

439. Do you consider that the telegrams to which you refer were strictly upon public service, or merely for the personal information of Ministers?—I never allowed any telegram to be franked unless I considered it strictly upon public service, either to or from me. *Hon. W. Gisborne.*
12th Oct., 1871.

440. Was the public service, in your opinion, benefitted by the franking of those telegrams?—That is a difficult question to answer literally. I considered it was for the good of the public service that they should be franked, because they related to the public service, but whether the result was a benefit I cannot tell. It was for the good conduct of the public service that they should be franked. There have been very few. I do not suppose I have franked twenty.

441. You have never authorised telegrams to be franked that were not strictly upon public service?—It was my belief that they were on public service or I would not have franked them.

442. You have not franked any that were of a personal character only?—No, and none upon merely electioneering matters. I do not remember ever to have franked a telegram not connected with the public service.

443. Do you think it would be justifiable for Ministers to telegraph free to the editors of newspapers to promote their own party views in a political sense?—I do not think it would be an advisable course to pursue, to make the public pay for it.

444. Do you not think it would be a violation of the telegraph rules and regulations?—Which rule do you refer to?

445. That no person shall have free use of the telegraph: that all telegrams shall be paid for.—A case might occur in which a grave misstatement had been made in the newspapers affecting the conduct of the public service or affecting the conduct of Ministers, and it would be justifiable for a Minister to contradict it in a franked telegram as much as it would be to do so in a letter upon public service. I think that for mere election or party purposes a Minister would not be justified—I should not feel justified in doing so.

446. You think it should be done when necessary for the defence of any public department, or when relating to the whole public service but not for party purposes?—The telegraph has not existed long, and there has only been one general election since it was established, and there is no precedent one way or another. I understand that in England and Australia the Governments use the telegraph for electioneering purposes. I am not aware of that as a fact, but I have heard so.

447. Would you have any objection to produce telegrams authorised by you to be franked?—There have been very few, and I cannot remember any particular instance of having franked a telegram to a person not an official, for those sent have been spread over a long time. I do not know any that I could refer the Committee to. Some are recorded in my office and they could be produced, others are not recorded, and I am unable to mention the dates, and could not produce them unless the telegraph manager could find them out for me.

448. The Committee understand that without a re-perusal of these telegrams you are unable to say yes or no?—They have passed out of my recollection, and the dates are not recorded in my office. There have been but a few, and I cannot recollect either the date or subject. I should not be able to direct the telegraph manager how to find them out.

449. Do you know anything of an accusation made against the department about a telegram from Hokitika in 1870?—I was not conducting the department then. I know nothing of my own knowledge, only what I have heard from the General Manager.

450. If the Committee express an opinion that franking should be confined to telegrams of a purely official character, do you think any Ministry in office would respect such an expression of opinion if assented to by the House?—If you mean by official telegrams those recorded in a public office, I think the public service would be injured by such a rule, because there are telegrams relating to matters intimately connected with the public service that could not be recorded or produced. No Government could be carried on unless Ministers received confidential communications, and that is especially the case with reference to Native affairs.

451. Do you take “official” to mean upon the public business of the country though not on the records?—Yes.

452. Attaching that sense to the word “official,” do you believe it would be the duty of Ministers to respect any expression of opinion by the Legislature that the franking of telegrams should be confined to matters of an official character?—Yes.

Mr. Gisborne withdrew.

The Hon. Donald M'Lean, Native and Defence Minister, in attendance, and examined on oath.

Hon. D. M'Lean.

453. *The Chairman*]. Have you authorised any telegram, received by or sent from you, from or to any person not being a public officer, and not on public service, to go free?—I am not aware of any instance in which I have authorised a telegram to go free except upon public service. When I have asked a question upon Native affairs—for instance, telegraphed a question to the Bishop of Waiapu—I have ordered replies to be free altogether. As a rule, I state on such a telegram, “reply free.” But those telegrams were always strictly relating to the public service.

12th Oct., 1871.

454. The Committee give a very large latitude to the term “public service,” and bring under that designation information and communications made, although not placed on the public records; for valuable information of a more or less confidential character would not be supplied unless those who gave it knew that it would be kept secret, especially so in Native affairs; but the Committee wish to know whether you would include in the term “official” matters of purely party importance, such as elections?—I may state distinctly that I have no knowledge of any instance of telegrams referring to elections that were not paid for. I paid for my own, because I looked upon them as private telegrams.

455. Excepting upon matters which really affected the administration of the Government—not upon political questions—but as a matter of State service, you have never authorised any telegrams to be sent free?—I don't recollect any. I have allowed very considerable latitude to Natives. I have