

political railway-construction, because at the present time nobody is worrying much about it, for it is not ours, but some day or other the country has to take the railway over: it may not be of any great importance at the present time, but it may mean that at some future time it is going to be of some importance; and in a scheme of this kind many things would be lost sight of, which, if the Government were making the line straight out, would not be lost sight of. A straight-out Government line cannot be asked for in there, because the whole of the coal district is being well served. It cannot be suggested that up to four years ago they were able to cart their coal out. That has been stopped; and now they have a railway-line into there within a mile and a half. It cannot be suggested that that country is not being well catered for and that they cannot get their stuff out over that. There must be thousands and thousands of people who have not got anything like that railway facility. They can easily either link up with More's line, or build a line out for themselves. I certainly think that you gentlemen would think twice before sanctioning a Government railway at Government railway rates in competition, practically, with the two railways that are in there at the present time and adequately serve the district.

8. Whom do you represent?—The Wairio Railway and Coal Company.

9. That is More Bros.?—Yes, More and Sons are big shareholders.

10. Who owns the Wairio Coal-mine?—It is owned by Mr. Samuel McMillan.

11. Mores have no interest at all in any of the coal-mines?—They have no interest in any of the coal-mines other than that Mr. McMillan is endeavouring to get Mores to purchase his coal at a certain price at the top of the line.

12. There has been no arrangement of that sort come to yet?—It has not actually been arranged yet, but it will be, and McMillan will dispose of his coal to More and Sons, in the same way as McKenzie—another mine-owner there—disposed of his coal to More and Sons. They found that it was much better to do it in that way and keep the coal in one channel, rather than allowing all the separate coal-holders to practically cut each other's throats. It comes over the one set of screens, which More and Sons have put up for these coal-mine owners at a cost of £600 or £700. They take the coal from the mine-owners, who fixed their own price, and then it is able to go over the one set of screens.

13. *Mr. Robertson.*] The working of the railway depends on the working of the Wairio Coal-mine?—No. You know that clause in the Order in Council: "The local authority shall run trains daily on the tramway hereby authorized (except at the option of the local authority on Sundays, Christmas Day, and Good Friday, and during such time or times when the Wairio Coal-mine is not working, but in no case for a longer period than three weeks at one time) commencing not later than 9 o'clock a.m. and ending not earlier than 5 o'clock p.m."

13A. Does not that put the Wairio Railway Company, in conjunction with the Wairio Mine, practically in a position to hold up the other owners if they wish?—I did not know that was in there. The document was prepared either by the Government authorities or—

14. By the Government, I understand?—There are a lot of things in it which, I may point out, really ought not to be in it. But it has not got anything to do with the Wairio Coal Company. The railway and the coal company are absolutely distinct. The coal company have only one of four or five different pits up there. McKenzie's pit has put out all the coal that has been turned out so far.

15. You will admit, however, that the existence of that clause in the Order in Council is detrimental to the other coalowners? Your argument is that this railway is there to serve all the coalowners equally, and that the other one is unnecessary. The existence of that clause is detrimental to them—it may threaten their interests?—It may threaten their interests, but that has to be taken in conjunction with the rest of the document as to the prices and running-rights and the deed of delegation, which allows any coalowner up there to apply to the Council for a tariff rate at once, and the local authority can then compel arbitration.

16. You see this scale of charges, which has been handed in to us?—Yes, that will be the scale.

17. In your statement you said that it depended on the amount of coal per day?—That is so.

18. The schedule, you will observe, gives the lowest rate at 2s. a ton. You said 1s. 9d. or 2s.?—Yes, I knew it was 2s. or 1s. 9d.

19. When the quantity goes up to about 300 tons a day, you said?—Yes. It went up in 50-ton rises, if I remember rightly.

20. It says 90,000 tons per annum. Allowing a six-day working-week, that is approximately 300 tons a day?—Yes.

21. You see this is a rebate, to be refunded at the end of the year, and that makes a difference to the possible rebates over a daily rate?—We could not make it a daily rate.

22. Your evidence would have conveyed the impression that the rebate was given on the daily rate of tonnage passing over the line: as a matter of fact it is an annual rate?—Yes. We could not make it a daily rate, because that would be chopping and changing about. We would never know where we were.

23. *Mr. Payne.*] Is this coal area being adequately served by the present line?—The present line extends to within a mile and a quarter of the terminus of the proposed line, and it is the terminus of the proposed line which will serve the coal area; and I think that a service that runs within a mile and a quarter of a coalfield is certainly an adequate service. Wherever you terminate your line on a coalfield, you will find that more than one mine will be more than a mile away.

24. Does the coal area lie between Wairio and the end of the present line?—It lies between McKenzie's pit and the end of the proposed line. The Wairio railway taps, naturally, the first of the coal, and the idea was to gradually push ahead until they got a mile or a mile and a half further on: but they cannot do it all in one day.

25. You said that this would be a branch line on a branch line: what logical argument have you to show that there would be any disability in that?—I have seen it in print dozens of times from the Government, as running the railways, that branch lines themselves do not pay—that small branch lines, at all events, are a heavy extra cost to keep up.