wages should be based on a family of four or five. The figures based on the census returns show that there is a breadwinner to every two and a half of the population. I would like to know what basis there is for Mr. Roberts's suggestion that wages should be based on a family of four or five.

Mr. Smith : I intend to follow the example of Mr. Bloodworth and ask one or two questions for the purpose of ensuring historical accuracy. In regard to one of these questions there is possibly some excuse for inaccuracy on the part of Mr. Roberts, because in 1913 he was not in Wellington, or, if he