

*Mr. Rotheram*: About a dozen boys were taken on before the Commissioners' scale of pay was issued.

*Mr. Winter*: But there is the fact of the Commissioners taking these youths on, and bringing them below the usual rate of wages.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I know in such a large department cases of the kind may arise occasionally. There are exceptional circumstances which do not come within the regulations, and I presume what you are now stating is one of them. However, Mr. Rotheram, the head of the locomotive department, says it is not at all the rule, and I am bound to take his word for it.

*Mr. Winter*: Well, on that point, of course, I only quote the case to show that the regulations are not carried out. We object principally to boy-labour because it has a tendency to elbow adult-labour out of existence. The work that is done and ought to be done by men will be done by boys. Although we admit that profitable employment should be found for boys, we think it should not be done to the detriment of the men. If some one must be idle, the boy or the man, it should be the boy, not the man, who has got to win the bread for the family. It is no benefit to me if my boy is working for 10s. a week if I am out of work. The rest of my family will simply be starving, unless I find employment somewhere else; and if the boys rush in in this manner it will come to this state of affairs: that the boys and women will have to go out and work, while the men stay at home to cook the dinner and mend the stockings. Men want to obviate that, if possible, and we are here to persuade you that the thing should not go any further, and that boy-labour should be limited to a certain proportion. We have fixed it in our letter, and if you can agree to that we may come to an amicable understanding right off. We are fully convinced that it must be fixed at such a proportion that it will not affect adult-labour. Adult-labour must not suffer to the extent it will unless this limit is made. If it is desirable that all boys should be employed, there are two ways of accomplishing that, two courses open: Either you must employ more men, and be allowed a greater proportion of boys (and if you want more men you must reduce the hours of labour); or there is another way, which does not come within the bounds of your jurisdiction, and that is to give proper facilities to people to settle on the land, and get the boys away from the workshops and railway-stations—give them employment at something more profitable, and in that way you will help to make the whole community better. With the present great surfeit of boys, we have come to the conclusion that boys are better idle than men, and we must ask you to limit the number of boys to the proportion laid down in our letter.

*Mr. Haden*: Following up the remarks of Mr. Winter. I am in the clerical staff, and in Lyttelton we have nine cadets to seventeen clerks (including the stationmaster). That seems a very unfair proportion, and what proves that it is so is that these young fellows, when they get to the maximum salary of a cadetship, £105, stop for two years at that. If they are any good at all they will have learned the trade during the five years, and be accomplished penmen, good at accounts, and so on; but yet there is not the slightest vacancy left for them to take up a superior grade. It really points to the fact that cadets are taken on in excess of the vacancies made by deaths or resignations. The next grade is £140, and that is not an extravagant salary for a man who has to keep up a respectable appearance, and possibly maintain a wife and family. He stops there about four and a half years. I do not think I need refer to it any more clearly; I just wish to point out that boys are taken on greatly in excess of the vacancies that occur. For £140, with a respectable appearance and position to keep up, is a poor lookout for a man if his ambition is limited to that; and then there is the fact that the young man must stop at £105 for two years and over.

*Mr. McKerrow*: How do you arrive at your proportion of one in four. On what principle?

*Mr. Winter*: I must admit it is more a speculative principle than a firmly-established basis. If you find that the number is not answerable, there is not the slightest doubt we should be prepared to meet you. But, so far as we can gather, other societies at Home and in Australia adopted that, and we gave them credit for having tried that system and found it satisfactory. We thought it advisable, therefore, to try it here, and if we find it is not answerable, if you find you cannot train up a staff to meet your requirements by it, we shall be willing to alter it.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I may tell you at once that the principle which regulates the department in this matter is to appoint cadets, apprentices, and youths just sufficient to keep up the supply. There is no intention on the part of the Commissioners to oust adult-labour, as you seem to imply. So long as the adult workman is efficient and conducts himself properly he will not be ousted to make way for young men. In the mechanical and locomotive branches it does not follow that the Commissioners can find a journeyman's place for the young man. The apprentice, when he goes into the shop, goes to school, as it were, to learn his trade. We do not at all undertake to find work for them when their time is up. Now, taking the thing in a very general way, in the traffic and general department we have some 1,553 employés, for which, under your proportion, we should have 388 boys; but the actual fact is that we have only 327. In the permanent-way and works we have 1,703 employés, and your proportion would give us 340 boys, but we have only 91 under twenty-one years of age. In the locomotive and running department there are 488 employés, which, according to your proportion, would give us 97 boys, whereas we have only 81. In the mechanical shops we have 798 employés, for whom we could have 196 boys, while really we have only 181; so that in every case we are under what your maximum fixes. But I should like to say that, practically, we are agreed upon that point; your limit is so wide that we are not likely to exceed it; but we do not want to bind ourselves by a cast-iron rule that no more than this proportion shall be in any one shop or department. The thing would hardly work. We are quite agreeable, however, to do this—take this as a sort of directory to guide us, knowing full well that, on the principle we have been working on, to keep up the supply of workmen, we shall not exceed it. At the same time, we should not like it to be laid down as an unalterable cast-iron rule that we must not in any case overstep it. Let me point out to you that a great many things come into consideration. At Invercargill, for instance, two or three very