

used for Dominion traffic became concentrated in European and American waters, and the tonnage entered at Bluff dropped from 612,470 net tons in 1912 to 101,931 tons in 1918. In 1913 about sixty-five large ocean-going vessels worked cargo at Bluff; in 1918 only six such vessels were in port. The Bluff-Melbourne service, after a spasmodic existence, is now practically *non est*. The coastal service, which was carried on by large and commodious cargo-vessels, has now fallen into the lot of the smallest cargo-carriers working on the coast. Very heavy expense has been incurred latterly by importers by the fact that steamers from Britain and America have not come beyond Port Chalmers, and they have had either to pay a heavy transshipment rate to bring the goods on by steamer to Bluff, or a still heavier railway haulage charge from Dunedin in order to get delivery of their goods, even after long delay. On the other hand, the same cause has operated against exporters, and large quantities of cargo have been railed from Bluff to Port Chalmers for shipment there. The revenue of the Board, which is chiefly derived from harbour dues, suffered a corresponding declension: the annual trade of the port in tons has fallen from 144,418 tons in 1912 to 80,000 tons in 1918. The Board is aware that some of the causes which have brought about this state of things have been beyond the control of the management of shipping companies; and in common with the rest of the British Empire the port has been resigned to suffer, and see the facilities which it formerly enjoyed being employed for the good of the Empire. But now that the war is over and the necessary readjustment of services is being considered, the Bluff Harbour Board is out for a return to the state of things before the war. Certain amalgamations of shipping interests have taken place, and it is necessary that the claims of the port shall be kept prominently before the powers that be in order that the trade of the port shall be adequately served, and promises made before the war shall be implemented. The Board therefore urges that the Select Committee of Industries shall note the position as regards Bluff, and add the weight of its recommendation in the proper quarters. A very large quantity of commodities has been held up during the last two years, such as frozen meat, tallow, wool, cheese, &c. The productivity of the district is increasing yearly, and as soon as the province gets satisfactory outlet the figures regarding imports and exports quoted for 1913 will be largely increased. The port requires—(1) Frequent visits from ocean-going steamers to carry exports; (2) direct services from Britain and America to cope with the imports; (3) a return to the Bluff-Melbourne weekly service each way for passengers and cargo and transshipments; (4) an adequate coastal service. In the local trades mentioned, fish, oysters, and timber exports, and timber, fruit, &c., imports, adequate steamer accommodation is essential to their proper development. With regard to the capabilities of Bluff Harbour, the Board has its own dredge, and has carried out a continuous dredging policy for the last fourteen years, during which time the port has been worked by the largest steamers regularly trading to the Dominion. It has agreed to improvements which include widening the wharf, and thus increasing the depth of the water. At present vessels can be loaded up to 28 ft. 6 in., and it is anticipated that the improvements will result in adding materially to that accommodation. The financial position of the Board is very strong: the funded debt is only £35,500, while the excess of assets over liabilities amounts to £130,000. The Board has authority to borrow £130,000 for harbour-works, and it intends to use this money in the near future in improving the facilities of the port by judicious expenditure at suitable times. Bluff has strong claims to being ranked as the fifth port of the Dominion, in normal times enjoys freights and insurances at main-port rates, and with the splendid Southland District behind it it is only a matter of time before it comes into its own. Attached, for the information of the Committee, is a copy of an article in the "Annual Review for 1913 of Shipping and Commerce," giving particulars of the shipping and trade statistics of the port, which will be of use to the Committee in considering the question of the industries of the province.

As the proper provision of harbour-construction is a natural adjunct to the development of industries, and comes within the scope of the present inquiry by the Committee on Industries, I wish to say that in my opinion a great improvement could be made in harbour-construction work in New Zealand. Harbours are national concerns, and should be treated as such by the Government. The functions of Harbour Boards should be to attend to the business and financial affairs of the ports and find the money for carrying out such harbour-works as the necessities of the district demand. The Government should appoint a highly qualified harbour engineer, with the necessary staff, to plan the construction work of every port in the Dominion; and no Harbour Board should be permitted to carry out construction work except on the plans prepared by a central engineering harbour-construction department under the control of the Minister. If a Harbour Board wished to add to the facilities of their port, they should say to the harbour engineer, "We can find a certain sum of money, and we want greater shipping accommodation to meet the growing requirements of our district: show us how much of the plan of our harbour can be carried out with the money we can afford to spend"; and the work could be proceeded with accordingly. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent in harbour-construction in this country, through amateur engineering, for which no adequate results have been received, and many districts are encumbered with heavy liabilities for harbours which have not yet materialized into a semblance of what was expected. The appointment of a highly qualified harbour engineer would make for more efficient work in harbour-construction, would provide for a general improvement in the harbours of the country, and would save thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money.

*To Mr. Craigie:* The figures I have in regard to export do not include coastwise trade. I could not give you the figures for both overseas and coastwise.

*To Mr. Hornsby:* I have not considered the question of State control of shipping.

*To Mr. Luke:* We think that our port has suffered more than any other port; in any case, we have been very hard hit.