

is quite impossible for you to do that in the remnant of the session that is left. Now we have to ask you to provide some other tribunal to consider our petition. We are not prepared to go on with the work in a slipshod, haphazard fashion, because if we do the limited amount of evidence that we would place before you when put into print would appear to be all the evidence, and so our case would be considerably weakened, and our men must suffer in consequence. Therefore we have decided to ask this Committee to set up some other tribunal immediately to investigate our petition.

*Mr. Arnold:* On the lines of a Royal Commission?

*Mr. Veitch:* We leave it to the Committee to decide what lines. We are prepared to accept any Commission, Board, or inquiry that you propose to set up, but we think we should be consulted with regard to the constitution of such a Board or body to whom you would relegate the matter. We want to be consulted as to the constitution of it, and to be given a full opportunity of defending our men before it. If we get that we do not care exactly what form the inquiry takes. It is urgently necessary that the affairs of the Railway Department should be gone into thoroughly in every detail. I do not think there is any Department of the State that involves anything like the amount of detail that is involved in the Railway Department. We would not go into this inquiry in a spirit of hostility towards the management, or Government, or any one else. If we were given a full and free opportunity of explaining what is really the matter with the Railway men we could convince the House, this Committee, and the management that many reforms are very urgently needed, that it would not cost the country much money, and that for all time afterwards the Railway men would be a far more satisfied lot of men. The trouble really is not a matter of wages only. I understand and acknowledge greatly the fact that the Minister of Railways proposes to bring before Parliament shortly a Bill to improve the conditions of the Railway men in the matter of wages in certain directions. We do not know what the proposals are, and, not being fully conversed in parliamentary procedure, I presume it is confidential till the Bill is brought down. However, I acknowledge that fact, but I wish to say that it is not altogether a matter of wages. Of course, the wages question is a very important one, but it is not really the whole cause of the trouble that exists in the Railway Department now. The real essence of the difficulty is the fact that we have no power to enforce what we believe we are entitled to, and that we have no defence. I do not speak disparagingly of the Minister of Railways, but this is the position we are in with regard to him when we have a dispute. I will put it this way: Supposing a man comes to me and says I owe him £5, and I say to him, "I do not owe you anything." That constitutes a dispute between him and me; and could you imagine any position to be weaker than if he had to come to me to arbitrate between us as to whether I owed him that money or not? Well, gentlemen, that is the position between the Minister of Railways and ourselves. If we have a dispute with him we have to ask him to arbitrate between us. That is not fair—we should have some body that we could appeal to when we have trouble. If we had that, then a feeling of security would exist in the Railway service. It is the insecurity that causes the trouble, and when retrenchment comes along the things we thought we were absolutely sure about slip through our fingers. I do not want to go through the whole position now, but I know this is a most important point in connection with the trouble in the Railway Department to-day. The men are very much dissatisfied at the present time, and greatly disappointed because they have not been able to get a full investigation this session. I sincerely hope you will see your way to establish some Board or Commission, or whatever you like to call it, to make the fullest investigation into the whole position. If you will grant us that we will give you our assurance that we will not approach the Board in a spirit of hostility to any one, but rather with the hope and with the firm intention, if possible, of making the Railway Department a far better Department from a parliamentary standpoint, from the public standpoint, and from the standpoint of the employees.

*The Chairman:* Then you have decided not to go on?

*Mr. Veitch:* Yes, we have decided not to go on with the evidence before this Committee. We realize that if we cannot put the whole case that half the case will appear to be the whole case, and people will say that if that is all the Railway men had to complain about it is not much after all. We have to have a full investigation and to be able to state our case fully.

*The Chairman:* Well, Mr. Veitch and gentlemen, I think your decision a very wise one, and a good number of the members of this Committee, if not all of them, agree with pretty well every remark you have made. This Committee, of course, wants to go exhaustively into your petition, as it did in the case of the petition of the Railway Officers' Institute, and there is no doubt about it that the men you represent would be prejudiced in the eyes of those who would read the evidence if that evidence was not complete. Not only that, but this Committee would not be in a position to deliberate fully regarding the conditions of service of the Second Division if it was not in possession of all the evidence you could place before it. I think, myself, your decision is a very wise one. Regarding your request that this Committee should make a recommendation to the House that you should get a Commission or Board set up to inquire into your grievances, of course that will be a matter for the Committee to deliberate on; but I think a number of members are already in agreement with even that suggestion, for it seems that some investigation should be made before the House meets again. You desired that your petition should be considered this session, but as time will not permit it I feel certain that some members of this Committee are convinced that exhaustive investigation should be made into your grievances by a Board or Commission, just as investigation has been made into those of the First Division. However, it will be for the Committee to decide, and I just want to assure you that I, as Chairman of this Committee, consider you have come to a very wise decision indeed.

*Mr. Veitch:* We are very anxious to have this inquiry started immediately if possible. We want to go right into this matter. I may tell you that you might as well try and stop the rising of the tide as to check the indignation of the Railway men at the present time. We have a duty to perform to these men, and we will not fail in our duty to them; but we want to have an immediate investigation into this matter, and I desire to emphasize the word "immediate."