

matters of detail, whatever the outcome of this struggle, we have every right to regard this Conference as a decided victory for the labour party. We have come here from the North, the South, and the two Coasts, and I must say it shows but scant courtesy to the Parliament and the Government of the colony that the representatives of enormous interests within it should have decided not to be present, even though they might have resolved to take no part in the debates, but only to hear the argument. Seeing, however, that the employers have abstained from coming here, we have only this one way of meeting them. Here we would have been enabled to discuss all the important questions connected with this movement. To go on to platforms throughout the colony we could only have met the employers in sections, and we should be probably told that the meetings where we appeared would be packed with unionists; the arguments would be restricted by some special or local circumstances, and "boiled down," to use a technical phrase, before they appeared before the public. The only fitting opportunity is here, before the Government of the country, where one can depend on full and fair reports by Government reporters, who are ready to give the public the full benefit of these reports. Now, gentlemen, I say that the position taken up by the employers' associations, or, shall I say, the capitalists, that union and non-union labour shall work together indiscriminately, is unsound; that such a position is inimical to the best interests not only of labour but of the employer. And for these reasons: Why does unionism exist? Primarily, no doubt, it exists to advance the interests of the labourer—for the purpose of conserving those interests—the results of its action fixing the hours of labour, appointing the rates of wages, and in other ways relieving the burden which the labourer has to bear, and, if you please, to save him from unwise competition in his own ranks. So far so good. The position which the labourer has gained he is fairly entitled to. He has gained it chiefly, if not altogether, through unionism. But does the work of unionism end there? I hold that it does not. If capital could only look on the whole question of unionism, the capitalists would find it as much for their interests as for the interests of the worker that there should be a full recognition of the claims of unionism; that, in effect, there should be a strong unionism throughout the land. And why? Putting it on the ordinary basis of common-sense, given a regulated scale of wages, regulated hours of labour, the capitalist would be in a position to know exactly, in respect of any undertaking he might think of entering upon, the cost which the labour would be to him, and he would know at the same time that none of those who are to compete with him in his particular business will obtain any advantage over him so far as wages or so far as the first cost in the matter of labour is concerned. Therefore I contend the capitalist ought to do all in his power to insist that every employé should be a member of a union. Let us now look to the question of the "freedom of contract," which makes the extent of a man's need and the extent of an employer's greed the sole rule which regulates the rates of wages and the hours of labour. And what of them? With most employers who go into contracts the men who are in their employment are not in particularly needy circumstances. The men may have been in the same employment for a great many years. Look at the Union Company, for instance: they have men in their employment to whom they give a fair remuneration. But let us say there is a manufacturer next door who has men in his employment of a needy class. Things occur from time to time which induce him to think that if he could get work done at a very low rate of wages he would be in a better position to contract than his neighbour who pays a fair remuneration to labour. He goes to his men and says to them, "Look here, men: work is not brisk just now, and if I cannot get that contract you will have to travel." But a contract comes along, and he says again, "Here is a contract, but to enable me to take it you must either take longer hours or lower rates of wages." That is how it is. Every man says, "If I can assist my employer to retain his business I also benefit myself," and for the sake of getting a present advantage he will often sacrifice what he may think is the main principle which should govern his action, the principle of right and justice. He accepts a lower rate of wages. In doing that he agrees to help the employer who takes advantage of his necessity, and he enables that employer to go into the market and contract for work for less than the fair and upright man who deals honourably by his men can take; so that the fair-dealing employer, as well as the most efficient workmen, are kept out of the race. And every member of the community suffers as a consequence, so that in time there is but little work to do, and that little is usurped by the unscrupulous contractor, the needy and incompetent workman, to the exclusion of fair dealing and good work. That is what freedom of contract leads to. It comes to this sooner or later—there can be no other result: that if one employer takes this position it becomes necessary even for the fair employer to do one of three things—he must adopt the same tactics and reduce wages, or lengthen the hours of labour, or recede from his business. Regarding these things, I say it is undoubtedly the interest of capital to see that we have a strong and united unionism. If freedom of contract to-day has to accept a lower rate of wages to secure a present advantage it is morally certain that the unprincipled employer, who has persuaded the worker to take this lower rate now, will in the long-run be in a position to insist that the workman shall take a lower rate still. Owing to this want of principle in the employer, and this submission of the worker to freedom of contract, which is against him, services have no longer their proper value, until at last the employer says to him, "Here you are; you are cut adrift from your fellow-men; it is no use looking to them for assistance; I want a still further reduction of your wages." Thus, under this freedom of contract, every working-man, every labouring-man, and every working-woman must eventually come down to their ruin—must, at any rate, be reduced to such a low level that long hours and low wages shall have placed them in a worse position than the men and women workers of the Old Country. We are told by the employers' associations that they have no desire to destroy the unions; they are quite content to have the old unionism; but the new unionism must be strangled at any cost. I have taken the trouble to read the history of unionism, and I know what the old unionism was: and in the popular literature of a very recent time its character and objects have been described. If the employers' associations are acquainted with the history of the past, even up to a very recent date, they will have no difficulty in informing themselves