

mental work of their own, ending in disaster and ruin to all interested. Here, again, contradiction comes in; they state that the Board is "unduly desirous of expending large sums of money." The previous letter charges us with unwillingness! Which is right? It does not matter, as both are equally untrue. In the schedule attached hereto will be found a report by Captain Leech, an officer of the highest standing, whose experience extends over twenty-three years as Harbourmaster at Westport. Other gentlemen, who represent the coal and shipping interest, have also written on the subject; copies of their letters and of the report of the Board's Engineer are also enclosed. Indeed, it may be said that all officials and experts, except the Railway Commissioners, are in favour of the proposal. The plans and particulars will now be submitted to Government in the usual way, and without the concurrence of Commissioners, when it is hoped that something like a critical examination will take place; then the Commissioners will have an excellent opportunity of showing some reasonable grounds for their extraordinary, unreasoning, and contradictory statements.

5. Here again the Commissioners made a mistake. The Westport Harbour Board, like others in the colony, depends not upon the colonial revenue, but upon the endowments granted by the Legislature.

6. This has no bearing upon this Board, as both the wharves and the railway are entirely in the hands of the Commissioners, but the inference to be drawn from this curiously-worded paragraph is that all local bodies should be abolished to obtain a better and simpler form, or, in other words, to invest the Commissioners with absolute power. A tyrant gives the most simple and effective rule, but New Zealand is not ripe for a triumvirate yet.

To summarise the whole position illustrated by this correspondence: the Railway Commissioners being in absolute possession of the railway yards, buildings, staiths, sheds, and all things necessary to perform the functions of carriers by rail, as intrusted to them by the Legislature, now seek to have their authority extended to harbour works, and to set aside, if they think proper, the plan of the works laid down by Sir John Coode, approved by the highest engineering authority, and accepted by the Government, the plan being more than half completed, and a great success. On the other hand, Parliament has established a local Board to control expenditure and supervise this work in a manner to be approved by Government, and open in every way to public criticism, subject to checks, which should insure the co-operation of local knowledge with the highest authority and responsibility.

The Government have the appointment of the local Board, but, unlike that of the Commissioners, it is easily revocable. The Board, unlike the Commissioners, are seven to three, and give their services disinterestedly and without payment of any kind. Unlike the Commissioners, they exercise no arbitrary control, and conduct their proceedings in an open manner, with the full knowledge of the responsibility of their position, and of the success of the works intrusted to them upon which hinges the prosperity of their district, and the future of themselves and their fellow residents. The result of the secret, centralised, and arbitrary system has been fairly illustrated by reference to works done, the particulars being in the Government's hands. The position of the Commissioners is emphasised by a reiterated form of expression, and by general statements, unsupported by even one illustration or valid argument, while on the other hand the veil is perhaps rudely, but effectively, torn aside in a manner to throw the fullest light upon the subject.

I have, &c.,

EUGENE O'CONOR, Chairman, Westport Harbour Board.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works, Wellington.

SIR,—

Harbour Board Office, Westport, 5th June, 1891.

*Re* the proposed pile facing along the front of the staiths extension: This is required in order to provide against stones rolling or sliding down the stone-protected slope of the river bank (see Sir John Coode's plan, No. MD. 1,666, and accompanying memorandum of the 12th December last), which stones, when they got into the berthages, are a serious source of danger. A loaded vessel would be very easily injured by resting on one of these stones; a hole would be made in her bottom, which would sink her, leaving the Board liable for very heavy damages. The following copy of a letter of the Harbourmaster on the subject dated the 14th December, 1889, and addressed to the Assistant Engineer, gives a further indication of the nature of this danger:—

"Stones in the berthages are expensive to deal with, as, in order to reduce the danger of their presence to a minimum, it is necessary to search the berthages at short intervals by means of a diver, and lift all stones found with a Priestman crane mounted on a barge. The cost of this process, as far as the existing staiths are concerned, was over £400 for the twelve months immediately preceding the erection of a face-piling, as shown by office records, representing a capitalised value, at 5 per cent., of £8,000; work itself only cost £1,982, so that it will more than pay for itself in five years. This saving is apart from the risk before mentioned, which is always present until the place is safely secured.

"The dredging at the existing staiths was carried out to 17ft. 6in. at low water spring tides, or 6in. less than is given on Sir John Coode's plan for dredging at the staiths extension. A month afterwards, owing to the scour under vessels' bottoms, and to the concave form of the front line of works, and the vertical wall of piling, there was an average depth throughout the work of 19ft. 5in., or 1ft. 11in. of an increase in depth, and in places there was as much as 5ft. 6in. of an increase in depth. See the copies of soundings attached, which were taken by the Harbourmaster at the time. There is at the present time an average depth of 20ft. This scouring action unsettles the stone facing. The stones will on the new work give similar trouble to that experienced on the old work, being similarly situated. (See cross-section at H attached).

"There was not on the existing staiths, until the pile facing was put in, a single bay where this trouble with stones was not a continual occurrence; and as the batter of the slopes and distances