

*Mr. Winter :* If I might be allowed I should like to point out that a number of men are under the impression that when they applied for redress of a grievance, and the application went in through the officers above them, in any number of instances, in all probability they did not come before you. Indeed, we always advise every man to try to get redress through the proper channel—apply to his foreman, who would forward it to his superior officer, who, if he can adjudicate upon the matter, will do so, or else get instructions from the Commissioners; but, supposing that any application is repressed by the superior officer, who sends back that the application cannot be entertained, must the man write direct to the Commissioners? We are under the impression that we can only approach you through our officers—first, the foreman, then the officer above him, and so on; but there are so many ways and means of suppressing applications which might be obnoxious to officials that the possibility is that they would be suppressed. We think you ought to give us some means of redress if we cannot get it otherwise. We do not mean to say that a man should come direct to the society with a little grievance. Many a little thing brought before the Executive has been referred back to the man who brought it, or, through the secretary, we have laid the case before the officer. That has been our policy throughout. As far as appointing two sets of Commissioners goes, that is very keen sarcasm, I admit; but we have no desire to go contrary to the Commissioners in any respect whatever. We wish simply to facilitate the work of the Commissioners, which will obviate the Commissioners being worried by every little detail. If the case goes before the Executive they will first of all sit in judgment upon it and see whether it is worth while considering; if not, it will go no further. We do not wish to say “So-and-so must be done;” all we ask is that we should be recognised as a medium of communication between yourself and the employés, and as the medium for correspondence.

*Mr. McKerrow :* Regarding your statement about the suppression of grievances, it is not within the personal knowledge of the Commissioners that any such case has occurred. If so, the officer has placed himself in a most unfortunate position. Are you prepared to name any one who has done it?

*Mr. Winter :* No, I am not. I do not mean to say definitely that such a thing has been done. I only say it is the men's impression.

*Mr. McKerrow :* Well, I think it is a very false one.

*Mr. Winter :* Yes, it may be; but, on the other hand, it is equally possible that it is a correct one. It is within the range of possibility.

*Mr. McKerrow :* Anything is conceivable, but may not be within the range of probabilities. With regard to what you have stated, I go further and say it is not done.

*Mr. Winter :* Not as far as you are aware.

*Mr. McKerrow :* I am sure no officer would take upon himself to put himself in such an unfavourable position—so unfavourable to his own status and chances of being kept in the service. As an officer of thirty years' standing, I never heard of such a thing.

*Mr. Winter :* Well, we will assume such a thing has never taken place. It must be admitted that it might take place in the future, and all we want is that the men should have a proper channel.

*Mr. McKerrow :* I have already stated that the proper channel for the employé, and the one now provided, is through the foreman on to the Commissioners. If he fails, it is his matter where he goes afterwards with the case. With regard to your society, I see no objection to any one going to the secretary or president and taking advice; but what I want to make clear is that we cannot agree to your Executive being the first to receive official information, getting our officers before you to give evidence and statements, and taking up the whole matter and adjudicating upon it. It is taking up our functions. Bear in mind that the Commissioners are appointed for this purpose by Act; it is not an arrangement on our part; we work according to the statute-book. I could not agree to such a thing; it would show a want of knowledge on our part. Of course, if Parliament chooses to make a new Act and provide that as one of the stipulations, well and good. But in the present state of the Act we cannot make law—the law is there, we have to administer it.

*Mr. Owen :* I might say that the intention of the society, as far as I understand it, is, that we wish to express ourselves in this way: If a man has exhausted, or thinks he has exhausted, all his measures of redress of grievance, having gone through the proper channel, then that you would receive from the Executive or society a communication on that case, as the proper channel, if the man considers he has not received redress of his grievance, but only after he has gone through the proper channel.

*Mr. McKerrow :* Yes; I think that would be reasonable.

*Mr. Edwards :* That is really what we want. A man has a grievance, this grievance may be imposed upon him by one of his superior officers, and he (the person aggrieved) appeals against it to his superior officer, who may have done something against him for spite. Is it likely that that officer is going to refer it to the officer above him? It is against human nature. So that we can assume that the complaint will go no further.

*Mr. McKerrow :* I have already stated that it is not within the knowledge of the Commissioners that that is done. I asked Mr. Winter to mention a case, and he said he only thought it was possible.

*Mr. Edwards :* Well, we do not come here to bring forward individual cases, but to establish principles; and it is admitted that you know of no such case, and you are almost certain that no such case would occur. Then it would be nothing out of the way to accede to our request—that is, to recognise our society as a proper channel if every other means of redress is exhausted. We do not wish to put ourselves in the way of the Commissioners; but, as a society of railwaymen, every case that is brought up is well gone into, and we would certainly satisfy ourselves that every other means had failed before we took up the case. We should only injure our position by