

and the north. That league was so constituted that its president was a Dargaville man and the secretary a Whangarei man. The railway problem presents itself to me in this way: If you take Kaikohe as the objective point, there are three ways of reaching it—First, by what might be called the extreme eastern route by Whangarei; secondly, by what might be called the central route to the east of the Tangihuas; and thirdly, by the central line to the west of the Tangihuas. The problem seems to me to resolve itself into this: that by two of these routes—that is, the line either to the east or the west of the Tangihuas—the distance from McCarroll's Gap to Kaikohe would be about sixty miles, whilst the distance from McCarroll's Gap to Kioreroa is twenty-seven miles. If you follow the line by making the twenty-seven-mile connection, you add to the distance of the point of objective at Kaikohe by about thirty miles. On the other hand, you bring into touch with Auckland several years in advance the whole of the Whangarei County and the whole of the Whangarei Borough, and the whole of Hokianga, and the whole of the north, and it seems to me, knowing the needs of the north fairly well, that that is the course that ought to be immediately taken. I do not want to go into the question of statistics, because after all they are only a matter of memory, and I take it that this Commission has access to data of that sort without requiring evidence from a mere looker-on. But I would suggest that whatever statistics are considered in connection with this railway question, they should include statistics of the whole of the Bay of Islands and the whole of the Whangarei County, as materially bearing upon the question. Taking the average railway construction, as far as I know it, I should say that by connecting by way of Kioreroa and McCarroll's Gap the whole of the north to Hokianga and the whole of the east will be connected with Auckland quite ten years sooner than if they wait for the line through the Mangakahia Valley to Kaikohe. At the present time, to my own knowledge, a very large number of passengers from as far north as Mangonui and as far west as the Hokianga take coach to Towai and join the train there rather than take the long water journey from Mangonui or the Bay of Islands; and when the line is through to Kaikohe, that number, I venture to say, will be very greatly increased. In my time in the north, and I believe at the present time too, all the coach-roads converged at Ohaeawai, and passed on to Kawakawa. When the line is open to Kaikohe—possibly in two years—the coaches no doubt will make Kaikohe the terminus. Now, a junction must sooner or later be made between Whangarei and the Main Trunk line proper, and I can see absolutely no reason why the railway traffic from the north to Auckland should be delayed ten years while the Main Trunk line is being constructed through the Mangakahia Valley to Kaikohe. It seems to me that from all points of view it is highly desirable to make that connection as soon as possible. The harbours on the east coast are good harbours; on the west they are poor harbours. Whatever connection we have with the outer world must be by way of the eastern harbours. A movement has been on foot in the Town of Whangarei for many years past to have their own harbour established as a port of entry, and merchants here tell me that, before many years, if trade goes on increasing at the present rate, that must come about. In that case, I take it, Whangarei will be the distributing centre for places as far south as Maungaturoto and Kaiwaka, and also for the north. In that case the connection between McCarroll's Gap and Kioreroa would very materially aid the inland settlers. Mr. Fowlds, when he was through the north, remarked that in his opinion the north would be the most closely settled district in the Dominion, and gave as his reason that the north was more capable of productiveness under intensive cultivation than any other part of New Zealand with which he was acquainted. I quite agree with that view. Dr. Findlay, when he was here, suggested that the lands, particularly between here and Kawakawa, being very cheap, were particularly well suited for fruit-growing. In that opinion I agree also. He also indicated not only that the land was suited for fruit-growing, but fitted to carry through a scheme for the utilization of prison labour for the preparation of farms to be ultimately disposed of to settlers, and that he would see to it that the north, whose climate was particularly suited for fruit-growing, should be used in that way. I have dealt with what I should call the eastern present line, and now I should like to come to the question of the central line. I have always held that a central line should be the shortest, the cheapest, and the most central. I think that the people to the north, although they would be inconvenienced for a period of, say, ten or fifteen years, by the linking-up of the Main Trunk line by way of McCarroll's Gap and Kioreroa, should not be penalized by thirty miles for all time. So that simultaneously with the construction of this connection a central line should be carried on from McCarroll's Gap to Kaikohe. That central line should, in my opinion, go to the east of the Tangihuas. I must at once say that I do not know the country to the west of the Tangihuas to anything like the extent that I know the country to the east. I hold the opinion that when the railway passes through the valley of the Mangakahia close settlement will be encouraged. I consider the Mangakahia to be the most extensive and most fertile valley in the whole of the north. I wish again to refer to statistics, not by way of giving statistics, but by way of indicating what I consider mere justice in the matter of computing statistics. I take it as an axiom and an absolutely just maxim that if statistics are considered at all, and a central line is under consideration, a straight line should be drawn through the centre of the district to be served by the railway—a straight north-and-south line—and that the statistics—population, stock, and others—should be computed from the sea-coast to the line. I make that suggestion because on a former occasion, when the eastern and western routes were under consideration, the statistics furnished as bearing upon the question excluded *in toto* the whole of the country to the east of the present Whangarei-Kawakawa line and the whole of the country for ten miles west of that line. In that way, by a simple process of manipulation, the whole of the population of the Whangarei Borough, the whole of quite twenty townships lying between Whangarei Heads and Bay of Islands, the whole of the production of a very large area, were absolutely excluded, and should, in my opinion, have been included. On