

thought we could not do the business for them, and they wanted a representative from every branch to come up here and hold a conference and get the matter fixed up. Of course, as you know, these men outside think it is only a matter of asking Mr. Herries, and the question is fixed up in five minutes. Sir, some of them may learn a little later that that is not so. We resisted that request from the branches, and we refused as an executive to ask for an increase of wages at that time, and here are my words as spoken to the Hon. the Prime Minister and the Hon. Mr. Herries. I am quite sure Mr. Herries does not mind me making this short quotation, and I am sure members of the Committee will not make use of anything I say against Mr. Herries or Mr. Massey, because they have been perfectly fair to us right through the whole thing, and everything that has been done has been done with the utmost courtesy. On the 22nd November we waited upon the Hon. Mr. Massey and the Hon. Mr. Herries, and amongst other things I said: "We are not here, sir, to put forward any extreme requests. We are not here to do anything that will embarrass the National Government, of which you are the head, at a time like this. As regards wages, Mr. Herries told us very plainly some months ago the mind of the Cabinet on the matter: that an increase of wages was out of the question. We are not here to-day to press for a general increase of wages for our men. We realize the position that exists and we are not prepared, as I say, to make any extreme demands which may possibly embarrass the Government; but whilst I say that, I am here to say that we expect, and I think can reasonably expect, the Government to do all they can, and to exercise some degree of courage in doing it, to keep down the cost of living so far as the workers are concerned. We notice you are making a new move—that you are setting up a Board of Investigation—and we are looking forward with a great deal of confidence to that Board doing something practical and something courageous to try and keep down the cost of commodities to the people of this country." We then submitted a number of matters which were not matters of finance which we thought the Department might have assisted us to get right in order to help us and try and allay any unrest and feeling which existed in the country. Some of those matters have since been fixed up. I then said, "You must understand that whilst we are prepared to go to our men and take the responsibility, and I have gone to the branches recently, and said to these men, 'You fellows have no right to press for an increase of wages,' assuredly if we are prepared to take that responsibility we have the right to expect that the Department and Minister will in turn help us in little matters." Now, sir, those are my remarks as president of the A.S.R.S. on the 22nd November, 1915, and I submit again that they can hardly by any stretch of imagination be interpreted as the words of an extreme "Red Fed." Well, after that interview Mr. Mack and myself visited a number of the North Island branches, and in every branch in which I spoke, in spite of strong opposition, I told those men to give the Board of Trade a chance and not to press the Government for an increase in wages. Mr. Mack can support me in that statement. I went, Mr. Chairman, to your own town, Palmerston North, and when we got there in the afternoon we were told we were going to be eaten—that we would not get out of the town alive because we had not pressed this matter of wages. We had a meeting there lasting from a quarter to 8 till a quarter past 12, and I may say that they did not have it all their own way. We got away alive at a quarter past 12 and went on to the next place. Now, I have never since I entered unionism in a public way made it my business, and am not going to make it my business, to toady to any section of men. I realize my responsibilities as a leader and I know what those responsibilities are, and if I think any body of men are in the wrong I am going to say so plainly and bluntly. The Board of Trade went on, and when we met again in February it became apparent that the position was becoming more aggravated. We again had requests from about thirty of our branches asking us to immediately convene them together in conference. We were to do this immediately, they said, in order to insist that the Government should do something, and all that kind of thing. Still, the executive took the view, and I supported them in it, that that of all times was not the time when our affairs should be handed over to any body of possibly irresponsible men. The position at that time was most delicate. We said, "If this thing is going to be brought to a successful issue the negotiations are going to be carried out by those who have the responsibility." I was not prepared to say what might happen if we agreed to a body of irresponsible men coming here to meet us. I do not say they are irresponsible intentionally, but the position was that a large number of new men who did not understand the real difficulty in the way would come in to the thing, and we were afraid of possible complications arising. We resisted that and went again to the Prime Minister and the Hon. Mr. Herries on Tuesday the 15th February. We said, "We have to thank you, sir, for agreeing to meet us again, and there are just two or three very important matters to which we wish to draw your attention. Mr. Mack and myself are the only speakers, and we will endeavour to be as brief and concise as we possibly can. The first thing, and what we consider as most important, is the request for an all-round increase in wages. We had hoped that there would have been something done in connection with the cost of living—that the cost of living would have been reduced—but apparently the National Government has found that there are insurmountable difficulties in the way of that being done, as we find that the cost of living, instead of being reduced, is going up day by day. We therefore have no option but to renew our request, as made to Mr. Herries some months ago, for an all-round increase of 1s. a day for the men of the Second Division." There is nothing there about only labourers, as suggested by the tradesmen. The position was accentuated by this fact, gentlemen, and our position was made more serious by the fact that the men on the waterfront had received an increase of wages, and our men were using that as a lever and an argument why they should have it too. Mr. Mack said, "I do not know that I can say very much more than has been said by Mr. Hampton, further than that we are having the utmost difficulty with our men at the present time. You will remember it is only a little over two years