

be called on to disclose in an intelligible form their charges on packages less than 1 ton in weight, on live-stock of different kinds, on grass-seed, potatoes, chaff, wire, timber, &c. In order to make the charges more readily understood by settlers we think they should show the number of sacks of standard weight and size to be taken to the ton, and similarly with other classes of goods whenever possible. Take grass-seed, for instance. The settler always knows what weight of seed he is receiving, but he may know nothing about measurement, and so suspect himself of being wronged when the charges are in order. In connection with the complaints of overcharging we should point out that the settlers do not seem to have been generally aware that their best course was to complain to the Postal Department if they thought they were being overcharged. If they complained at all it was to Mr. Hatrick, from whom they state they never could obtain any satisfaction.

At the root of the whole of the troubles in connection with the Wanganui River service is the fact that the shipowners operating on the river are also merchants competing for the supply of goods to the settlers. Obviously Mr. Hatrick is in a position to outbid his rivals in the competition for the business of the settlers, and the high rates charged from Taumarunui do not permit of successful competition from that end. In all Mr. Hatrick's invoices which we have seen the charges are for goods delivered. The purchasers of goods from Messrs. Hatrick and Co. cannot, therefore, know what they are paying for goods and what for freight thereon.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The result of our investigations as set forth above lead us to the following recommendations for the consideration of the Government:—

(a.) That the subsidy paid to the Wanganui River Trust be increased by £200 per annum on condition that the dues now levied on goods be abolished.

(b.) That Mr. Hatrick's attention be directed to the high freights from the Taumarunui end, and that he be requested to consider what reductions can be effected.

(c.) That Mr. Hatrick be requested to meet an officer or officers experienced in such business with a view to making complete and more equitable schedules of fares and freights.

(d.) That schedules of fares and freights as finally arranged be printed and exhibited at post-offices, copies to be supplied on demand to settlers and others concerned; also that a footnote be added thereto pointing out that complaints addressed to the Chief Postmaster, Wanganui, will receive attention.

(e.) That an officer of the Post Office be instructed to periodically inspect the book in which Messrs. Hatrick and Co. enter goods for shipment with the view of ensuring their despatch in accordance with their order of entry, this being provided for by a clause in the contract.

(f.) That the attention of Messrs. Hatrick and Co. be called to the complaints of disorderly conduct and illegal sale of liquor, and that they be requested to repress excessive drinking on the steamers, to maintain discipline, and see that the regulations under which the packet licenses are granted are strictly adhered to.

(g.) That before calling for tenders at the expiration of the present contract a complete schedule of passenger fares and goods freights, both up and down the river, be drawn up under three different scales—a maximum, based on the existing tariff; a middle, say 10 per cent. less; and a minimum, 20 per cent. lower than the maximum—and that different tenders be called for under the three different scales.

It should be stated, in conclusion, that all the witnesses were given an assurance that their statements would be regarded as confidential.

We have, &c.,

A. P. DRYDEN,

Chief Postmaster, Wellington.

CHAS. A. PIPER,

Traffic Superintendent of Railways, North Island.

T. N. BRODRICK,

Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington.

The Hon. the Prime Minister, Wellington.

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