

Mr. Meyer : Sooner than be a party to trying to induce the employers to be present here, if I am not out of order, I would, with your consent, sir, withdraw all I have said, because they have had an invitation extended to them, and if they do not see their way clear to accept it it is not our business to press the matter on them or urge them to come here; and I hope the remark made in the Premier's letter that we urged them to be present will be contradicted. We simply asked that an invitation should be sent to them.

The Chairman here read a letter from the Premier's office as follows :—

"SIR,—
 "Premier's Office, Wellington, 2nd October, 1890.
 "With reference to my letter of this day's date, I now forward to you copy of the letter I addressed to the Chief Commissioners of Railways, and of his reply, which has just reached me.
 "I have, &c.,
 "D. P. Fisher, Esq.,
 "Chairman of the Labour Conference."
 "H. A. ATKINSON.

Enclosure No. 1.

"SIR,—
 "Premier's Office, Wellington, 2nd October, 1890.
 "I have the honour to transmit to you copy of a letter just received from the Chairman of the Labour Conference.
 "The Government did not in the first instance think it their duty to invite you to attend the Conference, being of opinion that you did not come within the scope of the resolution passed by the House of Representatives; but they will raise no objection to your attending the Conference if you think your presence will assist in bringing to a satisfactory end the unfortunate strikes which exist at the present time.
 "I have, &c.,
 "J. McKerrow, Esq.,
 "Chief Commissioner of Railways, &c."
 "H. A. ATKINSON.

Enclosure No. 2.

"SIR,—
 "New Zealand Government Railways,
 "Head Office, Wellington, 2nd October, 1890.
 "I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of this date, and a copy of the letter to you from the Chairman of the Labour Conference requesting you to invite the Railway Commissioners to attend the Conference, and to urge the Commissioners to accept such invitation.
 "In reply, I have to state that the Commissioners, representing as they do so important a branch of the public service as the railways, feel it imperatively incumbent on them and their employes to maintain the strictest neutrality in any trade or labour disputes which may arise, and they therefore beg to decline the invitation of the Labour Conference.
 "I have, &c.,
 "JAMES MCKERROW,
 "Chief Commissioner.
 "The Hon. the Premier, Wellington."
 The motion of Mr. Sandford—Mr. Meyer's amendment not being seconded—was then put and carried.
 At 4.30 p.m. the Conference adjourned until 10 o'clock next day.

FRIDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 1890.

The Conference assembled at 10 o'clock a.m.

Present : Mr. Ansell, Mr. Avery, Mr. Boase, Mr. Browett, Mr. P. Brown, Mr. Cornish, Mr. Dobson, Mr. Elvines, Mr. D. P. Fisher (Chairman), Mr. J. Graham, Captain Highman, Mr. Hoban, Mr. Hutcheson, Mr. R. P. Johnson, Mr. H. C. Jones, Mr. Lomas, Mr. Meyer, the Hon. G. McLean, Mr. J. A. Millar, Mr. F. C. Millar, Mr. T. Mills, Mr. Mudge, Mr. Parker, Mr. Sandford, Mr. R. Seymour, Mr. Tees, Mr. Williams, Mr. Winter.

Mr. Sandford : It appears to me that the main question which has been discussed by the Conference has been confined to the maritime difficulty. Regret has been expressed by two or three members of the Conference on account of the absence of employers from its deliberations. That regret, I believe, is fully indorsed by all the representatives here. But it seems to me that the delegates on the labour side have not given the consideration it deserves to the reason which the employers may have had for declining to attend the Conference. There must have been a reason for their coming to that resolution. In the letters from the employers which have been read they appear to require that the unions shall give up the whole of the rights, or the principal right, for which they are contending. Now, we contend that for the employers' associations to ask the labour party to abandon such a vital principle without any discussion of it is unreasonable. The labour party might with just as much reason have asked, before we entered upon the Conference, that all the persons discharged, or who had left their employment, should be reinstated. Had such a demand been made by the labour party it would have been cried down not only as unreasonable but unwarrantable, and would have put an end to any proposals for a Conference. Fortunately, the labour party did not take any such extreme view. We hold that, having been invited to this Conference—the same invitation which we in good faith accepted—to settle, if possible, every question that might be raised—this question of unionism and non-unionism among others—they should have attended or been represented here. We were prepared to consider the whole of these questions, and the responsibility of the present opportunity being lost will not rest with us. Now, it appears to me that the employers take up one of two positions—either they fear that their position is untenable, and therefore they cannot come forward to discuss it, knowing they would have to admit that we had right on our side, or they are determined to crush unionism. Not to talk about