

as far as lies in our power. It is for you to say what you will place before us, and we will do our best.

*Hon. Mr. Millar:* I desire to make this explanation: There might be a lurking idea in the minds of the members of the Second Division that the petition of the First Division was drawn ahead to block the Second Division. Well, I wish to explain to the members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants that the forms of the House are that petitions are taken in the order in which they are presented to the House. The Officers' Institute petition was the first sent to the House, and therefore was the first sent to the Committee and dealt with. If the old petition of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had remained it would have been gone on with first, but it having been withdrawn and another one presented in its place it had to come after the petition of the First Division.

*Mr. McLaren:* I desire to explain to the Committee that I consulted with the petitioners outside, and they gave me to understand that they desired to be heard this morning. They fully recognize, in view of the probable early closing-down of the House, that it would be very difficult to deal with the whole of the details of the petition, and they desire to know just what the position was. I think if Mr. Veitch, the president of the society, were permitted to make a statement he could put his views of the situation before the Committee. If the Committee thinks it will take three or four weeks, I scarcely think the House will stay three or four weeks longer. It is not a matter for the Committee, but a matter for the House, and that is the difficulty.

*Mr. Veitch:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—I realize from the facts which have been stated so far as time is concerned that it would be impossible for this Committee to do justice to the petition of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants with the remnant of the session left. With regard to the statement made by the Minister, I may say this, that we do not charge any gentleman with ulterior motives. I may tell you that I disapprove of the man with the mud-rake: we are not here in that spirit at all. We are here to do the best we can for the men who have trusted us, and we will accept any position that you can prove to us is the best in the interests of those men. At the same time, I realize that we are in a difficult position. We have been called here hurriedly, all our men are not here, and we have had very little time to discuss the situation; and I should like to have a statement from you, Mr. Chairman, as to how much time this Committee could devote to the consideration of this petition if we decided to accept your suggestion.

*The Chairman:* Well, the statement has been made that the House will close on Saturday. I think, myself, it is impossible, so you see to a great extent we are guessing as to the time we will have available.

*Hon. Mr. Millar:* The Government are going to try and bring the House to a close on Saturday.

*The Chairman:* Well, if the House closes on Saturday we would have only Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings. That is about all the time we would have, unless we got special permission from the House to sit while the House was sitting.

*Mr. Arnold:* And in addition the Committee must deliberate and report on the petition of the Railway Officers' Institute. We have heard all the evidence, but it is not yet printed, and we will require a day or so to consider that.

*Mr. Witty:* And then the evidence in regard to the Amalgamated Society's petition would have to be printed.

*Mr. Veitch:* No official report has been sent to members at all by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants concerning this matter, and if a wrong impression has been placed on what appeared in the Press we are not responsible for it.

*Hon. Mr. Millar:* There was a meeting at Addington.

*Mr. Veitch:* I think even the Minister would be doubtful if that was a correct report of what took place at Addington. However, I should be glad if you would allow us to discuss the matter for a few minutes.

*Mr. Hampton:* Referring to the meeting at Addington, I saw it stated in the Press that the meeting condemned the Minister and this Committee. Well, the meeting did nothing of the sort. The resolution carried was that they heard with alarm of the possibility of their petition not being dealt with this session, and we decided that we would ask Mr. Witty and other members to assist us in bringing it on.

*The Chairman:* Regarding the way that came up from the Press Association in Christchurch, my own personal opinion of it is that some irresponsible Railway man said that the Government changed its mind and the petition was to be heard, and the representative of the Press wired it up to Wellington. That is about the position in a nutshell.

*Mr. Arnold:* And stated it as a fact.

*The Chairman:* Yes, as a fact. That is to a certain extent a reflection on this Committee, because the Government changing its mind does not affect this Committee. I felt convinced all along that the wire was not due to any suggestion from a section or number of Railway men, but due to some irresponsible person making the statement to the Press representative.

[The members of the society then withdrew; and, on returning,]

*Mr. Veitch* said: I have consulted with my friends, and we have come to this conclusion: that, as it has taken over a month to take evidence alone on the petition of the Railway Officers' Institute, we feel certain that it would be impossible for this Committee, if it carries out the same procedure as was carried out before, to deal with our petition in a manner that would do justice to our men in anything less than three weeks, and it is doubtful if it is possible to do it in that time. It is not our fault that there is no time to consider our petition now. I might say that it is fourteen months since we first petitioned Parliament for consideration of the grievances of Railway men. Therefore we cannot accept the responsibility for the fact that there is not now time to complete consideration of this matter. I believe candidly that this Committee is willing and anxious to do justice to the Railway men, but I realize, and I think you all realize, that it