

3. Mr. Seddon, assuming that these figures were correct, issued the Public Works Statement containing the two following paragraphs: (At page 1.) "Results have proved, however, that fair progress has been made with our necessary reproductive public works, and yet the expenditure thereon has been less during the past year than it has been for years past, and still the colony has advanced." (At page 14.) "For the purpose of showing how the 'tapering-off' policy succeeded by the self-reliant non-borrowing policy has affected our public-works expenditure during the last few years, I give the following figures, which represent the total expenditure under the Public Works Fund during each of the years mentioned, and which bear eloquent testimony to the self-sacrificing spirit exhibited by our colonists in accepting with thorough goodwill the decreased expenditure which that policy has entailed, and which also afford the fullest evidence of the resources and capabilities of the colony, seeing that, notwithstanding this enormous diminution in our loan expenditure, the country is becoming year by year more prosperous, and its financial position steadily improving. The figures showing the loan expenditure during the several years are as follows—namely: 1885–86, £1,475,386; 1886–87, £1,333,484; 1887–88, £966,159; 1888–89, £613,939; 1889–90, £482,464; 1890–91, £334,756; 1891–92, £295,978." (The correct expenditure for 1891–92 was £391,501.)

4. Reference to the small table printed at page 2 of the Public Works Statement would have shown that the statement on page 14 was inaccurate. On page 2 the total expenditure is put down as £491,612, but a note is added that in this amount there was included £100,000 which had been paid off the floating debt. Deducting this sum from the £491,612 it will be seen that the expenditure on public works was £391,612. The small credit of £111 had not been brought forward when this table was constructed.

5. Reference also to Table C of the Public Works Statement would have shown that the amount given on page 14 of the Statement was inaccurate; in the table it appeared as £391,612.

6. The Statement as altered by Mr. Blow was circulated as follows—viz.: To the Reader of the House twenty-five copies, on the 3rd October, and twelve copies on the 6th; none to the Council, and three hundred and sixty-three to departments of the Government. One thousand five hundred copies in all of this altered Statement were printed.

7. The *Hansard* report of the Public Works Statement was printed from the Statement laid on the table, but was corrected by the Reader in the printing office without reference to Mr. Seddon. The correct amount of the expenditure appears in *Hansard*.

8. The Public Works Statement was discussed on the motion for going into Committee of Supply on the 5th October. In this debate reference was made to the error in the text of the Statement by the Hon. Mr. Mitchelson and the Hon. Mr. Richardson: and the error was not contradicted or explained. The debate did not conclude until after 4 a.m., and Mr. Seddon lost his right of reply, he having been asleep when the Speaker put the motion.

9. The next time that the Public Works Statement came up for reference in the House was on the debate on the Public Works Appropriation Act, on the 10th October, but neither then nor on any other day was any reference made by Mr. Seddon to the error; the session closed on the 11th October.

10. Mr. Seddon did not alter the Public Works Statement; nor was he informed of the alteration until the 5th October, during the debate on the motion to go into Supply. He then asked Mr. Blow for an explanation of the error which had been referred to by the Hon. Mr. Mitchelson and the Hon. Mr. Richardson, when he was informed by Mr. Blow that it was an error, and that he had corrected it.

11. Mr. Seddon was asleep when the Speaker put the motion to go into Committee of Supply and consequently, did not reply to the comments made in the House about the mistake.

12. The Committee are of opinion that, in altering the text of a Ministerial Statement after it had been laid before Parliament, and without even informing the Minister of what he had done, Mr. Blow committed a grave indiscretion. They consider that no alteration of any parliamentary paper, after it has been laid on the table of the House, can properly be made without the sanction of the House.

6th September, 1893.

J. M. SHERA,
Chairman, Public Accounts Committee.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

[NOTE.—Other business than that relating to the alteration in the Public Works Statement, 1892, is not printed, and where other business occurs it will be shown by a line of asterisks.]

WEDNESDAY, 26TH JULY, 1893.

Present: Mr. Shera (Chairman), Mr. Guinness, Hon. Sir J. Hall, Mr. G. Hutchison, Dr. Newman, Mr. Saunders, Hon. Sir R. Stout, Mr. Tanner, Hon. Mr. Ward.

The Orders of Reference of the 28th June, 5th July, and 18th July, 1893, were read by the Clerk.

* * * * *

The Hon. Sir J. Hall moved, "That the Prime Minister, in his place in the House, having expressed his desire that the alteration which was made in the Public Works Statement of last year, after it was laid on the table, and before its insertion in the Blue Books, should be inquired into by the Public Accounts Committee. The Committee will proceed with such inquiry on any date that may be convenient to the Premier."