

535. I think it would be likely to upset the whole arrangements, and be one of the most troublesome concessions we could give.—As a rule day-messages do not average anything like 100 words each. The average is really about fifty words.

536. Yes; but if you had such a privilege as this, we know what agents are: they would rush off with an urgent message just at the last moment, and the greater part of the evening-paper messages would not be in time for press, unless made urgent.—The great safeguard against this would be that it would not suit the evening papers at all. There is hardly any paper which could set a lot of messages after 2 o'clock. If the agents attempted to do that, it would act as badly for the papers as for the Telegraph Department, and would soon be put a stop to.

537. I do not think it could possibly work.—It might be limited to the four principal towns.

538. Even then I fancy there would be continual confusion as to the amount of matter which had a right to go through.—It might be open to abuse in that way; but the experiment might be tried.

539. The 1,500 words they get would be equal to a column and a half of ordinary measure, would it not?—Yes—set out with headings.

540. Then, in addition, they have the right to copy from the morning papers?—Yes.

541. So that altogether, under the present arrangement, the evening papers can get something like three or four columns of matter a day?—Of telegraphic matter; but not all original.

542. They can get from one to two columns sent them. Is that not a fair amount in proportion to the quantity of reading-matter?—I think it is a fair amount; but, as a matter of fact, they do not get anything like the 1,500 words every day. Except on mail days, or the arrival of Australian steamers, they do not get anything like that.

543. There is one point you laid stress upon—as to the quality of the matter—about agents being so careful. I saw, from somewhere in the North the other day, you had a telegram of about ten lines announcing that at a masonic lodge meeting a jewel had been presented. Is not that trash?—Yes. An evening paper sent it, and we had to pay for it. I wrote a letter about it at the time to the agent.

*Mr. Shephard:* Then, if a man gets drunk and falls down in the street and breaks his finger, that is telegraphed. These kind of telegrams are habitual.

544. *Mr. Bain.*] I wish to ask if the large expense incurred by your Association was not incurred in running off a rival association?—I do not think so. A very large expenditure was necessarily incurred in establishing the Association, and the rivalry no doubt involved considerable expenditure; but it tended to establish the business much better than if it had been unopposed from the first.

545. *Mr. Barron.*] Is this entrance-fee absolutely necessary in order to pay the annual expenses?—The subscriptions are supposed to cover the actual expenses. The whole of the entrance-fees coming in would go into a general fund, and, if there was a surplus, the following year the subscriptions would be reduced all round.

Mr. J. CHANTREY HARRIS examined.

546. *The Chairman.*] We understand, Mr. Harris, that you wish to give evidence in this matter?—What is the object of the inquiry?

547. We are to inquire what further facilities can be given to the public Press for the use of the telegraph?—You do not go into the present system?

548. We are quite willing to listen to any statement you like to make?—Is it with regard to the present system, Mr. Chairman? Of course, there are a great many rumours outside of what is going on in this Committee; and I have heard that a series of propositions have been put with regard to telegrams supplied to morning papers, and the question of profit and loss to the department. I thought I would like to give you my opinion as to the working of the system so far as concerns my own paper.

549. It opens up the whole question of the present system, and what will be best for the future?—With regard to the present system, there seems to be an idea that the subscription paid by the morning papers to the special wire constitutes the major part of their contributions. That is a mistake. I went through my books this morning to ascertain at what rate we paid, and I find, besides the monthly subscription to the special wire (which amounts to £16 10s.), we pay at the rate of from £5 to £13 per month in what we term “payments over the counter”—that is, for messages at half day rates. We also pay from £6 to £12 per month for what we term “Press telegrams;” and here comes in our connection with the evening papers. They receive so much per day, for which they pay so much; but if telegrams come through the Association too late for the evening papers, the Association puts them on one side and sends them to us, and we have to take these telegrams and pay Press rates for them: so that, altogether, the yearly average is between £600 and £700 for telegraph charges. This is no slight drain upon a morning paper. I certainly do not think the Government would be justified in increasing our cost, because, in the first place, we are already paying heavily; and, secondly, because there is no morning paper in the colony that is really paying. After all said and done, considering the time we have the special wire (from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.), and that it is the wish of the Association not to send extraneous matter, the price we pay is, I think, ample. And, moreover, we do not want to occupy the wire during the whole of the time, but only so long as is necessary to send the day's news through. If, therefore, the Government thought proper, they might utilize the wire in other directions than for Press messages. I hear that certain proposals have been made with regard to changing the form of contribution from that of running the special wire—namely, charging so much per word. I do not think that would be fair to the papers or beneficial to the public. It might possibly be more profitable to the department; but then I take it, with regard to the public Press, the Government should give some slight consideration to public convenience, and afford the Press every facility to give the public as much and as late news as possible, provided it can be done without loss. I am not prepared to make any definite proposal as to what the Association would be prepared to do. If there was a meeting of the Association, I should advocate paying more if the present rate is unprofitable to the department; provided, if we have the special wire, there is no