

was not in favour of a separate organization, but would sign the petition. This I flatly refused to allow. The tradesmen themselves are the best judges of whether their interests have been looked after or not. The fact of presenting this petition emphatically indicates that they have not. Our association is not a hasty scheme. We have decided on it only after earnest endeavour for the past years to have matters placed before the Department through the A.S.R.S. It is only because it is our only way to get justice. Indeed, it will be impossible from the very nature of the association to get this. We have various grievances. I mention these now only to show matters which we want remedied. We are, however, not now seeking to remedy these, but we want the Department to know of these things. We want to be represented by tradesmen who will represent them. We want to be sure that our requests will not be deleted or censored by the unskilled. We want the Railway Department to know just what we tradesmen say is our grievance. We deny the right of the unskilled men, or a body representative chiefly of unskilled, to say that they will not represent to the Department matters which we, the skilled tradesmen, say should be represented to them. If skilled men have a grievance we deny the right of the unskilled men to say it is not a grievance. We refuse to accept the final decision by any one but the Railway Department. I come now to the question of wages, and we feel that it is only right we should bring up some of the grievances that exist in the Railway Department which we consider could be remedied if we had our own association to deal with them. I place the heads of the Railway Department second to no other organization in the world as regards clemency and justice. I say that we have no grievance with the Railway Department at the present time. I want your minds to be quite clear on that point that we are quite satisfied, and although I am going into the question of wages it is simply an example of a grievance that existed. Take the position of an apprentice and a junior labourer: a junior labourer can start at seventeen years of age; he gets sufficient wages to keep him and pay his mother for his board, whereas the apprentice starts at a small wage which is not sufficient to keep him while he is learning his trade. Some six years ago a lady asked my advice as to what she should do with her boy. She said he had been at college, that he was seventeen years of age, and he was a careful boy. I advised her to put him into the Railway Department as a junior labourer. He went into the Railway Department as a junior labourer, and after being there six years he had saved sufficient to put £100 into a concern in which I am also interested, and also paid his mother board. He is now a machinist, and what chance has a tradesman of ever catching him up? Then there is the question of the apprentice when he comes out of his time. A boy can be apprenticed in the service when he is one month over fifteen years or one month before sixteen years of age. He has to serve his time until he is twenty-one years of age, and during that time he only gets apprenticeship wages. This means that one boy serves ten months more than the other. I say that that is unfair, and that is one of the grievances which we are going to represent to the Department which we consider we will have to rectify if we have the opportunity of representing it in our own way. Another point is that when a boy who has been apprenticed comes out of his time he gets 10s. a day, but the labourer goes on and gets to within 1s. a day of that sum. The question cropped up this morning as to whether any specific instance could be given of where labourers have come into the service as tradesmen. There was a little quibbling in regard to that question, but I have no fear with regard to placing before you an instance I know of where a man came into the service who had never served one hour in his trade, and there is at least one man in the service to-day in that position who is acting as leading hand. The first instance I will mention is that of a man who came into the service and worked for practically six years as a labourer in the Maintenance Department. He became friendly with the foreman, and at the end of six years, on the recommendation of the foreman of the Department, he was appointed to the position as a tradesman, and his name appears on the D.-3 list as having served his full years as a tradesman. When I went to Wanganui some three and a half years ago I went to work in the Maintenance Department. When I started there we were put on a good deal of rough work, such as cattle-stops, engine-sheds, and the rough work of the place. There was one man in the gang who I saw at a glance was a botch. Of course he had any amount of rough work to do, and so he continued on. When that work was completed I was left behind to complete what was considered the better work, while the rest of the gang went away with the leading hand into the country. Some months afterwards I met one of the men in the street and asked him what he was doing. He said, "I am off the job." I said, "Do you mean that that other man was kept on?" and he said "Yes; do you know the truth about that man?" I said I did not, and he told me that while there were other qualified painters there this man had a friend in the leading hand and he kept his job. The man had been working in the Southern Cross Biscuit Factory, and had previously never done any painting except perhaps his own roof. When the man was first put on he was questioned as to his knowledge of the various colours of paint, and having answered them correctly he was put on. That man at once became very nice to the leading hand because of his lack of knowledge of the work and lack of skill. He at once became servile. The other man, to put it plainly, was a cheeky beggar. When a gang goes out on the road they live in huts, and this man who was not a competent tradesman would get up in the morning and light the fire for the leading hand. That would go on for some considerable time. Now that man, owing to his incompetence, would do all he could for the leading hand in order to save his position, and when the time came for the leading hand to make a recommendation this incompetent man got the recommendation. That man who had never served his time left the service the other day, and was getting as leading hand 1s. a day more than I am at the present time. He has now started work outside the service as a full-blown tradesman. That is why we want the men who are in future employed by the Department to be competent tradesmen. I say that by that request we are assisting the Department. The head of the Department cannot possibly be acquainted with these things unless he is informed that so-and-so