

JAMES YOUNG, representative of the Federated Bootmakers' Union, examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You desire to supplement what Mr. Whiting has told the Committee?—Yes. My evidence will practically be a confirmation of Mr. Whiting's in connection with the Bill, seeing that we both represent the same organization. We represent the Bootmakers' Federation, which comprises the whole of the bootmakers' unions in New Zealand. Our executive are appointed by the unions, and we represent the views as enunciated by them. Our organization comprises, I believe, fifteen hundred persons at the present time. With reference to Part I of the Bill, dealing with strikes and lockouts, we are very strongly of opinion that the whole of it is entirely unnecessary, and that it is an unwarranted infringement of the rights of the unionists of New Zealand. That is the opinion of our executive, formed after going through the Bill. They say the provisions of the present Act are sufficient to stop any strike of a serious nature, and if not sufficient the power of the Court is sufficient to penalise an offender in a fairly drastic manner. It has been said there have not been more than eighteen strikes in New Zealand since the passing of the Act, and, if that is so, when you consider the number of unions that are working under awards, you must agree that the number is very small. It has to be remembered that no Act passed by any Legislature prevents crime. You cannot stop the committal of murder, although a man can be hanged for it. You cannot stop strikes by arbitration, although you can minimise them by means of arbitration, and we contend that the present Act has done that. For an Act, however, to be passed by a Legislature providing that two persons coming to a common agreement to leave their employment shall constitute a strike, and render such persons liable to a penalty of £10—that is worthy of the Czar of Russia. I might mention in this connection that there was some trouble in a factory in Christchurch the other day. The men were told that they were not earning their wages. There were eight or ten in that position, and one man gave his employer twenty-four hours' notice that he was going to leave because he had been told he was not earning his wages. If there had been two men there of the like opinion, and they had acted together, that would have constituted a strike within the meaning of this clause, and they would have been fined £10 each in all probability. This is one of the many things that do not come under the scope of an award and which the men have to put up with. So far as the bootmakers' award is concerned, it is the lowest in the Dominion. It was agreed to by an industrial conference, and the wages are fixed at £2 5s. per week. We tried the Arbitration Court and got less than £2 5s., and yet the officials—the agitators, as they are called—in this union have kept the men up to the award without having a strike. It has been a matter of difficulty sometimes when the men found they were getting such low wages and the conditions were not improving, and the officials of that union ought to take credit for the fact that they have kept the workers to their bond. But when we find a drastic clause of the description I have referred to proposed to be inserted in the Bill, it is time to enter the strongest protest possible to prevent it from becoming law. If it passes it is our opinion that it ought to be called an Act for the perpetration of strikes. If a union strikes because an award is given which it considers imposes unfair conditions and the union is penalised under the Bill, then the whole of the unions, we make bold to say, will rise up to assist it by voting money and by other means, and we believe that chaos will follow if this Bill passes. We wish to see it deleted, and to have substituted for it what we have at present as the law of this country. That the men who have gone out on strike were justified—

2. What men are you referring to?—The slaughtermen, the miners on the West Coast, and the bakers; but we say this as a federation, that if men have been given an award they should be penalised for breaking it. We do not want to aid and abet the breaking of an award, but we say the law at the present time is quite sufficient to stop any industrial dispute taking the shape of a strike.

3. *Mr. EU.*] You agree with the acts taken by the Minister to enforce the existing law?—Certainly. With regard to Part II, I am in accord with Mr. Whiting. Clauses 11 and 12 we agree with, and we think the words "not exceeding £100" should be inserted in the Bill as a penalty for breach of an award. That is a fair sum for an industrial union to be fined in respect to any one breach, and we hope the Committee will see the matter in the same light and amend the law in that direction.

4. *Hon. Mr. Millar.*] You know that the present law is £500?—Yes, that is so. In most awards the Judge makes the stipulation that the penalty for breach shall be £100, and we have taken it from one of our old awards. With reference to assessors sitting with the Magistrate who hears the application for breach, we think that extremely desirable. As Mr. Whiting has pointed out, the Magistrate has no power to call expert evidence when hearing a case for breach, and we commend the suggestion to the Committee for insertion in the Bill. Clauses 15 and 16 we agree with. With reference to clause 17, where unionists take action for breach of the award of the Court, I know of a case where the Inspector of Factories has been asked to take action, and he has flatly refused to do so. The position is this: The union has an award, and there are females employed under it who are getting less than the minimum rate. Females are not mentioned in the agreement, and the fact that the man is employing them makes it necessary he should pay the stipulated rate. He has not done so, and the case had been referred to the Factory Inspector, who refused to take action because the conference that settled the dispute said there would be no trouble about these females. The men who were engaged in the conference state emphatically that there was no promise made or implied about the matter. Therefore, the union officials have to conduct the case for breach themselves, and take the chance of going before the Judge and being called agitators. This shows the Committee that there are cases where the Factory Inspectors, acting under the Minister's instructions, do not take the cases, and the unions have to do so; and in such cases I think they are justly entitled to the penalty.