

OTAGO-SOUTHLAND NEWS

FREEZING WORKS

Freezing works again featured in the news on a regular basis in the Otago/Southland region for not only the same sorts of reasons as they featured throughout New Zealand but also because of the election (for the second time) of Mr Blue Kennedy as the new Secretary of the Meat Workers Union. The election of Mr Kennedy, who is also a lay preacher in the Baptist Church, prompted one Dunedin newspaper columnist to predict confidently that the text of his next sermon would be "Thou shalt not kill!" Mr Kennedy won in a convincing manner by 1627 votes as against 120 votes in the disputed election and the nature of his victory is seen by some as a preference for his tougher brand of trade unionism.

A case at Ocean Beach which caused considerable interest related to the dismissal of an engineer for refusing to work with another engineer whom the union had ostracised for allegedly anti-union activities. A compulsory conference to hear the case was called and the decision of the chairman (Mr J. Burton of Auckland) was . . . "that the company gave a reasonable and lawful instruction, and consequently, I uphold the management's dismissal." The Minister of Labour stressed that the Government's principle was that every employer must have the right to hire and fire in reasonable circumstances but the Union counter-claimed that the sacking was a way of attacking the Union. It was further claimed that the compulsory conference had gone beyond the bounds of its authority in making a decision upholding the dismissal, and that therefore the case should be heard by the Industrial Court under a personal grievance procedure. The South Island Conciliator, Mr L. Fortune, in a report to the Court made mention of "Mafia-type mob rule" which had existed at Ocean Beach and claimed that he was subject to abuse, threats and intimidation at the time of the compulsory conference. Judge Jamieson ruled that S.120 of the Industrial Relations Act gave no right of appeal to the Industrial Court against the final and binding decision of the chairman of a compulsory conference . . . "The

chairman derives his authority from a decision made by the Honourable Minister of Labour, not from this court. Not only do we consider that we have no power to act as a court of appeal in respect of that decision, but we do not have sufficient material before us to enable us to make such a decision. That matter must be left there."

OAMARU GAS-WORKS DISPUTE

50 gasworkers and labourers began a strike at the Oamaru gasworks in support of a wage claim to bring their rates into relativity with drivers employed by the Oamaru Borough Council. A picket line was later established by the Union (Otago-Southland Labourers Union) in an attempt to prevent non-union salaried staff from continuing to operate the works, and resulting in the dispersal of the picketers by the Police. Related unions in Timaru, Dunedin and Invercargill have promised financial assistance to those on strike and several retired men in Oamaru have pledged their assistance to the council to carry out essential borough services being hindered by the strike.

GREAT OUTDOORS COMPANY

March 1978 saw the closure of the Great Outdoors Company's operation in Dunedin causing 90 employees to lose their jobs and bringing the total number of jobs lost to Dunedin in the past two years as the result of major factory closures to more than 350. Harsh criticism was made of Government's regional development programme and also of "absentee management" acting with little concern for the development of industry in Otago. Virtually all of those laid off had secured alternative employment at the time of writing.

UNIONIST PREDICTS WAGE EXPLOSION

Mr E. H. Soper of Invercargill, Vice-president of the N.Z. Drivers' Federation gave notice that in the light of the decision to subsidise freezing workers' wages, his union would attempt to gain similar subsidies for its workers. Mr Soper claimed that the Government is, in fact, subsidising the financial interests of overseas-owned companies and sees the subsidy as a step towards state control of a single wage-bargaining structure.

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