

he has to stand the consequences. I have given this matter a very great amount of consideration, and I do not see how we are going to improve on the system—it ought to be effective. There is no question about that, but it depends on the human machinery—there is the human equation all the time. We used to be told, “Well, there is a different standard set by Smith to that set by Brown.” Well, in order to provide against that we adopted the principle of sending round the heads of the branches, and they have specific instructions as to the conditions and requirements under which the review of the staff is to be made. They get the Foreman, they get the Station-master—at least, they get the principal ones—they get the reports of the others put before them, and I understand that they check every man in the service seriatim. If one man has been adversely reported on his record is looked up; if the man has served under six men during the year the six different reports are looked into and compared; questions are discussed and recommendations made. That is as far as you can go. I do not see what other method can be devised that is going to insure efficiency. Some people may think if you set up a Board and had half a dozen men travelling round it would be an improvement, but you would have nothing but trouble. You have got to rely on the men who are responsible and who are in immediate control of the people you are discussing; and I say, sir, that if the officers who are in control of the men would do the fair and square thing, that is all that is required. If there is any doubt about a man, say so—we can deal with the doubts. Instructions will be given, and the Head Office is quite prepared then to take all the responsibility for any decision it gives in respect to those matters. We are quite prepared in a case of that kind to uphold the responsible officers where they are doing the right thing, but we cannot uphold them where they are doing the wrong thing. If they make recommendations which result in injustices being done to men—that is, through increases being withheld without sufficient reason, or promotion being withheld when the man is qualified—then those people have to be taken to task; but, as I say, all the unpleasant work is passed on to Wellington. I do not see that I can say any more in reference to this subject, except that, whatever the defects, they are not the result of the system, but the result of the officers who are responsible for making recommendations, who have got men under them, and who ought to know the qualifications, not taking the trouble to make themselves thoroughly conversant with the qualifications of the men on whom they have got to report, or else shirking their duties.

19. Has the statement ever been made to you, has it ever been reported to you, or have you had a case in which a recommendation is not made because of personal feeling or jealousy between one officer and his subordinate?—Yes, that statement has been made, and it is not an altogether infrequent statement. In respect of that I might say this: that we go to no end of trouble in those cases to get right down to bed-rock. I am very glad you have asked that question, because I desire to make it perfectly clear from the Department's standpoint that it wants nothing of that kind. It wants the men to be dealt with fairly and equitably on their merits. I have a lot more instances here, but I quoted one case yesterday where the Head Office actually fought for four years. We wanted to be satisfied. The man was not next in order, so it did not affect his position, but he had been regularly recommended, and then all of a sudden there came an adverse recommendation. Well, the head of the Department said, “That is not good enough for me—I want to know why.” I believe it was two years, not four, but it was a long time. There was voluminous correspondence, and we did not concur in the recommendation until we got down to bed-rock and found that the man was not qualified. We satisfied ourselves beyond any doubt that the withholding of the recommendation in one year was *bona fide*. We did not let it go beyond that.

20. So that you have not discovered in any case where the reason was what I have just stated?—No, I cannot say we have discovered any case in which you could honestly say that the man suffered from any personal spleen.

21. But it may be possible?—Yes, but if it is brought under the notice of the Department, of course the matter is at once taken up, and if a man comes along and says he is not satisfied with So-and-so, in a good many cases one of our remedies is to transfer the man. If we think Smith has got a set on Brown and we find there are grounds for suspicion but cannot get proof we say, “Very well, we will give Smith a chance elsewhere.”

22. *Mr. Ennis.*] In regard to the instructions, Mr. McVilly, that were issued to officers to advise the men when not recommended for promotion, would they be issued to all the staff in charge of men?—The instructions are issued to every District Officer, and the District Officer is supposed to pass the instructions on.

23. It is not in the general Rules and Regulations of the Department?—It is a circular instruction issued by the Department in accordance with the common practice. Every instruction that is issued by the Department is not in the ordinary Rules and Regulations and Appendix; but this particular instruction was a circular instruction which was issued I think originally in 1903, and has been renewed from time to time by circular, and in many cases I have directed the attention of individual officers to the instruction by correspondence, and they have been suitably dealt with for not carrying it out.

24. Well, those District Officers may not have repeated that instruction to their subordinates?—They may not, but the position is that the Department takes it that District Officers who have instructions of that kind will transmit them to the men concerned.

25. But unless specially directed to transmit it they might not know they are expected to do so?—The trouble is that they generally transmit other instructions; some instructions which are intended to be private for District Officers are transmitted, and our general experience is that there is no difficulty of the kind you suggest.

26. Will you take my assurance that this instruction has not been transmitted to the staff generally?—At Invercargill?

27. Yes?—Well, I would be surprised if it has not. If it has not been it is not with the concurrence of the Department. If that instruction has not been transmitted, then the necessary steps would have been taken if the institute had directed attention to it, and I cannot call to mind that they have.