

Further, you will remember that you yourselves stated, in a subsequent communication, that they were for the most part fair and just, but should be framed so as to be consistent with the Act of 1887. But, gentlemen, they are not inconsistent with the Act, except so far that, if anything were attempted thereunder which would be unjust or unfair, or press unduly on the employés, the Executive, under its rules, would have power to call your attention to the matter or lay before you its injustice and, if possible, see it removed. It is not the object of the Executive to be antagonistic to the Commissioners, but, on the contrary, to create good-feeling between all concerned; and, whilst opposing any unjust treatment and redressing grievances, the Executive, at the same time, counsel obedience to superiors, strict attention to duty, and an honest performance of work. Further, it is quite evident if the union is properly managed a great benefit will be conferred on the Commissioners, because it will be the means of saving the Commissioners being harassed with frivolous complaints, and will promote a firm bond of unity between employer and employé, and you will then have a contented and well-treated body of employés, who will do more to advance the working of the railways to a successful result than a discontented lot. Before concluding, I would like to draw your attention to one matter. You will notice the majority of the deputation here are railway employés. Some people have tried to intimidate the employés by the remarks, "Oh, you go to Wellington, you will be marked." "Your wings will be clipped. The Commissioners may not do so directly, but indirectly through their officers." These remarks the Executive have treated with contempt, and placed reliance on your assurance as Railway Commissioners and as men of honour that the employés would not be marked, nor in the least prejudice themselves by attending as delegates, and accordingly requested the employés present to come here as delegates in order to see justice done to themselves and their fellow-employés. *Mr. Hoban* added: I deemed it necessary to make some explanation, and that is the explanation, so far.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Then I suppose the questions your fellow-deputationists wish to bring forward are those detailed in your letter of the 29th of March, relating to boy-labour, apprentices, unskilled labour, cadets, hours of labour, and piecework? These were the points specially touched on.

*Mr. Hoban*: Yes; but there is one thing I should say beforehand. We wish the Commissioners to recognise the Executive as the proper medium for the employés with regard to grievances. That is the first question we desire to put to you. We are only here as representatives of the Executive, and that is our first instruction from it to you. You will see it is quite evident that some channel is necessary. Hitherto the employés have dealt with the Commissioners, but you know as well as I do that there are any number of cases that have never been brought under your notice, where men received unjust treatment. We have considered this matter carefully, and I think it is to your interest as well as ours. We are only carrying out the wishes of the men, and, with the exception of very few, we have the whole of the men in the railway service in our society. We want to be recognised as the power to deal with these men, though, at the same time, we do not wish to act antagonistically to the Commissioners. We wish to work together, and do what is just for the service generally.

*Mr. McKerrow*: The fact of your presence here to-day, and our receiving you, is proof of our willingness to receive you on large questions regulating the relations between employers and employés; but, if I understand from your remarks that every one who has got a petty grievance, not affecting the general staff, must go to your Executive and act through them—if that is to come through you—we shall think twice before agreeing to it, because it would be a great hindrance to the administration of the department. I think it would be unworkable. If every individual case must come before the Executive, it would simply mean this: that there would be two sets of Commissioners. The Commissioners were really appointed for that very purpose, to see justice done between the heads of departments and employés: and there is a regular channel of communication leading right up to the Commissioners. Every other day, almost, we have communications from the workmen stating these matters, and we have also the statements of the officers; and it is upon these representations and statements that the Commissioners decide. But if such things are to come through another body, it would simplify the thing very much indeed if Parliament would at once appoint more Commissioners—appoint you Commissioners as well. It would be really a double set of Commissioners. But on all general subjects such as you have indicated in your letter we are extremely glad to meet you and take up general principles which regulate relations between employer and employed.

*Mr. Hoban*: When I said a proper medium, I did not mean that every little paltry thing should be included. A man may have a complaint: there is the officer. If he cannot get his redress there, he will come to us. We always impress it on our men that they must first complain to the officer, and then come to us if they do not get redress.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Before coming to the Commissioners?

*Mr. Hoban*: If a man likes to place the matter before the Commissioners, we cannot interfere with the employé. But we suggest that the correspondence should be through the Executive to the Commissioners.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I may tell you at once that we could not possibly agree to that, if that is what you mean? If an employé makes his complaint through the foreman and officers, and it comes to the Commissioners, and after they have dealt with it he still thinks he has a grievance, he can go anywhere he likes with it; we cannot interfere with the liberty of a person, and we do not want to interfere with what is right and due to him. But all our employés must first exhaust the arrangements of the regulations already provided.

*Mr. Hoban*: I do not mean, in every case, but that if the man desired it it should come through the Executive, which is a proper medium. If a man likes to take his case straight to the Commissioners we cannot stop him—our rules do not prevent him; but I say we are the proper medium for him to come through.

*Mr. McKerrow*: We cannot agree to that.