

Customs and Excise: Joint Committee of Preventive Staff Associations.

REPORT OF A DEPUTATION

TO THE

HONOURABLE THE COMMISSIONERS OF H.M. CUSTOMS AND EXCISE,

WHICH TOOK PLACE IN

The Board Room, Custom House, London, on 24th January, 1923, at 11.30 a.m.

Sir Horace Hamilton, K.C.B. (*Chairman*), F. S. Parry, Esq., C.B. (*Deputy Chairman*), and A. J. Dyke, Esq., C.B., C.B.E. (*Commissioner*), who were accompanied by E. A. Lidbury, Esq. (*Assistant Secretary*), E. S. Birt, Esq. (*Principal*), and E. J. Andrews, Esq. (*Waterguard Assistant Inspector*), received the Deputation, comprising Messrs. T. Pounder, *representing* Waterguard Superintendents and Inspectors, G. E. Fooks, *representing* Chief Preventive Officers; J. Hall, *representing* Preventive Officers; T. H. Sherlock, *representing* Preventive Men; and A. E. Howell, *representing* the Waterguard Federation.

Mr. Howell, in stating the case for the Deputation expressed appreciation of the courtesy shown by their Honours in receiving the Deputation, and remarked that this appeared to be the first occasion since the introduction of Whitley Councils that this method of approach had been resorted to in the Customs and Excise Department. That was not intended to indicate that the Staff had lost faith in Whitley procedure, but merely a desire to have a preliminary exploration of the ground with a view to effecting, if possible, the early resumption of Whitley negotiations.

He referred to the proceedings of the Waterguard Sectional Committee, resulting in the temporary settlement 15 months ago, and expressed disappointment that it had not been found possible to extend the scheme of allowances to Waterguard Superintendents, a Class which had, as a result of that settlement, assumed very much wider responsibilities without additional remuneration.

The temporary settlement was regarded as a makeshift, designed to carry the Department over a difficult period of financial stress. It had not allayed the dissatisfaction felt by the Staff with the unfortunate position into which they had been forced by circumstances over which they had no control.

The Staff, from top to bottom, were underpaid.

The failure to effect reorganisation of the Waterguard alone among the various classes of the Customs and Excise Service had created a number of acute anomalies by upsetting the balance that had hitherto existed between the salary scales of the Waterguard and of other Classes, while it might be said that their duties and responsibilities had increased in the same relative proportion. This was a fruitful source of discontent.

Detailed comparisons were given between the present pay of Preventive Men and the scales operative for Warehousemen, Assistant Immigration Officers, and the Police; between the salaries of the Officer Grade; between the scales for Immigration Officers and the pre-war and present salary of the Officer Grade; between the salaries of Chief Preventive Officers and Waterguard Superintendents and the pre-war and present scales of Surveyors and 2nd Class Inspectors, comparing also the status and responsibilities of the various classes mentioned.

The duties of Waterguard Superintendents had undergone a complete change. As a result of the temporary settlement they had now assumed control over extensive divisions of the coastline, and were virtually in the position of Assistant Collectors.

In spite of this they were the only Grade in the Department which had had no readjustment in pay.

The Chief Preventive Officers had now greatly increased responsibilities, as, owing to the increase in taxation and its broader basis, they had to conduct a larger number of Police Court prosecutions.

In pre-war days these prosecutions had been conducted by Collectors, and they could not but be regarded as a duty of considerable responsibility.

The Deputation had come to urge that immediate attention should be given to the reorganisation of the Waterguard Service.

He suggested that the Board should take the opportunity afforded by the application of the Coast Guard Report to consider the whole question of permanent reorganisation. The introduction of the Coast Preventive Scheme would involve a minor reorganisation and it would be an advantage from a Service and a Staff point of view to deal with the larger question at the same time. If this was not done further anomalies would be created, as it was proposed to recruit Coast Preventive Men as an unestablished class to perform quite elementary duties on a scale of pay ranging from 39s. to 46s. a week. Preventive Men were getting a starting pay of 27s. a week, and it seemed clear from this that not only they but the whole of the Waterguard Staff were inadequately paid.

