

53. The Mores could have got the leases?—Of course. Nine new leases have been issued lately—so it says in the petition—and when Mores' railway was first started there was only one small lease of 20 acres. Mores could have taken up the whole of the coal area but would not do it. I think that Mores' people and McKenzie should have had some opportunity given to them of appearing here when this petition was before the Committee. I think it likely that Mr. More would like to give evidence. As he is the man who has put up the money and carried this thing through, it would be a pity if his evidence was not heard.

54. *Mr. Robertson.*] You mean to say that he is vitally affected?—Yes.

55. I assume he is as much affected as you are?—More so.

56. *Hon. Mr. Fisher.*] He knows there is a petition, does he not?—Yes. I may say that four Ministers have been in Invercargill, and on each occasion Mores' people have taken just the one answer from those Ministers.

57. What was the answer?—That nothing would be done affecting this line without due notice being given to the Wairio Railway.

58. *The Chairman.*] Has due notice been given? Were they aware that this petition was coming before this Committee?—On Tuesday night at half past 4 they got a wire to say, "Coming on on Wednesday. You had better be here on Thursday morning." More lives thirty miles away. I suppose that by motor we could have got him in.

59. Are you not here representing More yourself?—Yes. I am also a shareholder in the company, as far as that is concerned.

60. Then More is represented by you?—Without instructions from More, because I have not seen him.

61. If you want any witnesses you have a right to call them?—For McKenzie I cannot speak, but I think he would like to be heard before the Committee.

[It was subsequently decided to sit to hear further evidence on Wednesday, 4th August.]

62. *Hon. Mr. Fisher.*] What additional light can be thrown upon the petition by Mr. More?—I do not know from your point of view whether he can throw much additional light on it; but he is the man who went up first and took the route lines, and that sort of thing. He is the man who has put his money into it and supervised the construction of the line; and he is the man who is able to tell you that it certainly would not have gone in at all had it gone in to serve only the Wairio and McKenzie's pit.

63. *Mr. Payne.*] When you are bringing witnesses I would personally like to have some knowledge of that Southland Coal Company, too?—Certainly. If you knew the Southland Coal Company, you would know that any suggestion of Mr. More being connected with it for various railway purposes is almost contemptible.

64. *The Chairman.*] You have stated that this line of Mores' cannot be extended on account of your want of capital, and you have also stated, I think, that even now the company are working on an overdraft. Looking at the matter from a public point of view, would not the public interest be better served by this proposed line managed by the Government?—I should like to give you the whole history of the moral aspect of the concern; but the Committee has told me that is not what you have to deal with, and that what you are concerned with is the practical question of whether or not this line should go in.

65. In the public interest?—They had to cart all their coal; for years they had to do so. Can it be suggested that it is not in the public interest when now a line, with Government trucks on it, is brought within a mile; whereas before they had six miles—has that line not been in the public interest, solely and entirely?

66. There is a liberal offer being made with regard to this suggested line. On the other hand, as far as I can see, you are in difficulties at the start. You have not the means of extension; and I do not know whether you are prepared to offer the same terms to get your line extended as they are offering on this proposed line, and we have to consider what is best in the public interest?—If you have to consider it in that way—from the point of view of the public interest—I should like to say this: after what Mr. More has done, no man is safe to put his money into anything.

67. *Mr. Payne.*] It is often urged in the House that the Government should not come into competition with private people. I think your argument is along those lines?—My argument is not along that line. It is this: if the Government or anybody else had taken this up in the first instance, then I should have said, "Put a line in, without a doubt. It is a paying proposition." But the Government did not do it, nor anybody else, until Mores did it. And then when Mores have done it and proved the value of the field and what can be done in it, people come and say, "Put a Government line in."

68. *Hon. Mr. Fisher.*] But is it a very payable proposition?—It is a paying proposition, which they were prepared to risk £15,000 in—prepared to risk all they had got; and I was prepared to risk all I had got and a little more; and I expect to get something out of it.

69. *Mr. Payne.*] Would they be prepared to sell to the Crown?—I should think so, given a fair thing.

70. You would rather sell out than come into competition and be ruined?—Certainly. But from the point of view of economics, I dare say they are prepared to say to the Crown, "You recognize that we have opened up this district, and take over our railway." They want to be given the credit for it.

71. Would they be prepared to sell to the Crown if it were thought better for the Crown to take it over and make the extension?—I should think so. All the Crown have got to recognize, in my opinion, is that Mores' people are the pioneers of that district, and Mores' people have opened it up; and if the Crown were to come along now and say, "You More people have had foresight and energy and have done your level best for the place; we are going to take over your line," that would be a fair proposition.