

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 7th August, 1902.

WILLIAM JAMES EDWARDS examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name in full?—William James Edwards.

2. What office do you hold?—I am the general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of New Zealand, and reside at Christchurch. I may say that the great objection taken to the superannuation, as set forth in the Bill which has been circulated among the members of the railway service, is that it appears that due provision is not made for the retirement of the older members of the service. A uniform percentage of 3 per cent. is there stated; but the members are prepared to pay, according to their age, an increased premium, whereby some provision could be made for the older members to retire, and get more adequate retiring-allowance than is provided for in the Bill which has been circulated. At our conference, held at Invercargill some five months ago, a scheme of premiums according to age was adopted, and was sent through Mr. Ronayne for the due consideration of the Minister for Railways. From the remarks by the Minister, as reported in *Hansard*, it would appear that at that time he had not been furnished with our conference scheme of sliding scale of contributions, which was a matter of surprise to us. We think that the premiums set out there, running from 3 per cent. to 10 per cent. for ages of fifty and over, are somewhat high, and as an alternative we would suggest that the rates be 3 per cent. up to thirty years of age, 4 per cent. from thirty-one to forty years, 5 per cent. from forty-one to fifty years, and $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. from fifty-one upwards. Those premiums are somewhat lower than those adopted by our conference, but, as you will understand, it is our desire to get the premiums as low as we possibly can. We realise the fact that the Government might have some considerable claims to meet on behalf of the older members of the service who would retire. To meet this, if necessary, we are prepared to agree that the fund should be allowed to accumulate for a certain number of years—for one, two, or three years, whichever term might be desired—to such an extent as would allow of the older men being paid off. That is the real objection that we have to the Bill—that provision is not made for the older members of the service being retired—and, as I say, members are prepared to pay increased premiums according to their age. If the fund could be subsidised by the Government the premiums might be reduced; but rather than the Bill should go through in its present form the men seem to be quite prepared to pay the higher premiums submitted to the General Manager for Railways by the conference of the society.

3. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] Those rates were 3 per cent. up to thirty years of age, 5 per cent. from thirty-one to forty, 7 per cent. from forty-one to fifty, and 10 per cent. over fifty?—Yes, those are the rates submitted by the conference. They are rather high, and if they could be brought down to the scale I have suggested they would be much easier for the men to pay; and we think that the moneys could be withheld from payment until such time as the fund accumulated to a certain extent, or if at any time it was found that the demands on the fund were so great that the money could not be paid, perhaps provision could be made for withholding payments for a further term.

4. Do you mean, withholding payment for a few years at the start of the system?—Yes, after it is started. It will only be a matter of time until the older members are worked off. In time they will all work themselves off the fund, and then all members of the service will pay 3 per cent. If anything at all can be done to tide over the difficulty of these older men being retired, I suppose that in about ten or fifteen years the bulk of the men of fifty and upwards will have been retired.

5. *Mr. Wilford.*] With regard to that point: there are twenty-eight men in the Petone Workshops who have been in the service from twelve to twenty-five years, I think, and twenty-four at Addington: are those figures correct?—I could not say exactly, not having a D.-3 return with me. We really have no data to go upon as to the ages of the men.

6. I have a list of the names of the men in the Petone Workshops and the length of their service, but it is only made up from hearsay. Can you tell me whether my figures are correct?—No, in the absence of a D.-3 return. Information as to the ages of men we cannot get very well. The Department could supply it. We have had to rely on the Department to provide information like that. Well, gentlemen, that is really the most vital matter which we have to put before you; that is to say, the question of provision being made for older members retiring on something like a fair pension or superannuation.

7. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] Do I understand that the suggestion is that at the start the Superannuation Fund should be deferred for one, two, or three years, if necessary?—Yes; the members are quite prepared for that.

8. I understood at the interview that you had with me the other day that you are agreeable to either a State contribution of 3 per cent. as against the sliding scale of contributions paid by the men or the State guaranteeing any deficiency?—Yes. We do not think that it makes any difference to the members whichever way it is. The only thing is that if the State subsidises the fund the premiums the men will be called upon to pay might be brought down lower; but, so far as the men are concerned, I do not think it matters whether the fund is subsidised or guaranteed by the Government. It practically amounts to the same thing.

9. Were the conference at Invercargill satisfied with the constitution of the Board?—They would have liked to have had two members of the Second Division of the South Island and two