

friend has any evidence to call let him call it by all means, and if necessary I propose to call any further evidence by way of rebuttal. It is farcical in a matter where the Government is accepting the advice of their experts to expect it at this stage to call a lot of non-expert evidence.

*The Chairman:* The Commissioners are of opinion that we should not ask Mr. Myers to proceed, nor do we consider it is right for him to do so. We are sitting in Palmerston North for the purpose of hearing the evidence of any one either for or against the proposals of the Railway Department. If either Mr. Luckie or any other gentleman is desirous of submitting any evidence we are prepared to hear them. We do not desire to close the evidence against either side at all.

*Mr. Luckie:* Do I understand, sir, the position is that I will have to call evidence, and that my learned friend will be in a position to call evidence in rebuttal, and that I will have a further right to call evidence in connection with the matter? It seems to be a most confusing way of putting the position before you.

*Mr. Myers:* I would not object.

*The Chairman:* We would be quite prepared to do that.

*Sir James Wilson:* During the time the Commission was sitting in Wellington I appeared before you, and I was informed that the Commission would be sitting in Palmerston North for the purpose of hearing the views for and against the proposals of the Railway Department, and that I would be given an opportunity of being heard. As I have to attend a meeting at Palmerston North to-morrow I find I will not be able to attend the Commission, and if it is convenient I should like to be given an opportunity now of making a short statement to you, gentlemen. No doubt the procedure is a wrong one, but I would be pleased to have the opportunity.

*Mr. Luckie:* Before proceeding any further I should like to say for the information of Sir James Wilson that it is my intention to say a few words with reference to the Levin-Marton deviation.

*Mr. Oram:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I would like to say that I have been instructed to appear on behalf of the Palmerston North Chamber of Commerce. I do not think it will be necessary for me to address the Commission, but before proceeding any further I should like to say that the Palmerston North Chamber of Commerce heartily endorses the action of the Railway Department in its scheme to remove the railway station and yards from the town and deviate it according to the plans of the Railway Department's Engineer. At a later stage it is the intention of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce to give evidence in connection with the matter. I do not think there is anything further I need place before you in the meantime.

*Sir James Wilson:* I wish to take this opportunity of thanking the Commission for the privilege of addressing it. In the first place, I should like to say that the persons for whom I am appearing had no intention of being represented by counsel until we became aware that Mr. Myers was going to make this a very serious question, and in consequence it was considered advisable by those who are opposing the present intention of the Railway Department to be represented by counsel in connection with the matter. Mr. Luckie was not instructed to take this matter up until the last moment, and therefore he is not in a position to speak with the fullest knowledge as to the position we take up. It was originally understood that I was to appear before the Commission as the representative of the different local bodies on the west coast in regard to the position they take up. I may say that the first intimation we had of the Commission was that it was to consider the station facilities at Palmerston North, and it was not our intention to say anything about that, although we were aware that the station was very congested, and we have no reason to suppose that it should not be altered. We did not propose to have anything to do with the matter until suddenly we found that the order of reference of the Commission had been extended and brought into question another matter which was to us a very serious one—namely, whether it was desirable and expedient that a deviation of the Wellington—New Plymouth Railway should be made between Paekakariki and Marton, and in consequence we were called upon to bring forward evidence before you. At the same time, as far as I am concerned, I do not propose to give any evidence, and I merely wish to make a brief statement for the information of you, gentlemen. We understand that you are required to report on three matters. The first issue to be dealt with is whether the existing facilities at Palmerston North are sufficient and suitable for the Railway Department's purposes, and you have to ascertain whether the suggested schemes should not be able to meet the case. The next issue is a very serious question, and one which is of national importance—that is, whether it is desirable, and expedient, and warranted to have a deviation of the railway-line. In the one case it is a matter of local importance, but in the other it is a different matter altogether. In connection with a deviation of the line, as has been suggested, it will mean that a large sum of money will be spent upon it. It is not my intention to go into the matter very exhaustively, but I should like to make it perfectly clear to the members of the Commission that this matter is not, as I have already intimated, one of local importance, but is a matter of national importance, and you, gentlemen, have a very serious responsibility cast upon you. To my mind there are many circumstances that have to be taken into consideration when reviewing the position, such as through traffic, &c. The suggestion submitted by us of shortening the line will, if carried into effect, prove of immense benefit to the country. During the time the Commission was sitting in Wellington Mr. MacLean, Chief Engineer of the New Zealand Railways, gave evidence in support of the proposals to deviate the line round Palmerston, and we want to rebut that evidence. I was under the impression that Mr. Hiley made a report in connection with the improvement of the station facilities, but I am given to understand that there is no such report in existence. Surely the Railway Department must have a knowledge of what Mr. Hiley said, and, moreover, we think that a gentleman of Mr. Hiley's experience would not suggest anything that would not meet the case. I do not know whether or not the Commission is possessed of any information to show that the traffic has increased at Palmerston North, but so far as I am concerned I have not heard. When you come to think of the position and the suggestion we make, and have