

329. Then, with regard to the tenders for the cartage of goods from the railways, that was a point on which you were examined. You are aware there have been cases of that kind lately?—*Mr. Carruthers.*
Yes. ———
4th Sept., 1877.

330. The tenders came with a recommendation on them from Mr. Conyers?—I think not; I think that some of the tenders were not received there. They were received at different points in the colony, and came first to Wellington, and were then sent to Mr. Conyers for recommendation and remarks.

331. And they came with a recommendation from him?—Yes.

332. What did you do with it; what did you recommend?—That the lowest tender should be accepted. There was considerable doubt as to which was the lowest tender. Mr. Conyers said it was the lowest in one case, and that the lowest should not be accepted for one reason, that the tender which was not the lowest was by a good man, whom he knew to be a good man.

333. And what was done on that recommendation of his; was it approved or not?—No; the lowest tender was accepted. Mr. Conyers was first asked whether the lower tenderer was a good man.

Mr. Conyers.

15th Aug., 1877.

WEDNESDAY, 15TH AUGUST, 1876.

Mr. CONYERS examined :

334. *The Chairman.*] Will you state what position you hold on the New Zealand Railways?—I am Superintending Engineer of the Southern Railways, in the late Provincial Districts of Otago and Canterbury.

335. Will you be kind enough to state generally what are your duties and powers?—It is rather difficult to do so. My duties are varied, and extend to the maintenance of the lines, the locomotive department, and the traffic department. My assistants are the engineers of permanent way, locomotive engineers, and traffic managers, but I exercise control over the whole of the working system. With regard to my powers, do you mean the power the Government places in my hands?

336. Yes. Will you state generally what are the restrictions imposed on you by the Government?—Relative to the different staff under my control, I have the power of dismissing or employing men. The officers who assist me I have the power of reporting, or suspending them from duty.

337. Will you state particulars respecting the tariff of railway charges and the running of trains?—The tariff of charges I cannot touch or in any way alter. I can make no reduction of any kind to anybody. The running of the trains I fix myself. The time-tables I also arrange. I have never submitted to the Government my time-tables.

338. What was your position in connection with railways previous to your present appointment?—In Otago I was General Manager of the railways.

339. Had you more authority then?—Yes; I had power to treat with the public. I will give you an instance. We had there lighters competing against the railways. In case vessels came in, and a lighter made an offer to take the cargo below railway charges, I could step in and offer to do the work cheaper. I also had full power to take on or put off officers, always reporting to the Government what I had done. The Government never interfered in these things. Any complaints or grievances that were sent to the Superintendent he referred to me. So long as the railways were worked with satisfaction to the Government and the public, there was no interference.

340. Are you prepared to state, as far as your judgment is concerned, the general success or otherwise of the railway management under your control in Otago?—The Government found no fault, and I have heard of no complaints.

341. When was the late Railway Commission appointed?—I do not know.

342. Were there written instructions given to the Commissioners?—I never saw any instructions. I was requested to go from Dunedin to Christchurch by the Engineer-in-Chief, but I have never heard of any instructions being given.

343. You elected your own chairman for that Commission?—Yes; Mr. FitzGerald.

344. In the report furnished by the Commissioners I see, Mr. Conyers, that they have recommended—and I also observe that the Government have since adopted the recommendation—of having weekly accounts kept, and rendered weekly to the Central Audit Office, Wellington?—Yes.

345. Will you tell the Committee whether such a change as that was absolutely necessary, and whether you think it imposed more work?—I should like to say now that I did not agree with the whole of the report made by the Commissioners, although I have signed it. Perhaps I should have written a separate report myself. I do not approve of the weekly accounts.

346. Do you think it makes more or less work for the railway officials?—It increases the work.

347. How many returns have to be made now to the Wellington Department?—I really cannot say for certain, but, speaking from memory, perhaps twelve or fifteen weekly returns are now required from every railway station throughout the colony.

348. You do not know whether it is fifteen or seventeen?—No, I do not. I should like to say that concerning the returns and forms I have no fault to find. My objections are in having the weekly system in place of the monthly. The weekly system means that all the returns have to be made out four times instead of once. It is simply repeating the work over and over again, and in my opinion unnecessarily.

349. Has there been any addition to your staff since the adoption of the new system?—Only temporary.

350. Do you still think that additional staff assistance will be needed?—Only in head offices. The extra assistance required lately was owing to the period being a busy one. We were making out the annual returns, and preparing the yearly balance-sheets. The new system came into operation on the 1st of July, and the changes consequently further increased the work.

351. What modification would you recommend with regard to the weekly accounts?—It frequently happens that forms have to be changed, and modifications introduced, and that could be done as