

You will see that we were advocating that engine-drivers should be paid up to 14s. in the first grade, and that, I believe, is practically what these gentlemen are asking for. On the whole, I find that the grievances put forward by them show that they are endeavouring to do the best they can for themselves. At the same time I realise the great danger which would exist if we start the sectional system here. There is no telling where it is going to end. You must either have the one system or the other. Which are you going to have? You must either have the sectional system or the amalgamated system. It will be impossible to run with any degree of success with the two systems, the one fighting against the other. That is what is taking place in Australia. I know it is having a very disastrous effect there on the interests and the service-conditions of the men. There must be at least an effort on the part of railwaymen to help each other. If you are going to have the sectional system, then I say it is only fair to institute it all round. The prayer of these men deals only with their own department. It would be only fair to see whether the other departments approve of the sectional system also. Another aspect of the question is that in Australia, where the sectional system exists, the first-grade drivers get higher wages than they do in New Zealand; but the history of our society proves that our men have made progress while the bulk of the men under the sectional system in Australia have had to tolerate retrogression. I saw a paper only yesterday setting out the wages of the men in Victoria some time ago. At that time large numbers of them were getting more money than they are getting now. That proves that those men have gone back. Why should we make a retrogressive movement? In New Zealand we started with the improved and better system, and we are going to do our best to hold on to it. In other countries they started under the sectional system, and now they find it difficult to get them to pull together. No attempt has ever been made by the Amalgamated Society to use undue influence, and members of this House will admit that we have done our very best for our men. We have urged their grievances before the General Manager. We have ventilated their grievances before the Hon. the Minister in Charge of the Railways, especially now that we have the privilege of meeting him occasionally; and we have also taken advantage of every opportunity to bring the grievances of all our men before Parliament. What more can we do for these men? I may say that the essence of the whole outcry and what started this agitation was the fact that the first-grade guards get 1s. and the first-grade drivers only get 6d. under the last amended Classification Act. Now, I say that the responsibility for that anomaly rests with you. We have done everything that we could do. We put forward a claim urging the Government to grant a shilling a day to the guards and also a shilling a day to the drivers. We put forward a schedule of suggested increases. It was sent to the Hon. Sir Joseph Ward, then Minister of Railways, who in turn handed it to a Committee of members of the House. That was in 1907. That Committee went into the matter, and made certain recommendations to the Hon. the Minister. For reasons best known to themselves, and reasons which I have never been able to understand, that Committee did not recommend any increases to be paid to the locomotive-men—to the drivers, at least. Now, the executive of the Amalgamated Society considered it unjust that the locomotive-men should not get anything, and they interviewed Sir Joseph Ward, who promised to do the best he could for them. They left the Minister on the understanding that the best he could do would be done for these men, with the result that when the amendment of the Act was passed by Parliament the engine-drivers got 6d. I admit candidly that, in my opinion, these men should have had 1s. But that had nothing to do with the Amalgamated Society. You, gentlemen, are responsible for that. I should like to read to you a letter which I sent to the Hon. the Minister, Mr. Millar, which I think just about covers the position, and gives a fair idea of the state of affairs:—

“SIR,—

“Aramoho, 26th July, 1909.

“In connection with the proposed interview of the Enginenemen and Firemen's Association to-morrow, I beg to place before you the following facts: Since our last interview I have had an opportunity of addressing several meetings in the Auckland Province, and have succeeded in inducing a number of men there to secede from their association. I have given a challenge to their President, Mr. Brown, or any member of the association nominated by him, to debate the matter with me openly. That challenge has not been accepted, and I have not yet been able to meet the southern locomotive-men. There is a very great deal of anxiety on the part of the members of the A.S.R.S. that recognition should be granted to the new association, our men believing that recognition of the new union will be a severe blow to unionism in the Railway Department; and this is my own view of the matter. There is no violent hurry to settle the matter finally. Even if they have a thousand members—which I am not prepared to admit—it has already been proved that a number of them have joined on wrong information, and it seems to me perfectly fair to ask that they be required to maintain a membership of at least 1,000 for one year. This test would prove whether the membership has been obtained by a spasm of popular feeling or a genuine well-formed desire to form a separate union. Either the locomotive-men have been treated as well as other departments of the service or they have not. If, in your opinion, they have, then they have no grievance, and are not entitled to special consideration of any kind. If, in your opinion, they have not, then the remedy is to be found in the redress of their grievances, and not in disassociating them from the A.S.R.S. It is not a fact that the A.S.R.S. has refused or failed to urge for the redress of the many grievances existing in the locomotive department, as you yourself know by experience. It is desirable, and in the interests of fair play to both sides, that time be allowed to fight the matter out to a finish before a final decision is arrived at by you. I will be very grateful to you if you will arrange a conference between their men and ours in order to battle it out face to face in your presence. As the apparent intention of Parliament, expressed in the Arbitration Act, is that the A.S.R.S. is to be the only union for the Second Division, I would strongly urge you to throw on Parliament the responsibility of making any alteration of existing conditions.