

“Arawa.” We should not give away all this coal if through doing so we were going to stick ourselves up. At a meeting in Dunedin they were all burning to start this National Commercial and Industrial Co-operative Steamship Company. Mr. Fox, the agent for the “Jubilee,” was there burning to assist the cause. Well, gentlemen, I would ask you just to consider what has been the result of the opposition that recently came here. Why, while we were continuing during the strike to take grain at low rates, the owners of the opposition steamer put up the charges to 6s. 6d. a bag! That is the difference between the dealings of the Union Company and the opposition. Well, now, Mr. Millar was going to kill us with this boat; but after getting some coals in Sydney she could not get any more, and so had to sell what she had, return her passage-money, and lay up there. I am not afraid of this opposition. It is not very long since, I venture to say, that it was the opinion of Mr. Millar and of every seaman that no other than the Union Company should have the trade of New Zealand; and I am sure it will come back to that again; it is only a matter of time. After settling our difficulties, I have no doubt we shall grow fond of each other, and be a happy family again.—(Laughter.)—But there is another difficulty that comes up in the settlement of this matter. I refer to the action of the Seamen’s Union at the time they were running the “Bel-linger” against the Northern Company. We stepped in and did our best to effect a settlement, and a settlement was arrived at on the understanding that all the men then in the employ of the Northern Company would be taken into the unions. But how did the Seamen’s Union carry out their part of the bargain? They did not take the men in, and a number of them are not in the Union to this day! I am not blaming Mr. Millar altogether for this, but a breach of faith on their part such as that makes it very difficult to deal with a case like the present. I would ask Mr. Millar now, would he really ask us to discharge a couple of thousand men? Could it be done, or could he find the men to take their places, scattered as they now are over the country? Under such circumstances, and when a breach of faith has taken place before, we must now stick to those we have employed. You could not get the old men together. We can only take those who may come back to us if we have room for them. We are quite willing to do that. But is it not, at the same time, a fair thing for us to say that we must stick to the men who are already in our employment? We will not deny any man who comes to us if we have employment to give. We will accept union men or non-union men. We have never shut any man out whether he was concerned in this strike or not. If a good man who has been on strike comes back to us we will not shut him out. If we have a vacancy for such a man he will still have a better chance of getting it than an outsider. But it is unreasonable to ask us to discharge the men who have come to our aid. It is impossible, and you must not ask us to do an impossibility. Before your unions came into existence did not the Union Company treat their men well? Was there ever a grievance brought before the directors, or the managing director, which, if there was anything in it, they did not investigate? Had the party aggrieved to wait any time before it was settled? I ask that without fear as to what the answer will be. Mr. Millar said something about barricading the wharves. What have we to do with barricading the wharves? That is the business of the Harbour Boards. The Union Company has no business with it. If there is any complaint to be made on that score, the Harbour Board are the proper persons to complain to. Then, Mr. Millar made an allusion to demurrage. I would ask him whether we have ever asked or received from him money for demurrage. Mr. Millar knows very well that sometimes a fireman would leave us in the lurch in a port. When that happens we must take a man wherever we can get him, whether he may be a union or a non-union man. No man could object to that. It is all very well to say that experienced men will not go with inexperienced firemen, but they have done so in the past. An attack has been made on the engineers. What I say of the engineers is this: that from the beginning of this strike they told us they had no grievance against us, that they wanted nothing, and were quite contented. It is useless to refer to the Conference at Sydney. The engineers told us that it did not affect us at all. There was a difficulty indeed between the engineers and the firemen. The former had lost control of the engine-room, and it was quite impossible to go on longer without some trouble arising. It is all very well to say that the engineers are an overbearing lot; they are like other men. Some may be overbearing, but generally they are a very good class of men, and they are always willing to get things put to rights. It is said that the engineers went as firemen and stokers. They did nothing of the sort. I sent an extra man on board one of the Sydney steamers; but what did the engineer do? He sent the man on shore, stating that he had no trouble with the firemen, and that after the first hour they did their work well. All that I can say about the engineers is that they behaved well to us. They came to us in a very liberal manner, and said they had no grievance, that they wanted nothing, and that the attack upon us was not fair. I have thought it right, now that an attack had been made on them, to say what I knew myself. I now come to Mr. Seymour. Probably I ought not to take much notice of what he said. I do not think that his speech was as fair or as mild as one might have expected from a man in his position. He turned into ridicule the statement which I made that our company was conducted like a Government institution, by making it appear that I said “more like a governing body.” What I meant was that it was not run altogether for the greed of shareholders. That is what I wanted to show you. Some people run away with the idea that we buy all these boats with our own money out of the profits. We do nothing of the sort. We raise capital as it is needed for the purpose. No doubt we keep ourselves strong. We are quite strong enough to bear a shake like this; and I venture to say we shall stand the shake of an opposition. We are not grabbing everything. We have kept ahead of trade. We have brought plant here to meet the requirements of trade as it increased. We have plant coming that will do everything that has to be done in the way of carrying from New Zealand for some time to come. You will never hear complaints of our having raised the rates of freight if you go from one end of New Zealand to the other. It is impossible to please everybody, but I think you will find that, for people who had a monopoly, there was never a monopoly in existence that was so popular as this monopoly. Why is it so? Simply because we treated every one well. As to the Seamen’s Representation Bill, it is not correct to say that I