

4. *Mr. Hampton.*] Have you had experience in connection with the A.S.R.S. business?—Yes, I have. I joined the A.S.R.S. twenty-five years ago, I think, and I have been a member of the society during the whole of that time. I have been returned to three conferences by the workshops constituency, and have not been opposed at the three elections. I was returned as a councillor in 1912, and am now in my second term as a councillor.

5. Have you heard the clauses of the petition of the Tradesmen's Society read—especially clauses 3 and 4?—Yes.

6. Are the statements therein contained true?—No, I do not think they are. I think that so far as my experience goes—and it covers a wider field than that of any of the men who are representing the petitioners—the A.S.R.S. have faithfully undertaken to represent the reasonable grievances of the tradesmen, and they have done so with tolerable success. I regard the latter part of clause 3 as a reflection upon the representative of the workshop on the Dominion council. It declares that the affairs of the tradesmen have not been treated or represented by the said society. Now, it has been my function, as representing the workshops of the South Island, to do this very work, and I believe with my colleagues on the council that we have treated to the best of our ability and faithfully represented the genuine grievances of the tradesmen, and, as I have already said, have done it with tolerable success. Not only that, but the council, which is composed of eight men representing the four big departments of the Railway, have given the workshops representatives their unanimous support in representing the grievances of the tradesmen so far as they have come before us during my term upon the council. Moreover, I would like to add in respect to the attitude of the representatives of the other departments that they have sometimes been more keen to represent the tradesmen's grievances than the tradesmen upon the council have themselves, notably when the question of dirt-money in connection with one of the running-sheds in the North Island was before the council. The matter was actually represented by the then president of the society, Mr. W. T. Wilson, who was, as you are aware, an engine-driver.

7. Do you believe that the prayer of the petition represents the views of the majority of the men?—No, I do not. I did not know what the petition contained until I left Invercargill on Friday last. As a matter of fact, I did not see the petition, although I was asked to sign it, until I passed through Dunedin on my way to Wellington. Therefore I had little opportunity of questioning my fellow-craftsmen in Invercargill as to whether they favoured the petition or not. I did meet one man who did not know that the petition meant severance from the A.S.R.S., and not knowing that it intended to deprive the A.S.R.S. of rights which it already possesses. I met another man who hoped that the prayer of the petition would not be agreed to. Apart from that, I am convinced that there are scores of tradesmen in the South Island, particularly in Hillside—where I have worked for nearly thirty years—who have displayed the utmost confidence in me as their representative, and would not say, if they knew really what they were signing, that I had not faithfully represented their grievances.

8. How would you account, then, for the signatures being obtained for the petition?—I would say that this petition has been brought up hurriedly and that the men have not had time to properly appreciate the prayer of the petition which they have signed. I do not mean to suggest so far as Invercargill is concerned that any of the signatures obtained to the petition were obtained by misrepresentation—that is, deliberate misrepresentation—but I do believe that in both Invercargill and Hillside if the matter were properly brought before the men and they were made to see that the prayer of the petition was deliberately intended to deprive the A.S.R.S. of the sole right it possesses to represent the tradesmen's grievances, that they would not sign this petition.

9. Were you connected with what is known as the tradesmen's movement?—Yes, I have had some connection with the tradesmen's movement since 1900. I was asked in that year by some of the oldest smiths in the service, and all of them are out of the service now, to draw up a petition to the Department for an increase in wages. The petition was in due course drawn up and unanimously approved of by the men, and the Department very readily granted the request contained in that petition. The prayer of the petition was granted in about three weeks' time from the date it was presented. Since that time no movement on the part of the tradesmen has been undertaken in which I have not had a leading part. There were intermittent attempts made during the years succeeding 1900—right up to 1910—to obtain an increase in wages. In 1910 a simultaneous movement was made in Newmarket and Hillside to form a Dominion committee to watch the interests of the tradesmen, and to seek an increase in wages. That Dominion movement resulted in a conference in Wellington in 1910, of which I was appointed chairman. The first resolution was to the effect that all transactions should be done through the A.S.R.S.; that the committee would take no independent action and would carry on all its negotiations with the Department through the A.S.R.S. As the outcome of that movement a permanent committee was established with headquarters in Wellington. Since then the sole purpose for which that committee was set up has been largely accomplished, and I should say that the sole purpose of this movement was to secure an increase in wages. In the first petition to which I have referred in 1900 the petitioners deliberately expressed satisfaction with the conditions of their employment—their only quarrel was that their pay did not equal the pay of those in like crafts engaged in private employment, and when that was accomplished the operations of that committee practically ceased. There was another factor which operated in bringing to an end for the time being the tradesmen's committee, and that was the reorganization of the A.S.R.S. In 1911 a conference was called for the first time consisting of equal representation of all departments, and it seemed to me, and I think it seemed to the great bulk of the tradesmen, that the new constitution of the A.S.R.S. gave the tradesmen as well as the workshops staff generally some assurance that their legitimate grievances would be faithfully attended to and properly represented.

10. Have you any reason to think that that has been a success—have the objects generally been achieved?—Yes, generally speaking they have. As I said, the question was one of wages, and the