

I was approached and asked to stand for the position of chairman. I stood for the position, and those very "Red Feds." with whom I am accused of being associated and assisting in this country were the very men who fought tooth and nail to prevent my being appointed chairman of the Addington Branch. However, I am not thought so badly of at Addington as they have tried to make out here, as I was elected by two votes to one. Now, what was the result of that? In 1913 came the Unity Congress, and our executive were there. There, I say, was a precedent for us conferring with the so-called "Red Feds." Mr. Wilson and Mr. Veitch prior to that had also conferred with the "Red Feds."; but our executive took this action, that as soon as "strike" was mentioned and as soon as it was made clear that the purposes of that organization was strike the executive got up and came out. What happened? Their decision was challenged in some places in this country by some of our members. It was challenged in Addington, and in consequence of that three or four of the executive belonging to the South Island went there to address a meeting of the branch as usual; and I say this to my friend Mr. McDougall, that the only ones, with very few exceptions, who troubled to go to that meeting were those extremists. I was chairman of the meeting, and after the four councillors had spoken—and I insisted they should get a fair hearing—after they had spoken a motion was moved at that meeting condemning their action straight out in leaving the Unity Congress. What did I say? I said, "Gentlemen, as chairman of this branch of three hundred or four hundred members I am not going to accept a motion from thirty or forty men to go forth to the country as being the expression of mind of this branch of which I am chairman." I refused point-blank to put the motion to the meeting; and there are men present here who can bear out and substantiate that statement. That is a little of my past policy as a private member in the ranks; and I say this, that if all the private members would show a little more enthusiasm like these other men show and attend the meetings you would hear very little of the "Red Fed." element in this country. It is not the "Red Feds." we have to fear; it is the apathy and indifference of the moderate man. Now, sir, I pass on to my present policy. What happened in 1915? I was returned to the conference, and what happened there? Mr. Wilson, who was president of the conference, in his opening said that he wished to give the delegates a timely warning that in the great national trouble it behoved them to be extremely cautious in regard to proposals which were going to involve the country in any material additional expenditure. Now, those were wise words of Mr. Wilson's, and I supported him in those remarks right throughout the conference, as I shall presently show. When the question of wages arose at the conference, what did this so-called "Red Fed." say? This is my policy, gentlemen: Mr. Hampton moved, "That this conference affirms the principles of a general increase of wages on a percentage basis. Conference is further of opinion that the present is not an opportune time to press for such increases, and leaves the whole question of increases of wages to the incoming executive." That is what I said. Now listen to this, and then ask yourselves if these are the words of a "Red Fed." socialist: "Nobody realized more than himself that the cost of living had gone up. Increases of wages had invariably been followed by higher prices of commodities. The Cost of Living Commission had discovered the same thing, and it also stated that the increase in commodities was greater proportionately than the increase of wages. It would be bad policy to go forward at a time of undoubted financial stress, and the society would not have public sympathy, which it was so necessary to secure in connection with its demands. It was most important that at a time like the present the workers should all be kept employed, and it was the duty of the Government to keep in employment, not only railway men, but all workers. If railway men were granted increases it would hamper the Government in giving employment to casual employees. If we could be sure of getting through the crisis on as good a wicket as at present they could congratulate themselves. What were New-Zealanders suffering in comparison with Belgians, whose country had been absolutely laid waste? It was the duty of railway men to help those in authority to make the path smooth. The delegates should join with other labour bodies in trying to get stringent treatment for any monopoly which was proved to exist." I submit that those words are not the words of an extremist or of one who is at all likely to create industrial trouble in this country at the present time. Regarding that latter precaution, it may need some explanation. I believe that labour, whilst it is critical and finds fault, should take up a more constructive policy. I do not think any one can have any objection to any representatives of labour meeting together to discuss things like co-operative societies, or even making general representations to the Government on any question affecting the cost of living, or of joining together to get evidence which they may place before the Board of Trade in order to help them to get right down to the root of things, instead of continually crying out for this increase in wages. That was the object I had in mind; and whilst our agreement, I know, states that we must not affiliate, that agreement was made as the result of the great maritime strike, and I believe the object of that agreement is that we must take no action which would in any way involve the railway men in a general strike, or that we must take no action which will place ourselves, so far as striking is concerned, in the hands of any other body of men. That is my interpretation of the agreement, and if I am wrong in that respect, then I would be glad to be put right. But, as I have said, it has been the custom for years for our society to confer with labour bodies, and that position has never yet been challenged. Now, sir, I pass on regarding our present policy. What happened? I am not here to blame any one or to say who is responsible for the cost of living rising, but unfortunately it did rise. I believe to a large extent it was unpreventable so far as the importation of goods and shipping freights and that sort of thing is concerned; but anyhow it went up, and unrest so far as this matter was concerned began to creep into the ranks of our men. They became insistent that something should be done to get them an increase of wages. They sent messages to us from all over the country asking that they be allowed to come here themselves. They evidently