

are to be dredged out, one by one, as they slip from banks, 20ft. under water, into the berthages where valuable steamers lie! Is there to be a diver permanently stationed below? or how is the risk of a vessel resting upon one of these to be obviated? If that can be answered, then what will be the cost of searching for and dredging each stone? A similar mistake has already cost the colony thousands. The former staiths were erected by the Public Works Department. The same mistake was made, and for a long time the Board struggled with the difficulty. A diver was constantly employed removing stones, at enormous cost. The risk incurred by shipping, the uncertainty and recurring expenditure, necessitated sheath-piling. The Government authorised and sanctioned the work, and although done at much increased cost and with the utmost care, it has been found impossible to make a perfect job, as the old structure interfered with the regular spacing of the sheathing. All this is a matter of common notoriety here, but it seems that the Commissioners do not understand it yet. Then as to the superiority of the department and its officers. What is the experience in regard to the previous erection? The old staiths were built under the supervision of the Public Works Department. It is notorious that saplings were used instead of the timber required by the specification; the change was probably profitable to the contractors, but a great part of the work has since been rebuilt in consequence, and paid for by this Board. The present contract has been let by Government under plans and specifications approved by Government and by Commissioners. I myself proposed that the details of certain working parts of the shoots should be supplied by the Commissioners in order that the work might suit them exactly. Their reply was a request to the Board's Engineer to do the work. There is a very great want of—shall I call it?—candour about the statements made by the Commissioners in these letters. Perhaps they were not intended for perusal here. The new contract having been handed over to this Board, every care will be taken to have the work honestly performed according to the specifications.

6. This is a repetition of the claim of Commissioners to be lords paramount. Is it because they are in charge of the railway that they are to be allowed to set aside Sir John Cooke's plans and substitute a plan of their own? That such a scheme has been proposed is well known, and that the Commissioners have exercised sufficient influence over the "dummy" Board to delay the progress of our harbour under the authorised and adopted scheme of Sir John Cooke, which so far has been such an unqualified success. The experience at Gisborne should amply illustrate the absurdity of allowing the plans of probably the most experienced and successful harbour engineer in the world being lightly set aside. Considerable injury has already been done by this interference. This will be shown in a report upon Westport Harbour Works shortly to be addressed to the Minister of Marine. Since the Commissioners have thought proper to interfere much beyond their proper functions and endeavoured to exercise that by general misstatements, it may perhaps be excusable on my part to assert my belief that their real object was mainly their *esprit de corps* as old Civil servants, and two at least old members of the Public Works Department to assist the functionaries still remaining, and to preserve to them the control of works which for some time has served for an excuse for their retention—that object may be commendable but not public spirited. The connection of the Public Works Department with works in this part of the country has been indeed disastrous to the colony, as witness the several principal works of importance here, all by bungling and bad management showing faults in construction and consequent heavy loss to the colony. To be particular, I will enumerate the Cobden Bridge, the Brunner Railway, the Brunnerton Bridge, the Inangahua Bridge, the Lyell Bridge, the Mokihinui Bridge, the coal staiths at Westport, and a work now in hand—the Westport and Ngakawau Railway. As this is the latest edition of blundering, I will give the particulars with a view to illustrating the result of the centralising system so much recommended by the Railway Commissioners. When the proposal to construct the railway was before Parliament, the department was asked to give an estimate of the cost. The estimate given was £35,000. Plans and specifications were then all ready, and although myself and others called attention to the absurd over-estimate made, and although a *bona fide* offer was actually given to complete the work for £10,000 less, yet they refused to alter their estimate, and it has been proved, now the work is in hand, that it will not cost more than £22,500. Instructions were given last January by the then Government to call for tenders for the work, and proceed with it energetically. The department called for tenders in mile sections, requiring neither deposit nor security with tenders, with the result which might be expected, and probably was anticipated, that random tendering would take place, and the greater number did not take up their tenders. The work has now been let at schedule prices to a number of unemployed, and you yourself, Sir, promised that they should receive the prompt payment for work so necessary to persons circumstanced as they were. These men have done their work, but faith has been broken with them, and they have been kept seven weeks without money. Then, notwithstanding repeated remonstrance, part of the work—namely, the bridge over the Ngakawau, which must take the most time to construct, has been kept back to the last, and when tenders were called the time for its construction was fixed at eighteen months—three times the time required. It is true that, upon representations made by me to the Premier, the time for completion was altered to ten months, but no reason can be assigned for such conduct as giving a term of eighteen months, where contractors say six months would have been sufficient, except that it was so done either to illustrate official stupidity or wilfully obstruct and retard the works. In either case the Westport Harbour funds are put to considerable loss.

7. There is no necessity to eliminate control or interference in connection with the railway. As far as this Harbour Board is concerned, there is no pretence of any right to interfere with the Railway Commissioners, either in connection with the railway or wharves. But in regard to the shipping and harbour, the Government cannot, in the opinion of this Board, do better than continue the present system under which all works in accordance with Sir John Cooke's scheme are, in the first instance, submitted for the approval of the Governor in Council, and, when sanctioned, proceeded with under the fullest publicity by a carefully-selected local Board, removable, and subject