

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

INVERCARGILL, WEDNESDAY, 7TH JULY, 1909.

GEORGE SCANDRETT, Constable, examined on oath. (No. 1.)

Witness: I joined the Police Force eight years ago. I was stationed for a few weeks in Dunedin, and was then transferred to the Bluff. After six months' duty there I was transferred to Invercargill and from there to Gore. After three years' duty there I was transferred to Gladstone, where I am stationed at present. At a meeting of the Invercargill police I was appointed delegate to give evidence before the Commission on certain matters. I propose to give evidence on generalities only. In the first place, we consider the pay insufficient; we think the service a very dangerous one. In quite recent cases constables have been wounded and stabbed. There is also the danger of disease through transferring cases of fever or blood-poisoning and recovering and handling dead bodies. Then there is great need of respectability in the Force. If the men wish to be respected by the public they must be well dressed and live in respectable localities. Again, the cost of living has become very much higher than it was seven years ago. It was found necessary some years ago to increase the old-age pension from 7s. 6d. to 10s., and on that occasion the Premier said that 7s. 6d. in 1899 was equivalent to 10s. in 1906 in purchasing-power. Then there is the matter of house-rent. A married constable must live convenient to the fire-bell, and in consequence of having to live in the centre of the town he has to pay a much higher rent for a suitable house than he otherwise would. A fair rental in Invercargill is about 14s., whereas 7s. only is allowed for house-allowance. If a constable went farther afield he would be out of hearing of the fire-bell, and would be probably fined for non-attendance, while he received no extra pay for duty at the fire. I have made a few comparisons with other departments in this respect. Gaol warders' house-allowance was raised two years ago from £20 to £30; they are now receiving 11s. 3d. a week, as against a constable's 7s. and a sergeant's 10s. 6d.; and warders may live where they choose. In respect to uniform clothing, we pay for the making-up of our own uniforms. The average cost for the full uniform is about £2 10s. In some cases it may be less, and in others more. We are allowed a tunic every eighteen months, and trousers every nine months. With other items of clothing, such as the shako, we are supplied free, with the exception of boots, the average cost of the latter being about £2 2s. a year. A gaol-warder has a tunic every twelve months and boots and trousers every six months, all free of cost. In respect to travelling-allowance and railway concessions, the police have all railway inquiries to make and the prosecuting of all their by-law cases; they have a very considerable amount of work to do for the Railway Department, and we are of opinion that since we do so much for them we should be allowed some concession, especially when travelling on leave. I would suggest that the police should be allowed a free pass once a year to where they are going on holiday leave. In consequence of police duties being most pressing in the holiday season, we cannot take advantage of the cheap railway holiday-fares, and even when we are travelling on leave we are liable to be called on for duty. Railway employees get a free annual pass, and their wives and families travel once a month at quarter-rates. In respect to teachers, also, I understand they have a free pass from the Friday to the Monday morning in order to attend technical classes. They are only compelled to attend two classes, and the rest of the Saturday and Sunday they have free. We are allowed 10s. a day travelling-allowance when on transfer or on duty away from home. We consider that hardly sufficient. Other departments are allowed more.

1. *Mr. Dinzie.*] In the matter of rent, how long were you in the Force before you were in charge of a station?—Five years.

2. So that for five years you were free from rent?—Yes.

3. In regard to uniform, you know that alterations have been made recently by which uniforms are provided more frequently than before?—Yes.

4. And there are no complaints as regards uniforms lasting out their time?—There have been cases where there has been a shortage, but in those cases the matter has been rectified.

5. Boots and socks and underclothing are supplied from Headquarters at wholesale price?—Yes.

6. Do you know that applications have been made to the Railways in regard to concessions for travelling?—You have told us that that has been done by yourself.

7. And the reply was that the Railway Department could not see its way to grant the concession?—Yes, I understood so.

8. *The Commissioner.*] You associate with the men generally?—Yes, I am a good deal with them.

9. How, in your opinion, do the men at present in the Force compare in general conduct with those at the time you joined?—I have not been much outside Invercargill, but I should say the conduct here seems exemplary, and everything seems to work very smoothly.

10. Is the men's physique satisfactory?—Yes.

11. Have you remarked any increase or otherwise of insobriety amongst members of the Force?—I know nothing of that nature here: there was one constable removed some time ago for insobriety.