

TUESDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 1903.

WALTER NEWTON examined. (No. 10.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—Upholsterer.
2. Resident in Christchurch?—Yes.
3. *Mr. Taylor.*] Had you, as a member of the Trades Council of Christchurch, any communication with Mr. Gardiner, of the Cust Flour-mill?—Yes, we had communication with him.
4. What was the nature of it?—In the first place, it came to the knowledge of the Trades Council that Mr. Gardiner was having pressure brought to bear on him to join the Flour-millers' Association and that he refused. We had a wire from him to that effect. We wrote to him, and he replied to the effect that he intended to stand out of the trust.
5. Have you the telegram with you?—No; you have the letter sent in reply.
6. Is that the letter [produced]?—Yes. The secretary of the Trades Council wrote to Mr. Gardiner with reference to his action in connection with the Flour-millers' Association, and he forwarded this letter in reply.
7. Is that a copy of the letter sent to him [produced]?—Yes. "March 6, 1902.—Mr. A. Gardiner, Cust.—DEAR SIR,—My Council has been informed through Mr. Etheridge of the stand you are taking with reference to the millers' trust, and also of your willingness to have your mill converted into a co-operative mill. While it is not at present in a position to take into consideration the formation of a co-operative mill, it wishes me to inform you that if it should be able to render you any assistance it will be most happy to do so. If the trust should be using coercive measures towards you, and also if they should endeavour to secure a corner in wheat, you might be good enough to supply us with the information.—I remain, yours, &c., F. Y. WILSON, Secretary." Mr. Gardiner, on the 8th March, 1902, forwarded this reply: "Mr. F. Y. Wilson, Christchurch.—DEAR SIR,—Yours of 6th instant to hand, and contents carefully noted. From the first we decided to stand out from joining the Flour-millers' Co-operative Association, and are no more inclined to join now than we were formerly. We wish to offer our thanks to your Council for its assurance of assistance, and should the necessity arise we will ask you to assist us in keeping our stand.—We remain, yours, &c., R. GARDINER AND Co." Information came to us subsequently that more pressure was being brought to bear on Mr. Gardiner—coercive pressure—and the Trades Council appointed a deputation of four of its members to wait on Mr. Gardiner with regard to the matter.
8. Where did you meet Mr. Gardiner?—At the Cust Hotel.
9. Do you remember the date?—It was the 23rd March, 1902—on the Sunday.
10. Did you further discuss the question of his position in regard to the Millers' Association?—Yes, we discussed the matter with him, and he told us that he had been strongly pressed to join the association, and that special inducements had been offered to him to join in the way of concessions in contributions to the association.
11. That is, the contribution would be a special one in the way of inducing him to join?—Yes.
12. Did he tell you what course the association threatened to pursue if he refused to join?—Yes; but he said he had been given to the following Tuesday—it was then Sunday—to decide whether he would join the association or not; and, in the event of him refusing, the association had made arrangements with the whole of his customers in the Oxford district to supply them with flour at less than cost-price for twelve months.
13. That was with the view of forcing him to go into the association?—That is so; and he put it to us whether we could help him to maintain his stand, and we assured him that we would do what we could. But he said that as a business-man he would have to consider the matter, for if the association carried out its threat he would be ruined, as he could not stand twelve months of that sort of thing.
14. Did he say who interviewed him with regard to the association?—No; he said that that was the intimation he had. I could not say whether he said it was by letter or interview.
15. Had you further communication with him after that date?—Yes. Before we left him on that Sunday he said he would wire to us his decision. He wired his decision, and stated he had decided to join the trust. That was the result of our interview with him.
16. You are in no doubt at all as to Mr. Gardiner having told you what course the Millers' Association had threatened him with?—Absolutely none.
17. Who was with you on that occasion?—Mr. S. Billcliff, Mr. Charles Taylor, and Mr. J. Fisher.
18. All members of the Canterbury Trades Council?—Yes.
19. And as a result of discussions over this inquiry you say that these three members are prepared to corroborate your statement?—That is so. Of course, Mr. Gardiner stated that he still wished to stand out, but the pressure brought to bear was too much for him.
20. He told you that he might have to capitulate?—That is so. We could not offer him sufficient inducement to stand out. At that time his mill was the only mill of consequence in Canterbury that had not joined or was working with the association. He said the whole of his customers were practically in the Oxford district, that most of his output went there, and he would be in a very awkward position if they offered to supply his customers as they threatened to do.
21. *Mr. Rutherford.*] You say that Mr. Gardiner, when the deputation met him at the Cust, told you that special inducements were offered him to join the association: do you mean greater inducements or just the ordinary inducements?—Exceptional inducements.
22. He did not state what nature they were, but spoke generally?—Generally. They offered him greater inducements than the others, and concluded by threatening him.
23. *The Chairman.*] Did Mr. Gardiner tell you what the pressure was, other than that they would go round to his customers and sell to them under cost-price?—No, he did not say definitely.