

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

THE VAILE STAGE RAILWAY SYSTEM

(COPIES OF CORRESPONDENCE, ETC., RELATING TO).

Laid on the Table by Leave of the House.

No. 1.

QUESTION ASKED IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BY MR. NAPIER, 29TH AUGUST, 1900, AND
REPLY THERETO BY HON. J. G. WARD (MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS).

“MR. NAPIER (Auckland City) asked the Minister for Railways, Whether he will take steps to test the value and utility of the Vaile stage system on railways by adopting the system for a period of one year on the Auckland-Waikato and Auckland-Helensville lines? He would like to point out that this system had been before the country for eighteen years. In 1886, he found from the Journals of the House that a Select Committee recommended that a trial be given to the system; and in 1890 another Committee was set up to inquire into the system. During the intervening years and since the latter year petitions in favour of the system had been presented to the House from, he thought, every local governing body in the colony, and from many thousands of private colonists. It was admitted generally that the present mileage system had not been so great a success as we had a right to expect. During the last twelve years the average interest earned by the railways was £2 18s. per cent., and that rate had only been obtained by making very large grants from the Consolidated Fund to pay for items which should have been paid out of the railway revenue. The increase of work on the railways during the last twelve years had been comparatively insignificant, being rather less than one trip *per capita* per annum, and half a ton freight *per capita* per annum. Considering that we had 363 additional miles of railway opened during these years, and that the population had increased by 153,000, he thought honourable members would admit that railway progress had not been as rapid as they were entitled to expect it would have been. It was a curious thing also that the charge for carrying and delivering each ton of goods was now 3d. more than it was ten years ago. One of the principal railway officials, a gentleman, he believed, of very high repute in his department—Mr. Fife, the Railway Accountant—said,—

“‘Travellers who make journeys not exceeding ten miles in length were 68·8 per cent. of the whole number, and yet they only contributed 24·1 per cent. of the revenue. Those who travel ten miles and not exceeding fifty miles are 25·3 per cent. of the total number, but they have to pay 39·2 per cent. of the revenue; whereas those who travel over fifty miles are only 5·9 per cent. of the total number, and yet they pay no less than 36·7 per cent. of the revenue.’

“Since the time this system was first promulgated in this country it had been tried in several countries. It had been tried in Russia, in Europe, Siberia, and Hungary, and in each of those countries it had been an unqualified success. The cost to make a trial such as he asked for would not be very great. The possible loss was estimated at from £10,000 to £15,000 for a year's trial. That, however, was the estimate of the enemies of the system, and was disputed by those who favoured the system, who said that there would be no loss, but, on the contrary, an enormous profit and a large increase in traffic. But, even if they took the estimate of the enemies of the system and gave the system a trial, it would only involve a possible loss of from £10,000 to £15,000. The honourable gentleman's predecessor was thoroughly in favour of a trial of this system. Mr. Cadman said, on the 15th August, 1890:—

“‘I hope the result of this action will be that, at all events, we shall have at least one line, to give this system a fair trial. We can very easily take the Auckland-Waikato line, the New Plymouth-Wanganui line, or the Napier-Woodville line, and give the matter a fair trial; and that will perhaps end the whole question. We all know that no great reforms are made without being well fought out. This question the Auckland people are determined to fight for, and I hope they will continue to agitate until it has had a fair trial.’

“The Right Hon. Mr. Seddon was also in favour of it, judging by his speech on the Public Works Statement of 1892. He said then,—

“‘The returns from the working of the railways do not show at all a satisfactory condition of affairs, and the representations of Mr. Samuel Vaile, of Auckland, as to the working of the zone system, indicate that at no distant date—possibly on the expiry of the Commissioners' term of office—it might be as well that a trial of this system should be made on our railways.’