

*Mr. Gray:* Before my friend passes on I would like to remind him that censorship does not originate with the Post Office. The Post Office cannot interfere with the circulation of any paper except in the cases specifically provided for by the Post and Telegraph Act, or where directed to do so by the Censor.

*Mr. Ostler:* I quite understand, but the point I am making is that the Post Office has refused to answer why this disloyal literature is allowed to go through uncensored while the literature of loyal Protestants is censored; therefore it seems that the censorship is in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church.

Fourthly, we have proved that because the Protestant Association sees real danger to its liberties in the political activities of the organization responsible for that sort of thing, and because the Protestant Political Association organizes for the defence of its liberties and issues a pamphlet containing facts or deductions generally admitted to be true in the Protestant Press in England, the Solicitor-General, on the complaint of some flabby politician, takes upon himself, upon being merely asked to advise, to think that the literature is mischievous—that it is mischievous, to use plain speech, to say that disloyalty is disloyalty—and he unlawfully directs the censorship not only of the literature, but of the sealed letters addressed to and sent out by that body.

Fifthly, we have proved that under his direction letters have been illegally detained and opened—because the Censor, although he was not permitted to say almost anything, did admit that he opened letters—and in some cases money that had been posted to this association had been held back—he refused to say what had been done with it. In fact, one must say that the gentleman who conducts the business of the Postal Censor in Auckland was an exceedingly well-tutored gentleman—he was not permitted to say anything which would throw any light on the matter at all. We have proved, at any rate, that the letters addressed to this box have been opened, and that they were kept back, and that money in them is kept back; what is done with it we are not permitted to learn. If this is insufficient to prove that the censorship is in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church, then I do not know what is. I say, sir, considering the facts which I say we have proved, if this is not proof sufficient that the censorship is in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church I do not know what more we could prove. All I know is that the great majority of the people of this country will never believe otherwise in the face of this evidence.

With regard to Mr. Williamson's evidence, I submit that makes the matter more extraordinary still. This officer was so zealous in the performance of his duties that he was able to anticipate by a clear fortnight the instructions of his Head Office.

*Mr. Gray:* He said he had had the file sent to him.

*Mr. Ostler:* We have it that on the 23rd or 24th March he put an order in the order-book ordering that the letters—that is, the correspondence—of the persons using this box should be submitted to censorship, and Mr. Morris did not direct him in writing to do so until the 5th or 6th April—a fortnight later. I am quite willing to admit that Mr. Williamson acted in good faith in the matter; I do not wish to impugn Mr. Williamson's good faith in any way; but I say it was an absolutely illegal act, and a very serious illegal act, committed by Mr. Williamson without any instructions from the Military Censor at all, and it is quite clear that there were no instructions on the 23rd March to open the correspondence of people using this box. Mr. Williamson gives this reason—I do not want to be unfair to him in any way—he gives the reason that he could not ascertain what was literature unless he opened the letters. Now, that is a reason which might appeal to the man in the street that knows nothing about postal matters. Surely it is not a reason which should appeal to a Postal officer of over forty years' experience. He must know the sacred nature of sealed letters, and if he had read that instruction by the Censor of the 18th December carefully he ought to have been aware that when the Censor orders the censorship of circulars issuing from this association it is quite a different thing from ordering that the correspondence addressed to or coming from that particular box was to be held up, opened, and retained. That is all I have to say on what I have treated as the first charge—that is, that a military censorship had been established over this box in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church.

On the second charge we have proved that some forty-five letters addressed to ministers were posted on Friday night, the 6th July. It was admitted they were posted in time for delivery on Saturday morning. Two we have proved were never delivered at all. The Post Office has made no attempt to meet that charge. That surely is a serious matter.

*Mr. Gray:* Have you proved they were posted?

*Mr. Ostler:* Yes, two witnesses have proved the posting of those letters. Two separate ministers have said they did not receive their notices at all. Now, that is two in forty-five, an average of something like nearly 5 per cent. If the average which is stated in the Post Office return to Parliament of one error in practically half a million letters due to errors in the Post Office is correct, then 5 per cent. is something a little bit unusual. To put it in decimal figures, as Mr. Williamson put it, whereas the average they have found of errors due to Postal officers is 0.000,002, the average in this case is 0.05. The rest of these letters, we have proved, were delivered on Monday, except two or three which were delivered on Tuesday morning. With regard to Mr. Garland's and Mr. Macdonald's evidence, I quite agree with my friend there may be room for saying they were really delivered on Monday and not got until Tuesday; but in regard to the Rev. Reuben Bailey's letter there can be no mistake about that, because there is a note on the envelope, which he states he put on it the next morning, that he did not get it until Tuesday morning. Seeing that, for the reasons I have given in reference to the first charge, the censorship was not imposed by the Censor at all but by the Solicitor-General, and was therefore illegal, it must follow that these letters were illegally detained.