

447. Can you give us some idea where these belts are?—They traverse both sides of the Inangahua River, and on either side there are a series of belts or seams—coal-measures, in fact—varying in size, some of them, I think, as much as 20 ft. thick, with others less in proportion.

448. Are you satisfied, then, that there is in this district a very large area of coal country?—Yes, I am quite satisfied of that. In fact, I am more satisfied since the Commission sat than I was before, because evidence was adduced before that Commission that went to corroborate all I said, and even more, as to the existence of coal.

449. Supposing the Brunner Mine were closing down, as I understand it is likely to do within a few months, what effect would that have on the coal industry in your district?—Well, given the means of getting it away, I have no hesitation in saying there will be a very large output of coal.

450. You say “given the means”: would it be necessary, for the purpose of getting this coal away, to connect the coal-measures with the present terminus of the line of railway at Reefton?—Just so; it requires that to be done in order to work the coal at a payable profit.

451. Supposing the coal is as extensive as you say, and there be a development of the gold-mining industry, and a development of the timber industry, to which I am going to allude in a moment, do you think that private enterprise would connect the terminus of the line at Reefton with these coalfields?—Well, I have no doubt that such a thing may eventuate, but it would be idle for me to arrive at a definite conclusion as to what private enterprise would undertake in that respect. I have no doubt, if it were properly laid before capitalists, and with the fact of the Brunner Mine being exhausted, a field would be open to capital that might justify the expenditure of a connection.

452. We all know a community will wait and wait a very long time for the Government to move; but, supposing for the purposes of my question, the Government never extend this line beyond Reefton, and your community and capitalists generally have that before them?—Then I should be inclined to favour the opinion that private enterprise would embark in the project and connect the coal-measures with the line at Reefton. I say so, coupling it with the fact of the exhaustion of the Brunner Mine. There would be a larger market than there is at present, although there is a very large demand for the coal now in consequence of its quality for household purposes.

453. What do you say as to its quality?—I say there is no coal equal to it in the colony for household purposes; and even for steam purposes, so far as mining is concerned, it is used satisfactorily for that.

454. If this development took place there would be an enormous increase of traffic over the line?—The inference is so. Instead of the trains going back empty, as they have ever since the railway has been constructed, the trucks would go back full.

455. Taking the Blackball Mine as a guide, do you know whether the Blackball coal is similar to the coal beyond Reefton?—It is similar in character, but it is not as good. It is admitted on all sides that it is not as good for household purposes as coal got in the Reefton district.

456. Do you know how many men the Blackball Mine employs?—I think, somewhere about two hundred miners.

457. What community does that mean?—I should say about six or eight hundred people altogether.

458. Do you know what the output has been at the Blackball Mine?—About 500 tons daily.

459. Well, it may be some help, although it is a very rough guide, to take the output of the Blackball Mine, and the number of men it employs, and ask how many mines equal to the Blackball Mine do you think might be opened on the coal-measures you have mentioned about Reefton?—I think there would be room for at least five or six mines capable of putting out that quantity if they were fairly developed.

460. *The Chairman.*] Do you mean they would employ about ten to twelve hundred men?—Yes.

461. *Dr. Findlay.*] With a total population of probably four or five thousand people?—Yes, provided there is a full and fair development of the whole field.

462. Can you say whether there are large timber areas to the northward of Reefton?—There are.

463. Can you localise them?—The timber is pretty general to the northward. Some portions of it are maiden bush entirely, and some where the fringe of the bush has been utilised. I should not like to say the area. There is room there for a number of mills, supposing there were the means of getting the timber away to the market.

464. Are they, as a matter of fact, carrying sleepers at present by dray from part of this area?—That is so. They are conveying railway-sleepers, well, I dare say about sixteen miles from the bush to the station.

465. Now, what are the timbers generally?—Red-, white-, and black-pines, totara, and several birches.

466. Is there much silver-pine?—There are some bushes of silver-pine, but I cannot speak definitely upon that point.

467. Well, the timber traffic up there is practically undeveloped?—Undoubtedly; in the face of the timber-supply near the coast at the present time, and the difficulty of transit, they cannot compete.

468. What is the nearest mill to Reefton the timber from which is carried over the railway?—Ten or eleven miles.

469. Where is that from Reefton? Whose mill is it?—Perotti's.