

*Captain Highman* : Then, I submit, what is the present state of the country if there has not been a quarrel? Undoubtedly there has been a quarrel, and, I submit, the sooner we face the broad issue that there is a quarrel, and that there is something to mediate upon, the better.—(Hear, hear.)—It is all very well to come here and say that there is no quarrel; but if we all said that we might as well disperse. There is no logic in the remark. I fail to see it. The country now is thrown almost into a state of absolute standstill; the Government of the country, to whom we have to look for legislation for the country, instructs its Executive to call a Conference to mediate upon this difficulty, and we are here assembled. Only one of the other side comes here, and I must say I admire—and it commands the admiration of every one here—the pluck of that one company in coming here and facing the difficulty.—(Hear, hear.)—The others, as I have said in my opening remarks, and I am extremely sorry to say it, are wanting in courtesy, even if they have no quarrel. At the invitation of the Government, to whom they look up, or are supposed to look up, they have thought fit to play sulky and not come here. This is the attitude they have taken: They have played the sulky part in not responding to the Government of the country; and I should almost move a resolution that the combined associations of employers otherwise than the Union Steamship Company show, by their act of not responding to the invitation of the Government of the country, a want of confidence in that Government.

*The Chairman* : We will take that resolution after we have done with the present discussion. Would you like to say something on the subject, Mr. Lomas?

*Mr. Lomas* : I am afraid, sir, that I can scarcely add anything to what has been already said to-day. I take it, sir, that the chief discussion of the meeting ought to rest between the representatives of the Marine Officers' Association and the representative of the Seamen's Union and the Hon. Mr. McLean.—(Hear, hear.)—In regard to the coal-mine difficulty, I was rather sorry to see Mr. McLean go so far out of his way as to bring in, as I thought, side-issues. He dragged into this present discussion the difficulty which arose between the Grey Valley Coal Company and their miners some time ago. Mr. McLean knows the ins and outs of that difficulty as well as I do, and he also knows that when they submitted their books to be inspected, four days before the result of the investigation by our auditor in Dunedin reached us, the company itself threw the men out. And probably if the company had not taken that rash step, but had allowed the men to work on until the results came from Dunedin, the men might have made some compromise, pending the final decision in the matter. It was rather unnecessary to go over that ground, for the reason that myself and my colleague came down to Wellington for the purpose of conferring with Mr. McLean and Mr. Kennedy, as representing that company, and did our very best, eventually succeeding in getting the men to compromise matters pending a Royal Commission, which is likely to sit. It is rather out of place to bring that matter before the Conference, seeing that it is a side-issue. As to our position as coal-miners in this matter, we could do nothing else than stand loyally by the seamen, and I am not ashamed to confess that I regard our affiliation in this colony as essential. I do not see, as a single union, how we could hold our own against the capitalists; and we have resolved that we are going to be on the defensive. We have no wish, as far as I know—and no one can charge me, as the recognised leader of the miners, in any case, of attempting to take any undue advantage of any employers I have had to do with. My employers generally give me credit for being fair and reasonable in most matters. I cannot see how we could possibly hold our own unless affiliated; and we are not going to sit down and allow the Union Company, or any other powerful company, to quietly break up our ranks; and for us to go on working to supply the Union Company with coal would be to assist that company and the free labourers to crush us out of existence. We have no feeling in the matter whatever with our own company, and we do not wish to create any feeling. If the Union Company's boats, and other boats, were manned with union men to-morrow we would go back to work, and work on the old terms. As to free labour, I confess I have not much to say about it, and do not care much about it. I am not at all alarmed about free labour. I have had a good deal of experience of free labourers, and they are, to my mind, the very best friends of unionism. If the Union Company only has as long an experience of free labour as many other companies have had I am certain that they will take their old hands back, and they will find that it will be more profitable in the end. Mr. McLean can ascertain from the Westport Coal Company how far these free labourers—they are called blacklegs, and it is a better term too—(Hear, hear)—how far these free labourers assisted them in the dispute some five years ago. They had the mine full of these men, and the result was they lost considerably, and if it had not been for the assistance of the Union Steamship Company that company would have gone down. My experience all my life has been that these men know what to do with the companies, and know how to get at them; and, so far as the free labourers are concerned, I am not alarmed at their taking the places of the seamen and of the wharf labourers. I hail their presence at Westport with delight.—(Laughter.)—I say that sincerely, because as long as the mine is closed and there is no one working the struggle will last the longer. Our company lost very little money indeed until those free labourers entered the mine during the last strike. The free labourers will get the worst of it if this fight continues. I know our men can stand, and stand under very great difficulties; and I am pretty certain we shall stand quietly by the seamen until the end of the strike, no matter whether it is a bitter end or a sweet one. I do not say that we wish to hold anything like a sword of terror over the head of the Union Company in any way. I am disposed to be conciliatory about the matter; and I am sure that the fact of the delegates coming so readily at the invitation of the Government shows a disposition on their parts to meet this thing fairly and squarely and discuss it on its merits. Because we would not consent in the first place to give ourselves entirely away to the other side before we came to Wellington they would not come here and meet us. That will make us all the more determined to fight this matter to the end. It seems to me that the question before this Conference is a question between the Shipping Company and the Seamen's Union and the Marine Officers and us delegates. I do not think we should take much part in the discussion unless the representatives of the particular industry we are interested