

Mr. McLean has told us that there must be a give-and-take principle in all trade, and I presume between employers and workers. Granted; if all employers were "give-and-take" men. There is this difference: The trouble is that a large proportion are "take" only, not "give." They simply go on this line alone—"how cheap" they can get their labour, for the sake of cutting their neighbour's throat in the matter of competition. So long as you have to deal with men of this kind you must have a defined line. I regard "give-and-take" as one of the finest theories that can be adopted, but the most impracticable in its application. We never know precisely when to "give" and when to "take," and there are a large number of cases in which we have to give all and have nothing to take. If the world were governed by principle (said one of England's greatest men) nothing would be easier than to govern the world. But, seeing that such is not the case, it becomes the duty of every wise man to accept the least of any two evils presenting themselves. The lesser of the two evils which are now before us is that of unionism as against freedom of contract. To withstand unprincipled employers, who would take all and give nothing, it is necessary to have a strong unionism—to have a defined line, in the interest both of employers and workers. Now, for union men to mingle, to mix themselves and their labour with that of indifferent workmen, and secured at a cheap rate by the unscrupulous employers, what does that mean? It means simply to kill the union. It will kill the unions, for this reason: If you once introduce distrust into the ranks of labour there will be an end of the union. The employers know that if they can create distrust among any body of men these men are at their mercy. If the union is strong, having the welfare of the worker at heart, desirous to protect him from bad outside influence, they do a good for employers as well as men, by getting for the employers better service. We ask for ourselves the same right which we concede to the capitalist—the right to combine. Take, for instance, Chambers of Commerce. What are they but gigantic unions in the interest of trade and commerce? And properly so. They are combinations for the fixed purpose of guarding trade and putting an end to unprincipled trading. All honour to the Chambers of Commerce for doing that. But will you allow the Chambers of Commerce to do one thing and not allow the unions to do what is also in the interest of trade for no other reason than because it benefits the members of the union? If you apply the same arguments to Chambers of Commerce the effect of carrying it out would be suicidal to them as a Chamber of Commerce as well as to us as a union. What would happen if the union did not guard the interest of the worker? Let us see. We all know the conversations that go on from time to time in the ship's hold, or on the wharf. Some over-zealous unionist might make some remark that displeased some one present. No notice perhaps might be taken of it at the time; but he soon receives intimation that he has to go. This weeding-out principle goes along, until you find none but weak-kneed unionists are left. No doubt there are weak-kneed employers as well. There are employers who would leave the Employers' Association to-morrow if they dared. In the way I have described the men are operated on until they are completely in the power of their masters for the time. It comes to this at last, in respect of freedom of contract with regard to labour: that in the outside market the whole trade as regards the wages of the workmen has got down to starvation-point. But, it will be asked, what is the way out of it? I would suggest the same that was suggested to the employers in Canterbury—for there are some reasonable employers there as elsewhere. It was suggested when a dispute arose that there should be a strong body on each side. Let us have a strong body of federated labour and a strong federation of capital—two strong bodies. In this way the interests involved on each side would be very great. Each would be strong enough to discuss all points without insisting upon the cession of any right before the discussion could begin. In this way there would be some prospect of arriving at an amicable understanding. This is a position which I trust Mr. McLean would impress upon the employers of this colony. We have no wish to see them cut up into sections. Let us have a strong federation of employers if you please, but let them accord to us the same right. To ask us to act as individuals while they act in concert as an organized body would be unfair and unjust. When a dispute arises let us come to a Conference, sit round a table as we are here, and try to arrive at some just decision that will determine all differences.

*The Chairman:* Is there any other member who wishes to address the Conference before I call on the Hon. Mr. McLean to reply?

*Hon. Mr. McLean:* Are you all exhausted, gentlemen? Have you expended all your powers of argument against the Union Company?—(Laughter).—Well, I must say that, with the exception of one or two speeches, I have nothing to complain of: the discussion has been carried on in a fair spirit. A good deal has been twisted about, but I suppose that is all fair in argument. I certainly must compliment you all upon the way in which this discussion has been carried on. I got a few hard knocks for the company I represent, and if I give a few small knocks in return I hope you will not think I am doing it purposely or through ill-will, but only in the way of defence. I am not here to quarrel with anybody, as I said, and I shall try to express my ideas, in answer to the things that have been said against us, as mildly as possible. Now, gentlemen, a good deal has been said about the employers not appearing here. No doubt, as our company is a large employer of labour, I might as well say something in defence of it before this assembly. The employers' associations, as you are aware, were only brought into existence since this strike. So far as I know, there was not an employers' association in existence before this strike took place. But by this strike their men were called on to leave them, they did not know for what. When their men formerly came and asked whether there was any objection to their joining the unions, most of them said they had no objection. Our men came to us and asked the same question, and we had no objection. This boycott, which was brought into existence by the Maritime Council, caused all the mischief. Those employers who had no objection to their men joining their trade unions, who were perfectly willing that their men should do so, were the first to be attacked. When asked, their storemen refused to deliver their goods; their carters refused to carry them. What was the consequence? Their employes had either to obey orders, and retire from the unions, or leave their employment. What other position could be taken up by the employers? Their position was