

In reply I am to state that the Government is powerless to give effect to the wishes of your Board in this matter, as to do so would be contrary to the provisions of section 7 of "The Greymouth Harbour Board Act, 1884."

I have &c.,

H. J. H. BLOW,

Assistant Under-Secretary for Public Works.

The Chairman, Harbour Board, Greymouth.

SIR,—

Westport Harbour Board, Westport, 8th June, 1891.

I have the honour to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your P.W. No. 89/183, dated the 1st June, 1891, enclosing for the information of the Board correspondence from the Railway Commissioners referring to the constitution of the Westport and Greymouth Harbour Boards, and I now beg to forward comments upon these letters. The extracts are quoted, numbered, and dealt with *seriatim*.

2. This letter starts with the assumption that the shipping arrangements are necessarily an integral part of the railway system. This is not the case. The authority of the Railway Commissioners is over railways, wharves, &c., but does not extend to the rivers, harbours, or sea, nor to the construction of new works. If this is a just claim to be lords paramount on all operations affecting the working of the railway, then their authority must extend much beyond the harbours and shipping—the coal-mining, for instance, the delivery of coal by sea, &c. They would have the power arbitrarily to expend public money on works both on land and sea. The Commissioners would appear to adopt the socialists' proposal, that all instruments of production and distribution should be under the control of the State, and, like the French king, they also say, "*L'Etat c'est moi*." With regard to the inconvenience, I am not aware of any instance occurring, and I do not believe one could be shown to illustrate that insinuation. It is true that the Board is not responsible for the working of the railway, nor for the administration of its other endowments, which have been likewise placed in different hands, but unfortunately the Board's revenue suffers from every blunder committed, and not the parties who are to blame.

The inconvenience is certainly not now a matter of opinion nor of fact, but pure imagination. The Board has been in existence since 1884; can the Commissioners give one instance where "necessary works" or works of any kind have been obstructed as they state? I have shown how the Board would be affected by the success or failure of the railway. I am now tempted to add that the public convenience, the development of the coalfields, and the interests of the harbour are also of importance. The real position of the Harbour Board is clearly defined by statute. Checks have been wisely provided to regulate and direct expenditure and to prevent arbitrary and uncontrolled action. The practice before the "dummy" Board and since has been to follow closely the plans of Sir John Coode, and as the works proceed plans and specifications have been submitted to the Government for approval. The proceedings of the local Board are conducted in full view of the colony; the Press and the people have free access, and are welcome to watch and criticise. There is nothing arbitrary, underhand, or secret here. It is not likely that the local Board, being so interested in the progress of the port and all its accessories, would throw any impediment in the way of successful or effective working of the railway. Far from it; the Board being local is generally the first to be made aware of deficiencies, and at once places the matter before the proper authorities with a view to a remedy. An instance of this is to be noted in connection with the wharf extension and sheath-piling to the new staiths, of which more presently. Another instance: the case of increased rolling-stock required, for which funds have been placed at the disposal of Commissioners in October, 1889, and unused to this day. The development of the coalfields at Westport and the economic supply of coal throughout the colony is a necessity to the industry and domestic comfort of the people. This is truly a matter of great colonial interest; it is dependent upon circumstances connected with production and distribution. A very small part of this task is allotted to the Railway Commissioners—only the carriage by the railway, nearly all the appliances being found for them. The management of the traffic here is in itself a small routine matter of business. When taken with the railway system of the colony it is a sufficiently important undertaking; but the real difficulty, heavy responsibility, and the importance lie outside these functions, in the production of the coal, its distribution by sea, and construction of the Westport Harbour works.

4. A perusal of the evidence given before two Committees of the House of Representatives and a knowledge which Government have of what has taken place since, demonstrates clearly that the inducement to establish the "dummy" Board was to prolong the existence of a moribund department, and also demonstrates that the action was ill-advised. The result a public scandal and a waste of public money.

5. This paragraph is no doubt couched with the most friendly intentions in regard to the Marine Engineer and the moribund department referred to. The Commissioners now claim to take the place of Government, and their views are to be paramount. I state most unhesitatingly that the staiths are a great waste of money. They are erected contrary to Sir John Coode's harbour plan, against his advice, on a system which has been condemned and superseded at Newcastle, New South Wales, and at all the principal coal ports of the world, where preference is now given to loading by cranes. The plans themselves are defective. No better illustration could be given of the impropriety of intrusting the construction of works to persons wanting local knowledge and experience than this. In addition to the mistake of altering Sir John Coode's harbour plans, we have now a defective structure, no provision being made to prevent large stones on the river bank from rolling down under the shipping, although previous experience has shown such to be absolutely indispensable. I had the honour of discussing this omission with one of the gentlemen principally concerned, and he suggested that the stones when they fell in could be easily dredged out. Stones