

be allowed to take up these positions. We will press this decision of conference." The conference previously had decided that no particular position should be set aside especially for any particular class of workman, but we maintained the principle that any man who was qualified and was senior should be entitled to the position. The tenth request was, "That the attention of the executive be drawn to the fact that angle-iron smiths are not receiving the 6d. per day granted them by Parliament." The reply was, "That deputation be asked to supply specific instances through their branches." The eleventh request was, "That foreman painters be appointed in Hillside, Petone, and Newmarket, the same as Addington shops." The reply was, "This matter has been represented and we are at present dealing with it." I might say that right up to the present time we have this matter of the foreman painter in the large shops in hand. Mr. McVilly and the Department will bear me out in that. We had been representing this matter to the Department long before the tradesmen put the matter before us from their association, but up to the present time we have not been able to secure it. The twelfth request, "That the attention of the executive be drawn to the fact of casual relieving hands absent on holidays (Thorndon running-sheds)." The reply was, "That full particulars be supplied by the branch." The thirteenth request was, "That no persons be allowed to do tradesmen's work who have not served an apprenticeship." Our reply was, "We do not approve of remit 13, and the deputation be asked to interpret it." I do not intend to enlarge upon that question—that will be left to the tradesmen themselves; but the reply given by the president, I think, briefly and aptly covers the position, and I think will appeal to the Committee in regard to this matter. I might say, for the information of the Committee, that at this interview with the tradesmen we took the precaution to have a verbatim report of everything that was said. I have a copy of that report here, which I will hand to the Committee, and which they may retain. The arguments put forward by the tradesmen and the replies given by the executive to their requests are set out in the report. Mr. Hampton was not the president then, but his reply to that request was, "My opinion is that practical ability is worth more than all your paper, and the whole test is the man's ability to do the work. It is my opinion that if the Department chooses to pay a labourer 13s. as a tradesman that is their business, and not mine." Now, sir, I appeal to you and ask if that is not a common-sense, practical, straightforward statement. We do not say that the Department should not employ a labourer at tradesman's work at labourer's pay, and no single instance can be found where that has been done. When the Department have employed a man who might be skilled in some other branch of the service whom they considered fit and competent to do the work, and whose work they were satisfied with, they paid him tradesman's wages; and whilst I might say that the slogan of democracy throughout the world to-day is "Equal opportunity for all and equal pay for equal work," no tradesman in any trade can deny the right of a man if he has the skill and ability to do the work being employed to earn his living at that particular trade. That is the position. I might here remark that I am frequently called upon to approach the Department for clerical work for men who are injured in the service, or who are by reason of illness unable to carry on their ordinary occupations, and it would be just as reasonable for the Department to turn round and say to me, "This man has not served his time as a clerk and therefore cannot earn his living as a clerk in the First Division of the service." The Department has in very many cases replied, "We will find him clerical work and give him an opportunity"; and there are tradesmen, I believe, at the present time in the Railway service doing clerical work and not earning their living at their ordinary trade. Then, request 14 from the Tradesmen's Association was, "That all tradesmen who may be employed in the future by the Department shall have served their apprenticeship, and have indentures and all papers to show that they have served such apprenticeship." Our reply was, "Deputation to be given the same reply as to number 13"—that the deputation be asked to interpret it. Request No. 15 was, "That a tradesman be appointed to the position of leading hand to take charge of tradesmen in Nelson, as formerly." The reply was, "That the deputation be informed that this matter has already been represented by Council." For months and months we made representations to the Department in connection with this matter, but we were unable to get it redressed on behalf of the tradesmen. The request No. 16 was, "Does your executive recognize that a margin of from 2s. 3d. to 3s. per day should be recognized as the difference in the value of a tradesman's work and that of a labourer, and that thereafter all rises be granted on a percentage basis?" The reply was, "The Classification Act already provides for the margin stated, and we do not approve of any hard-and-fast rule as to percentage basis." Now, sir, what I want to point out is this: that the petitioners in quoting the difference between a labourer and a tradesman have taken those men who are machinists and lifters who are earning 10s. per day, and have called them labourers. Some of the lifters are getting 10s. 6d. per day, but the maximum for machinists is 10s. Those men are classed as labourers. I have recently had the opportunity of going through the Everleigh Workshops in New South Wales, and one surprise to me there was that the very class of men who are called "labourers" by the tradesmen in this country received higher wages there than the fitter. The fact is that machinists in the Everleigh Workshops in New South Wales received 12s. per day, and the maximum for a fitter is 11s. 8d. Now, sir, another statement has been made, and, I might say, published broadcast to members of Parliament, which states, "This union is composed of all classes of railway men in the Second Division, and its membership totals eight thousand, of which only about five hundred are tradesmen." I propose to hand to the Committee a return of the tradesmen in our organization at the 31st July last, when we took the last return. Evidence will be forthcoming to show that some branches have increased in membership since then, and the return will show that a number of branches did not send in returns at all. I may mention here, sir, that tradesmen are admitted into our society under two methods of subscription. The one method is for full membership, the members paying 1s. per month or 13s. per year; and the other for