

do not know whether the men are here who can certify to it—that the secretary of the Tradesmen's Association at Addington said himself that he would sign my petition and has no intention of leaving the A.S.R.S. Now, another misrepresentation that has been indulged in in order to secure those names in conjunction with the apprenticeship question—which is the main thing that this petition has been built upon—is the statement of comparative earnings between the junior labourer and the tradesman. Mr. Mack has already referred to it, but there are one or two aspects that I want to have the opportunity of referring to. They are, first, that those figures as presented here are purely suppositious. They cover a period of twenty years; but when I tell you, gentlemen, that it is only four years since those respective scales of wages as given here were brought in, you will see that it will be at least sixteen years before such a thing as that could actually happen in practice, and, as Mr. Mack has pointed out, the difficulties in the way of men attaining to that rate of wages are absolutely tremendous. They talk about labourers at 10s. 6d. a day, and get out statements like that to mislead the men. Does any one believe that labourers are getting 10s. 6d. a day as a general thing? Very few men are. About 160 on the D.—3 have reached that amount; but this statement saying they go up automatically year by year is the most misleading thing that could ever be put in the hands of any body of men. The agitation has been built up mainly on that sort of statement. Everybody knows that when a junior labourer enters the service he goes up to the position of adult labourer. There is no guarantee that he will go up to the position of lifter at 10s. 6d., and I know personally of labourers who have been fourteen and fifteen and more years in the service who are waiting and ready to jump at some of those higher positions of the service, but they cannot get the opportunity. The Department is quite right—there is 90 per cent.—I believe I would be safe in saying there is 95 per cent. of tradesmen in the New Zealand Railways who are in the first grade. The petitioners have taken what is a general thing—what is practically a certainty. They have put in a statement showing the comparative earnings of a tradesman and a labourer, and have built up their argument on that. I want to ask you, gentlemen, if that is a fair thing?

5. *Mr. Field.*] What is that paper?—This is the paper on which the Tradesmen's Association has been principally constituted. I should like the Committee to secure a report on it from the Department, whether it is a fair statement of the actual position. We now come to the question of the ballot-paper. A vote has been taken, and it has been said that the proposal was carried unanimously. I could get lots of votes carried unanimously. If I asked the men to vote on the question as to whether they were in favour of a wage of £1 per day I believe every man would vote for it; but there is still another question behind that. Would it be in the public interest to give it to them? Apart from that, I say that this ballot-paper, which professes and which has been brought forward here as evidence that the men want to leave the A.S.R.S., I say that it is not a fair ballot-paper; that it puts one side of the view to the men, and it gives them no explanation as to why the proposals were turned down. It was purely a catch question, and was not a straight-out vote, "Are you in favour of leaving the A.S.R.S. or not?" I just want now, sir, to refer to the question which has been raised in connection with the *Review*. You have had an article put before you as showing our "Red Fed." policy. Now, this is about the best joke of the whole thing. If there is one thing that Mr. Wheeler has been found fault in by one section more than another, it is that there has not been enough "ginger" in the *Review*; and when Mr. Mack and I went around the branches the members said to us, "For Goodness' sake why don't you get the editor to shake up things in the *Review*." Now, I look on Mr. Wheeler as a most moderate and safe man for the editing of the paper. He has held the position for eight years, and I do not think we have had a libel action yet—have we, Mr. Wheeler?

*Mr. Wheeler.* We have had one threatened—that is all.

*Witness.* He has not let us in so far, and I am not going to be one to instigate him to do anything that is going to land us in financial trouble. I am not going to deny responsibility for what appears in the *Review*. At the time that article appeared it was certainly a most critical period, and Mr. Wheeler's intention was, I believe, to impress upon the authorities the imperative necessity of doing something to relieve the situation; but I want to say this, that it is quite plain that Mr. Wheeler is appointed by the supreme body of our society, which is the triennial conference. He takes up the position—and I am inclined to agree with him to a large extent—that he is responsible to that body and the members as a whole, and not to the executive council. When he was re-elected at the last conference of 1915 he issued a circular to the members of the A.S.R.S. in which he made the statement as follows: "I guarantee to the branches an independent voice in the *Review*. I am not to be regarded purely as a servant of the executive." Now, upon that circular, which the members of the conference were aware of, Mr. Wheeler was elected to the position; but I say that while we are an administrative body, if I thought for one moment that any editor should hold that position at the hands of the conference, and that he was going to adopt a policy which was going to land us in a revolutionary action, if I thought he was going along those lines, I would have no hesitation in taking the matter up and taking strong exception to it. Another matter which I might illustrate here is this, as showing the attitude of the editor to the officers: One editor by propaganda work in the paper got the secretary who held the position prior to Mr. Mack removed from office. If Mr. Wheeler wishes to "slate" me in the columns of the *Review* it is perfectly open and competent for him to do so so far as I can judge. He has never tried it on yet, but there is nothing to prevent him doing so, and as far as my controlling him is concerned it is absolutely ridiculous. Honestly and candidly I say that I do not really know, and I do not know whether any one else knows, how far I can go and how far I cannot go; but this I do know, that if the branches thought for one moment that I interfered with Mr. Wheeler and told him not to put this or that in the *Review* I know they would make it pretty hot for me. I say, sir, that it is not a fair action to