

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 5TH AUGUST, 1879.

Dr. LEMON sworn and examined.\*

Dr. Lemon.

August 5, 1879.

1. *The Acting Chairman* (Mr. Stevens).] Dr. Lemon, will you make a general statement of the present position of the Telegraph Department with respect to the Press of the colony?—The Press rates in force in the day-time are a halfpenny per word up to 5 p.m.; that is, one-half the ordinary rate. There is this exception: that the evening papers throughout the colony have the right to have 1,500 words transmitted at evening rates during the day up to 5 p.m. The evening rate is 1s. per 100 words. For every word over 1,500 the evening papers pay one halfpenny. Between the hours of 5 a.m. and 10 p.m. the Press rate is 1s. for every 100 words. After that time the local offices are closed to the public, except in the case of a member's speech being delivered, or any other important event transpiring, when the office is kept open to telegraph it. We have two wires leased—one to the Press Association, and the other to the Press Agency. These wires commence at Auckland, and pass from here through all the chief centres to Invercargill, with the exception of the Bluff. When the Australian mail is expected, the officer there has to be on duty in case the steamer should arrive late at night. During the session the hours for keeping open the special wire are extended to 2 a.m., up to which hour telegrams can be handed in by Press men, and they are sent so far as time permits. The price we get from each association is £2,000 per annum, payable monthly in advance. Those are the whole of the Press arrangements with the Telegraph Department in the colony.

2. *Mr. McLean.*] There are written agreements with those Press Associations? Yes; written agreements with each.

3. When does that terminate?—Two years from the 1st January, 1879.

4. Have you been able, consistently with the duty of the department to the public, to afford them two special wires for the hours you have mentioned?—In most cases; but not in places like Grahamsown. It involves additional staffs.

5. Can ordinary messages be sent in the same time as before these agreements were entered into with the associations? When in Auckland I have got telegrams from Dunedin that had been sent three hours previously. I used to get them in half an hour, or forty minutes at the outside.—I myself recollect when they were sent much quicker than now.

5A. Have you estimated the time it takes for all these telegrams to get through? Take the time before these agreements came into operation—are you able to afford ordinary telegrams the same facilities for quick despatch now as then?—With this difference. You must understand that the limit for evening papers used to be 500 words. During last session it was increased to 1,000 words; and in the following recess, on account of the morning papers having the special wires, it was increased to 1,500 words, or three times the old amount.

6. In what position do ordinary messages stand as to precedence with Press messages, under the arrangement of special wires?—When the wires are all working right, we send ordinary messages in the ordinary course. When some of the wires are deranged, we take the special wires to clear the ordinary work. We have a proviso in the agreements to that effect. If some of our wires are out of order during the day, we take their wires during the night-time, and give the lessees of the wire a rebate.

7. How much has that rebate amounted to during the last six months?—Very trifling; I think it would not be more than £150 or £200 at most.

8. Do you keep these two special wires especially at the use of these two associations for the hours you have named?—Yes.

9. Do you know how many papers there are in the Press Association—how many contribute to the £2,000?—No; I could not tell you. The offices are kept open at all the centres.

10. Can you not tell us from that?—During the last three or four months they have been hanging.

11. Well, say in January last?—There was then one at Invercargill, one at Oamaru, one at Dunedin, one at Timaru, one at Christchurch, one at Wellington, one at Napier, and one at Auckland. That was in the Press Association. In the Press Agency at the same time there was none at Auckland, one at Wellington, one at Christchurch, one at Dunedin, and one at Invercargill. I will not be sure about the last.

12. Do you know as a fact that two newspapers are laying out and standing the cost of one of those wires, £2,000, and that all the other papers are standing the cost of the other one? Has that come to your knowledge?—Yes; the *Press* in Christchurch is bearing the principal part of the £2,000.

13. Do you consider an arrangement just that compels two newspapers to pay £2,000, while all the others together have only to contribute £2,000?—If I answer that question I may be traversing the opinions of the Government. If you will read my memorandum you will see my views on the matter.

14. But you admit that it is so. What will remedy this state of things? What do you suggest as arrangements by which you could keep faith with the public and transmit their telegrams within the ordinary space of time—that is, in the time it took before these arrangements came into force?—You are dealing with two classes of newspapers.

15. I ask you first exclusively as to evening papers, and then to consider the arrangements which you would make as to morning papers? Would you consider, so far as morning papers are concerned, that it would be better if the department, in the interest of the papers themselves, should make arrange-

\* Some of the shorthand reporter's notes of questions and answers could not be touched without re-writing the whole.—C.L.