In order to educate and explore opinion on the subject of the Education Bill I undertook, during the Recess, an extensive tour through Yorkshire, Lancashire, Wales, and Gloucestershire. I spoke in York, Sheffield, Manchester (to three audiences on three separate days), Rochdale, Burnley, Liverpool, Bangor, Carnarvon, Aberystwyth, Swansea, Cardiff, Gloucester, and Bristol. Everywhere I had large and overflowing audiences. At Manchester the Free Trade Hall was packed and thousands were rejected. At Liverpool, Swansea, Cardiff, and Gloucester the large halls could not contain half the people who sought for admittance. At Bristol I addressed 3,000 Dock Labourers who promised their hearty support for the Bill, and I was there assured of the united support of the Railway Workers in England and invited to address a mass meeting of Railway Workers at Swindon.

In addition to these large Public Meetings, all of which were enthusiastic, I received Deputations representing the Cotton Spinning interest, the Newspaper interest, and the Roman Catholic interest and had, of course, the advantage of a great deal of miscellaneous conversations with employers and men concerned in the Industries likely to be principally affected by the Bill. My general impressions may be summarised, briefly, as follows:—

First, it appears to me that there is a genuine and remarkable enthusiasm for the Education Bill among the workers. This was specially evident in Wales and at Bristol, and I think that there would be widespread disappointment among the workers if the Government were not to proceed with the Measure. On the other hand, in the cotton and worsted and woollen districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire feeling
is mixed. An influential Deputation, representing the employers in the Cotton Industry, represented to me that they thought that the provisions in the Bill with respect to Day Continuation Classes would be extremely inconvenient to carry out in the Industry. An equally influential Deputation, representing the men, informed me that, while they were all individually in favour of the Measure, they could not answer for the rank and file whom they represented.

My own impression was that both Masters and Men would be ready to concede on the question of Half-Time, though they would not like making that concession, but that they would certainly oppose - the Masters with considerable vigour, and the Men possibly, though of this I am less certain, with a divided voice - the provisions in the Bill respecting Continuation. But even among the Cotton Spinners I met intelligent and prosperous Manufacturers who thought that the change was necessary and should be carried out in spite of the inconvenience which it would cause.

I endeavoured, in my Lancashire Speeches, to assure the Cotton Industry that I was in no way insensible of the inconvenience and possibly also of the initial loss entailed upon their Industry by the provisions of the Bill, but that an ample margin of time would be allowed them in which to make the necessary adjustments and it would probably be half a generation before the Measure could be fully put into operation. My impression is that the opposition in Lancashire will be sensibly reduced as soon as it is realised that there is no intention to rush the Cotton Industry.

I do not attach much importance to the apprehensions of the Roman Catholic community, which are founded upon misapprehensions as to the terms of the Bill, which I confidently expect to remove.

I am convinced that Organised Labour is behind the Bill - indeed in many cases the measure was represented to me as not going far enough.