

1909.

NEW ZEALAND.

ADDINGTON RAILWAY WORKSHOPS

(MINUTES OF EVIDENCE GIVEN BEFORE THE BOARD OF INQUIRY ON THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

THURSDAY, 11TH MARCH, 1909.

Mr. T. RONAYNE, General Manager of New Zealand Railways, examined. (No. 1.)

Witness: In connection with this matter I think it is only right and proper, and in justice to myself, the Department, and the men—the men especially—that I should make a statement in order that the full facts of the case may be laid before all concerned. With your permission I will make that statement now. My informant called at my office and made strong representations as to the slow and leisurely manner in which the boilermakers were doing their work. In his opinion the shops required shaking up, and he urged me to send a strong letter to Addington. The work in the smiths' shop was not so severely criticized, but he considered that there was a certain amount of slowness there. My informant is a man fully competent to judge as to the amount of work a boilermaker should perform, and as to the celerity in movements necessary to insure a fair day's work. The information was of such a specific nature that, in the interests of the Dominion and also of the men, I felt it my duty to place the matter before the Chief Mechanical Engineer, who has charge of the Workshops. The information, coming as it did from a man who previously had on many occasions spoken in the highest terms of the quality and quantity of the work turned out in the boiler-shops, a man whom I considered was actuated by motives conducive to the proper working of the shops, a man who had always, prior to the interview referred to, really acted as the boilermakers' champion in any cases where they thought that they were not being fairly treated, caused me much indignation, and while in that frame of mind my letter was written. In due course I received reports from the Locomotive Engineer, the Workshops Manager, and all of the foremen, although in reality there were only two shops—the boiler-makers' and the smiths' shops—implicated, couched in more or less indignant language, denying that there was any inattention to their duties on the part of the men. Knowing the officers in question to be zealous and intelligent in the discharge of their several duties, and having every confidence in them, I could only come to one conclusion, and that was that the information I had received could not have been correct. Prior to receiving the information, I may say that I had the utmost confidence in the men in the boiler and smiths' shops, and I was amazed to learn that they had so fallen off in their work—not in the quality, as I know that Addington can hold its own with any locomotive-shops in the world, but in the lack of energy they were said to be putting into their work. From what I have since learned my informant considers he has been misunderstood, and that he made no strictures regarding the smiths' shop—in fact, did not mention the smiths' shop. So far as this is concerned my memory is quite clear on the matter, and there was no misunderstanding on my side. Contrary to the rules and regulations in force on the New Zealand Railways, my letter was handed to the Press by some unscrupulous person, when a further investigation was deemed necessary, and to avoid any suspicion, and in fairness to the officers and men, I recommended that a public inquiry should be held by experts having no connection with the Department. In doing so I felt convinced that the honour of the officers and men on whom my informant had cast such serious reflections would be fully vindicated. My reference to Price Bros. and the Petone shops was intended to act as an incentive to the Chief Mechanical Engineer to see if there could be a greater output of work.

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you put in as evidence the letter which you wrote to the Chief Mechanical Engineer?—Yes. The first letter had no right to get out. I considered the matter, and thought it was manifestly unfair to prejudge the case, and gave immediate instructions to have it withdrawn. It is not my style to prejudge a case.

2. Your contention is that the letter was intended to act as a departmental whip?—Yes, it was not intended for the staff but for the Chief Mechanical Engineer to deal with through the officers in the ordinary manner. As it is, it has become public property, and grave suspicion has been created in the minds of the public as to whether Addington Workshops are properly conducted.