

eligible young men may come forward there to be trained as mechanics, or to go into the department. There may be vacancies under the proportion at Dunedin, but you must admit that it would be extremely undesirable to take lads of such tender age away from their homes. In such a case we would have to overstep the limit. But over the whole department—supposing we could put all the departments under one roof—we could carry this out to perfection and keep within it; in fact, as it is, keeping the whole of our men together, we are within it. Mr. Hannay has just drawn my attention to the fact that under your scale we may have 1,021 young men, but we have only 680.

*Mr. Elvines*: That may be right enough, but the reason why we really want the boys to be proportioned to each department is, that in any particular spot they shall not over-run the number of men. In the mechanical department you really have a larger number of boys in proportion to the men in any one particular shop. Well, the men in that shop are in duty bound, if they act as men, to teach these boys their trade, and the boys are expected to learn their trade; but it is really impossible that you can teach the boys their trade with so few men, and it is a great injustice to bring boys up to a certain age with their trade unlearned, and then throw them out into the world to get their living as common labourers, after spending the early part of their lives in getting an education. The education of these boys should be perfected, and I know that it is not. Some of them are kept on as improvers, at the rate of perhaps 1s. a day more than they had as apprentices. You must see that that is really unfair to the men and the boys to be compelled to work with men who are not getting the wages. This is a great reason why we wish the number of boys in any one shop or department to be restricted to one to four—that is what it amounts to; and when they are out of their time, if they really have not been taught their trade—which is a great injustice—we do not object to your continuing one in four as an improver. That really gives you a proportion of two to four; but of course we could not expect improvers to keep on very long at the low rate of wages in our own department.

*Mr. McKerrow*: What is your department?

*Mr. Elvines*: Works. In our department we have had some young men who served their time there, and many of them have gone out into the world again, and had to take work at reduced rates. After learning their trade outside, which they should have learned in, they have come back and got full wages. Some of them had the manliness to go out who were not getting full men's wages, and try something else—young men of twenty-five, some of them married. That is the injustice to the boys; you take them on, and you have to turn them out into the world without learning a trade. That is what we want restricted in the department.

*Mr. McKerrow*: You mean in each workshop?

*Mr. Elvines*: In each workshop or department. Take the fitters or blacksmiths at Addington: in the fitting-shop the boys are really excessive; and we know for a fact that down the line from Ashburton to Culverden, and the branches, the cadets there number twenty-eight to forty-three. That is a far larger proportion of cadets than there should be; and some of them are full-grown men, and married. This is where we say there is a great injustice: you get them, as you say, to keep up the supply, and make use of them in the end to reduce the staff, because you put a cadet, who should be getting a higher salary if he has served three or four years, on as a clerk or stationmaster. That is, we want a certain proportion agreed to. We do not ask you to restrict the cadets to any certain place—we know they must be spread all over the line—but the workshops are the principal places where we want the proportion curtailed. And our proportion is far more liberal than in most trades. Boilermakers only allow one boy to five men, shoemakers one to five, and so on; but we give you the opportunity of taking two boys to four men, three to eight, and so on. You see, we have been very liberal, and you say you leave a large margin; but what we contend is this: that all the boys are put into one place. If you could spread them out we should not object; and that is the point we want you to concede to us.

*Mr. Edwards*: You have 680 boys, I understand?

*Mr. McKerrow*: It is hardly fair to call them boys, although all are under the age of twenty-one.

*Mr. Edwards*: Well, they are getting boys' wages: that is why we style them boys.

*Mr. McKerrow*: They are not getting full men's wages.

*Mr. Edwards*: By the arrangement we propose you would have 1,021 boys, and that would be considerably to the advantage of your department; therefore nothing would be lost in agreeing to our request. In the Addington fitting-shops at present you have twenty-five apprentices and seven improvers to forty-eight mechanics. It is only within the last year or two that the proportion has been so great. In the boilermakers' shops there are seven apprentices and six improvers to nineteen mechanics, a proportion of five to twelve; in the tarpaulin shed, four boys to fourteen men; in the carpenters' shop, five apprentices, seven boys, two improvers, to twenty-nine mechanics; and in the painters' shop, seven boys to ten tradesmen. That is an instance that the proportion of boys to men is too large, and apt to prevent a great number of men earning a fair wage. Then, the boys are men, many of them, so far as age is concerned, but get boys' wages. That is how it affects us; and it would be greatly to the advantage of the department to alter that, because you would have a larger number of boys, and they would be distributed. When boys are found in large numbers in any one shop it greatly affects the wages.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Would you have the boys paid off in the Addington shops, for instance?

*Mr. Edwards*: Where these things occur. We do not expect it to be done immediately; it is a matter of time.

*Mr. McKerrow*: You expect us to work in your direction?

*Mr. Edwards*: Yes; if you agree to what we request, we depend on the Commissioners seeking to bring the proportion within the limits we have arranged.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I have already stated that we see no practical difficulty, only about the distribution, and I have tried to explain that. In regard to your remarks, I quite differ from you in this