

and can bring it down at a fairly reasonable price, but every pound of coal that is taken away from it means that the balance going over the line has to bear a proportionately higher rate; and it ultimately means that Mores' line must be wiped out, and they lose the whole of the money they have put into it. Now, we are prepared to assist the coal companies in any way possible. We are prepared to assist the settlers in any way possible. Firstly, we are prepared to extend the line to Ohai, provided we have a guaranteed security of tenure and a guaranteed quantity of freight. We cannot say anything better than that; or, secondly, we are prepared to do this: we will sell the line to the Government at a valuation to be fixed by arbitration. The next point I wish just to touch on is that of public benefit and policy, which has been made a great point, it being suggested that the proposed line is going to greatly benefit the public. Firstly, the line will go in to serve the interests of the promoters primarily; as they say, they have £300,000 worth of property which the line will serve. Secondly, it must benefit very considerably the holdings of Messrs. McGregor and Rodger—large holdings in the district—which must be considerably enhanced in value even by Mores' line going in there, let alone the increase in value which will be brought about if the Government line goes in. If there is an extension of that line—and it is suggested that there may be an extension—it will have to run six or seven miles before it touches any other ground than Mount Linton and Birchwood. A point has been made of the lime-deposits in the district. If you will look at the map you will notice there is a lime reserve of some 30 acres. That is entirely on the left-hand side of our line, and entirely away from the Ohai portion of the line. There may be—I believe there is—some lime further down, but it is some miles away—I think I am correct—from the termination of this line. Another point: If this Government line goes in it sets the seal for all time on any competition. It sets the seal for all time on the whole of the coal district round there. Now, there is known coal—any amount of it—beyond Nightcaps. For instance, in Mr. Ritchie's property there is any amount. This line does not serve that. If people wished to come in and take up Ritchie's coal-land, or any other coal-bearing land and wished to develop it, would the Government then be prepared to assist them by putting in a Government line to that place? If not, then it is prejudicing the whole of that country; and if there is anything in the nature of a monopoly at all, this line is going to set the seal on the monopoly of the Morley coal-pits. It is centring the whole of that coal upon the Morley coal-pits, and anybody outside of that coterie cannot possibly compete, for the Government cannot put a line in in any more places. The next point is with reference to the public benefit and utility. Is there any guarantee whatever that the public will get cheaper coal? Absolutely none. There have been statements made, but there has been nothing shown that the public are going to get any cheaper coal. The coal lessees are entitled to charge 10s. for the coal. The railage, according to Mr. Furkert, from there to Wairio is going to be 1s. 9d. That makes it 11s. 9d. at Wairio. Hundreds and hundreds of tons of coal are carted away from that district by the farmers surrounding, and those farmers will have to pay at Wairio 11s. 9d. a ton for the coal. Presupposing, as has always been suggested by the promoters of this proposed line, that there will be 70,000 to 90,000 tons of coal coming over there, if that amount comes over Mores' line they have set the charge at 2s. McKenzie's people are mining the coal at 7s., and putting it on the trucks and making a profit out of it at 7s. It will land in Wairio at 9s. a ton, as against 11s. 9d. over the Government line. Now, take the "through" rate. Then it is 10s. 7d. a ton. That is not for coal going to Wairio alone to supply the surrounding district, but coal going away from the district. The 7d. from Ohai to Wairio and 10s.—the cost of the coal—makes it 10s. 7d., on its way through to Invercargill or elsewhere, at Wairio; while the coal going over the Wairio line will be there at 9s. a ton. If that be so, it shows clearly that there is no guarantee that the public will get cheaper coal. The surrounding district will suffer very considerably. The long-distance people will not suffer quite so much, but they will suffer. Another point: if McKenzie can mine this coal for 7s. a ton, and put it on the trucks and make a profit out of it at that, McGregor's people or the Mount Linton people can do the same thing—they can mine it for 7s. a ton, and make a profit out of it. But under their conditions they are allowed to charge 10s. for it. A great point has been made of the fact that the Wairio Railway Company are charging rates up to 5s. 6d. a ton. Here these people are allowed to make a profit up to 4s. a ton on every ton that comes out from there, and their capital is a matter of £5,000, against the other people's capital of £15,000 to £20,000. If there is likely to be any exploitation of the public, it certainly is not from the point of view of the railway people. I submit that, being enabled to charge 10s. a ton, as they are, that is a more exorbitant rate than the railway people's maximum of 5s. 6d. for carriage, high as it may seem. Finally, Mores' people, with the approval of the whole district, have honourably and honestly done what they considered to be in the best interests of the district—the best interests of all parties concerned there, and the best they could to open up and serve and develop the whole of that locality; and I confidently submit to you that it is not an equitable proposition to judge either actions or proceedings commenced four or five years ago in the light of present developments. They are entitled to this consideration: that in reviewing their actions and what they have done the Committee should as nearly as possible place themselves in the position Mores were in when they first took this up, and view the proposition from that point of view. If we could look into the future for three or four years, how differently most of our works would be done; and I do not say but that this railway of Mores' might have been put in differently. It may have been—I cannot say; but I certainly say that at that time—at the time it was put in—it was put in to the best of their judgment; it was put in with the approval of the whole of the people in the district; it was put in with the expressed approval of the Wallace County Council, and to save their roads. I submit that that it has done. It has taken Government trucks five miles into that district. It is prepared to carry them a little further, and to serve anybody likely to come in; and I submit that having done that it has done all that any reasonable person could expect. I submit, sir, that Mores' people are entitled to every consideration at your hands. My allotted time has expired, and I thank you for the courtesy and consideration extended to me.