

68. Are you well within the mark in estimating it at 150,000 acres?—Yes.

69. As a matter of fact, you gave me a higher figure at first, so that you are quite within the mark now?—Yes.

70. Is that good land?—Yes. Besides the level parts you could take the tops of the hills and use them. There is a lot of country there which could be utilised if it were not for the reservation.

71. What would be the value of the land if these valleys were improved?—If you take the value to-day, I dare say it would be about £4 or £5 an acre. These are small holdings.

72. Has there been a demand for land for settlement in your district?—Yes, a great demand.

73. For how long?—I should say for the last eight or ten years. Of course, there has always been a certain demand, but during the last eight or ten years it has been much greater. The principal portion of the land there has been applied for under section 216 of the Act.

74. A large portion is held without being improved?—A good portion is held on speculation. People speculate in it with the idea of coming into the country and settling down there.

75. Then, according to your view, the existence of the blue-marked reservation has to a very large extent blocked settlement in the Hokitika district and to the south of it?—It has practically ruined the southern portion of the riding. If this reservation had been lifted ten years ago Hokitika would have been one of the most profitable parts of the country for settlement. As it is I have figures to show that during these ten years the number of cattle and sheep imported has greatly decreased. That shows what it would have been but for the reservation.

76. Then, settlement is prevented by the "blue" reserve?—Yes. There have been 200,000 acres applied for in that reserve.

77. You were Chairman of the County Council and will be able to tell the Committee whether the local bodies have suffered in their finance by the existence of the "blue" reserve?—Yes, terribly. The Westland County Council would benefit by the increased rateable value of the land, if there were more accommodation for settlers. These are mostly along the South Road, within a radius of ten miles from the town. Take my section. The upset value of it was £400, and at the next valuation it will be valued at £2,000, and we derive rates from the improvements as well as from the land. It would be thousands a year to us if freehold property could be taken up. The land itself would be worth £10 an acre, and we should have had many dairy factories established in the district.

78. In addition, you say there would be an increase in gold-production by the increase of settlement?—I did not say that; but one thing goes with the other. If we had population they would have ample means to invest their money, whereas now we are locked out from investment.

79. When you were living on the Coast you were a storekeeper?—I am a storekeeper.

80. Then, you know something of the condition of trade between Christchurch and the Coast. Would the construction of the railway be a benefit to the Coast?—A very great benefit.

81. In what respect?—In the facilities it would give to people travelling. If we had the railway from the Coast we could get to Wellington in a day; and we could get to Christchurch in a day, get our business done, and get home again in a very short time, whereas now it takes us five days to get there. Then, our harbours are bar harbours, and you cannot always be certain of being able to get away. We could do with the railway constructed in a day what it takes us a week to do now. In the same way we have very few visitors from Christchurch now, but if the railway was completed we should have a number of people coming across, and that would set a lot of money free.

82. Do you think it would cheapen the necessities of life to people on the Coast?—It would in certain respects. It would not cheapen produce, but it would cheapen such articles as tea, tobacco, and other stores of that description. Such things as potatoes, onions, oats, and chaff it would not cheapen.

83. You have timber and coal on the Coast: what would be the effect in regard to them?—It would be a benefit to Canterbury if they could have them placed in the trucks on the Coast and taken across the Island without change.

84. Is it possible that it could be said that every person in Westland would not benefit by the construction of the railway. I do not mean necessarily in pocket, but that they would be better off in their mode of life?—Certainly, they would benefit. The whole district would increase in prosperity, and every one must go on with it. The value of property would increase, and we should have the social conditions of life altered for the better. We should have many persons taking advantage of excursion fares on the railway to come across, and in every respect the conditions of life would be made more pleasant.

85. This would also apply to the people of Nelson?—It would.

86. And to a considerable extent to the population of Canterbury?—Yes. A great many of them would come across to the West Coast for their health, and so on.

87. It would be a great advantage to the Canterbury trade to have the railway?—Yes.

88. Besides the advantage to tourists?—Yes. Even now, with the bit of line that has been constructed, we have had three thousand more tourists in the last ten years than we ever had before.

89. You have heard the calculation given as to the advantage the railway from Hokitika to Greymouth has conferred on the district?—Yes. I used to be a storekeeper up in the Valley, and it used to take me three days to get to the town, and now it can be done in a day.

90. Then, it is an advantage to all the people on the Coast?—Yes.

91. You have had an opportunity of thinking the matter over, and perhaps you could offer to the Committee an estimate of the sum which the damage and loss to Westland, Nelson, and Canterbury through the non-construction of the railway must necessarily exceed?—It is a very large