

1892.
NEW ZEALAND

THE RAILWAY WORKSHOPS.

(EXPLANATION RELATIVE TO ALLEGED DISCREPANCY IN INFORMATION SUPPLIED RESPECTING
LOCOMOTIVES ON THE NEW ZEALAND RAILWAYS.)

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr Seddon by leave of the House.

The RAILWAY COMMISSIONERS to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

8th September, 1892.

THE Commissioners, in accordance with your request dated the 31st August, and received in the Commissioners' office on the 6th instant, have the honour to remark on the discussion of the 11th ultimo, headed "Addington Workshops," reported in *Hansard*, page 618, forwarded by you for explanation.

There seems to be some confusion in this discussion, which appears, as far as the Commissioners can make out, to refer to three different returns or replies to Mr Sandford's questions, which had reference to three different dates and times, and each of which supplied different information demanded. The figures supplying the information in response to the demands of a different nature will not, of course, be similar.

Firstly the Commissioners sent, to the order of the House of the 7th July, a return showing all the stock in the colony on the 31st March. This was returned for further explanation, and was further explained by the Commissioners on the 15th August.

Secondly the Commissioners sent, to an order of the House of 5th July, requiring "The number of locomotives at present in the Government workshops awaiting repair," a return showing that at that date—5th July—there were no engines in the Government workshops throughout the colony awaiting repair. This statement was, of course, correct, and was given after inquiries had been duly made.

Thirdly, in response to a question asked in the House on the 11th August by Mr Sandford, as to "Whether there are at present, or have been during the month of July, any or all of the following engines undergoing repairs at the Addington workshops," the Commissioners gave you a reply that twelve engines were in Addington workshops for repairs during the month of July. This reply you do not appear to have communicated to the House. This answer was strictly correct also.

The second question had reference to a specific date—namely, the 5th July. The third question had reference to an extended period—namely the month of July.

The second question had reference to the number of engines awaiting repairs, the third question to the number of engines undergoing repairs—most essentially different conditions, just as the conditions of a prisoner awaiting sentence and one undergoing sentence are essentially different.

The Commissioners absolutely deny the insinuation made by Mr Sandford that evasive replies are furnished by them. The Commissioners think that the gentlemen asking questions very often may not have a clear appreciation of the subjects they are asking about, and that the answers sent by the Commissioners have not always been communicated, and hence there has arisen a misapprehension.

In the case of the third question, the answer the Commissioners gave was not read to the House and Mr Sandford's condemnatory remarks were made to the House without the House having any opportunity of judging of the merits of the subject. The Commissioners respectfully submit that they always endeavour to give the most complete information in response to orders or questions from the House, and always endeavour to couch their answers in the most respectful and clear language they can command, and they endeavour to do this in a straightforward manner.

The suggestion that the Commissioners kept the railway work standing in order to take in private work is erroneous. It appears to the Commissioners that if Mr Sandford desired to know whether it was correct that the Commissioners had allowed railway repairs to stand untouched while they employed their men on private work, a direct question would at once have elicited a complete explanation and denial. There is nothing in Mr Sandford's question as sent to the Railway Commissioners which gave any indication that he desired such information.

There are always plenty of men who are on temporary jobs whom the Commissioners do not desire to discharge if work is available, and when they are requested to do private work of a special character, they do not refuse it if it can be done without inconvenience. The work