

*The Chairman:* I would call your attention to the fact that the five-minutes bell calling the House together rang some time ago.

*Witness:* This is an important matter, and I am representing two thousand petitioners. I think that as sensible men the Committee will see that the case I have made out in favour of the eastern route is a very strong one, seeing that all the engineers have reported in favour of it. The Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones, after going into all the evidence, decided that that was the right route to adopt; yet we have a Minister now who takes one flying trip through the country and decides, against all the evidence I have brought before you, that the other route is the best. I say that if the Hon. Mr. McKenzie is a clever-enough man to lay out railways like that, and he is right, then he is worth £10,000 a year to this country, and it ought to employ him as an advance agent to go and lay out railways through the country without having engineers at all. It is an utter impossibility for a man, after paying only a flying visit to the district, to come to such a conclusion. I am going to ask this Committee to call upon the Government to produce the Engineer's report, and also to summon the Government engineers, because we think the country has a right to all the evidence that can be produced, and we feel that the Minister should be only too pleased to produce every particle of evidence he can if the position he has taken up is a right one. I only want what is fair. I have never said a single word in regard to this affair that I am not prepared to utter from a pulpit. The figures on that map show that the location of population is entirely in favour of the eastern route—excepting in regard to sheep. The greatest population is going to be here [place indicated]. Further north this railway is being made for the benefit of the whole of the population of the North, and we say that no deviation of this line should be made to benefit any of the counties down here [place indicated] at the expense of the big population there is going to be further up in the future. We say that this railway is a main trunk railway, and the House ought to be very careful that no mistake is made in regard to it. This is the point [indicated on map] where the Minister proposes to take the railway across. Well, you can see that that is not the centre of the peninsula. It is twelve miles from the Wairoa River, seventeen miles from the coast on the west, and thirty-three miles from the coast on the east.

[In reply to questions, witness pointed out various places and indicated routes on the maps.]

*The Chairman:* You mentioned Mr. Stewart, of Auckland: is he in private practice?

*Witness:* Yes.

J. STALLWORTHY, M.P., made a statement. (No. 2.)

*The Chairman:* We shall be glad to hear you now, Mr. Stallworthy.

*Witness:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—I have only one petition before you, I think. The other petitions—and there were a good many of them—were addressed to the Minister of Public Works and were sent to him direct. So that many persons have signed petitions that are not before this Committee. I will touch first on what Mr. Mander has mentioned as a compromise. That compromise the Minister has told us would cost the country £15,000, and add two and a half miles to the length of the railway for every person living north of the locality in question. Then, again, Mr. Mander tried to make a point of the Minister not having given him a plan of the adopted route. Work has been going on to the 77-mile peg, but it was stopped there on the instructions of the Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones, and until the last week or two nothing was done beyond that, because the Minister had not the survey plan to enable him to go on further with the construction-work. It was therefore quite impossible for him to supply a map showing the surveyed line. So that point, I think, is one that does not carry much weight. Now, last year a deputation came down from the North, and the prayer of their petition was that the Government, before proceeding further with the line than they had got, would survey the suggested western route. Up till last year—and the dates Mr. Mander has quoted were all prior to that—there had been no survey whatever of the western route, and the deputation asked that the Government would survey the western route before proceeding further with the line. Nothing more was asked than that. In support of the petition for a survey they very naturally quoted certain figures. The accuracy of those figures Mr. Mander doubts; but those figures were supported not by the verbal evidence of the petitioners only, but by a map—a very good map—made up from the county sheets issued by the Lithographic Department of the Government, and that map showed the population of each county and riding in the district. So that, whatever figures the petition gave, there was the map before the Committee. We asked simply for a survey. Now, the petitioners whom Mr. Mander represents to-day and who are here to give evidence were here last year, and their argument was this: "Do not grant a survey of the western route; do what the engineers have recommended." "Stick to the engineers" has been the cry of the opposing faction all through. Yet, at the same time, the engineers had never been over the western route. Mr. Hall-Jones has been mentioned. It was Mr. Hall-Jones who was in charge of public works last year, and to whom the deputation went after their interview with the Petitions Committee. A map was laid before Mr. Hall-Jones. Previous to that, I may mention, he had seen a map showing such a "kink" in the route as is shown on this map of Mr. Mander's, and I also had seen it. When I saw it I told the people that if the proposed line possessed a kink like that I would not support it. After that the western agitation flagged until we were shown that the map was a gross misrepresentation, and that the line could be made as straight in the one direction as in the other. The Minister, in giving the engineers instructions to survey the western route after the deputation had waited on him last year, put his rule on the place where construction had been stopped and on the place where it was agreed the line would go by either route and drew a straight line, and told the engineer to survey to that line as nearly as he could. The result of that survey has not been made known. But the alteration has not been made on the visit of Mr. McKenzie alone, as Mr. Mander appears to try to show. First of all, Mr. Hall-Jones was the Minister who was responsible