

is being used to accomplish some object or to overcome some difficulty. A job must be done well before it will work well, and all the time the tradesman is responsible not only for the workmanship, but for the time he takes over the job also. That is bad enough, but to be told that any one has a right to come in and work alongside us, to practically serve his time alongside us, and be paid journeyman's wages while serving his time, surely, gentlemen, that is too much. Is it any wonder that the skilled mechanics in the service having identity of interests and sympathies in common have decided to pull together? All the skilled mechanics who have served their time will stick together on this question if on no other. That is the question that causes the tradesmen to stand on their dignity. They stand a good many things—they have stood many things in the past—but they will never stand any body of men telling them that their trade is not their own, that they have no right to it, and that Tom, Dick, and Harry can come in and work alongside of them. That is practically the language the A.S.R.S. use to us. We will never stand that, and whether we get recognition or not we will never be reconciled to the A.S.R.S. That is the reason we want to be "on our own," so that we can mind our own business. We will bring nothing but our own business forward; we have no wish to interfere with anybody else, and neither do we wish any one else to interfere with us. Is it not logical to suppose that the tradesmen know what they want better than anybody else? Is it not also patent that the tradesmen could represent the tradesmen's case from a tradesman's point of view better than any one else, and probably represent it in a more reasonable manner? That fact alone is a sufficient reason why we should be allowed to look after our own business, but taken in conjunction with the fact that we are first compelled to submit our case for approval, and then leave it entirely in the hands of an organization whose interests are conflicting, even if not hostile, it is sufficient reason for any impartial man why we should get recognition as a separate union. Now, in support of our claim that the A.S.R.S. are hostile, I would call your attention to the answer they gave to the remit on the question of wages over twelve months ago. They told us they were not prepared to give preference to any branch of the service. Now, gentlemen, do you realize what an answer of that kind means? It means that they are putting in a new form that played-out old fallacy that all men are equal. That is what it means. There are no two men in the world equal; not two leaves on the same tree alike, and certainly not two sections of the Railway Department of equal value; and when they say that they are not prepared to give preference they simply say "Whether you deserve this or not, we cannot afford to serve your particular case—we are not going to give preference to any section." Levelling up, they call it; we call it levelling down. Every skilled mechanic is an acquisition to the Department, and I think the Department will admit that. I do not think there has ever been such a shortage of skilled mechanics in the Railway Department as there is to-day. The mechanics have a right to stand and be judged on their merits, but under the present system we are not judged on our merits; we are forced by the A.S.R.S. to carry other sections on our back, as instanced by their reply that they are not prepared to give preference to any particular section. Now, owing to the reception which the A.S.R.S. gave our remits the tradesmen absolutely lost faith in the society. Many of them never did have any faith in it, and what little faith some of them did have was lost. It was felt that our whole salvation lay in our chances of obtaining official recognition in order that we could put our case forward and protect our trade if we did nothing else. The fact that we are here from all parts of New Zealand in support of our petition shows plainer than words that the tradesmen are not satisfied, and when a large body of men who have identical interests are thoroughly convinced that any particular union has not done the right thing towards them is it not better for all parties concerned that we should be allowed to go our own way? In June, 1915, shortly after the Tradesmen's Association remits were submitted to the conference and rejected, the delegates went back to their branches and reported. Then Messrs. Hampton and Moore, who were at that time the workshops representatives on the council, commenced a tour of the various centres for the purpose, they said, of putting the other side of the story. Everywhere they spoke they called meetings of the branches of the A.S.R.S., quite ignoring the fact that large numbers of tradesmen had never belonged to the A.S.R.S., and, further than that, as they were going to speak on tradesmen's business only, many of our tradesmen refused to attend the meetings because of the presence of non-tradesmen. They said, "We have no quarrel with the other men in the shops; our quarrel is with the executive council of the A.S.R.S."; and they looked on the presence of the non-tradesmen at that meeting which was to deal with the business of tradesmen simply as a dodge to prevent an adverse motion being carried against the representatives of the A.S.R.S. Now, this is an illustration of what it would mean: Let us suppose that at one of their meetings they had fifty members present—twenty-five tradesmen and twenty-five non-tradesmen. If at the conclusion of the meeting the tradesmen were disgusted and wanted to carry a motion of no-confidence they would fail to do so if only one tradesman failed to support the motion. That would mean that, although twenty-four tradesmen out of the twenty-five voted for it, still the motion would be defeated, and it would be proclaimed as a great victory by the other side. That would then be considered as an indication of the feeling of the tradesmen in that particular centre. It shows that in a mixed meeting of that kind it is not a true indication of the feeling of the tradesmen. If such a thing could happen when the numbers are equal, try and picture to yourselves, gentlemen, the position the tradesmen are in to-day when they are outnumbered. Mr. McDougall stated that there were five hundred tradesmen in the A.S.R.S. I am not prepared to say how many there are, but we will give them a thousand members. The A.S.R.S. some time ago stated that the strength of their membership was 8,400. Well, say there are, roughly, a thousand tradesmen amongst eight thousand members—that is eight to one; what a hopeless position for the mechanics to be in! How could they possibly do anything against that weight of voting-power? They could not possibly do it; and, further than that, you see the great preponderance of unskilled labour. Even if some of those