

19th September, 1950.

IN pursuance of my promise that I would keep honourable members of the House informed concerning developments in connection with the stoppage of work on the waterfront, I now have to inform the House that work at all ports has, with the exception of certain perishable cargoes, been brought to a standstill and the country's transport system is virtually paralysed.

The decision of the watersiders to hold up the industry and trade of the country can only be deplored in the strongest terms.

Along with the Minister of Labour, the Hon. W. Sullivan, I have had long discussions with the leaders of the waterside workers. We have done everything in our power to impress upon them the loss, suffering, and inconvenience that are inescapable consequences of their action.

In our meetings with them we have discussed the most minute details of their problems. We have tried to impress upon them that strikes are not a satisfactory or proper method of dealing with disputes and that they cause suffering to hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

We have invited the watersiders to submit proposals for the more satisfactory working of their industry and for the settlement of disputes.

In our August discussions we offered to establish a Royal Commission to inquire into every aspect of their industry. That proposal was whole-heartedly welcomed by the watersiders, who gave their pledge that until the Royal Commission had completed its findings there would be uninterrupted work on the wharves throughout New Zealand.

Immediately the August conference was concluded the Government set about preparations for establishing the Royal Commission, and will be ready this week to announce its personnel and order of reference.

We wrote to all interested parties inviting them to submit their ideas about the matters to be inquired into by the Royal Commission. The last to reply were the watersiders, who gave their views last Thursday.

The present hold-up is in complete breach of their clear undertaking that normal work would proceed pending the Royal Commission's findings.

The issues involved in the present trouble are fundamental and basic—lampblack is only one of many matters in dispute, the real trouble is simply whether disputes are to be settled by lawful constituted authority or by direct action and strikes.

The watersiders themselves asked for the re-establishment of the Waterfront Industry Authority and agreed to abide by its decisions, yet when a decision of the Authority is given with which they disagree they refuse to honour their pledge to abide by its decision and use the strike weapon in what they say is the only means of achieving their ends.

We have invited the watersiders to put forward to the Royal Commission their proposals for running the wharves. We have promised them that the present, and any future, disputes can be considered by the Royal Commission. There is nothing more we can offer them.

It is only a matter of a few weeks ago that they asked for the re-establishment of the Waterfront Industry Authority; now they demand that it should be abolished.