

Minister. The interpretation placed on these regulations by the management of the Railway Department is that the Department is entitled to deduct all sick-leave from members' annual leave, irrespective of the time they are absent, and this interpretation they are strictly carrying out. Your petitioner submits that the just and equitable interpretation of these regulations is that a member is entitled under Regulation 56 to full pay when absent from duty owing to illness for any period up to four weeks, and that where the four weeks have expired and extended leave of absence has been granted the extended leave only should be deducted from the annual leave, so that an officer should receive the whole of his annual leave provided the period during which he has been absent on sick-leave does not exceed four weeks. That, owing to the interpretation placed by the Railway Department on Regulations 55 and 56, there are many cases where Railway officers have not received any leave for recreation purposes for three years. 13. That notwithstanding the fact that the duties of Railway officers are more exacting than those of officers in the Post and Telegraph Department, the hours of employment are considerably longer, and that no payment is received for overtime or any other special duty, yet only twelve days leave of absence is granted to them together with four departmental holidays, as against a maximum of thirty-three days to officers in the Post and Telegraph Department." If we refer to Schedule E, "Comparison of Leave granted to Post and Telegraph Officers and to Railway Officers," we find—"Post and Telegraph: For each complete year's service—To officers who have service for fifteen years and upwards, twenty-one working-days; also New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Sovereign's Birthday, Dominion Day, Christmas Day, and the day following, seven days: total twenty-eight days. To officers who have served less than fifteen years, fourteen working days; and departmental holidays as above, seven days: total twenty-one days. No deduction is made from the above leave unless the total intermittent leave during the previous twelve months has exceeded five days, and absence from illness or accident has exceeded one week. In cases of illness or other pressing necessity the Minister may grant to any officer such extended leave, not exceeding twelve months, and on such terms as he thinks fit. The Governor may, on the recommendation of the Minister, grant to any officer in the Department of at least ten year's continuous service twelve months' leave of absence, and to any officer of lesser period of service any time not exceeding six months' leave of absence on half salary. During such period of absence no officer shall be entitled to receive any annual increment. Railway: To officers of any length of service, in each calendar year, twelve working-days; Christmas Day, Good Friday, Labour Day, Sovereign's Birthday, four days: total, sixteen days, less any time off sick. Subject to the production of medical certificate any officer is entitled to full pay when absent from duty owing to illness for any period up to four weeks. No further payment can be made without the authority of the Minister. No member who is absent on extended sick-leave is considered eligible for promotion during the period of such absence. In the event of members being off sick for periods totalling over two months in any one year their scale increases are withheld for a corresponding period of time." Now, gentlemen, we contend that if you compare those two lists of annual leave and sick-leave you will find we are not getting sufficient leave considering that we have to work longer hours and do not get payment for overtime. A reference to Schedule E will show that until recently officers in the Post and Telegraph Department with a service of fifteen years or upwards were granted twenty-one working-days and seven departmental holidays, and officers of under fifteen years' service fourteen working-days and seven departmental holidays each year. The Railway officer is granted twelve working-days each year in addition to four departmental holidays. Since the petition was presented to the House an alteration has been made in the regulations governing the leave of Post and Telegraph officers. The period of annual leave, however, remains unaltered, the principal alteration being the omission of any mention of the seven departmental holidays previously allowed, and the substitution of three and two weeks respectively for twenty-one and fourteen working-days. The comparison is now reduced to a matter of weeks instead of days, and you will see that, putting departmental and statutory holidays apart for the moment, the Railway officer of over fifteen years' service is granted exactly one week less annual leave than the Postal officer receives. Three of the four statutory holidays are extremely busy work-days for the majority of the officers of the Railway service, whereas the exact opposite is the case in respect of the Postal official. We are certainly still desirous that our leave regulations should be brought into line with those of the Post and Telegraph Department. In support of our request that Railway officers be granted the same period of leave as Postal officers, it is necessary to bring under your notice the fact that, while the work of the Railway officer is as important as, and of a more exposed and dangerous nature than, that of the Postal officer, the hours of duty in the Traffic Branch of the Railway service are longer than the hours in the Postal service. Under the regulations, any time that an officer is absent from duty owing to sickness is counted against his period of annual leave due. This bears very hardly on our members, particularly so in the case of those located at isolated stations in the country. The Minister of Railways has stated that owing to serious malingering on the part of the staff it became absolutely necessary to take drastic steps, and paragraph 55 of the regulations was presumably the outcome of the Minister's conviction on the matter. Is it equitable or even justifiable to make the whole suffer for the few? We admit there may possibly be a few malingerers, but the statement of the Minister is in our opinion of far too sweeping a nature. Now, gentlemen, to explain the position a little more fully, if an officer of the Railway Department is off for one day on sick-leave, that is taken off his annual leave in every case, and the officer may lose his leave for a number of years. We have a case where a man's fellow-officers offered to forego a day each off their annual leave so as to allow an officer in our Department who had had no leave for two years to obtain fifteen days' leave in the third year. I might say that the District Officer said he considered the spirit shown by these men was commendable, yet although the Department was going to lose nothing they refused to allow those officers to forego that day so that their colleague who had been suffering ill health for some considerable time and had been off each year