

1924.

NEW ZEALAND.

RAILWAYS STATEMENT

BY THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS, HON. J. G. COATES.

MR. SPEAKER,—

I have pleasure in presenting the Railways Statement for the year ended 31st March, 1924.

In presenting my last Statement I explained that it had not been possible for me to personally review our railway system owing to the short time I had held the portfolio. During the recess, however, I have made an exhaustive inspection of all branches of the Department's activities, and have formed definite opinions with regard to the more important problems, and these I have dealt with herein under the different headings.

Generally speaking, I am convinced that the Dominion has a splendid railway system, and that, if given necessary facilities, it can be made to pay a reasonable interest on the capital invested, and render more satisfactory service to the community. The nature of the facilities I refer to are new stations and layouts at important termini and main centres, deviations, grade-easements, and increased accommodation; and my proposals with regard to these matters have for convenience been dealt with in a separate report, which will be presented to Parliament at the same time as this Statement.

Before proceeding to deal with new subjects I propose to touch on the matters mentioned in my last Statement.

REORGANIZATION.

After the close of last session I immediately closely examined the existing organization, and with the General Manager of Railways put some changes into effect. I feel sure that the reorganization of the Head Office, which is set out in the diagram annexed, will result in a much more satisfactory apportionment of the work and responsibility of the management than existed hitherto, speed up routine, and enable the time of the General Manager to be exclusively occupied in matters of prime importance.

To extend this decentralization of responsibility to other important officers of the Department, such as District Managers, District Engineers, Locomotive Engineers, &c., was a most difficult matter, especially with regard to the management of the districts. I arranged a conference with the District Managers to consider the question, but they were of the opinion that matters directly affecting revenue, expenditure, staff conditions, and regulations required to be in the hands of a central authority to ensure uniformity and stable finance; also that authority is at present in the hands of District Managers to meet the full transport requirements of the various districts. I am not yet satisfied that much more could not be done, and I have certain proposals under consideration now which will, when put into operation, greatly assist towards a solution of this problem.