

(a.) *Whether correspondence addressed to post-office box No. 912 at Auckland has been corruptly or improperly suppressed or detained by the officers of the Post Office.*

This is an extension of the charge made by the Rev. Howard Elliott as set out in the original Commission—namely, that certain circular notices posted at Auckland on or about the 6th day of July, 1917, relative to a meeting to be held at Auckland by the Protestant Political Association, were corruptly or improperly suppressed or detained by the officers of the Post Office.

The evidence shows that about 2,500 envelopes had been posted containing circulars advising people to whom they were addressed of the fact that a public meeting would be held on a given date, and inviting the addressees to apply for tickets of admission. Of these 2,500 envelopes, nine of the persons to whom they were addressed received them empty, and two did not receive them at all.

If I were to take the evidence on these points as absolutely reliable and conclusive, I should still consider that the shortages were trifling out of so very many posted; and certainly there was in no degree satisfactory evidence of any impropriety or corruption on the part of the Auckland Postal officials, especially where there is an utter absence of motive except the very far-fetched one suggested by Mr. Elliott—namely, a desire to stifle his meeting. But I ask myself whether there is no margin for error or mistake in the preparation and posting of these circulars? There were several persons, male and female, concerned in the handling and despatch of these letters. Some were addressing envelopes, some were stamping, some were inserting the contents, and every one is assumed to have been perfect in attention to his or her particular part. It is only a small matter, certainly, but each person was supposed to turn in the flap of each envelope, and yet it has been conclusively proved beyond any reasonable shadow of doubt, through the stamping-machine, that many of the envelopes were posted with the flaps outside and open. Which is the most reasonable proposition—that nine envelopes out of 2,500 had been posted without contents, or that these nine envelopes had had their contents improperly or corruptly removed by Post Office officials without any apparent or sufficient motive?

And so with the two envelopes which are alleged not to have been delivered at all: I am very far from satisfied that these envelopes were ever posted. Again, there is too much margin for error amongst 2,500 letters handled by a number of different people.

It has been strongly urged that the sorters ought to have detected that certain of the envelopes were empty, and something ulterior is inferred from their failure to do so. I do not attach the slightest importance to this. I had ocular demonstration of the fact that the most expert sorters could very easily and frequently fail to detect the fact that certain envelopes were empty. It might easily happen, without casting any great reflection on the sorters, that where such a large number of envelopes, mostly of a kind and evidently containing circulars, had to be handled, the same nicety of handling would not be exercised.

A further statement is made that some forty notices were posted to ministers of various denominations with a view to having the fact that the meeting was to be held duly notified from the respective pulpits on the Sunday previous to the meeting, and that these notices did not reach the addressees until the Monday, and in some three cases until the Tuesday. However this may be, I am perfectly satisfied that the delay was in no way due to the Post Office officials, but, rightly or wrongly, was entirely due to the act of the Censor, who did not release the letters until too late for delivery on the Saturday. All these letters bore the superscription "If unclaimed within seven days please return to box 912, Auckland," and therefore would be censored in accordance with instructions, which I shall refer to later.

With regard to the missing letters and other incidental complaints, it is very greatly to be regretted that Mr. Elliott, when he made his complaint to the Chief Postmaster, did not then and there supply all available particulars of the addresses, &c., when requested to do so. He was asked to do so by the