

and just as Britain lost her American colonies through the obstinacy and unfair treatment of George III and his Ministers, so the A.S.R.S. have alienated us entirely, and we mean to have no more dealings with them. We as tradesmen must at all costs have protection for our trades, even at the cost of severance from the A.S.R.S. I want to emphasize that this particular step we have taken is not only the wish of a few, as has been repeatedly thrown at us by the A.S.R.S., but is the emphatic wish of the many. We realized that although the delegates at our conference represented the great majority of our tradesmen in the service we had not the right to take such a serious step without consulting the tradesmen themselves, so it was decided that a ballot-paper should be issued to all tradesmen. This was accordingly done. The ballot-paper was as follows:—

VOTING-PAPER.

To the Tradesmen employed in the N.Z.R. Service.

The following remit was submitted for consideration to the executive council of the A.S.R.S. by delegates of the N.Z.R. Tradesmen's Association during conference held in Wellington from May 21st to May 25th, 1915:—

"That all tradesmen who may be employed in the future by the Department shall have served their apprenticeships, and shall have indentures or papers to show that they have served such apprenticeships."

This remit was rejected unanimously by the A.S.R.S. Executive Council.

After careful consideration of the A.S.R.S. executive's attitude on the above matter and the general welfare of the tradesmen of the N.Z.R. service, are you in favour of the tradesmen of the service throughout the Dominion forming an organization, with Government recognition, for the purpose of looking after the interests of such tradesmen?

YES.

NO.

The following was the result of the votes recorded:—

	Votes recorded.	Yes.	No.	Informal.	Total.
Addington	280	241	32	7	280
Petone	273	223	42	8	273
Newmarket	272	251	19	2	272
Hillside	206	184	20	2	206
Eastown	116	98	17	1	116
Napier	63	53	10	...	63
Invercargill	55	43	12	...	55
Westport	26	20	6	...	26
Nelson	9	6	3	...	9
Ballot-papers from different sources that were late	47	47	47
	1,347	1,166	161	20	1,347

Surely conclusive proof that the A.S.R.S. had been "weighed in the balance and found wanting." Broadly speaking, it is a form of dilution they intend to force on us, and dilution at the present time, as you gentlemen are aware, is a world-wide question. Mr. Asquith says, "Undoubtedly it is difficult to persuade skilled men to forgo their privileges and admit unskilled men to their work." Is there any question about the privileges which we have bought and paid for by the long years of apprenticeship? I think not. There should not be. This war has demonstrated the value of skilled labour. And when we look to our union for help to support us in this matter we find that on the point which is dear to every tradesmen's heart they are out against us. Engineered by an executive officer, Hillside Branch set up a committee to tackle the apprenticeship question, and the scheme evolved was taken from the West Australian Government agreement, as explained to the executive of the A.S.R.S. by the chairman of our Tradesmen's conference (Mr. Rowles). But, strange to say, this very essential point that appears in that agreement was omitted, that *all* apprentices must be indentured. What happened to that report when brought before the branch? A new clause was inserted by the predominant and powerful partner—namely, the unskilled—that all machinists be classed as tradesmen. Now, sir, machinists in the service are drawn from the ranks of the unskilled. Machinists do not serve an apprenticeship, much as we would welcome it; so that we are back to where we were, and, as I said, the A.S.R.S. find themselves in a tight place. There is no half-way house on this point. They must be for us or against us. They are against us, and, sir, in refusing to put these remits forward on our behalf they cut all official means of communication between us and the Department. So that we are forced to come to you, gentlemen, and ask that you will recommend to Parliament, which will give us the right to plead our own cause before the Minister or General Manager of Railways. What is our representation at the present time on the executive of the A.S.R.S.? In the true sense of the word, none. For we have no direct representation. The A.S.R.S. constitution provides that one delegate be elected by financial members employed in the workshops of the Department. The workshops representative represents iron and wood machinists, strikers, lifters, fitters, holders-up, furnacemen, labourers, and tradesmen. The first-mentioned group of workers, you will see, are labourers skilled and unskilled. Gentlemen, in making these comparisons I am casting no reflection on these men or their work either. In this small group alone you will see that we are not bound by identical interests, except, of course, in general welfare. Indeed, our interests are conflicting, and with few exceptions the non-tradesman holds the view that as he puts in the same hours of labour he should draw the same wages. Now, as I have pointed out, we are few in numbers in the A.S.R.S., and the reason is this: the majority of tradesmen belong to an outside union of their own, and they will not join a body whose particular interests are so divergent. In the A.S.R.S. there are upwards of fifty different sections, and, gentlemen, as the overwhelming majority belong to the unskilled, you will see