

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 1909.

Mr. S. BROWN, President of the Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners' Union, examined.
(No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You reside in——?—I reside in Christchurch, the headquarters of the Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners' Union, of which I am the president. I wish to speak in support of the petition for the recognition of the new union. I may say our principal argument is this: that we are not satisfied with the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants as at present constituted. This association of ours was started about fifteen months ago, and we have now got a duly registered society with branches all over the Dominion, and our numbers are something like eleven hundred out of fourteen hundred eligible members. We say that there is great dissatisfaction among locomotive-men, and for this reason they have formed their own association. We contend that the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants is based on too many trades and callings for one body to be able to look after their interests properly. There you have a body representing something like seventy different trades and callings. Now, these gentlemen meet every three months, and we say it is impossible for them to look after every man's interests. We also contend that a great deal of time and energy which ought to be devoted to the men's interests has been wasted through their arguing and quarrelling amongst themselves. I can give an instance which only recently took place in Dunedin. Last year the chairman of the branch, in consequence of their constant quarrelling and arguing amongst themselves, resigned. We contend that this is not unionism. I may state that in taking this step we are only following in the footsteps of all English-speaking countries. These societies are recognised societies throughout Australia, England, Scotland, Ireland, and America. In America they even go so far as to have a separate society for engine-drivers and a separate society for firemen; and I maintain that a thousand men with interests identical have far more weight than five thousand men quarrelling and arguing amongst themselves, and who cannot decide upon any point for fear that one section will be getting a little more than another. We also find that there is great jealousy amongst the lower-paid men, such as platelayers, &c. A platelayer will say he is entitled to as much money as a driver. I have heard several prominent members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway servants say the same thing. We contend that this is not right, and we cannot expect assistance from these men when the men themselves make such erratic statements. I maintain also that we have never been successful in increasing our rates of pay. I may say that I started in the service twenty-seven years ago. I started at 5s. 6d. a day as a cleaner. To-day we start at 5s. as cleaners. A driver then could rise to 13s. a day. They cannot do that now—12s. 6d. is the maximum. We have only to compare our wages with Australia, where these associations are formed, to see that they benefit the loco-men. I will also draw your attention to the First Division. They have formed an Officers' Institute. They withdrew from the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants; and what is their position to-day? These men were allowed to withdraw from the society to look after their own affairs, and now, because we propose to withdraw and look after our affairs, we are getting considerable abuse. I should like to point out to you the increases of wages of these gentlemen since they went out. I have got here the scale of pay issued in 1885. Here you have stationmasters at £130. What is the position to-day? I think the minimum is £190 now. Of course, they had house allowance as well, £25, which brought the amount up to £155; and I think £190, including house allowance, is the lowest a stationmaster is paid to-day. I should like to present this schedule for your perusal. You can see how these men have benefited, and our position to-day is becoming intolerable. What do we find now? We find that the Classification Act has even placed us in a worse position than we have ever been in before, because it gives the Department power to say that there shall only be 1 per cent. in the first grade of engine-drivers and firemen. Yet have these gentlemen of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants made one word of protest? No, they have not. I may say that the wages of all the other divisions have been raised, owing to the increased cost of living, and yet this has never been done in our case; and yet the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants has the presumption to say that they have been looking after our affairs. Now, I think the Conciliation and Arbitration Act allows fifteen men—I think fifteen is the minimum that can form a union—and they can bring their employers before the Arbitration Court; and yet we cannot do so. We have got a combined body of men—engine-drivers, firemen, and cleaners—with interests identical from one end of the Dominion to the other, and yet we find that they have no right to be represented and to form a union. I may say that I greatly regret that any man should oppose that right, and yet we have men who call themselves unionists who take up that attitude. I ask that the difficulty we labour under should be removed, and I say that no man has a right to oppose or refuse this request in a democratic country like New Zealand. I may say that our views are in accord with the principle of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, where men are debarred from taking part in a union unless of that particular trade or calling. I think that is quite right. I think there is no man better suited to represent any particular trade or calling than the man employed in that particular trade or calling himself. We do not want to injure the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in any shape or form. There is not a man here who can say I have caused any friction, and my earnest endeavours have always been that we should form our union and go hand in hand with the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and demand reforms if necessary, and I feel sure that, if we form our union and are recognised, we are prepared to meet the Amalgamated Society in every way, and