

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER, 1909.

WILLIAM HARRINGTON ATACK, Manager New Zealand Press Association, examined. (No. 1.)

The Chairman: Will you be good enough to make a statement, Mr. Atack?

Witness: I wish to lay before the Committee the difficulties that will arise from the Local Time Bill from the point of view of the newspaper Press of the Dominion. I shall commence by saying that we are already 1 hour 35 minutes ahead of Australia, which, of course, means that when it is noon in Australia it is 1.35 p.m. in New Zealand. Consequently, if you put on the clocks one hour we shall then be 2 hours and 35 minutes ahead of Australian time, and upon that, unfortunately, in a large measure depends the efficacy and promptness of the cable service of the New Zealand papers. You see we get all our cables, both of English and Australian news, *via* Australia, and therefore we are dependent on Australian time. The main difficulty will be with Australian news. The extension of one hour would prevent our obtaining certain news, especially on Saturday nights, which the public and the newspapers expect, such as the progress of test cricket-matches, championship sculling-races, football-matches with New Zealand teams outside New South Wales. Other news of the same character will be rendered more difficult to obtain, or will be delayed, or may miss New Zealand altogether. Roughly speaking, no results of Australian races—by which I mean the leading Australian races, which are run at about 4.30 or 5 o'clock—will arrive in time on Saturday nights, as the New Zealand telegraph-offices shut at 8 o'clock, and consequently the messages cannot be distributed to the New Zealand papers if they do not reach the cable-station at Wakapuaka by that hour. We already have very great difficulty indeed on occasion in getting this news over, and the public of New Zealand have been educated to expect it. As the Committee are aware, they are a very sport-loving community indeed, and on such occasions as test cricket-matches, or football-matches, or sports of any sort there are always crowds round the newspaper-offices eagerly awaiting this news. Already they are quite sufficiently impatient at the delay that occurs, and I do not know what they would say to having to wait an extra hour or being shut out altogether. I might add that that difficulty could be got over so far as Saturday night is concerned if the Government—provided this Bill were passed—would agree to open the local telegraph-offices later than 8 o'clock. At present they shut them at 8 o'clock; consequently no news arriving after 8 can be distributed at all. If the Government would open the offices till 9 or 10 the difficulty of distributing the news would disappear, but, of course, the late arrival would still be there. In addition to this, all the news would be delayed generally one hour. For instance, the day before yesterday the Melbourne Cup, which is an event of considerable importance in the sporting world, was run. The result of that and similar races at present reaches New Zealand at about 5.45. With this Bill in operation that news would all be delayed for an hour, not arriving till 6.45. Now, with respect particularly to the effect of this Bill upon the morning papers of New Zealand: the bulk of the English cables that appear in the New Zealand morning papers reach Australia at night, whence they are sent on to New Zealand. These already reach us very late, and in future some will probably be cut out altogether, and, of course, the whole of them will be delayed an hour. In order to obtain the full news in the past it has been necessary to make a special arrangement with the Government of New Zealand at considerable cost—we pay them £400 a year for doing it; formerly we paid a good deal more—to open the telegraph-offices here after midnight to enable these messages to catch the morning papers. That expenditure will be largely wasted. We shall still, unfortunately, have to get the offices opened, because by putting on the clock an hour it simply means that the messages will be delayed an hour, and, while one hour's will be cut out, the hour's previous to that will come at the time the last messages previously came. We shall still, therefore, have to pay this subsidy to the Government, but shall get one hour's less news than we are getting now. I may say that it is already a great tax upon the morning newspapers of the Dominion to have to wait so late, because they have to keep their men waiting and all their lights going very often solely waiting for these midnight cables; and the addition of an hour would be practically fatal to many of them, because they have to catch the early trains, and it would simply mean they would have to go without a certain proportion of the news which they now give the public and which in many cases the public expect to see in the morning papers. Then, much of the Australian news that they now receive will be cut out altogether. Australia is a very large country, and it is not easy to collect the news of important occurrences in good time. Very often we are pressed for time as it is. For instance, the proceedings of the Commonwealth Parliament at Melbourne late at night will never reach the New Zealand morning papers, as far as I can see, with the addition of an extra hour. And as for news from distant portions, like Western Australia or South Australia, it would practically cut out very nearly everything, I should think, for that news has to go over many hundreds—in some cases thousands—of miles of wire before it can reach Sydney, which is the distributing-point. With regard to the effect of this Bill upon the evening papers of the Dominion, we already find it very difficult to get messages to the evening papers in good time, even though the staff in our Sydney office starts work at 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning. A portion