

26. I understood you to say that the Institute was content to leave the matter to the Department?—No, I said Parliament and the Department.

27. You say now that you have approached the Department and have never got any satisfaction. Now, is it not within your knowledge that the Department has from time to time considerably increased the staff at various stations with a view of enabling relief to be granted to the officers—that is, shortening the hours?—Yes, and in connection with that I will give the Department credit for having given one station relief very recently at the request of the institute, and that is Edendale. We preferred a request to the Department, I think, asking for relief from long hours at Edendale, where the officer was working at the rate of eleven hours and a half per day—I am, of course, quoting from memory—and when the secretary totalled up the hours it was found that the man had been working at the rate of 134 days extra per year at that station, for which he got no remuneration, taking the comparison of the Post and Telegraph hours. This man, unfortunately, before he got relief fell sick, and he was off duty for a little over three weeks, I think, and the balance of the time he was off was deducted from his annual leave. That is what that officer got for working 134 days extra that year. I think there was another station on the Main Trunk line where the Department met us and appointed extra staff.

28. Well, take this case of Edendale: you say that the alteration was made at the request of the institute?—Well, I know that the reply came back to the institute that it had been decided to increase the staff.

29. That is so; but that is in accordance with the usual practice of replying to anybody who makes a representation on a certain matter?—Yes.

30. But are you not aware that the Department had had that matter of Edendale under consideration?—We have the file here, and I will refer to it to show what took place. The following letter was sent by the institute to the General Manager: “11th October, 1910.—Sir,—I have the honour, by direction of the Executive Committee of the institute, to bring under your notice the long hours worked by the Stationmaster and clerk at Edendale, and to ask that something be done to reduce these officers’ hours of duty, and bring them within a reasonable limit. The present Railway staff consists of the Stationmaster and clerk and a porter. There is also a telegraph messenger at the station. It is impossible for one man to manage the postal and railway work, and consequently both the Stationmaster and clerk have to be on duty during the daytime. Their shifts (worked week about) are arranged as follows: Early shift—5.45 a.m. to 7.25 a.m., 1 hour 40 minutes; 8 a.m. to 12.50 p.m., 4 hours 50 minutes; 1.25 p.m. to 6.30 p.m., 5 hours 5 minutes: total, 11 hours 35 minutes. Late shift—8.20 a.m. to 11.55 a.m., 3 hours 35 minutes; 12.45 p.m. to 4.15 p.m., 3 hours 30 minutes; 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., 4 hours: total, 11 hours 5 minutes. These hours are increased at the end of the period, and also when late or early special trains are run. The work was continuous, and the hours of duty long, before the tablet apparatus was brought into use, and the instalment of the tablet, of course, has intensified the position. You are doubtless aware that, owing to the breaking-up of the large estates around Edendale during the past few years, the settlement in that district has largely increased, and that, as a natural sequence, the volume of the railway and postal work has been increased in proportion. The postal and telegraph work alone is very heavy. During the year ended 31st March, 1909, 9,490 telegrams and paid bureau calls were handled. Money-orders to the value of £2,691 7s. 6d. were issued, and over £676 worth paid. Savings-bank deposits totalled £4,138 15s. 11d.; withdrawals from the bank £2,585 5s. 9d. The sale of postal notes and stamps reached an amount of £1,284 4s. 8d. The Stationmaster placed details of his own and his clerk’s hours of duty before the District Traffic Manager at Invercargill in April last, when the tablet was about to be installed, and made a request for the addition to his staff of a cadet, which he stated would permit of a shift being worked that would reduce the senior men’s hours to a fair thing. The matter was under correspondence until the middle of July, when the Manager advised the Stationmaster as follows: ‘The General Manager advises that it is regretted the clerical staff at Edendale cannot be increased at present.’ The Stationmaster returned to the subject in August, only to be told by the District Traffic Manager that in view of your decision nothing further could be done. There appears to be no doubt that some additional assistance is required at this station, and my committee trust you will have the question thoroughly gone into, and that you will increase the clerical staff so that the desired relief can be arranged.” Then there was an undated letter from the General Manager which we received on the 26th October, 1910, as follows: “Head Office, Wellington.—Sir,—I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 11th instant in respect to the hours worked by the clerical staff at Edendale, and in reply have to inform you that this matter has received careful consideration, but I regret I cannot see my way to appoint additional staff at the station. It is considered that the present staff is ample to meet all requirements without working unduly long hours.—T. Ronayne, General Manager.” Then the institute wrote again to the General Manager: “21st December, 1910.—I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your undated letter No. 1910/2221/33999, in which you state that you cannot see your way to appoint additional staff at the Edendale Station. I would point out that the hours worked by the Stationmaster and clerk average eleven hours and one-third per day at ordinary times, and that the time cannot be considered intermittent, as the officers concerned are actually on duty and working for the full length of their respective shifts. The Stationmaster was recently compelled to take sick-leave (which has been deducted from his annual leave) on account of severe colds contracted whilst on duty, and aggravated by the long hours worked. Now that sick-leave is set against the annual leave due to officers, it seems unduly hard that a member should be expected to work the hours the officers at Edendale have to put in, and then, when off duty ill—practically as a result of overwork—lose the time off when his annual leave becomes due. You state that the staff at Edendale is sufficient to meet all requirements without working unduly long hours, but I would draw your attention to the fact that the Stationmaster’s representation to his district office, to the