

service, and to inform you that since the return of Sir Joseph Ward here the delays have been strongly commented upon in Parliament. On the 24th ultimo Mr. J. G. W. Aitken, one of the members for this city, asked the following question: "Whether the Postmaster-General's attention has been drawn to the great irregularity that has existed in the delivery of the San Francisco mail, both in the Home land and in this colony, for a very long period—for instance, the mail by this route due at Auckland on the 20th instant, is not yet reported as having arrived at that port—and, if so, whether he will inform the House as to what steps he intends to take to see that the colony gets better served for the money expended on this service?"

The Minister, in replying, said, "The whole dislocation is due to the terrible results of the earthquake in San Francisco, which has completely disorganized business in that city, including that of the Oceanic Company. I am fully aware of the irregularities and the action taken by the Department to bring about more regular deliveries. When passing through the United States I took up this matter seriously with the contractors, who have been doing their best to bring about greater regularity. The question was also discussed with the Postmaster-General of the United States. The contractors confidently hope that Congress next session will grant an increased subsidy to the service, in which case the Oceanic Company will place an order for building larger and faster steamers, the plans for which are already prepared. The late departure of the 'Sonoma,' due at Auckland on the 20th instant from San Francisco, and her prolonged voyage, are stated to have been due to the maritime strike at San Francisco, precluding adequate labour for loading purposes, and compelling the company to engage inexperienced firemen and stokers. Representations have been made to the contractors."

This answer did not satisfy Mr. Aitken, who represented that the delays and discrepancies dated from a period long before the recent earthquake, and that the unsatisfactory nature of the service could be traced from the time when the service fell entirely into the hands of an American company. While the "Sonoma" might have been delayed by a strike, he pointed out that she certainly lost a great deal of time between San Francisco and Auckland. Mr. Aitken admitted that at one time the San Francisco service was the premier service of the colony, but he considered it no longer held that position, and urged that the whole question of the colony's mail-services should be looked into, when, he was of opinion, it would be found that a saving in cost could be brought about by such a revision.

This attack on the service so early in the session presages that when the renewal is being discussed trouble may be expected from other quarters, and considerable opposition may be looked for before the House will agree to the colony becoming a party to the service for another term. The want of confidence in the regularity of the service is, however, not confined to the House of Representatives, but is beginning to be voiced by the public, which has raised an outcry over the late arrival of the "Sonoma," previously referred to, involving as it does a departure from Auckland on the present voyage four days behind schedule time.

The attached statements of the departures from and arrivals at Auckland and San Francisco from the beginning of this year will show that there has been ample cause for grave dissatisfaction; and the Postmaster-General wishes to have such an assurance from your company as will lead to the reasonable expectation that the last has been heard of these irregularities.

I have, &c.,

W. GRAY, Secretary.

Messrs. the J. D. Spreckels and Bros. Company, San Francisco, Cal.

[S.F. Agr. 06/73.]

Enclosure 1 in No. 34.

STATEMENT showing the Departures from Auckland and Arrivals at San Francisco of the San Francisco Mail Steamers from the 19th January to the 1st October, 1906.

Vessel.	Left Auckland.		Arrived San Francisco.			
	Date. (Due 3 p.m.)	Hours late.	Contract Time 396 Hours.		Hours beyond Time-table Date. (6 a.m. Monday)	
			Date.	Hours over.		
	1906.					
"Sonoma" ...	January 19 ...	8 20	February 6	42	28	
"Ventura" ...	February 10 ...	15 44	February 27	43	36	
"Sierra" ...	March 2 ...	1 20	March 19 ...	25	4	
"Sonoma" ...	March 25 ...	38 30	April 12 ...	66	82	
"Ventura" ...	April 13 ...	2 0	May 1 ...	39	19	
"Sierra" ...	May 4 ...	3 15	May 21 ...	25	6	
Service stopped by earthquake—two voyages missed—25th May and 15th June.						
"Sonoma" ...	July 11 ...	127 30	July 30 ...	68*	176*	
"Ventura" ...	July 27 ...	2 20	August 14 ...	54*	36*	
"Sierra" ...	August 17* ...	1 0	September 3	26*	8*	
"Sonoma" ...	September 12†	106 0*	October 1*	93†	180*	

* These particulars not in original (the Mail Agents not having then reported).

† Late departure due to late arrival at Auckland on inward voyage—six days late.