

ROBERT JOSEPH COLLINS, Accountant to the Treasury, examined. (No. 5.)

18. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] Will you state to the Committee what you remember about this matter?—It is my practice to take all debentures up to the Audit Office for signature, and if Mr. Warburton is not there I hand them to a clerk named Georgeson, or the Chief Clerk, Mr. Roskruege. With regard to these particular debentures, I took them up on the morning of the 15th August, and the debentures were received in Audit at 1 p.m. on that day. It was just before luncheon-time, and, to the best of my recollection, I handed them to Mr. Warburton himself, and he noted on the papers that they were received on the 15th August at 1 p.m. Of course, I am speaking from memory. In no instance are debentures taken up and left on the table of the Controller and Auditor-General. They are always handed either to Mr. Warburton himself or to some other responsible officer. As a rule, I always take up the debentures, and did so on this occasion.

19. You say something was noted on the debentures?—On the “narration” of the debentures there was a note made by Mr. Warburton to the effect that the debentures were received on the 15th August at 1 p.m.

20. Could that be produced?—Yes. It is in the possession of the Treasury.

*Mr. Warburton.* That note might be consistent with my going back in the afternoon of that day. I have no doubt of my recollection in this matter—that I did not receive them until after 1 o'clock.

21. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon* (to Mr. Collins).] Your recollection is that you delivered these debentures personally to Mr. Warburton?—To the best of my belief, I did so.

22. *Mr. Graham.*] You are not positive on that point?—I wish the Committee to understand distinctly that debentures are not left about on tables.

23. Can you tax your memory so as to be able to say whether you saw Mr. Warburton?—I have been up to Mr. Warburton on several occasions with debentures, but I could not speak positively with regard to these particular ones. To the best of my recollection, I handed these debentures to Mr. Warburton.

24. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] How do you come to make the statement that Mr. Warburton made a note on the papers?—I was aware it was done—that it was noted on the papers that they were received on the 15th August at 1 p.m.

25. *Mr. W. Fraser.*] Who noted them?—Mr. Warburton.

26. Did you see him make the note?—I could not say at this distance of time; but the note was made, and is in his handwriting.

27. Would it not be consistent if Mr. Warburton noted at 2 o'clock that they were received at 1 o'clock?—Not if they were handed to a responsible officer at 1 o'clock.

28. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] These papers would be handed over to Mr. Warburton himself or to a responsible officer?—Yes.

29. He would be able to prove whether he received them or not?—It would be a matter of memory. Mr. Warburton might be out of the office, and then I would hand them to Mr. Gavin or to some other responsible officer.

30. Whose duty is it to see to the printing of the debentures?—It is my duty, under the instructions of the Secretary.

31. Did you see to the printing of these debentures?—I did.

32. Can you tell the Committee when they were printed?—Between the 3rd and 4th June—printed in time for the date when the last instalment of loan was payable, and that was the 4th June.

33. Prior to that date had there been any discovery made or objection made to the words “Consolidated Fund” in lieu of “Public revenues of the colony” being on the face of the debentures?—Not prior to the 5th June.

34. *Mr. W. Fraser.*] To these debentures?—Not to the wording of any debentures.

35. *Mr. Graham.*] Had the Controller and Auditor-General signed the debenture forms prior to this date?—Certainly not.

36. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] When was the question first raised as to this imperfection on the face of the debentures?—About the middle of the month of June.

37. In the meantime these debentures had been printed and signed?—They were in course of signature.

38. Then, if it has been said that the discovery was made prior to the printing of the debentures, and we were requested to amend the form of debenture, and to print them as corrected, would that be correct?—It would not be correct. I can say that without doubt.

39. You say that about the middle of June was the first time that exception was taken to the wording of the debentures?—That is so; but it was not to the wording of these debentures. It was to the wording of other debentures under another Act—“The Land for Settlements Consolidation Act, 1900.”

40. Do you know anything about the time when the mail left?—The mail left on the 15th August, and it was the desire of the Secretary to the Treasury to get the debentures away that evening.

41. What was the latest time these debentures could have been signed and sent away?—If they had been signed that night they could have been sent away by the morning train.

42. Did any one report to you that they were not being signed?—There was no report to me, but I was aware of it. The matter lay between the Secretary, Mr. Smith, and the Auditor-General.

43. At all events, up to the morning of the 16th there would have been time for them to catch the morning train?—Yes.

44. It has been said by Mr. Warburton that he had no knowledge that there was urgency in the matter: do you know anything about the urgency?—I took them up on the 15th August for that purpose. They were hurried through owing to the urgency.

45. If you delivered them to Mr. Warburton, or to some other responsible officer of the Audit Office, would you state so?—I would say, “These are wanted to go by the mail.”

46. Have you any recollection that you did say so?—I have no absolute recollection, but I can hardly think that I did otherwise.