

re the Westport Harbour contracts. By referring to copy of the aforesaid memorandum you will see that you agreed to let the works in small contracts to the workmen. This has not been carried out in every instance, but what we complain of most is that the maintenance contract has been let to and is still retained by non-unionists of the very worst kind.

We have offered a strong protest against our members being compelled to work along with these men. Up to the present we have carefully avoided resorting to extreme measures; but we regret to find that these same men have again tendered for the work, and quite a number of others whom we cannot recognise as having any claim within the terms of your memorandum. We could give most satisfactory reasons for our protest if an opportunity were afforded us before the tenders were formally accepted. There is, however, the one position we have taken up, that of not allowing our members to work with non-union men—a position from which we cannot and will not move whatever may be the consequences; and in this we have the fullest sympathy and support of the Maritime Council and of all the trades-unions in the colonies.

Therefore we are of the opinion that, if you cannot see your way clear to let the maintenance contract to the men who really represent the employés on the harbour-works—namely, Messrs. Reece, Barrowman, and Cross—you should at least give us a chance of explaining our position in reference to these contracts, and not force us into extremes that would involve the thousands of unionists, and bring trouble upon those who have no direct interest in these labour disputes.

We were more than astonished, after going to the trouble, and at considerable expense, of going up to Wellington to interview you, and getting your pledge that the works would be let to the employés, to find that they could only be let for the short term of six weeks. Surely this was tantalising us in a manner that we consider unbecoming to the Public Works Department; and, although the contracts have been extended, we are again confronted with the District Engineer advertising to relet the contracts in the quarries for another short term. We are at a loss to know why this should be necessary, seeing that the works are being carried out to the entire satisfaction of the local engineers, and, according to their own admissions, better and cheaper than by the late contractors, and under much greater difficulties.

Such being the case, it would be at least some satisfaction for us to know why our men should be treated so much worse than the ordinary contractor. We feel satisfied that neither the Government nor any other employer would ever think of letting works of such importance to other contractors for such short terms as are offered to us.

We are most anxious to avoid any friction with the Government, but we cannot submit to be put into competition with such unprincipled men as those who have at present the maintenance of the Cape Foulwind Railway line. Neither would we like to think that the present Ministry would encourage in any degree a system of sweating in order to get any works under their control done cheaply. I may also inform you that the present union contractors have in several instances made important and very material concessions on some of their contracts to the Board, and these concessions, I understand, in every case were unsolicited.

If the Government cannot meet us in the manner I have indicated, could they kindly consent to allow the tenders to remain in the hands of the local engineer until a deputation had had the opportunity of stating their case to you?

I expect to be leaving for my home at Denniston early next week: until then my address is, care of Mr. G. Newton, Taylorville, Brunnerton. If you deem it necessary for the deputation to come to Wellington will you please let me know at your earliest convenience?

Trusting that we shall receive every consideration, and apologizing for the length of my letter,
I have, &c.,

JNO. LOMAS,

President A.L.M.A. of New Zealand.

The Hon. the Premier.

No. 7.

COPY of MEMORANDUM by the Hon. the PREMIER.

THE Premier, having replied to the deputation upon the general question as to what action the Government meant to take as to employment in the several districts, was then asked by the deputation, as they had heard by telegram that the contractor had stopped the works at Westport Harbour, what provision do the Government intend to make until contracts can be let, and at what rate of pay, as the men would be seriously inconvenienced if no work was obtainable until the Government were in a position to let the contract.

The Premier, having consulted the Minister of Public Works, stated that the Government were desirous to provide temporary work pending the introduction of the new system referred to in his answer of yesterday. He mentioned that, from a reference to the Public Works Department, it appears that the stoppage of Westport Harbour works was due to the contractor declining to proceed with them. His original contract was completed a few days ago, but, as the Public Works Minister was unwilling there should be any stoppage of the works, he sanctioned their continuance at the late schedule rates for a few days, until specifications could be prepared for letting the works in small contracts to gangs of workmen. The specifications are in hand, and it is hoped they will be completed in a week or ten days.

The Public Works Department was taken somewhat by surprise by the contractor stopping so suddenly, and by having received only about twenty-four hours' notice. In order to meet the temporary difficulty of the men being without work through the stoppage of the contract, the Public Works Minister has given instructions that the works shall be proceeded with at day-wages until the small contracts are out, and that the rate of wages will be the same as was paid by Mr. Wilkie.

1st March, 1890.

H. A. ATKINSON.