

somewhat high demand of the A.S.R.S. for a 10-per-cent. increase all round, causing the Minister to recede from his promise to break up £50,000 in correcting anomalies in the classification list on the ground that it will take perhaps four times that amount to do what is requested of him. If you approve of the proposal we have made to the executive, we should be glad if you will act along the same lines and prepare a memorial to that body. It will be necessary also to proceed at once to make arrangements to give effect to the proposal. My committee suggest a deputation to Wellington. We have taken the matter in hand, feeling strongly that immediate action is required to save from disaster the cause that we have been striving for so long." That was signed by Mr. A. Peters, the secretary of the movement there. This annoyed us very much, and another letter was written to the A.S.R.S. as follows:—

M. J. Mack, Esq.

Hillside, 21st August, 1911.

DEAR SIR,—

In reference to the petition the executive council has presented to Parliament, there is one item to which the tradesmen desire to direct your attention—viz., the 10-per-cent. increase to all sections of the Second Division. Now, we wish to say that so far from protesting against the proposal we heartily welcome it. It has been ever our policy, during all the years we have been striving to better ourselves, to greet with pleasure the advances other sections have made. But what we do think is that our claim for consideration at the present juncture is paramount.

A reference to the petition presented to the G.M. through the A.S.R.S. in 1910 will disclose the statement, which has never been questioned either by the G.M., the Minister, or the Council, that "we are the only class who have not had restored to us the 10 per cent. reduced from our wages in the year 1881."

You may not be aware that the failure of the tradesmen to get an increase in recent years is due in some degree to the action of the A.S.R.S. The conference of 1906 actually threw out a request for an increase of 6d. per day for the smiths. Of course we do not wish to make the present executive responsible for the errors of past councils, but we certainly think it reasonable to expect you to help correct the injustice done by your predecessors in office.

Now we desire to be loyal to the A.S.R.S., and we hope that what we propose to ask will commend itself to you as a perfectly reasonable request.

We do not ask you to recede from your demand for a 10-per-cent. rise, but what we do ask is that the thousand tradesmen who have been agitating for years be allowed to represent their own case before the Railways Committee. We are advising you first hand of our proposal; we are also communicating with all centres, and are hoping to arrange some plan by which we may be thoroughly represented.

On behalf of the Tradesmen's Committee,

I remain, &c.,

A. PETERS, Secretary.

Now, sir, we felt just as keenly in Petone, but we were persuaded by the North Island representative not to go so far, as it really showed a want of confidence in the A.S.R.S. Shortly after this two attempts were made to form these Tradesmen's Committees into a Tradesmen's Association—namely, by the Dunedin Committee and by the Wanganui Committee. We thought in Petone, and, I believe, in other centres also, that it would be better in the meantime to give the A.S.R.S. another chance. In August, 1914, tradesmen again met in conference at Wellington, and were received by the A.S.R.S. Consent to receive us was, however, reluctantly given, as they considered they need not have been approached, seeing they had our workshops representative to speak on our behalf. In March, 1915, action was taken in every centre, and the New Zealand Railway Tradesmen's Association was formed. Again allow me to emphasize the fact that our association was to work in and under the A.S.R.S. After the formation of our association the branches decided to hold a conference on the same date as the executive of the A.S.R.S. were sitting in Wellington, which took place in May, 1915. Time, sir, will not permit me to dwell on all that took place at that conference between us and the A.S.R.S., but the unsympathetic and at times hostile attitude they displayed towards us was intensely disappointing, more especially as we had come with our grievances as a body of men entirely loyal to them, though neglected. Representatives on whom we had built our hopes, more especially one of them, so interrupted one of our speakers that he had to be called to order, and so far lost control of himself that he flatly refused to obey his chairman until he (the chairman) reminded him that he would not tolerate interruption from any one, and commanded Mr. Hampton to be seated. Now, sir, if this was Mr. Hampton's attitude towards us when a workshop representative, what can we expect at his hands now that he has become president of the A.S.R.S.? A suggestion that we made, that they would allow one of our delegates to accompany them when approaching the Department on our behalf, was flatly and indignantly refused. Notwithstanding the many differences we had, their chairman thanked us for the forcible way we had put our case. But on the following day, when they requested our attendance, they accused us of coming in a "Stand and deliver" attitude towards them. Our first request to them was that they would endeavour to procure for us an increase in wages. Their answer to us was that they were not prepared to give preference to any particular branch of the service. They did not question or deny our right to this, but they were so tied to the overwhelming majority of the unskilled, whom they also represent, that they are afraid to push the just claims of the tradesmen from a fear of causing jealousy among the ranks of the unskilled. Approximately there are seventeen hundred tradesmen in the service. Of these, we believe about five hundred only are members of the A.S.R.S. They will not take our case on its merits. We are met with answers such as this: "I stand for the good of the whole." In other words, "I stand for the majority whom I represent." It has been forced upon us that the policy as actually pursued by the A.S.R.S. is to assimilate skilled and unskilled labour, and to regard them both as on the same footing. The climax came, sir, in the answers to our remits dealing with the encroaching on tradesmen's rights and our request that they be represented to the Department. Remit 13 read that no person be allowed to do tradesmen's work who had not served an apprenticeship. The 14th remit was that all tradesmen who may be employed in future by the Department should have served an apprenticeship and have indentures and papers to show they had served such apprenticeship. We look on this, gentlemen, as a point of honour with us; it is this question that has stirred the tradesmen from the North to the Bluff. It was the rejection of this remit that broke our loyalty to the A.S.R.S.,