

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(Mr. W. F. MASSEY, ACTING-CHAIRMAN.)

FRIDAY, 6th SEPTEMBER, 1901.

Mr. SAMUEL VAILE examined. (No. 1.)

The Chairman : Mr. Vaile, I understand you wish to speak in support of your petition and of your scheme. The Committee will now hear anything you have to say.

Mr. Vaile : Sir and gentlemen,—I would like, in the first place, to say this: that since the inquiry into this stage system of railway administration in 1886 there has been a very great change in many things. It is now nineteen years since I first placed this system before the world—that is to say, it will be nineteen years on the 3rd January next—and it is fifteen years since the inquiry was held into this system, viz., in 1886. Of course, as I said, during that time there have been very great changes taking place in many things. Then it was a question of my theory, and my theory only; and I am not in the least surprised that the system met with a great deal of opposition, for it seemed to be absolutely absurd to say, when, for instance, you took the Auckland Section, the existing fares to Te Awamutu being at that time £1 5s. and 18s. 9d. for first and second class, and I proposed to reduce them to 3s. and 2s., and asserted that two of the lower fares would give a better financial result than one of the existing fares—the thing appeared so absurd that it was perfectly natural that people received such a statement with a great deal of caution, and I was not at all surprised at even the derision that followed. Never having done any public work of any kind, I did not feel competent to deal with it efficiently, and wrote to Sir Harry Atkinson, Sir George Grey, Mr. Macandrew, Mr. J. C. Firth, and some ten gentlemen in all, asking them to take the idea up; but, to my amazement, I never got a single reply, or even an acknowledgment, from any one of them. In considering it, I came to the conclusion that they simply thought I was “a shingle short,” and afterwards, in conversation with Mr. Macandrew, he candidly told me that that was really the conclusion he arrived at—that some lunatic had written to him. Finally I had to take the matter in hand and deal with it myself. Nobody feels more keenly conscious than I do that I made many mistakes. Having to launch out in public life with the biggest subject in the whole colony, and probably in the whole world, to begin with, it was rather a trying position that I was placed in, and all I ask is that these things be borne in mind by the Committee. The work before me was a very difficult task, and I could only devote the time after 7 o'clock in the evenings to it; and not having time to revise and rewrite my matter—not even having the assistance of any secretary—it was impossible for me to avoid falling into many errors which, after considering and rewriting, I should have avoided. What I devoted my time and attention to was making sure of my facts and figures. Literary effect was a matter of secondary importance. However, I did the best I could at that time. The members of the Special Committee of 1886 were exceedingly good to me. They gave me a most patient and exhaustive hearing; and I need not remind you, gentlemen, that that was a very powerful Committee. The end of it was—may I remind you that at the opening of the inquiry, with the exception of Major Atkinson, I believe nearly every one of the Committee were hostile to my measure, yet they reported: “The Committee, bearing in mind the great importance of the subject, recommend a trial should be given to the system on an isolated section of our railways.” To that report they attached conditions which were impossible to comply with. These conditions, I have been informed, were attached at the last moment. They were brought up at the instance of Mr. J. B. White, one of the most hostile men in the whole country to the new system. He has himself said in print that they were brought up at his instance and attached to the report, and they practically barred the system from being tried. At that time nothing whatever of the kind had been proposed in the world; and so it was simply my theory, and my theory only. That I was right in the theory has been proved by the course of events. You will see that, six years after it was placed before the public here, the Hungarians adopted it in a modified form. I need not go into all the particulars now; they adopted it, and it has been a marked success in that country in every way. It excited much ridicule when I proposed to carry people from Waikari to the Bluff for 12s. 8d. second class, or 18s. 6d. first class, the then fare being, first-class, £4 10s. 11d., and second-class, £3 0s. 9d. It was no surprise to me that the department went against it. It was no surprise to me that the public generally were not impressed. They all thought I was wrong; and I may tell you, in 1885, when I left Auckland for the South, and