

Mr. WILLIAM THOMAS BARNES made a statement. (No. 11.)

*Mr. Barnes:* I represent the Lyttelton Stevedores' Industrial Union of Workers. I am simply a member of that union. I may state that Mr. McLaren has gone through a considerable portion of the matter which I intended to bring before the Committee. I want, however, to traverse the vital question that arises as to the wharf labourers and the conflict of opinion as to their wages and work. Any person who knows about the wages at New Zealand seaports knows that a wharf labourer's wages are 10s. a day. That is the rate of wages which he receives for the work he has to do. Yet I know of several cases which I could bring before the Committee where men have been earning £160 a year from different employers who have only been offered £1 a week under the Workers' Compensation for Accidents Act. One man, who had averaged £31 5s. 11d. for the six months previous to his accident, was offered 2s. 6d. a week. Another man, who averaged £80 0s. 2d. for the six months preceding his accident, was offered and accepted £1 a week. Another man, who had earned £74 10s. 5d. for the previous six months, accepted 13s. 9d. a week. Another man, named Dix, who was laid up for five weeks and a half, was offered 5s. a week, when his usual weekly wages came to £2 15s. I only mention these cases to show what an injustice is done to the men. The wharf labourers at Lyttelton have to work for one particular firm, and it does not matter whatever other firm they may tell you to go to, if you do not go you will probably find your self what we call in our wharf language "beached" for a week. At the same time, if you have worked for these different firms during the week you go to the firm that employs you originally and get your money. Therefore they are actually and virtually your employers, and they send you where they like and then pay your wages. That is where the injustice comes in. I may have been working for one firm for five or six months, and then I am sent to another firm, and may get hurt while I am working for them. Of course, I would not get hurt if I could help it. I may be working for that firm for only seven days, and my average for the preceding six months is not taken into account. I ask you, gentlemen, whether that is right or just.

84. *The Chairman.*] How do you propose to meet that case?—It is not for me to adjust these matters; but I may say that my opinion is that the person who pays the money over the counter should be the responsible person to pay half the average wages of the person who is injured.

85. That might suit Lyttelton, but it might not suit other parts of the colony?—The wages bill might be adjusted for each centre, as it is done in Lyttelton.

Mr. WILLIAM EDWARD AGAR made a statement. (No. 12.)

*Mr. Agar:* I am vice-president of the New Zealand Stevedores' Union of Workers. As my colleague has stated, the most vital point to the wharf labourers in Lyttelton is that a person may be called upon by the Stevedoring Association to work for three or four firms in a single day. He may work for one of these firms for only an hour, and he may get injured during that time. It is now held that, although a man may have been working under the Stevedoring Association for twelve months for every firm except one, and then may have to go and work for that firm for an hour or two and receive an injury; as he had not worked for that firm for any length of time they only allow pay for the average amount which he has earned from that firm, which may be only 1s. 3d. per week, whereas if he had been working for his usual employers his average earnings might have been up to £3 a week. What we suggest is this: that the Act should be so amended that it would not matter whether a man worked for a day or a half-day for a particular firm, the compensation which he should receive should be based on the average wages which he has earned for the twelve months, and not on the particular amount which he has earned from the particular firm for which he has been working for only a short time.

*Mr. Barnes:* The compensation should be dated from the day on which the accident took place, so that the insurance company could not steal from the worker the difference in the premium.

*Mr. McLaren:* To show how serious the matter is, I may say that there is now in Wellington one case in which a man received compensation for an accident under the Act, and he is actually being supported by charity. The compensation was so small that he has had to depend upon charity to support his wife and children.

86. *Mr. Tanner.*] You, Mr. McLaren, spoke of the delay in settling small claims for compensation, and said that it led to their being abandoned?—Yes.

87. Are there many such cases?—There are a good number of them.

88. Is it because of the disappointment, or because the men have to ship off elsewhere?—I find that both causes operate. In some cases the witnesses go away elsewhere, and the man who makes the claim, not being able to get hold of them, abandons his claim. In other instances a workman who has received a small injury and has recovered from it has to go elsewhere to work. In these cases, if they are not settled within a month or two, the workmen abandon them altogether.

89. Another point which you raised was with regard to the desire of the unions to represent injured members in case of litigation?—Yes.

90. We have had a witness who said that it was the desire of the unions that they should act for the man who receives the injury. As it is, the injured man has to take action individually, and he may compromise the case, although the union is behind him and finds the funds. Do you consider that that system should be stopped and the charge given to the union?—That is substantially our view—of course, with the proviso that where the individual wishes it the union shall supersede the individual.

91. Would you like to see the Act amended in that direction?—Yes; and that, with the permission of the individual, the union should have power to represent him directly. I would point out that workers generally have the impression that they must act as individuals, and in a number