

there has been no abuse, and, after all is said and done, you cannot get away from the principle that whilst we may ask for increase of wages, and whilst we may get certain wages under the Classification Act, and whilst the unions may ask for wages to be increased in the Arbitration Court and secure a certain minimum wage, I cannot for the life of me see how you are going to get away from the principle that the man who pays the money must be the judge as to whom he shall pay it, and whether the man is a competent man or not. Now, sir, the question has arisen as to whether the machinists in Sydney were labourers or not. That question was raised the other day, and Mr. Mack cabled to the secretary of the society in Sydney on the point, and received this reply: "Present machinists mostly worked-up labourers' engineers. Recently forced Department promise future appointments machinists other than drillers from apprenticed men only, indentures not imperative; other tradesmen, proof fitness essential." I say that no matter what test you apply—a man can have a sackful of indentures—as a matter of fact I have seen a man with a sugar-bag full of papers and references who could not do what he was put to do. I know myself of a case only two or three years ago. A young fellow served his time as a boilermaker at Addington. He had frittered away his time, he had neglected his opportunities, and when his apprenticeship expired the Department took the course of saying, "Here you are; here is your walking-ticket." That young fellow came to me and wanted me to appear for him before the Appeal Board. I said, "Well, candidly, you have been a young fool, and you know it; but you have lodged this appeal—I do not think you have much chance, but seeing you have lodged the appeal I will do the best I can for you." I went down there and took up the point that here was a man who had served his apprenticeship and had his indentures. The foreman boilermaker said he was not a boilermaker, but I said, "Here is the indenture duly signed by the engineer certifying to this young fellow being a fully fledged boilermaker." That was the only point I could find in the young fellow's favour, but unfortunately for him and for my side of the case that point was not upheld. I just use that as an illustration to show how indentures are, after all, not what they are supposed to be. Now, sir, I have a further reason why that request of the branches was turned down, if that is wanted, and I say with a full sense of responsibility that if this request is right and we acted in good faith in turning it down, that this of all times was not the time to bring such a proposal forward. Who knows—what men in this room know, and what tradesmen know—who may be called upon yet in this country to take up the work of skilled men? I have here illustrations contained in the *Auckland Weekly News* of the 22nd June showing women engaged in railway work and munition work. There are two pictures to which I wish specially to draw your attention. The pictures show women there using the acetone welding plant for which the Railway Department are called upon to pay 1s. per day additional to the tradesmen who do that particular work.

4. *Mr. Rowles.*] On what ground?—I do not know that affects the position. I only know it is a fact that there are women doing the work. The picture also shows that there are two women with soldering-irons and a furnace apparently engaged in some mechanical work. I say this, that even had I been in favour of that proposal, I am not prepared as a responsible officer to go forward to the Department with any request that will in any way hamper the proper carrying-out of railway work under circumstances such as we are under at present. We have, however, repeatedly represented this question. We have always insisted that in the event of a labourer encroaching on a tradesman's work he should be at least paid the minimum wage for tradesman's work. Here is a letter of the 9th July, 1914, sent by the general secretary to the Hon. the Minister of Railways. It states,—

"On several occasions recently we have made representations to your Department that tradesmen are working in the various shops at the minimum wage of 10s. per day. This, I would respectfully submit, is out of all reason. A man is either a tradesman or he is not. If he is not a tradesman and unable to earn tradesman's wages, then he should be dispensed with. If, on the other hand, he is a tradesman, he should be paid for the work he is doing. There are many labourers in private employ who are receiving 10s. per day, whilst, as I have previously said, we have tradesmen, such as fitters, moulders, carpenters, employed under the Government at 10s. per day. I may say at once that there is a considerable amount of unrest with the tradesmen in the various shops on account of the wages they are receiving, and I sincerely trust that you will go into the matter as early as possible with a view to seeing that the men I have referred to receive more than the minimum provided by the Act, as it would appear as if an effort is being made to make the minimum the standard instead of the maximum. The position is, as far as I can understand, that if the foreman will not recommend a man as being worth more than the minimum your Department will take no action in the matter. This really means that the foreman is controlling the wages of the staff instead of the heads of the Department."

Here is the Minister's reply, as follows:—

"In reply to your letter, No. 613-14, of 9th July, with reference to the pay of tradesmen in the workshops, I have the honour to inform you that your representations have received careful consideration, and I regret that I cannot see my way at present to make any alteration in the schedule of pay for tradesmen. To accede to your request practically means abolishing the second grade, which is not at present warranted. I find on looking into the matter that over 90 per cent. of the tradesmen are in Grade 1, which discounts your statement that it would appear as if an effort is being made to make the minimum the standard rate of pay instead of the maximum. I consider that in view of this there is no justification for the unrest which you allege exists in the shops at the present time on account of the wages."