

158. *Mr. J. McKenzie.*] You say you are of opinion that the original estimate was too high?—Yes.

159. Are you aware of the fact that every contractor that touched the line lost money on it?—I am not aware of it; but I am aware that some have made money.

160. Can you tell me one that made any money?—Well, I do not like to mention names.

161. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would you object to consider a proposal which might be of mutual benefit to both parties by which you would perhaps get less land, but would receive more money?—It comes to the same thing.

162. *Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson.*] Would you have any objection to the clause in last year's Act being inserted—subsection (8), clause 8—by which land so granted could be leased or otherwise disposed of according to the land laws of the colony?—That is meaningless. You cannot dispose of lands otherwise than in accordance with the land laws of the colony. I do not mean the Land Act by any means; but “according to the land laws” means transfer of land, and all contracts relating to land.

163. Well, then, subject to the conditions of the Land Act?—No; because the Land Act has been altered since then.

164. The Land Act of 1885?—The difference between the two Acts is this: that Act did not give any power to take up land on open terms, the present Act does; but if you were to proceed under the present Act, then you must say to the company you will make no profit out of it. Whatever profit is made will go to the Government.

165. Then it would appear that you are not disposed to forego the right of the company to deal with the land in what way they please?—It is their property when they have acquired it.

167. *Mr. O'Callaghan.*] Would you be willing to have a clause such as I have referred to inserted in the Bill?—No; because, as I understand, it would hamper the company.

167. *Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson.*] As to the land being disposed of according to the land laws of the colony, do you not think that is equally an element in the question now as it was last year, if we are to judge by your speech of last session?—I can only say that any company that would spend a million of money on a project in which they were to have no interest in the settlement of the land ought to be sent to a lunatic asylum.

168. That might have equally applied last session, might it not?—The truth is, I do not wish to meddle with the Act. It has been drafted by Sir Frederick Whitaker. It is a most complete piece of machinery, and perfect in all its parts.

169. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] I have no doubt that Sir Frederick Whitaker is a most able parliamentary draftsman, and I do not want to say anything as to all its parts; but, referring to the clauses which provide for the contract, are we to understand from you that, if the estimate of value on the constructed portion of the line is made on the basis of the present construction, the company will take it over and ask no grant of land on account of it. Do you say so?—I do.

170. On the other hand, if they are to pay the cost of the work or the estimated cost of the work at the time, you would expect a grant?—Yes; on the original estimate.

171. But on the present estimate of value you ask for no grant?—No.

172. But on the other alternative you would ask for a grant?—Yes; that is my position.

173. *Mr. O'Callaghan.*] Does it strike you that it would be possible under the proposed contract for a few large syndicates to be allowed to purchase this land: the whole of it?—I do not see how they would benefit if they could do so. There are no contiguous blocks, and they could not get any block of more than a thousand acres.

174. When taking into consideration the whole of the country, would there be a difficulty to form blocks to prevent that?—It is the interest of the company to have the land settled. I do not care what clause you may think proper to put in so as to compel the land to be sold and settled in properly-sized divisions, their object is to settle the land; it is their interest to do so. Therefore I say that we want to settle a very large portion of New Zealand which is now a howling wilderness.

175. Do you think if they could see the whole of this country it would prevent them selling?—I say that I agree to any provision you may insert in the Bill which would compel them to offer the land for sale within, say, twelve months. The company would surely not make a line of railway through a district where there was nobody living on the land. The Government also themselves will reap a substantial benefit—quite as large a benefit as the company—from the value of all their land being raised.

176. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] But if the company are compelled to sell within twelve months?—I did not say they were to be compelled to sell, but “to offer for sale.” They might not be able to find purchasers. I am willing that any fair clause should be inserted in the contract that would induce settlement along the line. There is no other object in view on the part of my people. When I say “my people,” I mean, of course, my constituents. Neither is there any other object in the view of those who inhabit the Maniototo country.

177. *Mr. O'Callaghan.*] Would it not be difficult to find any blocks of agricultural land that would not, if sold, interfere in some way with the interests of the miners?—I am quite prepared to exhibit a whole sheaf of telegrams which I have received from parties dwelling in the locality, expressing their opinion that no injury would be done to mining industries, but rather that great benefit would result from it to mining, agricultural, and pastoral interests.

*Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson:* In fact, to the whole of the public of this “howling wilderness.”

*Mr. Pyke:* Well, I cannot call it anything but a wilderness, where merely about eight thousand people are located on as many millions of acres.

178. *Mr. J. McKenzie.*] Would you have any objection to let the Committee see those “sheaves” of telegrams which you say you have received?—I am going to have them copied, and sent to the Committee—every one of them.

179. Suppose the Parliament of New Zealand were prepared to give away to a company the