

a good deal has been made of the ballots which were taken. I think, last year. There was a number of ballot-papers issued—I believe to the extent of seventeen hundred or eighteen hundred—and there were something like five hundred which did not turn up. I am only speaking approximately as to the figures. If the tradesmen themselves consider the movement is so keen amongst tradesmen, why did a large number of the ballot-papers go astray? Evidently a number took no notice of them, and a large number of the members never voted at all. I will give an instance to the Committee of the way in which the ballot was conducted. Members termed “casual” men, who are probably in the service for a certain period, were allowed to vote on that particular question. The members termed “casual” might be engaged for one month or for two. They were allowed to participate in the taking of that particular ballot in connection with which the members of the association placed the facts before you yesterday. Now, sir, we come to one of the most important points—namely, where the tradesmen themselves say they stand on rock: that is, in regard to indentures. They ask, sir, that nobody should be allowed to commence in the Railway service who cannot produce his indenture, and at the same time the petition has been sent round and signed, I dare say, by a number of men who cannot produce their indentures. Now, the petitioners claim to have those men as members of their association. Supposing, for argument’s sake, those men are members of the Tradesmen’s Association and that their services are dispensed with, should they seek to re-enter the Department again they cannot do so because they cannot produce their indentures. That is one of the things we were guided by in regard to the representations that they made to us. We did not know really what the Tradesmen’s Association have in their minds; but to carry the thing out to its logical conclusion with a railway man who seeks to better his position and leaves the Railway service and takes up land for the purpose of becoming a farmer, does the same thing apply in the Farmers’ Union, that because a man has been a Railway servant he is to be debarred from going in for farming? I would just like to say this: it has been freely stated that we would allow Tom, Dick, and Harry to come along and do the work. I know of no organization, except perhaps the Boilermakers’ Union, outside the Railway service who are asking for the same conditions as the Tradesmen’s Association is asking for—that a man shall not start work until he can produce his indentures. I say that the majority of the organizations to-day that I know of—and I speak of one of the largest organizations there is in New Zealand, United Furniture Union—do not take into consideration the fact as to whether a man can produce his indenture or papers or otherwise. The man is judged on his ability. If he can do the work he is paid accordingly, and that is the principle upon which the executive council are standing at the present time. We stand for the man to prove his worth. He has to pass the judgment of the other men. He has the leading hand, a tradesman, the workshops foreman, also a tradesman, judging the qualifications of that man and finding out whether he is competent to do the work or otherwise, and I think that if that man satisfies those men that he is able to carry out the work of the Department, surely that is a sufficient guarantee that the man is a competent tradesman. The man who is a competent tradesman has nothing to fear, and the majority of them do not trouble about papers of any description. I just want to touch briefly on one other matter that has come forward, and that is with regard to a certain movement that took place in the Petone Workshops. It has been stated that the Tradesmen’s Association did not want to be dragged at the heels of the A.S.R.S. in any industrial dispute. Now, sir, just quite recently there was a stop-work meeting of fitters held in the Petone Workshops, and the fitters at that particular time had a meeting for the purpose of getting more wages. They were advised that they were to be put on overtime, and they did not wish to work overtime unless they were to get more money. Now, to show you that the A.S.R.S. is not to be blamed for this, we find that proposal emanated from the Tradesmen’s Association. The fact of the matter is that the meeting was called for the Friday, and the resolution that they passed on the Friday was rescinded on the Saturday, and the men at that particular meeting were members of the Tradesmen’s Association. With regard to the Tradesmen’s Association, it has been freely mooted that the fitters are the men who are really at the bottom of this agitation and forming this organization. We have a diversity of opinion amongst the various trades, and they say that although the fitters are the prime movers in this agitation, they have not got the unanimous support of the tradesmen throughout the service. I would point out, and it has been proved, that a section of the tradesmen—turners—quite recently had a representative on the committee. I do not know whether they have one at the present time, but I desire to point out to this Committee that it has been stated that they practically have unanimous feeling of the men in their organization as far as the tradesmen themselves are concerned; but I would point out that there is a large number of men in the workshops who do not belong to the Tradesmen’s Association. They are members of the A.S.R.S., and it has been freely stated that they are quite satisfied that we represent their demands and have gained for them better conditions and better pay since 1906. In 1908 our organization was remodelled whereby the workshops representatives would have direct representation. We have not since 1908 had very many complaints with regard to the matters we have represented, and I feel sure that by the return put forward by Mr. Mack, the general secretary, it will be seen that we have, at any rate, been successful in connection with many of the demands. There was a question asked of Mr. Mack in regard to the bedding of brasses. At the present time we have lifters bedding their own brasses, but I would like to say the fitters to a certain extent think it beneath their dignity to do that class of work. A fitter was put on some time ago to do that work, but he thought it belonged to another branch of the Department, and, in fact, he said a lifter could do the work just as well as he could. He said he did not consider that it was really a tradesman’s work; he wanted to be relieved of it. I have nothing further to say, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, on behalf of the A.S.R.S.