

WILLIAM JAMES ANNAN MCGREGOR examined. (No. 11.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A sheep-farmer at Mount Linton, Southland.
2. *Mr. Payne.*] In giving evidence Mr. Armstead said you would materially benefit if this proposed railway were made?—I would benefit perhaps with other settlers to a certain extent. At present we have been going to the bad on account of the way the roads have been wiped out and the heavy rates we have had to pay to endeavour to keep up impossible roads.
3. What amount of land do you own?—Over 10,000 acres. Some of it is good land, perhaps 2,000 acres, and a lot of it is rough country.
4. What do you value it at now?—Some of it at about 10s. an acre and some of it at about £8 or £10 an acre.
5. Do you consider that would be improved by the railway?—Not more than what it is now. It is sheep-country.
6. You have done nothing in the way of cutting up at present?—Only one block I have offered for sale—a block of 800 acres.
7. What did you offer that at?—£8 an acre.
8. Would you get more if the railway went through?—No, I do not think so.
9. You do not anticipate any great advance?—No, no great improvement from it. I am one of those interested in a coal company. I helped to take up some land in the first instance to encourage the railway to come in, and we built up hopes which proved to be false.
10. *Mr. Robertson.*] What is the company?—It is a company registered as the Linton Coal Company.
11. *Mr. Payne.*] Would you be in favour of adopting a betterment plan whereby you would pass over to the Crown half the increased value of the land which might be created by the putting-in of the railway?—We are offering to pay rates on our land if this railway is put in and it does not pay.
12. *Hon. Mr. Fisher.*] You have offered to put the Government in a position so that they will not be a loser?—Yes.
13. Are you willing to sell your land to the Crown?—Yes, at a price. I have been down in Southland for nine years. I started first as a Cheviot settler, and I have been pioneering all my days and have a family. I am struggling along, but I would sell to the Government or anybody else who came along.
14. Would you be prepared to make an upset price before the railway was put in?—Yes.
15. You have 10,000 acres, and it varies in value from 10s. to £8 and £10 per acre, but somewhere about the property there is a blister?—Yes, there is. I do not think there are many of us in Southland without one.
16. Is the land freehold?—No, some of it is Crown leasehold. There are 17,000 acres of pastoral land, and all Crown land.
17. *Mr. Robertson.*] The Linton Coal Company is not the name of the syndicate that has the coal leases?—No, the Linton Coal Company has simply the one lease. We have an area of 200 acres on the coal reserve in the Wairaki Survey District.
18. That is one of the coal companies that would be interested in the line going through?—Yes. There are three companies there that the railway would serve.
19. *Mr. Payne.*] How many individuals are interested?—There may be several more settlers. It is leasehold country, and the settlers hold rights from the Land Board to mine the coal for household purposes.
20. How many others would be affected by this railway if the coal was made available for sale?—Perhaps another three or four.
21. *Mr. Robertson.*] What are the size of your flocks now on the land?—I carry between eight thousand and ten thousand sheep.
22. *Mr. Payne.*] The railway would serve you in connection with the carriage of your wool and produce?—Yes, as far as the wool is concerned. There would be a decrease in our rates to the County Councils, and we would have better roads. It is shameful how the Government grants are mopped up in that part to keep the roads passable. I am one of those who signed the Order in Council to get this railway, as I thought it would do some good, but I can see that this private line is not worth a tinker's curse to the settlers in our quarter. The only prejudice to the line is the competition of a good class of coal coming into the market.
23. *Mr. Armstead.*] In the first instance you were very anxious that this line should go in?—Yes, because we were under false hopes.
24. Why were you under false hopes?—Because the railway never went to Ohai.
25. It was not said in the first instance that it was going to Ohai?—But we were led to believe it was going there.
26. You know it has taken them four years to get it to where it is with hard work?—I doubt it very much.
27. You said you had two of the worst seasons that have been experienced?—We had two bad seasons, but you could have had the railway in before those two seasons came along.
28. Do you know you had the biggest flood you ever had in that district?—Yes, one of the big floods.
29. Would you be surprised to know that after we had taken the level of the line and after submitting it to the Government, who assured us that no floods would touch it, we raised the level 18 in.?—Only here and there.
30. You say that this line would not benefit your land very much?—Not very much.
31. How much an acre in value do you think it would put on to your land?—I have not the slightest idea. There is not much of my land adjoining the railway. My homestead would be five miles off the proposed railway.