

*Mr. Hoban* : I am referring, of course, to porters.

*Mr. Maxwell* : They are, of course, essentially different.

*Mr. Hoban* : The ten days' leave during the year does not recompense the men for the excessive hours worked: private firms often give more than that; so I do not think that was a fair argument when the scale was drawn up. But we are not here now to discuss these matters over again. We are here simply to hear the reply you have to give us. I trust it will be a definite one and a satisfactory one to the employes generally.

*Mr. Owen* : I wish to make a few remarks with regard to the scale formulated during the last ten years. I thought I might draw a comparison, if it will not be thought odious. I wish to draw attention to the difference in the scales between New Zealand and the Australian Colonies. Of course, we are all south of the line, and I think we should all share and share alike. We do not ask for any rise in pay; but there is a great difference between this colony and the Australian Colonies.

*Mr. McKerrow* : That is stated in the evidence. There is a higher rate paid on the other side. It is hardly advisable to have that discussion again. I merely give the hint so that we may curtail the remarks and get to business, and allow the Commissioners to inform you what they intend to do.

*Mr. Winter* : Mr. Maxwell says a great deal of thought and care has been bestowed on the present scale. He says it was initiated fifteen years ago, but has since been modified. We all agree that a considerable amount of thought and care has been bestowed upon it, but it has always been in one direction—to get labour as cheap as possible. The workshop hands' and the continuous workers' wages have been gradually reduced. Some mechanics are paid 8s. and 8s. 6d., and labourers 5s. or 5s. 6d.

*Mr. Maxwell* : It is not 5s. 6d. for labourers; it is 6s. 6d. It is only 5s. 6d. for lads.

*Mr. Winter* : Well, these regulations are misleading, for it says 5s. 6d. a day.

*Mr. Maxwell* : That is only to young men joining the service; it does not affect the labourers' scale. I can quite understand that the scale may be misleading. It is not intended to regulate the pay of labourers.

*Mr. Winter* : I take it, then, that the present rate of pay will not be interfered with, but all boys taken on will work up only to get 5s. 6d. It is very unfortunate that these things are not more explicit, because every one has been misled. I think all the thought and care has been in one direction for a large number of years, and that there should be a reaction. The thing should be reversed now, and, to use a sporting phrase, let the labourers have "an innings." The regulations have always been modified against the labourer.

*Mr. Maxwell* : I do not suggest that they have been modified from time to time unfavourably. They were modified and the scale pretty well fixed in 1879, before I was in charge of the railways. The labourers' wages were fixed at 6s., but Parliament raised them to 6s. 6d. in 1882 or 1883. As far as I remember, there has been no cutting-down of wages since.

*Mr. Winter* : That modification was done by the people's representatives, instead of by the department. Thought and care was bestowed in the proper direction that time,—that cannot be disputed. Taking the modification of 1879, at that time a mechanic's wages was fixed at 8s. 6d. a day; now they have been modified to 8s.

*Mr. Rotheram* : The average is 8s. to 10s. 6d. a day.

*Mr. Maxwell* : In 1879–80, I think, the 10-per-cent. reduction was made by the Government of the day, supported by Parliament; in the Railway Department there were immense discrepancies in rates of pay. In one part of the country the wages were 20 and 30 per cent. higher than they were in other parts. There was no uniformity. A man in Christchurch might be getting one rate, and a man in Auckland be getting 25 or 30 per cent. less. The Government of the day, not the department, determined to stop that state of things. A man should be paid just the same for doing the same class of work in any part of the colony. They constructed an average scale, and that is practically the present scale, and all men were paid a uniform rate according to the scale. A driver in Auckland received the same rate as a driver in Invercargill, and a mechanic in Canterbury the same as in Auckland. That is what happened. A very large proportion of men who were very much underpaid got their wages raised.

*Mr. Winter* : I am afraid that there was very little raising done.

*Mr. Maxwell* : A very large amount.

*Mr. Winter* : Since then the tendency has been to reduce very considerably. Where men with 10s. a day have gone out of the service the tendency has been to fill their places with men at 9s. and 8s. a day. It is that gradual modification from a higher standard to a lower one that we do not approve.

*Mr. McKerrow* : I will now read the modifications the Commissioners wish to place before employes for acceptance:—

The Commissioners have resolved to make the following material concessions to the demands of the Association:—

1. By restricting boy labour in the shops.
2. By giving extra pay for guards' overtime.
3. By abandoning the rule which leaves the local officer to fix the working time, and by allowing standing time up to three (3) hours at a spell to count for working time in the case of drivers, firemen, and guards, without deduction for dinner-hour.
4. By restricting excessive hours.
5. By abating piecework as a rule.
6. By raising the age for cleaners to enter.

But they cannot undertake to treat persons engaged on intermittent services on the same basis as those on continuous work. The latter work on the eight-hour system, the former must have their duties regulated according to services.