

Captain R. WORLEY, Civil Engineer, examined.

I desire to draw the attention of the Committee to the importance of light railways. I notice that a witness brought this question to the notice of the Committee in Dunedin; but as one who has had experience in connection with light railways at the theatres of war I would like to say a few words on the subject. I think I ought first to state what my experience has been. For twelve months I was an officer in charge of a light railway company, and supervised the light-railway construction-work done by such company in France—in the Ypres sector. After that I was appointed Light-railway Officer attached to twenty-two headquarters in charge of light-railway work done by the Army Corps. After seeing what I have seen I am thoroughly convinced that light railways are going to play a very important part in opening up the country in New Zealand. The chief recommendations of light railways are cheapness and lightning-like construction, and the capability of negotiating extremely sharp curves, thus being able to follow the contour of the land. As used in France the rolling-stock would carry weight for weight with the French broad gauge—that is, the light-gauge railway-truck would empty weight for weight with the French broad gauge, worked out at about two-thirds the carrying-capacity. [Witness gave details of work done by light railways in France.] An important fact is that a light railway could be put along the sides of most of our country roads in the Dominion, requiring no additional fencing. The maximum speed in carrying provisions, &c., is about ten miles an hour, and where it did go through private property it would not require to be fenced except under certain circumstances. It cannot negotiate any steeper grade than our present railways, but seeing that it is only for goods traffic it can cross the face of obstacles at no inconvenience, speed not being an important factor. Obstacles which would at present have to be tunnelled can be got over by zig-zagging. That was done in France. There are numbers of places in New Zealand where light railways could not fail to be a great boon, especially where there is no road-metal. I could mention many places where light railways could be constructed, with advantage, but I might state in regard to this district that a light railway from Stanley Brook down the Motueka Valley to Tasman and Appleby, with feeders to Motueka, Riwaka, and other valleys, would link the whole district up with the present system. From Stoke there could be a branch line round the Rocks Road. By such means the orchardists would get their fruit away rapidly, and infinitely cheaper than under the present system, under which each orchardist has his fruit taken away individually. The light-railway system will mean a great saving of labour, and it will save the roads—it takes all the heavy traffic off the roads. The system could also be adopted in districts like that north of Waitara, and in many other districts in the Dominion. I will not give estimates at present of the cost of the light railways, but I will say that it will come to something under one-fifth of the cost of the present-gauge railway. The engines could be built in New Zealand—for instance, by Messrs. Price Bros., Thames. There would have to be special rolling-stock, too. Before leaving France I wrote to the High Commissioner, and saw him personally in reference to New Zealand buying a large quantity of the plant and rolling-stock for redistribution to local bodies, &c., in New Zealand. General Richardson was also interested in the matter. Sir Thomas Mackenzie promised that he would put the matter before Mr. Massey and Sir Joseph Ward immediately on their arrival. I heard from a private source that another colonial Government had made an offer to buy up the whole of the light-railway department plant in France. Many hundreds of miles of it is quite good, and can be bought at about two-thirds of the price it can be got from the makers.

*The Chairman:* We are very much obliged to you for bringing this matter before the Committee.

*To Mr. Craigie:* I think it would be an excellent idea to electrify the lines.

D. H. RUNDLE, Manager, Nelson Co-operative Fruit Company, examined.

I may state that I have only been in New Zealand six weeks; previous to that I was for four years in Tasmania. The Nelson Co-operative Fruit Company has 240 growers, representing over 4,000 acres of new orchards, which the Committee has seen, between Nelson and Motueka, and these growers have invested to date £12,000 in packing-sheds, cool stores, and evaporators. One of the things we have to face is that in the next year and in the following years the present packing-shed equipment will not be nearly big enough for the amount of fruit that is going to come off our company's acreage. Neither is there going to be sufficient cool-store space. The Government has advanced to the company the limit of the amount that can at present be granted—namely, £9,000.

*To Mr. Hudson:* I am just going to put the question of obtaining a larger advance before the company; that is a question that will have to come before the Government later on. We hope to do it not through a small organization of 240 growers, but through an organization of some thousands of growers. If machinery for other agricultural purposes is imported free I think the fruit industry is entitled to the same consideration.

*Mr. Craigie:* You have had experience in Oregon, California, and in Tasmania: will you give us your opinion as to the quality of the fruit grown here compared with the fruit grown in the countries I have mentioned?—The fruit I have seen grown on this new land is equal to anything I have seen anywhere for quality, and I believe for keeping-quality; but I am not sure on the latter point yet. Fruit could be distributed to the consumer cheaper by one organization having control; there would be a big saving of expense. I do not favour Government control; I favour the growers putting the industry on a commercial basis, and paying capable men to run it.