

Stress of work arising out of the reorganization and the necessity for dealing with other problems of pressing importance has prevented the Board from accomplishing as much during the year now under review as it wished, but many data have been collected, and the way prepared for a forward advance during the current year. This is also one of the matters which is to be made the subject of careful study by one of the officers who is being sent abroad.

The relations existing between the Department and its staff have much improved during the year, notwithstanding that in the early part of the year a section of the Department's staff ceased work owing to its being found impossible for an agreement to be reached between the Government and that section of the staff regarding wages and working conditions. Negotiations had been in progress for some little time before the beginning of the year regarding claims for substantial alterations in wages and conditions that were put forward by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. After several conferences between the management and the Minister of Railways on the one hand and representatives of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants on the other, it was still found impossible to reach an agreement on the claims of the society. It was, however, agreed between the parties that the whole of the claims should be submitted to a Board on which there should be representatives of the Department and of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants respectively, with an independent chairman. This Board was duly constituted, and Mr. H. D. Acland, of Christchurch, was appointed chairman. The Board duly entered on the inquiry with which it was charged, but its proceedings did not result in a settlement of the difficulties; and after further conferences between the society and the Minister, which were equally unsuccessful, the staff who were represented by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants ceased work on the 21st April, 1924. The other members of the staff, with a few exceptions, remained at their posts. Further conferences took place during the period of the cessation of work between the society and the Government, and it was finally agreed that the claims of the society should be referred to a tribunal consisting of the members of the Arbitration Court, with two additional members, one each being nominated by the Minister of Railways and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. The men resumed work on the 29th April. The Board reported in due course, and the Government adopted its findings.

Much as such incidents as that just dealt with are to be regretted, there is no doubt that the occurrence in question cleared away many difficulties and opened the way to a better understanding between the staff and the management, and it is with much pleasure that the Board finds itself in the position to be able to record that the relations between the management and the staff have, during the year, shown a steady improvement, the position at the present time being very satisfactory in this regard.

Mr. E. E. Gillon, Chief Mechanical Engineer, retired on superannuation in December, 1924, and applications were invited for a Chief Mechanical Engineer to fill the vacancy. Mr. G. S. Lynde, O.B.E., A.M.I.Mech.E., M.I.Loco.E., was appointed to the position. Mr. Lynde served his apprenticeship in the locomotive and carriage and wagon shops of the Great Central Railway. During the war he served with the the infantry on the Western Front, and in 1916 was transferred to the Royal Engineers (Railway Operating Division) which unit he ultimately commanded.

In 1923 the Government approved of four officers being sent abroad to study the working-conditions of railways in other countries, but no officers were sent at that time. Early this year four officers were selected to go abroad. Mr. J. Mason, a member of the Board, and Mr. P. R. Angus, Locomotive Engineer, left the Dominion for Australia, South Africa, Europe, and Great Britain in January last. Mr. W. R. Davidson, Assistant Chief Engineer, and Mr. J. Pickard, of the Traffic Branch, left for Great Britain via America in February last. It is anticipated that these officers will be absent from the Dominion for about nine months, and that the information they will gain during their travels will be of great value to the management.

The administration and control of staff has been given a great deal of consideration, and proposals for reorganization of the Staff Branch are under consideration. These proposals it is expected will improve the existing system.

The total expenditure for salaries, wages, &c., for the year ended 31st March, 1925, was £4,385,000, out of a total expenditure of £6,540,000. The salaries and wages of the permanent staff for the year amounted to £3,000,000, and casual wages, overtime, Sunday duty, and night allowances to £1,385,000.

The magnitude of these figures indicates how necessary it is that the strictest supervision and control is maintained in order to keep the working-expenses within reasonable limits having regard to sound administration and public safety.

Arrangements are in hand which will ensure that the Board is kept in the closest touch with the staff requirements in the various branches throughout the system.

The Board is considering an alteration to the present method of discipline in the service, and it is hoped to discuss these proposals with the representatives of the various societies at an early date.

The scale increases for the year provided for in the schedule to the Government Railways Classification Act, 1908, and amendments, cost the Department £51,000. In addition to this promotions and improvements in grading cost £44,000.

LIBRARY.

The matter of providing a library containing books of reference and information regarding modern railway practice has been under consideration, and will be put in hand as soon as accommodation is available. A library is a necessary accompaniment of any system for educating the staff in modern methods of transport. What is aimed at is more than a mere collection of books. It is intended that the library shall embrace something in the nature of an information bureau, where matters of interest regarding transport will be collated and indexed, and preserved in a form that will admit of ready reference, so that at a moment's notice the most up-to-date information may be available on any subject of importance that may arise.