

meeting all the Commissioners of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, these being the only States that time would permit of my visiting. I was met with the greatest courtesy by the Commissioners, who went out of their way to afford me all information possible, much of which was of great value to myself, and, I believe, will be of advantage to the administration of the Railway Department of New Zealand.

It was somewhat difficult owing to the varying conditions in the several States to make an absolute comparison with New Zealand, but there is no doubt that all the States I visited possess advantages over this Dominion. Briefly stated these are :—

In New South Wales, coal, which is a very important factor in railway working, costs at least 60 per cent. less than coal can be obtained for in New Zealand, whilst in Victoria it is at least 33 per cent. lower. Then, again, the physical features and vastness of the Australian Continent, the position of its ports and principal markets, induces very long hauls of the traffic. This of itself is of material advantage from the standpoint of economical service. In most of the Australian States one central management can work the whole system, owing to the whole of the lines of the system being directly connected with the main centre of each State. In contradistinction to this we have in New Zealand ten separate sections divided from each other by considerable distances, and we are compelled to have several complete sets of departmental officers. Our chief sections consist only of one of 1,322 miles, and another of 1,073 miles. Many miles of these lines run in close proximity to the seaboard, and have to contend with keen sea competition. Our numerous harbours within short distances of each other influence the length of rail haul, which is invariably for short distances only; the geographical configuration of the country and the position of our principal cities and important provincial towns are such as to preclude the likelihood of long-haul traffic being obtained to any extent. Again, the centralization of population in large cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane permit of most effective and cheap methods of dealing with the suburban traffic, which are unattainable in New Zealand's large centres with their present populations. For instance, Flinders Street Station, in Melbourne, alone deals with nearly 150,000 people daily, who come into the metropolis by the morning trains and return to their homes at night. In Sydney a somewhat similar position is found, but there is also in addition a valuable adjunct in their tramways system, which forms a part of the railway system of that State.

Altogether there are 11,114 miles of railway in the one Southern and three Eastern States, forming in effect one great connected system affording the means of direct communication and interchange of the products of one State with the other.

I ascertained from the Australian Commissioners the method adopted by them in dealing with the railway accounts, the average amount of money expended in maintenance, the conditions under which their employees work, and also the salaries and wages paid to them. This information I propose to submit to the House when it will be seen that, all things considered, our charges in the aggregate are lower for the carriage of the natural products of the country. It will also be seen that our passenger rates generally compare favourably with those in Australia, whilst the salaries, wages, and conditions of railway employment in New Zealand are more desirable than those obtaining in Australia. The amount expended in New Zealand on the maintenance and renewal of track, charged to revenue, is much greater per mile than in Australia; moreover, our rolling-stock, taken all round, compares quite favourably with that in use in Australia.

Taking into consideration all the natural difficulties existing in New Zealand, and also the fact that no system of railway management is successful in giving universal satisfaction, I venture, after impartially surveying Australia from a railway point of view, to express the opinion that having regard to the consideration given to the producers' interests, and the extent to which our railways have during the past fifteen years of State management in New Zealand been used as a means of developing the Dominion, the New Zealand system will compare favourably with the railway systems in other parts of the world, and I have no hesitation in saying that in no part of the world does the question of the safety of the travelling public receive more careful consideration.