

1880.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER, DUNEDIN

(CORRESPONDENCE EXPLAINING AND REBUTTING CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. Oliver, with the leave of the House.

No. 1.

Mr. CONYERS to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

Office of the Commissioner of Railways (Middle Island),
Dunedin, 29th June, 1880.

SIR,—

I have the honor, at the request of Mr. Armstrong, to submit a letter which that gentleman has addressed to me with reference to the mode in which he has been dealt with in the report of the Civil Service Commission.

Without attempting to prejudice the merits of the matter, I cannot but sympathize with Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Armstrong's statement, that the locomotive engineership of the Otago Railways was conferred upon him by the Provincial Government, unsought, is strictly true; and I am in a position to bear emphatic testimony to the ability, energy, and faithfulness which he has evinced in the discharge of his duties both under the Provincial and General Governments.

I sincerely trust that some means may be found to obviate, or at all events to mitigate, the disadvantages which the remarks contained in the newspaper version of the report of the Commission are undoubtedly calculated to entail upon him.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works.
Wellington.

I have, &c.,
WM. CONYERS,
Commissioner of Railways, M.I.

Enclosure in No. 1.

Mr. ARMSTRONG to Mr. CONYERS.

SIR,—

Locomotive Engineer's Office, Dunedin, 28th June, 1880.

I have the honor to request that you will permit me to lodge, through you, this my protest against the very injurious and unfair manner in which the Civil Service Commission have treated me in the matter of their report upon railways.

A version of their report which was allowed to appear in the public papers—which has been thus scattered broadcast over the colony, and which can hardly have been disseminated save by the act or connivance of the Commission, and is, at all events, their production—speaks of me in a way which is calculated to blast my professional prospects for life.

Subsequent to the appearance of that version in the newspapers, a document, purporting to be a report of the Commission, was laid upon the table of the House. Having obtained access to this document, I compared it with the newspaper version, and I find that the most objectionable portion of the matter which affects myself has been eliminated from the former, and I am consequently placed in this position: while all the harm that can be done to me by those statements has been done, and I am made by the act of the Commission a marked man before the colony, they can, and probably will, shelter themselves by repudiating the newspaper version, and pointing to the garbled document as their true report. As, however, the newspaper version of the report will be read by hundreds who will never see the other, it is the one upon which I stand arraigned before the public, and I claim the right to deal with that in framing my protest.

Apart from the manipulation which the report has, as I have shown, undergone (to obviate, I suppose, the risk of its being contemptuously rejected by the House), I allege that the procedure of the Commission was unfair, because the adverse remarks upon me are based upon leading questions which

they put to me—questions of a one-sided character, which specially served to lead up to certain conclusions—just those, in fact, which the report contains; and, had I allowed the matter to rest there, these questions would have placed the Commission in possession of only one-half the truth.

In reply to the questions of the Commission, I frankly acknowledged that I had served an apprenticeship as a carpenter and builder, and that I never before acted as a locomotive engineer; but I insisted upon adding to this that all my experience and practice had been of a professional character, first as a road engineer and then under Messrs. J. Brogden and Sons as a constructor of railways; that I held first-class testimonials in these capacities, and also as a draughtsman—the latter being one important qualification of a mechanical engineer; and that the position of locomotive engineer of the Otago railways was never sought by me, but was voluntarily offered to me by the Provincial Government, who were satisfied with my qualifications. All these salient facts the Commission have seen fit to repress.

I also informed the Commission that the charge of the locomotives is not the only portion of the duties of my position; that the building and maintenance of the carriage and wagon stock of the department also devolves upon me. This part of my duty, which, measured by the amount of money-expenditure involved, proves it a most important one, and for which, even by the showing of the Commission my early training specially fits me, they have thought it consistent with their notions of honourable dealing to make no mention of.

As to that portion of my duties in respect of which the Commission have thought fit to insinuate an unfavourable verdict, I may point out, that the fact of the Provincial Government having conferred upon me, unsought, the appointment of Engineer of Permanent-way and Rolling-stock to their railways, is sufficient evidence, until the contrary is proved, that I was then (and that is six years ago) competent to take the discharge of the duties required of me.

It is true the railways were only sixty-two miles in length, but the experience I have gained, combined with incessant study and attention, has enabled me to keep pace with the gradually extending duties which have devolved upon me as the mileage has increased; and I appeal to my immediate superior whether the functions of my position have not been performed with credit to myself, and, to speak modestly, with some advantage to the department.

It is not only that harm has been done to me in this colony by this most unfair procedure of the Commission, but in the neighbouring Australian Colonies. Wherever, in fact, this newspaper publication of the report reaches, I am rendered a marked man; and, although I entered the service with professional credentials of a high character, any attempt to retrieve my credit and restore my prospects, even out of the colony, would be almost hopeless in the face of the damnable and degrading remarks the Commission have introduced into their report.

I cannot believe that this procedure of the Commission is otherwise than distasteful to the Government. They cannot see, with approval, old servants who have served them faithfully thus held up to the odium of the country, their dearest interests injured, and their prospects fairly blasted; and I beg you will appeal on my behalf to the Hon. the Minister who presides over this department, and to whom, through you, I am more directly responsible, that some reparation may be made to me for the grave injustice and wrong which have been inflicted upon me.

The Commissioner of Railways, M.I.,
Dunedin.

I have, &c.,

ALEX. ARMSTRONG, M.I.M.E.,
Locomotive Engineer.

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1880.