

MONDAY, 29TH MARCH, 1909.

Mr. T. RONAYNE, General Manager of Railways, re-examined. (No. 27.)

1. *The Chairman.*] It has been stated by a witness (the Hon. Mr. Jenkinson) that he has obtained from you concessions for railwaymen without their knowledge. Is this correct?—Mr. Jenkinson saw me on several occasions. He made certain suggestions regarding concessions to boilermakers. In some cases they were considered reasonable and were given effect to.

2. The same witness has stated that the Workshops foremen are robbed of full power by the Classification and Superannuation Acts and by the existence of the Railway Appeal Board. Do you consider this to be the case?—Foremen have power to suspend men from duty. They have not got the power to dismiss. Their position regarding the Classification Act as defined by Mr. Jenkinson is not quite understood. Every year each man in every workshop has his position reviewed. By way of illustration, say a boilermaker's work and value are being dealt with—the foreman boilermaker, the Workshops Manager, the Locomotive Engineer, and the Chief Mechanical Engineer sit as a board, and his claims for an increment or promotion are discussed and fixed for the D.—3.

3. Do I understand from you that there is a board that is cognisant of every man's position?—I may call it a "board." It is practically a board. It is the usual practice in all departments. The Maintenance Branch and the Traffic Branch follow precisely the same course which I am now illustrating as pertaining to the Locomotive Branch. The decision of the board, being duly certified to by each member of the board, is in due course forwarded to me, and if the recommendations are in accordance with the Act they are given effect to. The recommendations vary in character. In some cases the man's pay may be reduced, or he may be considered unfit for retention in the service. Should a man be retired or reduced in pay, assuming in all cases that he is on the permanent staff—not a "casual" hand—and a contributor to the Superannuation Fund, he may go to the Appeal Board for redress. Should he do so, the Department would probably call the foreman as a witness to justify his action and give reasons for his recommendations. In general practice it is found that foremen do not shirk their duty in this respect. It is possible that a foreman may recommend a man and overlook his deficiencies rather than appear before the Appeal Board, but, with the close supervision which is exercised by the Workshops Manager and the Locomotive Engineer, such a contingency I consider a very remote one and not likely to occur.

4. Statements have been made by witnesses alleging inefficiency in what is known as the staff system. Will you describe this system, and give your experience of its working, and the reasons for its adoption and retention?—To a certain extent I have already described the system, but I will give it in a more elaborate and lengthy form:—

In order to remove any misapprehension that may exist as to the necessity of concentrating the staff arrangements in connection with the Railway Department as a result of the statements made by Mr. Jackson when giving evidence before the Board, it will be as well to outline the system and the reasons which made its adoption absolutely necessary.

It was the practice for many years to allow officers in charge of districts, Workshops, and large stations at which a number of men were employed to engage, on their own responsibility, any men who were required to fill vacancies that occurred on their respective staffs. It was, however, found that this system did not work satisfactorily. Men who were considered unsuitable for employment in one locality would not infrequently go to another and be taken on without proper inquiry being made as to their qualifications and eligibility. This resulted in there being no properly recognised, well-defined standard. The same difficulties were found to exist in connection with the retiring of men, or their punishment for offences committed against the regulations, or dereliction of duty. Some officers went to the extreme and inflicted severe penalties, which, in many cases, were not justifiable and were out of all proportion to the offence committed. Others again took an extremely lenient view, and passed over in the lightest manner grave breaches of the regulations which should have been met by severe punishment, and in respect to which dismissal would, in some cases, have been justifiable. As the Railway business expanded and the staff increased it became more and more apparent that this system of engaging and dealing with men for offences committed against the regulations could not be satisfactorily followed, and it was essential that a standard governing the admission of men into the service should be set up, and a proper system adopted for the general control of the staff throughout the Dominion. The larger the staff the more necessary it became to alter the system in such a way as to insure the whole of the regulations governing the admission of the staff into the service being properly carried out. In connection with this I may say that, the Superannuation Act having been passed, it became more necessary than ever that the qualifications of persons joining the service should be very severely criticized. As long ago as 1889 the staff appointments were practically concentrated at the Wellington headquarters, and since 1896 they have been governed by the regulations made under the Government Railways Classification Act. All applications for employment are duly recorded, and applicants, in order to be eligible for permanent employment, must be of certain age, able to pass medical test, be a certain height according to age, have certain educational qualifications according to the positions they are to fill, and, if tradesmen, possess the necessary degree of expertness at their calling.

The Workshops staff comprises three sections—viz.,—

(a.) The permanent staff.

(b.) Term and regular casuals—that is, men who have made application for employment in the ordinary course in accordance with the regulations. These men are engaged for certain periods according to the amount of work that is available or in sight, and, if they are eligible and satisfactory in every respect, are employed in order of application, and may ultimately be attached to the permanent staff.