

1895.

NEW ZEALAND.

NEW ZEALAND RAILWAYS.

MEMORANDUM BY MR. J. L. SCOTT, LATE RAILWAY COMMISSIONER, ON LOCOMOTIVE AND MAINTENANCE WORKSHOPS, WITH REPLIES BY THE LOCOMOTIVE SUPERINTENDENT AND CHIEF ENGINEER.

Laid on the Table with the Leave of the House.

No. 1

Mr J. L. SCOTT to the Hon. the PREMIER.

SIR,—

Government Buildings, Wellington, 31st December, 1894.

I cannot close my term of office without adding to what has been said by my colleagues a few remarks on various matters to which my instincts and previous training have led me to give special attention, and upon which they have fitted me to form correct opinions. I allude to some serious defects in the management of the Maintenance and Locomotive Departments of the railway service.

The maintenance workshops are equipped and conducted in a primitive style which is positively astounding. No one other than a country blacksmith who has not sufficient work to keep more modern appliances employed, or the means to purchase them if he had, would think of continuing such a state of things as exists in these workshops. The same system obtains from one end of the colony to the other. In illustration, let me say that on my last visit to Dunedin I saw one man turning an iron spindle in a treadle-lathe, two others working a vertical hand-power drilling-machine, and another working a manual-power boring-machine, making droppers for wire fences, of which hundreds are used. I shall be well within the mark if I say that these men were not doing more than one-fourth of the work they could have been doing with better appliances.

At each centre this department has one or more blacksmiths at work. These men, with their assistants, with the exception of two at Christchurch, are working at hand-blown forges, emulating Longfellow's village blacksmith. What makes it still worse is that they are at work the greater part of their time on railway metals, which they are manipulating in various ways, either for use in the road, for gate-posts, verandah supports, bridge-work, &c. Such work is altogether too heavy for hand-blown fires, supposing they were excusable for lighter work, which they are not. No private employer would dream of doing such work with similar appliances. If he had no better tools himself he would send on the work to some one who had. I may remark, in passing, that the fancy this department has for using up old rails for all sorts of purposes is a mistaken and costly one. There is for the time being a ready sale for all the old rails. When this falls off there will still be a large field for their use as telegraph-poles, to which purpose I am pleased to see the present able head of the Telegraph Department has been putting them. Here they may be utilised without any great waste of labour.

Taken all through, I do not hesitate to say that the work done in the workshops of the Maintenance Department costs, at a very low estimate, from 50 to 75 per cent. more than it ought, while a great deal of it ought either not to be done at all, or done in an altogether different manner.

The remedy for this waste of labour is to close these shops altogether until the department has grown large enough to keep works of fair size and with more modern appliances fully employed, and to transfer the men and their work to the Locomotive Department. In every centre the Locomotive Department has spare engine-blown fires with steam-hammers and all other necessary appliances, while the blacksmiths in the Maintenance Department "grunt and sweat under the weary life" of doing heavy work in hand-blown fires without any of the necessary accessories. These remarks will not, of course, be taken as reflecting in any way upon the workmen in this department. They are a steady, industrious, and intelligent lot of men, and are doing the best they can with the appliances and facilities afforded them.

Having referred to the condition and equipment of the maintenance workshops, I will briefly refer in the same direction to those of the Locomotive Department.

The Addington workshops, which are the largest in the colony, are really well equipped and splendidly manned. They have now nearly all the tools necessary for carrying out railway work of