

It would be convenient, before going into the details of the present arrangements, to describe shortly the various legislative measures which have affected the Post Office in the Colony.

Legislation.

I. The measure which first came into operation in the Colony was the Imperial Act, 3 and 4, Vic. C. 96, under which power was given to Her Majesty's Postmaster-General (by virtue of a warrant dated 31st August, 1841, issued by the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury) to establish Rules and Regulations for the transmission of Letters and Newspapers, and for levying rates of Postage.

II. On the 7th January 1842, a Local Act was passed, intituled the "Postage Ordinance," which came into operation on the 1st March of that year.

The main objects of this Ordinance were—

- 1st. To provide for the appointment of Officers.
- 2nd. To fix rates of remuneration for the conveyance of Mails by sea.
- 3rd. To establish Postage rates.
- 4th. Miscellaneous provisions, among which the free transmission of Official correspondence.

III. The disallowance of this Ordinance by Her Majesty was notified in the Government Gazette of September 6th 1843, on the ground that the Postmaster-General of Great Britain having been charged with the conduct of the Department under the Imperial Act above mentioned, no place was left for Local legislation; new Regulations were at the same time published in the Government Gazette, issued in pursuance of the Treasury warrant above mentioned, which thereupon became the law of the Colony. This alteration created considerable dissatisfaction, and it is perhaps worth while to note the grounds upon which these regulations were principally objected to.

The principal objection was that whereas under the Ordinance Newspapers were not subject to any charge, the new Regulations imposed a rate of 1d. on British or Colonial Newspapers, and 2d. on Foreign ones.

At the same time however, a burden was imposed on the Post-Office in the form of a gratuity to be paid to Masters of Vessels at the rate of 1d. for conveyance beyond Seas, and ½d. for conveyance to places within the Colony.

The result of this was, both dissatisfaction on the part of the Public and a loss of Revenue.

The loss to the Revenue arose as follows. The payment of the gratuity to Masters of Vessels was imperative on the part of the Department, but the payment of the Postage was optional on the part of those to whom the Newspapers were addressed.

In many cases these latter refused to receive their Newspapers at the rate charged, and accordingly refunded no part of the expense already incurred in gratuities.

Another objection to the new Regulations was that a double postage was exacted on Letters arriving in New Zealand by Vessels which had touched at intermediate Ports.

3. No further attempt was made to alter the laws relating to the Post-office till 1848, when the "Postage Ordinance" was passed by the Legislative Council.

The effect of this Ordinance was to empower the Governor to establish Post-Offices and Postal communications, to appoint Officers, to fix rates of Postage, and to make general Regulations, to be enforced by penalties not exceeding £5.

4. In addition to this an Act was passed in 1856, intituled the "Local Posts' Act, 1856," to provide for the establishment of Local Posts, empowering the Superintendent to fix rates of Postage on correspondence transmitted by such Local Posts, and prescribing the mode in which the Revenue arising therefrom should be applied.

Lastly, the "New Zealand Post Office Act, 1858" passed during last Session, repeals all existing Acts and Regulations.

None of the Acts or Regulations previously in force made any attempt to introduce provisions specially applicable to the particular requirements of this Department, or calculated to guard against abuses or irregularities, whether arising from negligence in the safe-keeping, transmission, and delivery of Letters, or from attempts at fraud on the Revenue.

The Post Office Act now in operation contains elaborate provisions for cases of this nature, and confers the powers required for the punishment of delinquencies, which could hardly be reached except under some law enacted specially for the purpose.

So long as the Post Offices were few in number and the means of communication limited, the transactions were simple, and probably the imperfect state of the law was of no practical evil consequence. But with the increase in the business, and the consequent increased intricacy of operation, a more complicated machinery has become necessary.

Besides this general defect in the laws previously in operation, the "Local Posts' Act, 1856," as is now generally admitted, was positively objectionable, principally on the following grounds:—

1st. It was inconsistent with the engagement entered into with the Imperial Government.

By that engagement the Colony was bound in the terms of the Treasury Minute, November, 1855, to deliver all Letters arriving from the United Kingdom *free* to destination. In contravention of this stipulation, the "Local Posts' Act, 1856," authorised the levying of an additional payment on such Letters.

2nd. It necessitated a very greatly increased amount of unnecessary work, and consequently of expense, in the several Post Offices, by requiring that a double set of accounts and papers should be kept in each

3rd. It created a burdensome tax upon those Letters which had to be transmitted by several of these Local Posts', by charging a separate rate upon each transmission, whereby the postage was raised to such an amount as, in ordinary cases, to amount to a prohibition.