But in any case, whether the Coast Guard Report was adopted by the Government or not, the Deputation wished to urge that the time had arrived when permanent reorganisation should be undertaken. From the Service point of view it appeared necessary for administrative reasons to effect a settlement of the problem, and from the Staff point of view it was a matter of urgency that the salary scales should be placed on an equitable basis, properly related to the scales of other comparable classes in the Department. He felt that justice was on the side of the Staff claim and urged this as a paramount consideration.

Mr. Pounder, representing the Waterguard Superintendents, laid stress upon the enlarged scope of the duties and responsibilities of the Grade. His own division extended from King's Lynn to Shoreham, and for three months in the year, owing to the absence of the 1st Class Superintendent on leave or on other work he had to assume sole responsibility for the control of the officers in this wide area; yet his salary scale as a Controlling Officer, was less by £50 at the minimum and maximum than that of a Surveyor. He quoted figures proving that, although he was two increments up the scale, he was worse off financially than if he had remained an Upper Section Chief Preventive Officer, and that on account of not having been granted a temporary allowance, 40% of the 2nd Class Superintendents, who were on the minimum of the scale, were in receipt of less than the average salary and emoluments of the next lower Grade at the maximum.

He urged that these facts should be taken into consideration and that they justified early attention being given to the reconstruction of salary scales.

Mr. Sherlock, representing Preventive Men, stated that, compared with the lower ratings of the Merchant Service, Preventive Men were very poorly paid, and that this was not consistent with their status or their responsibilities as Revenue Officers. Men coming in on the minimum of the scale, with the prospect of a falling bonus, would find it very difficult to make ends meet.

Sir Horace Hamilton, in reply, stated that he was much obliged for the statement made by the Deputation. As Mr. Howell had said, this was the first time since the introduction of Whitley machinery that a Deputation had been received by the Board. The Whitley Constitution did not

preclude this course ; but he was glad to hear that in no sense was the Deputation to be regarded as a substitute of, but rather a preliminary to Whitley, negotiations that would take place later.

In these circumstances, he did not think it desirable to go into the general case at the moment, though it was useful for the Board to hear the arguments upon which the Staff based their claims. He hoped, however, that when discussions were resumed the Official Side would have the advantage of a similar statement to that made by the Staff Side two years ago.

The important point that had emerged was that the Staff were anxious that in any case re-organisation should take place at the earliest possible date. The application of the Coast Guard Report was urged as affording a convenient opportunity for effecting this purpose ; but if that Report was not adopted it was still urged that the time had arrived for considering a permanent settlement.

The Board did not underrate the advantages of an early settlement.

Mr. Howell had stated that the temporary settlement had been designed to carry the Department over a difficult period of financial stress. It could not be said that the financial position of the country had improved since that date. On the other hand it would be recalled that one reason for postponing a permanent settlement had been the desire of the Board to review the Waterguard organisation, and if a Coast Preventive Force was set up it appeared to the Board to provide a suitable opportunity for doing so. The Government had not yet arrived at a decision as to the application of the Coast Guard Report, and it was not yet possible to say whether, if a Coast Preventive Force was set up, it would be possible to link that up with a permanent settlement. But if this was found to be impracticable, or if no Coast Preventive Force was brought into being, the Board would still consider if it would not be possible, in the public interest, to arrive at a permanent settlement, and in doing so they would bear in mind the Staff views.

Referring to the Waterguard Superintendents, Sir Horace stated that when the temporary settlement was effected two questions had been left over. A settlement had been reached with regard to the Preventive Men on Land duty, but it had not been found possible to reach any conclusion on the case of the Superintendents. Mr. Pounder had put some very relevant facts before them, and these would be given due weight when the terms of reorganisation were under consideration.

Mr. Pounder asked that as the date of a settlement could not be definitely fixed the Board should give immediate consideration to their case. The Superintendents were the only grade, from the Launch Service upwards, without an allowance.

Sir Horace replied that a decision of the matter was bound up with the Coast Guard Report, and he hoped the adoption of the Report would afford an early opportunity of dealing with the whole matter. If that was not possible they would look at the question in a new light.

Mr. Howell thanked the Hon. Board for receiving the Deputation and said they realised the difficulties existing at the moment, but were very pleased to hear the views taken by their Honours as to the possibility of connecting the application of the Coast Guard Report with a permanent settlement. They would anxiously watch the progress of events and hoped the whole question would soon be cleared up satisfactorily.

The Deputation then withdrew.