Industrial Councils.

We disapprove entirely of the abolition of Conciliation Boards and the institution of Industrial Councils. In our opinion the institution of Industrial Councils as provided in the Bill must operate on many unions so as to cause much inconvenience and embarrassment, and some unions, the smaller ones, it must affect very harshly. In addition to this objection, there is great danger, especially in the case of the union representatives who defend their unions' demands as they ought to be defended, that the risk of the employers' prejudice will be extended. With regard to the first point of objection, it is quite conceivable that in the case of small unions, and especially new unions, there would be great difficulty in securing three men with capacities great enough and with the knowledge of procedure which is indispensable, to justify the hope that the case would be efficiently conducted. This must result in unsatisfactory awards and consequent irritation and bad feeling. The second objection may not be so serious in great cities, where the opportunities of employment are comparatively numerous; but in New Zealand, where the industries are comparatively small and the chances of employment consequently restricted, it assumes a very different aspect, and inevitably commends itself to us as a cogent reason why the proposal to establish Industrial Councils should be opposed. Further than this, we see no reason why our agitation for giving the Conciliation Boards extended powers, and thereby restoring to them their dignity and usefulness, should be disregarded. If expert knowledge is required the Boards are now empowered to call it to their assistance under clauses 51 and 52 of the principal Act. This ought to meet the position that the Boards have sometimes to deal with matters "they know nothing about." And if it is logical to propose the abolition of the Boards because they sometimes have to deal with matters "they know nothing about," does not the same logic constitute the severest of possible indictments of the present Arbitration Court system? This is most foolish, but it happens to be the position in which the Government has placed itself. Our opinion is that what is wanted to secure that a fair award shall be given is not the appointment of experts to an Industrial Council, but the appointment to the Conciliation Boards of men who are capable of weighing the evidence given by experts from the witness-box. Confer upon our present Boards the same powers as are vested in the Industrial Councils under the Bill, increase the number of each side's representatives from two to three, make it necessary for two from each side to form a quorum, and then there will have been introduced a better system of conciliation and arbitration.

With regard to the right of appeal, we agree to it if it is applied to the awards given by the Conciliation Boards. If not, then the position is ludicrous. To establish a Council of experts, to give it power to made an award, to give parties a right of appeal to the Arbitration Court against such award, and to make the decision of the Arbitration Court—the non-expert body—final, is, to put it mildly, ridiculous in the extreme. However, we agree to giving parties a right to appeal against the decisions of the Conciliation Boards on lines laid down in the Bill as applying to Industrial Councils.

Industrial Agreements.

We approve of the proposal to extend industrial agreements to the whole of the employers when it is shown that the employers bound by the agreement employ a majority of the workers in the industry. Also, we agree with the clause making agreements as enforceable as awards of the Court. We have been asking for this for years.

Enforcement of Awards.

We approve of clause 22, empowering Magistrates to enforce awards. This will probably remove the condition which has caused more dissatisfaction than anything else—namely, that of hanging up applications for enforcement until a sitting of the Court. We would suggest, however, that a subsection be added to the clause giving the Magistrates power to call in experts to sit with them. It this is added this clause will grant what we have been urging at Conference after Conference.

Liability of Members.

Clause 29 makes individual members liable for the payment of a fine which the union or association does not pay within one month after an order to that effect is filed. The individual liability is limited, however, so as not to exceed £10. We object to this clause on the ground that in the case of workers' unions it is certain that the total amount of the fine will be paid, whereas in the case of employers' association it is not so certain. An employers' association may consist of two persons. If an association of this membership were fined £100, and refused to pay, all that the State could possibly get would be £20. This is grossly unfair to the workers' unions, and consequently we strongly disapprove of it.

Payment of Fines from Wages.

This is certainly one of the most reactionary clauses in the Bill. To give an employer such power over his worker as to deduct fines from his wages is to go right back to the days of feudalism, and make the worker a serf to his master. And, further than that, it is a direct contradiction of the principles of "The Truck Act, 1891," and "The Wages Protection Act, 1899," and is contrary to the spirit of all our labour legislation. We call upon all unionists to make a united protest aginst this obnoxious principle.

Contributions to Unions.

The proposal to secure contributions to unions from non-members is a politician's way of circumventing what seems to him a difficult question, and it shows a complete disregard of the great principle which the trades-unions hold dear. We have been fighting to secure the recognition of the principle that the man who bears the brunt in the fight for better conditions is entitled