

5. That the two sixpenny rises received in 1911 and 1913 have only brought tradesmen up to the position that they occupied in 1881 before the 10-per-cent. reduction. That whilst other branches of the service have gone beyond what they then received tradesmen have actually remained stationary.

6. That the ever-increasing cost of living is felt keenly by us as by other members of the community, and as Railway servants we have to refrain from augmenting our earning in many avenues forbidden by the regulations of the Service we find it increasingly hard to provide for those depending on us.

7. In conclusion we trust you will regard the several clauses in the above petition as reasonable, and respectfully urge that you will grant it your immediate and favourable consideration.

We have, &c.

Then followed a list of signatures of the tradesmen. Now, sir, there we have an admission by the tradesmen that they have reached the position that they were in prior to the 10-per-cent. reduction, which was denied and disputed yesterday; and, again, the reason given here is the ever-increasing cost of living. Just at that particular time this unfortunate war broke out and the tradesmen immediately met and forwarded us this resolution: "1. That we impress on the executive council the justness and reasonableness of our claim embodied in the petition; that we expect them to push this at an opportune time, and that we do not wish to embarrass the Government at the present time. 2. That a copy of this resolution be handed to the executive council." My executive council believed at that time that that was the general feeling of the Railway service, and they immediately waited upon the Minister of Railways and told him that so long as the cost of living was kept within reasonable limits there would be no demand made by the A.S.R.S. for any increase in wages. Now, sir, what do we find? Eight months after that the tradesmen met again, and, notwithstanding the fact that the war was at its height and still going, the request was that the executive council should make a demand upon the Government for an increase of 2s. per day on behalf of tradesmen and tradesmen only. The request was of this character: that wages be increased to 1s. 8½d. per hour, and that in future all tradesmen be placed on the same footing as engine-drivers as regards wages. That has been kept back from the Committee, and our reply has also been kept back from the Committee. Our reply to that request was this: "We are not prepared to give preference to any particular branch of the service; we are prepared to push forward for a substantial increase to meet the increased cost of living for all branches of the service." We regard it—and I think the gentlemen of the Committee will admit rightly so—that whilst the cost of living was going up, if any increase of wages was to be given that increase of wages should apply equally to the man who is only receiving 9s. a day as to the man who is receiving 11s. 6d. or 12s. per day. The next request was that the present system of grading be abolished and the following substituted: one period of probation not exceeding twelve months, and that the wage for that period be fixed at 10 per cent. below the maximum rate of pay. The probationary period shall mean and include all time served in the Department, broken or otherwise. We replied to that request as follows: "We have made repeated efforts to have the second grade abolished, and that there should be a difference of 6d. in the first grade, and we support the suggestion *re* the probationary period." Their third request was, "That all apprentices on the serving of their time receive the maximum rate of pay on the completion of twelve months' service, during such time to be paid at not more than 10 per cent. below the maximum rate." Our reply to that was, "The answer to No. 2 covers this"—that is, that we had been making efforts and approved of it. Their fourth request was, "That all tradesmen working at dirty work received 1s. per day extra as dirt-money. 'Dirty work' to mean fitters and boilermakers in running-sheds, fitters stripping engines in repair-pits, boilermakers working in smokebox, firebox, or inside tanks or tenders." Our reply to that was, "The council now is, and has been, representing this matter to the General Manager." Now, before I go on I think I might just as well deal with that particular remit. I have here, as you will see, the file dealing with the wages of boilermakers in running-sheds. This question had been started by the executive council as far back as 5th September, 1912, and the correspondence in connection with it was finished on the 21st July, 1915. I am prepared, sir, to put this file in to the Committee. There is every letter received by me from our branches, there is every communication sent by me to the various branches, to the General Manager, and the General Manager's reply thereto; and if the Committee after perusing this file can conscientiously say that we have made no effort in the matter, then, sir, I am prepared to let the petition go right along without any further opposition. I might say just here that I am prepared to produce any file bearing upon any request that the tradesmen can put forward with regard to any matters that have been represented to us and have been neglected. Their fifth request was, "That all tradesmen employed on new engine-work be paid 6d. per day extra." Our reply was, "More information to be asked for." We wanted them to give us specific reasons or instances where men were employed upon new work and were not getting the 6d. which is provided for in the schedules, Classification Act. The sixth request was, "That all leading hands be paid 15 per cent. above maximum tradesmen's wage, rising to 25 per cent. in three years." Our reply was, "We favour the abolition of second-grade leading hand." The seventh request was, "That all tradesmen acting as acting leading hands for twelve months continuously receive the same increase as if it were a permanent appointment." Our reply to that was that we agreed to that remit. The eighth request was, "In all running-sheds and workshops where there are three or more tradesmen of any trade employed one of each trade be appointed as acting leading hand." The reply of the council went further than they asked. We replied, "Council supports this remit, provided that the word 'acting' is deleted. In that sense we have already represented the matter." What we urged was that instead of a man being appointed as acting leading hand a permanent appointment should be made to the position. Their ninth request was, "That all positions of Car and Wagon Inspector, Brake-bridge, Boiler, and Engine Inspector be filled from the ranks of tradesmen." Our reply was, "That deputation be informed that conference decided that all qualified persons