

moreover, divide his attention with the North Island as well. They urge that every stationmaster be authorized to order the running of trains, and change their crossing-places at discretion, and this, be it remembered, on a single-line railway. The permanent-way is to be intrusted to the inspectors, as the working engineers of the line. What chain of communication should be established between these numerous and scattered working engineers and the managing business man is not explained. If a bridge should break down, or a retaining-wall give way, the nearest stationmaster would send for any Government engineer who might be in the neighbourhood to direct the rebuilding. If no such officer were at hand, the traffic would remain indefinitely suspended until application was made to some distant authorities to send an officer to attend to the case. How accounts of the cost of carrying-out such works would be kept by the inspector the reader is left to imagine. I do not think any private proprietor would so dispose of an establishment worth millions of money.

I shall now be stating matters within the knowledge of numbers of persons whose business has brought them into connection with the railway, when I say that, on my appointment to the charge of the Middle Island railways—when I was first transferred to Christchurch—a standing difficulty annually recurring was the block of the grain traffic. Many Christchurch merchants warned me that, coming from the South, I had under-estimated the difficulties of the grain season, and should break down. These same gentlemen can vouch for the fact that no such breakdown ever occurred. System and regularity were introduced. Each successive grain season has been worked more easily than the preceding, and this year, with a heavier grain crop than ever before known in this Island, the produce is being carried, without jar or difficulty, with greatly-increased despatch and economy. I do not claim personally the credit due to the success of each detail; but I can fairly claim to have organized the system under which these results have been produced.

Further, I found various customs and methods of working prevailing in different parts of Otago and Canterbury which were occasions of irregularity and consequent expense. By degrees, with much uphill work, order and regularity have been established, many old-standing abuses have become things of the past, and strict regulations defining the duties of various employés have been brought into operation.

Through a period of financial depression the traffic receipts have largely fallen off excepting in the matter of grain. At the same time great reductions in the working expenses have been effected. The cost of running engines has been reduced to less than half what it was in 1876.

Although the lines are older and more worn, and the cost of renewal is consequently greater, at the same time the cost of maintenance of way is on the whole less than formerly, owing to the stricter regard now paid to economy of labour and material.

All these and other fields of investigation are open to fair inquiry, and will show that the improvement of the system of railway working in this Island has been marked by a steady progress. It is a system that has to be built up step by step, through many difficulties that cannot be appreciated by a passing visitor. I do not profess that the system is perfect; on the contrary, much remains to be done to increase its efficiency and diminish its cost. It requires much care, while retrenching expenditure, to effect the end in view without unduly sacrificing what has already been gained, and without throwing back the railway system of the colony into the irregular and disjointed state of its earliest days.

While engaged in writing this reply, it has come to my knowledge that the Civil Service Commissioners have actually examined as one of their witnesses a person dismissed the service for drunkenness. If they would place reliance upon such evidence as that, they might as well base their report upon the statements of other persons discharged for misconduct, which can be frequently seen in the daily papers.

I should state, in conclusion, that my reply is based on the text of the Civil Service Commissioners' report as published in the *Dunedin Evening Star* of the 19th instant, a copy of which I enclose. Should the original report differ in any material points from the copy at my disposal, I beg I may be excused if my rejoinders should not apply.

I have, &c.,

WM. CONYERS,

Commissioner of Railways, Middle Island.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works.