

so, because a later clause provides that there must be seven to form an association. Now, there are a good many industries in an industrial district which do not number seven employers—for instance, in the freezing industry, where only one or two exist in a district. There ought to be some provision to meet a case of that kind. I should also like to see an alteration made in subsection (2) of section 32, which states that “an industrial union or an industrial association, being a party to a dispute, may appear before the Council by its chairman or secretary, or by any number of persons,” &c. The Committee must be aware from evidence that reaches it from various sources that one of our troubles has been that disputes have been managed by men who are not immediately interested in the industry affected, and I should very much like to see that clause amended to provide that the parties appearing in any dispute must be interested in the industry. I do not think there are any other points I need refer to, unless the Committee wishes to ask me any questions.

8. *The Chairman.*] Has not your evidence as a whole been against the present system?—I am afraid I must confess that it has.

9. By that are we to understand that you desire the repeal or absolute sweeping-away of the system as it now stands, without having anything to take its place?—I do not suggest that. I think everything should be done to make conciliation effective, and I would not suggest the sweeping-away of the arbitration clauses completely. I should like to see the present Bill given a trial. When I say I am not very sanguine about the results you have to take that for what it is worth. What we do want is some system of conciliation which would be effective.

10. Was not that the desire of the original framer of the first Act?—I believe it was, but we have now got very far away from his original desires.

11. But are you not standing in the position of the Hon. Mr. Reeves in 1891 and 1892, when he had a very earnest desire to get the conflicting parties together to talk the matter over in some simple manner?—He tried to make the Act too rigid. The Arbitration Court was established as a kind of Supreme Court, with power to enforce its awards from the beginning.

12. You say you always queried the compulsory clauses in the Act, and had not faith in them?—Yes.

13. Do you think any legislation would prevent men in any industry from striking in the last extremity?—I can hardly imagine any Act that can prevent that. You cannot stand over a man with a whip. You may take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink.

14. Your highest ideal is that any such Bill, in whatever form we may pass it, may be successful in minimising outbreaks?—I do not fear outbreaks.

15. You discount their effects?—Yes. I believe the arbitration system has cost the country a great deal more during the last fifteen years than any strikes would have cost it in the same period, and I do not see why you should prevent men having the right to strike. Why should you compel a man to work when he does not want to?

16. You spoke of the minimum wage, and said it was immoral: is it not always open to an employer to give his employee a higher wage than the minimum?—Yes.

17. Is that frequently done?—Yes.

18. Is that not a direct incentive to a good man to excel?—Yes; but that does not cover the case of men getting more than they can earn.

19. That can be provided for by the permit system, can it not?—No.

20. To us there appears to be a permit system under which a slow worker can obtain a smaller wage than is fixed by the Court. A normal standard wage is fixed by the Court?—It is the minimum; that becomes the maximum.

21. It is the rate at which the bulk of the men are paid?—Yes.

22. And over and above that it is optional for the employer to give a skilled and energetic man a higher rate?—Yes. But, suppose 10s. a day is established, which is probably 2s. a day more than the average men have been getting. If the employer has to bring up the men who cannot earn the 10s., it follows that the efficiency represented by the 8s. becomes the standard. The employer cannot afford to pay on the higher scale, because he is losing on the less efficient men. It is the 8s.-a-day man who fixes the standard of efficiency, and the others grade themselves down to it.

23. The surplus value of those men who are really worth more than the rate formerly paid makes up in a rough sort of way for the loss on those who are below the standard of efficiency, and consequently there is not much encouragement for an employer to go higher?—In most cases he cannot add appreciably to his wages-cost. You have to keep the labour-cost of your product down, and if that increases every year you ought to cut down the wages of the higher men in order to keep up the level of the inferior men.

24. Do you mean to say that the moral fibre of workmen generally has deteriorated?—Yes, it has been deteriorating for many years past.

25. Before the arbitration system came into force?—I cannot say that.

26. You speak from your own knowledge and experience?—Yes; I do not say that every man has deteriorated, but I take the average.

27. Are there any causes outside of what you have been discussing?—Yes.

28. Can you name them?—I think some of the false social ideals which are being preached have a considerable amount to do with it.

29. Do you think there is a broadcast feeling among the workers that labour is dishonourable and discreditable?—There is a considerable change in the way in which they regard their work compared with my recollection of twenty years ago.

30. Do you mean that it is not executed with the same cheerfulness and readiness?—They have come to regard their work in a different light and spirit.

31. You would not call that a better spirit?—No, distinctly the reverse.