

Invercargill, 9th October, 1903.

SOUTHLAND Employers' Association strongly protest against Labour Department Bill. Shameful, inquisitorial, unnecessary, not tend improve relations employers employed. Urge strongest action to prevent passage.

RICHARD ALLEN,

Secretary, Employers' Association.

Mr. JAMES COX THOMPSON made a statement. (No. 13.)

*Mr. Thompson:* I am vice-president of the Dunedin Branch of the Employers' Association. In dealing with this Bill I may say our opinion is that it is not one which should find a place on our statute-book. The provisions contained in many of its clauses are already provided for in existing legislation. To these we have no objection, but we look upon them as simply duplicating what already exists. There are other clauses from which we dissent entirely, because we consider they are entirely wrong in principle. They are very indefinite, they are very far-reaching, and they confer powers that are beyond all reason. The Title of the Act is misleading. It is called "An Act for the creation of a Labour Department," and then it proceeds to state that its work is to be in connection with the industrial occupations of the people. While it does so, it comprises work and operations of every description not confined to industrial occupations at all. If the Bill is one for the purpose of collecting statistics regarding the industries of the colony, then I submit we have already sufficient power conferred on the Registrar-General for that purpose. Some of the details set out here are very objectionable, such, for example, as ascertaining the cost of production. That is very objectionable, and all that is required under that head is already provided for by the income-tax returns. Therefore, our contention is that existing legislation gives all the power needed in this respect. In the definition of "employer" you have the following words used: "'Employer' means any person, firm, company, or local authority employing labour of any kind for hire." But this Bill only refers to the industries of the colony and to labour only. These preliminary clauses we pass over, with that exception, pointing out that it is not in accord with the provisions set out later on. I have referred already to procuring the cost of production, as provided for in clause 6. That is a provision which we think is entirely outside the operations of a Labour Department. Clause 7 with its subsections is really very objectionable. It provides that, "For the purpose of obtaining the necessary information to enable the Department to carry out this Act the Minister, and any officer of the Department," may procure the information. "Any officer of the Department" is most objectionable. It does not matter who he is. He may be an Inspector of Factories, or perhaps a man who has been in some employment which he has left and gone into the service of the Government, and he is to have all the powers conferred by this Act. Then, with regard to subsection (a) of this clause 7—all that is provided for is already provided for in existing legislation. There is no registration of these associations of workers until their rules have been approved of. Again, in subsection (b) we have a very wide statement made: "The full name of every worker employed by him, together with the nature of the employment, the hours of labour, the mode, terms, and rate of payment therefor, and such other particulars as may be deemed necessary." That is a provision of very wide scope to place in such a Bill as this. Then, we most emphatically object to subsection (c) of the same clause. It gives power to "obtain from all persons able to furnish the same such further and other information, either general or particular, as the Minister deems necessary relating to combinations of capital or labour and their effect on production and prices of commodities, and the collection of Customs duties and their effect on the operations of labour." That subsection should be struck out of the Bill, because it confers most unnecessary and dangerous powers. You might have some vindictive person coming forward and giving evidence which might seriously injure you in your business. We think that is a most objectionable clause. We pass over clause 8, with its subclause, and we come to clause 9, which we think should be struck out, because the powers there given are already given. We next come to clause 10, which provides for a penalty in case of refusal to give information. We think this is too stringent, and that the word "neglects" should be struck out, and it should only apply to persons who refuse to give the information. A man may overlook a thing and have no intention of refusing to give the information. In clause 11, which provides for the recovery of fines, we propose that the words "in a summary way" should be struck out, and also that all the words after "Magistrate" be struck out, so that there shall be a right of appeal. It is a civil action, and therefore it is only right that there should be a power to appeal. These are the main points that I see objectionable in the Bill. Of course, we consider that the Act should not have gone in this direction at all, and we have the greatest objection to clause 7 being inserted.

Mr. GEORGE THOMAS BOOTH made a statement. (No. 14.)

*Mr. Booth:* I am president of the New Zealand Employers' Federation. I think, sir, I shall have to go over to some extent the same ground as Mr. Thompson has gone over, for the sake of summarising and placing before the Committee in a brief form the objections the employers have to this Bill and the amendments they suggest to it. We have some copies of the suggestions we make. They are very roughly drawn up, and put in the shortest possible shape the explanation of our views. Mr. Thompson has said the employers are inclined to regard the Bill as unnecessary on the ground that on the face of it it appears to be designed for the purpose of procuring statistics for the purpose of compilation, and if that is the main object of the Bill there is sufficient machinery in existence at present to carry out that purpose. Then, if the compilation of statistics is, as it appears, the main purpose of the Bill, we say that the Labour Department is not the proper Department to carry out that purpose. There are already statistical Departments which can gather in all the necessary information without creating any extra machinery and without causing any conflict between employers and employees. Those Departments can summarise the information without the necessity for this Bill at all. I say, therefore, that if the compilation of