

A.S.R.S. since 1910 have been able to do what we tried to do in 1900—they have been able to bring up the wages of tradesmen to within a reasonable range of what is paid by private employers outside.

11. What do you think the object is behind this petition?—I think there has crept into the tradesmen's movement something that was never intended originally. There is now evidently an intention to raise artificial barriers to protect the trade—a thing that was never contemplated in the original movement amongst the tradesmen. I have never heard in all my experience in Hillside of any serious complaint against the treatment that the Department were meting out to the tradesmen in respect to their trade. When I say "serious complaint," of course I have not mixed up with the men without knowing something about the doctrines that the petitioners propound, but they were never serious enough to gain or command the attention of the great bulk of the men. So far as I know, not until 1915 has this doctrine taken hold of the men. In 1914 the tradesmen sent a Dominion representative to Wellington, and their demand was for wages, but I am not aware that any of the new proposals were seriously contemplated or got the seal of any properly organized body of tradesmen until 1915.

12. Would you expect that the tradesmen expected to get an increase of wages as the outcome of this petition?—I do not know what their hope is in the matter of wages. It seems to me there has been imported into the movement since the days it was established, and the days in which I took a lively interest and acquired some part of it, a new matter which seemed to be stressed more by the tradesmen than the question of wages.

13. Your idea is that the artificial barrier is the main part of the question?—So far as I am aware the protection of the trades by artificial barriers is their chief concern. We, on the contrary, believe there are difficulties about our trade and that it will not be snatched away from us. There is also the question of labourers doing tradesmen's work. It seems to me that the petitioners, according to what I have heard, desire to place restrictions upon the Department so that the Department cannot use the labourers in the service of the State up to the limit of their capacity which they might reasonably expect to do. This seems to be quite unwarrantable. It is behind the trouble we are witnessing in the Old Country to-day in connection with the manufacture of munitions.

14. Is there any other matter you wish to refer to?—No.

15. *Mr. Sidey.*] Having granted the request of the Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners' Association to break away from the A.S.R.S., providing the Tradesmen's Association comply with a similar condition, can we reasonably refuse their request? You can please yourself whether you answer the question or not?—Of course, I am not aware that the Engine-drivers' Society has yet got official recognition. I believe they have a recommendation; but I would say, further, that, having made one mistake, it does not seem to me reasonable that you should perpetuate that; and I would say, further, that after all the Engine-drivers' Society and the proposed Tradesmen's Association are different things, and they are working for different purposes. The very protection which the tradesmen are working for the engine-drivers have. They did not ask for a society because they wanted their trade or profession protected, because they have already got protection. Every man who stands upon a footplate of a New Zealand locomotive must go through one channel: he must become a cleaner, then a fireman, then a driver. But the position is entirely different with a tradesman. The Department gets its craftsmen from all sorts of sources, and the Department could not man one-half of its shops by the men it trains itself. They certainly could not man those of one Island alone if they demanded from every man his indentures. There are not the craftsmen in this country possessors of the indentures who could man the shops of this Island.

16. What is the proportion of the men in the service who have indentures?—I am quite convinced on this matter of indentures that there are not 20 per cent. of the men who are working at their trade who have indentures. I might say that I walked into a shop yesterday and asked the foreman if he could give me a job, and if he wanted my papers. He said "No, I have seen sacks of papers—I do not want to see papers." He then told me that some little time ago he had been working in the Auckland docks when a man came to get work who had papers from Vickers (Limited), one of the finest firms in the world. The foreman said, "I started him to work and I found within half an hour that he could not hit the ship let alone the rivet."

17. Your name has been mentioned as one of the founders of the Tradesmen's Association: is that so?—Yes. There is no man in Otago who took a livelier interest in the affairs of the tradesmen than I did, and there was no man who enjoyed the confidence of the tradesmen more than I did, and there was no man who more fully represented their grievances before the Minister and members of Parliament. Mr. Sidey knows of the movement I was associated with. There was no intention to create a separate organization, and on several occasions we expressed ourselves as satisfied with the work of the A.S.R.S. As a matter of fact, apart from the resolution passed in 1910 when we declared we would only operate through the A.S.R.S., when the general secretary and the president visited Dunedin in 1912, the president made a statement that somewhere in some remote corner of the North Island some tradesmen were attempting to form a separate society, and I went down to Hillside and informed the men of what was said. I asked them to convene a meeting of the Hillside tradesmen in the A.S.R.S. The right was granted to me to meet the tradesmen during the week, and a resolution was carried expressing our confidence in the A.S.R.S. as our representatives and continued loyalty to the A.S.R.S., through which benefits had come not only to the tradesmen but to all sections of the Railway service. That resolution was carried unanimously. That organization with which I was identified was an altogether different organization to the one now before you. I will read the resolution that was read in Hillside and carried unanimously: "Special meeting of tradesmen to consider statement of president of A.S.R.S. in his address to Otago and Hillside branches that there was a movement on foot in the North Island to establish a society of railway tradesmen apart from the A.S.R.S.: